

G N O S T I C A



# Histories of the Hidden God

Concealment and  
Revelation in Western  
Gnostic, Esoteric, and  
Mystical Traditions

Edited by  
April D. DeConick  
and Grant Adamson

## HISTORIES OF THE HIDDEN GOD



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Concealment and Revelation in Western Gnostic,  
Esoteric, and Mystical Traditions

*Edited by*

APRIL D. DECONICK and GRANT ADAMSON

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# INTRODUCTION

## IN SEARCH OF THE HIDDEN GOD

*April D. DeConick*

### A GOD AT ONCE KNOWN AND UNKNOWN

In Western religious traditions, God is conventionally conceived to be a humanlike creator, lawgiver, and king.<sup>1</sup> In the Hebrew bible, he is not pictured as an incorporeal deity. Rather he has a form – a *tselem* and a *demut* – that is humanlike.<sup>2</sup> He possesses body parts: a face, hands, ears, mouth, fingers and feet.<sup>3</sup> He is enthroned in the highest heaven and rules the universe from his celestial temple. So in the scriptures he is lauded as the *God of the Heavens*.<sup>4</sup> He is the astral Lord, known as the god whose throne is heaven and whose footstool is the earth.<sup>5</sup> He talks to the Israelites out of the heavens and his luminous embodied image, the *kavod*, can be seen in heaven by visionaries like Ezekiel.<sup>6</sup>

His heavenly presence, however, is not the whole story. This is a god who also was believed to have a physical presence in the sky and on earth. He is the god who manifests himself in the cosmos, riding on the clouds, whose appearances or theophanies are accompanied by thunder, lightning, rain, and earthquake.<sup>7</sup> In the biblical literature, the temple – the replica of his heavenly station – was believed to house God’s presence in Jerusalem, although its limited size was such that it could barely contain the fringes of his mantle.<sup>8</sup> The scripture remembers Solomon praying at the Temple’s dedication, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!”<sup>9</sup> This passage reflects the struggle within the Israelite religious tradition to balance the transcendence of a god who resides in the heavens with the belief that his presence also dwelled within the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> In the earliest traditions, his religious cult is the Israelite version of “the care and feeding of the gods.”<sup>11</sup> The sacrifices originally were meant to be food given to him as morning and evening meals.<sup>12</sup>

He is recognized as the Lord who walked in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day.<sup>13</sup> He wandered around Babel, scattering and confusing the people he saw because he did not like the fact that the tower of Babel was so tall that it stretched into the clouds.<sup>14</sup> Immediately before the flood, he closed the door of the ark behind Noah, his family, and the animals.<sup>15</sup> Jacob physically wrestled with God on earth. Because Jacob prevailed in the match, he was given a new name, *Israel*. The location of their wrestling match was named *Peni'el* or the *Face of God*, which is interpreted in the scripture to mean “For I have seen God face-to-face, and yet my life is preserved.”<sup>16</sup>

In spite of this strong embodied tradition, there is a tension in the Western religious traditions, an uneasy reception of the anthropomorphic god who is physically accessible. This uneasiness can be seen in the biblical story of the Israelites' encounter with the Lord on Mt Sinai. The narrator makes clear that the Israelites hear his voice coming out of a midst of fire, but see no form.<sup>17</sup> In the Psalms, a worshiper cries out in frustration, “O LORD, why do you cast me off? Why do you hide your face from me?”<sup>18</sup> In the story of Moses' interaction with God, he is not allowed to see God face-to-face, because God tells him, “man shall not see me and live.”<sup>19</sup> Instead, Moses is allowed a quick peek at the buttocks of God's manifestation, called his *glory* or *kavod*, a luminous human-like form that reveals God, while simultaneously concealing the essence of God from direct view.<sup>20</sup> In Christian traditions, the theology of the *kavod* is what makes Christology function as it does, when Jesus is promoted as the visible image or *glory* on earth of the invisible God in heaven.<sup>21</sup>

This uneasiness with humanlike and manifest gods extends beyond the biblical materials. It is evident in the Greek currents too, as early as the sixth century BCE when philosophers began to criticize their standard religious and mythological traditions.<sup>22</sup> This criticism was worked out over centuries and was expressed most radically by the Neoplatonists who posited an utterly transcendent deity that was unknowable.<sup>23</sup> The centuries of philosophical criticism impacted other Western religious intellectuals such as Philo of Alexandria whose reconciliation of biblical and Greek theology formed the bedrock for consequent theological treatments within the Jewish and Christian traditions.<sup>24</sup> Thus, there comes to exist a strong tradition in the West that even though the Lord is an embodied god who reveals himself in history, he is also a god “who hides himself” actively.<sup>25</sup>

It is notable that some of God's last words to Moses are, “I shall hide my face from them. I shall see what their end will be.”<sup>26</sup> It has been noted by more than one commentator on the Hebrew bible, that God does just that. By the end of the Hebrew bible, God disappears.<sup>27</sup> As Richard Elliott Friedman has noted, “The consequences and development of this phenomenon in the New Testament and in post-biblical Judaism are extraordinary.”<sup>28</sup> Others argue further, that God's hiddenness becomes a source of existential concern, in modernity even challenging the assumption that the God of Abrahamic religions actually exists.<sup>29</sup>

So there develops within Western theistic religions, the centrality of God's presence as well as his hiddenness. There is a tension between the God who reveals himself and the God who hides himself, the God who is accessible to humanity and inaccessible at the same time. He is the God who is both immanent and transcendent, who is both present and absent. He is the God with a body, and the God without. He is characterized most famously by the North African theologian Tertullian as a god who is "at once known and unknown."

That which is infinite is known only to itself. This it is which gives some notion of God, while yet beyond all our conceptions – our very incapacity of fully grasping him affords us the idea of what he really is. He is presented to our minds in his transcendent greatness, as at once known and unknown.<sup>30</sup>

The Gnostic, esoteric, and mystical currents within Western religious traditions capitalize on the hidden and hiding God, and all the tensions surrounding this characteristic. The hidden God becomes the hallmark of the mystics, the Gnostics, the sages, and the artists who attempt to make accessible to humans the God who is secreted away. Central to these currents is the question posed so long ago in the prophetic literature, "Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea ... who divided the waters before them to make himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths?"<sup>31</sup> The Gnostic, esoteric, and mystical quests are quests for the hidden God, seeking to explain and harness the secrets of God's hiddenness.

## CONCEALMENT OF THE HIDDEN GOD

A number of essays in this volume address the central problem of the relationship of the hidden God to the universe and human beings. At the root of each case studied here is a central feature of Western Gnostic, esoteric, and mystical currents. God's hiddenness depends upon where he resides. If he resides outside our cosmos, he is naturally concealed by his transcendence. He is in a realm generally inaccessible to human beings. When God is hidden within the cosmos, either he is framed as an astral Lord in a heaven so distant that he is unknown to humans or he is framed as a God who has been distributed secretly within the created order and the human being.

April D. DeConick, in [Chapter 1](#), "Who is hiding in the Gospel of John?," addresses the theology of the Gospel of John from the perspective of 8:44 which has been (mis)translated for centuries so that a bifurcated god has been hidden from view. She argues that 8:44 properly translated – "You are from the father of the devil" – indicates that Johannine theology had bifurcated the Jewish god into a malicious sublunar ruler and a beneficial astral Lord. The sublunar ruler was equated with the God of the Jews and the father of the

devil, while the astral Lord was understood to be Jesus' father, the unknown god who his son Jesus had come to reveal. This hidden astral Lord was the true God of devotion. The theology of the Gospel of John is a panastral *transitional* system where the Lawgiver rules earth and the sublunar realm with his son the Devil, while the astral Father rules the heavens with his son Jesus. The author of the Gospel of John is struggling with his community's connection to Judaism and Jewish scripture, understanding that salvation came from Judaism, but did not remain within it. In the Johannine gospel, Jesus descended from heavens to straighten out the religion, to teach that the just God is a god who resides in the heavens. He is a god of love and righteousness, grace and truth, whom no one knew prior to Jesus' advent when he revealed himself through his son. The Jews think they worship this god, the Johannine author concludes, but in reality they are worshipping an inferior god, the Lawgiver, who rules the world and fathered the Devil.

Andrei A. Orlov offers us a detailed examination of the tradition of the aeon Adoil in [Chapter 2](#), "Adoil outside the cosmos." According to Orlov, in 2 (*Slavonic Enoch*), God reveals to Enoch the mystery of creation, how Adoil, a luminous being, was called out from nothing before anything existed. His disintegration becomes the cornerstone of visible creation, the foundation upon which God establishes his throne. The myth of Adoil represents the type of myth found in the Lurianic Kabbalah, where the bursting of the primordial vessel of light is envisioned as the first creative act of God that brings to life the visible created order and God within it. This primordial act of manifestation corresponds with the anticipated eschatological act of restoration, when righteous human beings will be reintegrated into one single luminous entity, the aeon of righteousness.

In [Chapter 3](#), "The old gods of Egypt in lost Hermetica and early Sethianism," Grant Adamson explores the theogony preserved in the Nag Hammadi treatise *Eugnostos*. The author of this esoteric treatise writes from the perspective of one who already possesses Gnosis of the hidden god, and he invites the reader to learn about "what is hidden" to "the end of what is revealed." He hopes the reader will come to some understanding about the Unbegotten and its revelation as the gods, aeons, heavens, and cosmos. In *Eugnostos*, the visible cosmos is patterned after a divine universe of powers by a demiurgic god. The divine universe had been generated previously by a male-female divine consort that stemmed from the Self-begetter who ultimately derived from the Unbegotten hidden God. Adamson traces this particular theogony and cosmology of *Eugnostos* to old Egyptian or Hermetic sources, outlining its basis in the astrological system of the Egyptian decans. He concludes that Iamblichus' reference to Hermetic sources and *Eugnostos*' system are indicative of a common Greco-Egyptian theogonic tradition that was as old as the Ptolemaic period. He suggests that this old system also emerges in Sethian Gnostic traditions in the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Gospel of Judas*. Thus he hazards a date for the *Gospel of Judas* in the mid-second century, immediately prior to the composition of the *Apocryphon of John*.

Bernard McGinn explores the consequences that apophatic theology has on anthropology in [Chapter 4](#), “Hidden God and hidden self.” The God of early Christian thinkers and mystics was unknowable and inexpressible. How does this apophatic theology impact speculations about anthropology? McGinn seeks to examine this question by analysing five examples of rigorous forms of apophatic theology. Gregory of Nyssa argued for a God without “de-finition,” or limits, as the infinite and unknowable Source of all things. Gregory mapped out the connection between this theology and the belief that human beings were created in God’s image. If God is beyond all limits this implies that human nature is also outside the realm of what can be grasped by conceptual thought. McGinn argues that this situation leads the infinitely unsatisfied human being on a progressive hunt for an infinitely elusive target. Augustine of Hippo plays with negative anthropology in the *Confessions* where the self remains a radical mystery. He finds that it is in the practice of confession – admitting our weakness while praising God who is beyond all language – that the self expresses its unknowability. McGinn looks at the ninth-century Irish thinker, John Scottus Eriugena next. For Eriugena, God is properly called *nihil*, the unnameable *nothing* who is only named as it flows forth in creation. The human mind, created in God’s image is, likewise, both ignorant of itself and knowing itself. Its ignorance, called by Eriugena *ineffable understanding*, is to be praised more than its knowledge. Self-awareness is awareness of our transcendence above all things that are able to be defined. Thomas Aquinas’ negative anthropology, although not explicitly developed by Aquinas, emerges with his insistence that we can only know that God *is*, not *what* God is. So too the human being, as God’s image, is an unknowable mystery. The human being can come to know and love God as God knows and loves himself, as infinite incomprehensibility and incomprehensible infinity. Finally, McGinn turns to Meister Eckhart who rigorously denied real knowledge of God or humanity. God is *no-thing*, birthed from nothing. He is divine Intellect, which Eckhart defines as a radical potentiality to create and conceive all things that exist, rather than a discrete reality capable of being conceived. Human beings are the expression of the hidden God, identical with the nothingness of divine Intellect. This leads Eckhart to emphasize our need to annihilate the nothingness of everything that is created in us, to detach, to die, and to be buried. McGinn explains that through detachment, the false self is effaced, to *sink my ‘I’ in God’s nothing*.

In [Chapter 5](#), “God’s occulted body,” Claire Fanger analyzes a twelfth-century Latin cosmological fable: the *Anticlaudianus* by Alan of Lille. While the medieval Christian tradition understands God’s hiddenness to be mediated in the incarnation of Christ, Alan writes about the Christian dispensation in a narrative where Christ himself goes missing. A New Man replaces him, a figure that appears to represent the perfection of man whose nature embraces reason and the liberal arts in his quest for a truth that is hidden beyond ordinary language. This is represented mythologically as the ascent by Reason,

Fornesis, and the Star Maid (whose language contains secrets that cannot be vocalized in human words) in a chariot to bring down a perfect soul. Fanger argues that the nature of Christ, however, is not completely gone. Rather it is hidden as part of cosmic nature within the Platonic scheme of procession and return. Fanger explains that Alan maps the embodiment of Christ onto the entirety of creation as the *alpha and omega*, which is the pulling of the divine into the cosmos and back again, a configuration of Christ through circularity. What progresses must return. Thus the natural world, including the human being, experiences a transmutation through both its hidden divine and visibly embodied parts.

## THE HUMAN QUEST FOR THE HIDDEN GOD

The second section of this volume focuses on a question central to the Gnostic, esoteric, and mystical quests. What is necessary for the human being to do in order to find a god who is secreted away? The papers in this section explore various ways in which Gnostics, mystics, and sages in Western traditions engage in ritual and technical activities in order to gain access to the hidden God. Scholars explore here the significance of prophetic instruction, progressive training, contemplative journeys, and dream interpretation.

In [Chapter 6](#), “Obscured by the scriptures, revealed by the prophets,” Kelley Coblenz Bautch studies how God is hidden and revealed in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*. This fourth-century Syrian corpus presents us with many interpretative challenges, not the least of which includes a God who is hidden in the scriptures. While the text recalls a God akin to God in the Hebrew scriptures, the scriptures themselves are said to misrepresent the divine through false pericopes that must be identified. Who assists with this process? Jesus, who is considered the *true prophet*, the one who assists the faithful in distinguishing the genuine passages about God from the false ones in the scripture. What criteria does Jesus put in place to make these judgments? Any statement in scripture that suggests that God is one of many, that God is not omniscient, or that God is not good are to be viewed as corruptions that entered the scripture in the time period immediately following Moses’ death. Only the tested and initiated are privy to this vital information. They receive this information via esoteric instruction from the leaders of the community who carry on the oral correctives meted out by Jesus when he was alive. The false pericopes are not without value. They were added to the scripture to provide a test for the faithful, hiding God from the impious and challenging the faithful to recognize blasphemy.

In [Chapter 7](#), “How hidden was God?” David Porreca examines revelation and pedagogy in ancient and medieval Hermetic literature. He launches his discussion with the question about esoteric revelation and writing. Why write down teachings about a god who is supposed to be hidden? Who was

the Hermetic God supposed to be hidden from? Porreca weighs the mandates for secrecy found in this corpus of literature against its didactic intent, which assumed that teachers were meant to reveal their knowledge of God to pupils who were deemed worthy of this instruction. Porreca argues that progressive initiation was the mechanism that the Hermetic teachers used to determine a pupil's worthiness, and functioned as the arena for the revelation of teachings about the hidden God that were kept away from unworthy eyes. God is considered completely concealed, Porreca concludes, from the uninitiated. As the pupil goes through Hermetic initiation, God is less and less hidden the further the pupil advances in the process. A god who is everywhere and nowhere is hidden beyond normal perception. This hidden god of the Hermetics can only be revealed through strict study and contemplation under the instruction of a master.

In [Chapter 8](#), "From hidden to revealed in Sethian revelation, ritual, and protology," John D. Turner explores the relevance of cognitive thought and ritual action to the metaphysics and soteriology preserved in the Sethian Platonizing treatises. While discursive information about the Ineffable and the Unknowable is central to these treatises, it is the mystical union with the primordial source of all reality – a God entirely devoid of cognitive content – that is the goal. How can such a thing be achieved? After describing the ontogenesis of the Sethian triadic deity, Turner examines the progressive contemplative ascent into union with the supreme unknowable One. This progression begins with discursive thought when the person learns to mentally distinguish between transcendent forms and the principles beyond them. Next the person learns to know the Good within him/herself. Then, through vision, the person comes to see the glories of the highest aeon and realizes that principles prior to it also exist. Afterwards, the person is bodily transformed and shown the path of contemplative ascent leading to a mystical union with the supreme One. This technique consists of a series of ascending *withdrawals* when the person becomes inactive, still and silent, to the point that he becomes incognizant of himself. The person has become one with the object of the vision, having passed into the realm of non-knowing knowing. Turner identifies the Sethian treatise *Allogenes* with the earliest attempt in Western mysticism to narrate the successive stages of a mystical union with the Unknowable God who can only be known by not knowing him.

Jonathan Garb writes about modern Kabbalistic techniques – ascent/descent, transformation, and empowerment – in [Chapter 9](#), "Shamanism and the hidden history of the modern Kabbalah." These shamanistic techniques are used to provide access to the hidden God, who already in medieval Kabbalah is identified with the Tetragrammaton and the quality of mercy, and with the name *Elohim* and the attribute of judgment. The divinity is believed to have hidden itself within the cloak of *Elohim*. The myth of the hiding of the Tetragrammaton in *Elohim* is described in terms of the adornment of a king in his royal garments, glorious, majestic. Garb explains that the Jewish

shaman as a *tzaddiq* assists through certain behaviors to *push down* the *Elohim* from the head to the neck of the divine body, then to the chest and genital regions, and finally out of the divine body into the lower worlds. This process is believed to theurgically affect the divine worlds by drawing the divine light down into the lower regions. After discussing Luria, Garb moves on to examine the teachings of Luzzato in the eighteenth century, and the contemporary Lithuanian Kabbalah and Zionism. He argues that the history of modern Kabbalah is a history of numerous failed attempts to hasten the advent of the Messiah by shifting the focus of Kabbalistic practices from the divine worlds to lower and lower realms, which are perceived to be more and more demonic.

David Cook addresses Muslim dream states and their interpretation in [Chapter 10](#), “Dreaming of paradise.” Although seeing God is alluded to in the Qur’an in theological contexts, actual visions of God become problematic early within Islam. In a religious tradition that rejects the visibility of God and believes Muhammad’s revelation to be final, dreams that feature God and visions of the afterlife become very problematic. Even so there exists a vast dream literature in the tradition, and some of it hints at the possibility of seeing God in dreams. Although he never quotes such a dream, Ibn Qutayab understands dreams that contain visions of God to be metaphorical, indicative that blessing and forgiveness of sins are bestowed on the dreamer. Cook notes that dreams which feature visions of God are sometimes used to legitimate the supremacy of certain leaders, such as the Sufi Abu Ubay’d, or certain behaviors, such as particular forms of prayer. In most Muslim dreams, God is presented as a voice or a presence, rather than a visual target. What is emphasized is the awesomeness of being in God’s presence, not what God actually looks like. Dreams of God’s presence often involve ascensions into the heavens, meetings with prophets, and fantasies of women.

## REVELATIONS OF THE HIDDEN GOD

Several scholars choose to study a rupture in the Gnostic, esoteric, and mystical traditions about the hidden God. If God is truly hidden, how can God be pictured or described at all? How is such a God revealed within our world and experiences? Does he remain hidden even within his revelation? Is his revelation beautiful or monstrous? Cosmic or alien? Real or illusionary?

Shira Lander and Robin M. Jensen each deal with the problem of artistic representations of a God who is hidden, but who reveals himself, in Western religious traditions that prohibit iconic representations. In [Chapter 11](#), “Revealing and concealing God in ancient synagogue art,” Shira Lander focuses on synagogue art in late antiquity and the employment of the *manus dei* by artisans to represent visually the revelation of God. She argues that the hand is used to suggest both the action of God and his voice. Lander associates

the gesturing of the hand with the speech act, since public speech in the Roman world entailed physical gestures. The narrative contexts of the artistic depictions of the hand of God, however, suggest that the visionary (whether Abraham or Isaac) did not see God directly, but rather the light and cloud that enveloped the hand. In Jewish art, the hand was used to convey both God's visibility and presence, and God's hiddenness and inapprehensibility simultaneously. This differs from its use in Christian art of the same period, where it was employed to convey the incomplete manifestation of God prior to the incarnation of Christ.

In [Chapter 12](#), "The invisible Christian God in Christian art," Robin M. Jensen begins with Isaiah 40:18-20 and two questions that naturally fall out from this passage: can or should one conceptualize God with some kind of body and is rendering in visual art that mental image of God blasphemous? While the father God is readily depicted by artisans from the fourth century onwards as an enthroned bearded man, this does not mean that his figurative image was accepted by Christian theologians. They derided these representations as naive, sacrilegious, and idolatrous. They emphasized that scriptural references to God's body parts were to be read metaphorically, rather than as literal materialistic descriptions. God was corporeal but hidden, and no mortal hand could fashion or fabricate his image. Some theologians, like Marcus Minucius Felix, pointed to the human being as God's image and argued that no further representations were necessary. For Origen of Alexandria, this meant the human's internal image. But this was not the case with other Christians who argued that God's own words "Let us make man in our image and after our likeness" meant that God has a human form. Anthropomorphic teachings spread in the fourth and fifth centuries and divided the churches. Jensen argues that these teachings were entrenched in the early church, while vexing to some who exerted much effort to refute them. Theologies of the hidden God were one strategy used to do so.

Jeffrey J. Kripal takes on the dark side of the hidden God: the monstrous, the *outside that has gotten inside*. In [Chapter 13](#), "On the Mothman, God and other monsters," Kripal explores what historians of religions have known for a long time, that the experience of the holy and the experience of horror are interchangeable. The monster is both omen and revelation. The monster is the left-hand of the sacred, a negation that functions to raise the mind to a higher level of reality. Kripal centers his study on the paranormal currents found in the work of John A. Keel, who was an American journalist, UFO specialist, monster hunter, and demonologist. He reads Keel as a modern Gnostic who knows that the world is illusory. It is a sinister scam established by a stupid deity who is messing with us, according to Keel. The aliens and monsters of traditional and contemporary folklore are the many manifestations of *our haunted planet*. For Keel, all religious phenomena from the ancient times to the present are manifestations of a single metaphysical energy. He relates this energy to the electromagnetic spectrum of modern physics, but says

that it cannot be measured with our current modes of technology because it is *extradimensional*. It exists outside our own space-time continuum, but it influences everything within our reality. The world's mythologies are literally vibrations along this spectrum that interact with our culturally conditioned brains. Where do these vibrations come from? Keel believed that there exists *a mysterious exterior force that has the ability to manipulate us*. This superpectrum is God, and we are a trivial part of it. It manifests as demons, jinn, faeries, the Yeti and Sasquatch, the UFO alien, Marian apparitions, and more. We have failed to reduce this phenomenon to *humanly acceptable terms*, because we have chosen to believe rather than to question. Perhaps we are afraid of the answers.

According to Stephen C. Finley in [Chapter 14](#), “Hidden away,” the Nation of Islam, under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, featured a Gnostic system grounded in theosophy, freemasonry, the Jehovah Witness tradition, and nascent ufology. At the basis of this system was secret knowledge about God that provided followers with a sense of control over the meaning of “black” bodies which, historically, had been constructed as inferior. This religious tradition developed in such a way that it understood Master Fard Muhammad to be the manifestation of the hidden God. He was the great Mahdi. Elijah Muhammad is considered the first person in the tradition to recognize Fard as the literal and bodily fulfillment of the *one* who was to come at the end of the age as it is spoken of in biblical prophecy. Although Elijah Muhammad recognized this himself, the tradition goes that Fard Muhammad confirmed this secret teaching in a private meeting and transmitted it to Elijah Muhammad along with other secret teaching. As God-Allah himself, Fard Muhammad was understood to be the embodiment of an *intermediate* being, an immanent intermediary between the cosmos and the earth who created the *originals* who were black people. This knowledge is hidden primarily from white people, who were made later by a different god, Yakub. The purpose of the creation of the white people by Yakub was for the destruction of the black. It was necessary for Fard Muhammad to remain hidden from the world until the end times when Yakub's order will be destroyed and the new millennium established in which black people will exist in their intended state of peace.

Margarita Simon Guillory unearths the hidden history of the African American Spiritualist movement in [Chapter 15](#), “Conscious concealment.” She argues that the history of African American Spiritualism and its beliefs and practices have been historically repressed for a number of reasons including a racialized resistance in predominately white Spiritualists circles and in African American urban communities like Detroit. Despite this suppression, African American Spiritualist activity developed, especially as alternative Spiritualist movements like the Holy Science groups in Detroit. Through investigative research, Guillory reveals the conception of God that was developed within the Holy Science movement. The bible was considered *a divine attribute proven through mediumship*. Humans had the ability to possess spiritual gifts as

confirmed by the works of Jesus Christ. The metaphysical framework, which was an intersection of theology, anthropology, and science, posited God “as” *vibratory source*. God is the source of vibrations, the oscillating energy that pervades the universe. These vibrations radiate into spaces of temporality. These vibrations can manifest as *messages* given to congregants and church visitors by mediums. The vibrations can materialize visually as color surrounding the individual, a colored light which the medium sees. The vibration is not always an abstract depersonalized light property. The vibration can also have a personal identity. Thus in temporal spaces, these God vibrations undergo externalization via coloration and identity formation. Above all, God is identified “as” Infinite Intelligence, and human beings are understood to be the direct manifestation of this Divine Intelligence. Because of this connection, humans have the ability to tap into Intellect via various spiritual processes such as the one Holy Scientists call *unfolding*. This process opens up the person internally to a mental awakening, so that individuals are receptive to *infinite wisdom* and to their spiritual gifts. The attainment of this higher consciousness allows the Holy Scientists to raise their minds above their daily economic hardships, intra-communal classism, and racism they faced in urban Detroit. This access to *esoteric wisdom*, manifested by God “as” Infinite Intellect, did not negate social constructions like race. Rather it allowed for a *transcendence of race and the physical body*.

The final essay in this volume corners the hidden history of God and the West as constructed by Joseph P. Farrell. John Stroup, in [Chapter 16](#), “Occulture in the academy? The case of Joseph P. Farrell,” takes on what he calls the Farrell phenomenon. It is the case of a credentialed academic trained in patristics at Oxford University who has established himself as a populist authority within American occulture and science fiction. His work represents the meeting of pseudo-science and deviant religious views within an alternative spiritual and religious social setting. Farrell argues that he has uncovered the hidden history of Christianity which was originally not Hellenized or Neoplatonized. This original form of Christianity centered on a personal yet transcendent God known to Abraham and to Jesus. Over time, however, Neoplatonism took over the tradition and transformed the church’s theology, so that it came to be centered on a monistic impersonal God-beyond. This simplistic Neoplatonic theology, Farrell thinks, represents an encoding of misunderstood *paleoancient technology* that the ancient people had derived from an extraterrestrial *donor* civilization which was incredibly advanced technologically and knew the transcendent God of Abraham. Farrell thinks that Eastern Orthodox Christianity has consistently rejected philosophical Hellenization, maintaining a strong continuity with ancient Israelite cultic practice and the personal yet transcendent God of Abraham. Stroup leaves us wondering what this all means, especially when Farrell adopts an academic stance as a public authority and representative of ancient catholic orthodoxy to promote his increasingly bizarre scenarios where *the wilder the better*.

## NOTES

1. Ringgren (1966/1976: 66–94); van der Toorn (1999: 361–3).
2. Gen. 1:26–7.
3. Exod. 34:10; Pss. 10:4; 33:16; 110:1; 144:7; Isa. 66:1; 40:11–12, 66:1–2. Cherbonnier (1962: 187–206).
4. E.g. Neh. 1:4; Ps. 115:3.
5. Isa. 66:1.
6. Deut. 6; Ezek. 1:1. On the history of YHWH and his astral associations, see Niehr (1999: 370–72).
7. Pss. 18:10–11; 68:33; Deut. 33:26; Isa. 19:1; Judg. 5:4–5; Deut. 33:2; Pss. 18:7–9; 68:7–8.
8. Isa. 6:1.
9. 1 Kgs 8:27.
10. E.g. Pss. 11:4; 48:9–14; 68:28–9, 35; 84:1–4; 99:1–2; 132:13–14. See Burnett (2010: 115–50).
11. Oppenheim (1977: 171–227).
12. Cf. Exod. 29:41; Lev. 21:21; Ps. 141:2.
13. Gen. 3:8.
14. Gen. 11:5–8.
15. Gen. 7:16.
16. Gen. 32:22–30.
17. Deut. 4:12, 5.
18. Ps. 88:14.
19. Exod. 33:17–23.
20. DeConick (2006: 11–14).
21. DeConick (2010: 310–11).
22. Carabine (1995: 13–187); van der Horst (1999: 367).
23. van der Horst (1999: 367).
24. Dreyer (1970: 68–145).
25. Isa. 45:15. Howard-Snyder and Moser (2002: 2–3).
26. Deut. 31:17, 18; 32:20.
27. Balentine (1983: 157–63); Friedman (1995); Burnett (2010).
28. Friedman (1995: 7).
29. Howard-Snyder and Moser (2002: 1–23).
30. Tertullian, *Apologeticus* §17.
31. Isa. 63:11–12.

## CHAPTER 1

# WHO IS HIDING IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN?

## RECONCEPTUALIZING JOHANNINE THEOLOGY AND THE ROOTS OF Gnosticism

*April D. DeConick*

I became intrigued with Johannine theology when I noticed that the standard English translations of John 8:44 obscure the Greek, which reads: *ὕμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστὲ*. With the article preceding *πατρὸς*, the phrase *τοῦ διαβόλου* is a genitive phrase modifying the nominal phrase *ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς*. Thus: “You are from the father of the Devil.” If the statement were to mean, as the standard English translation renders it, “You are of the father, the Devil,” then the article preceding *πατρὸς* would not be present. In this case the phrase, “father” would be in the predicate position and could be expanded with an appositional phrase *τοῦ διαβόλου*, a grammatical choice that the author of John makes a few verses later in 8:56 when referencing Abraham: Ἀβραάμ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν, “Abraham, your father.”<sup>1</sup>

This literal reading is confirmed by the last segment of the verse (8:44f) which straightforwardly acknowledges the present of two beings, the liar and his father: *ὅταν λαλή τὸ ψεῦδος, ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων λαλεῖ, ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ*. The full verse reasons that the Devil lies since his nature is that of a liar. Why? Because not only is the Devil a liar himself but his father is also a liar. But this is not the sense of the standard English translation which is peculiar and strained. It reads *αὐτοῦ* as a genitive “it” referring to an unnamed singular antecedent such as “lying” or “falsehood.” Thus: *ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ* is rendered in the standard English translation idiosyncratically, “the father of lies.”

In order to sort out what was going on with this verse, I went back through the literature and discovered that this verse has a controversial history. In another publication, I have drawn out the parameters of the controversy.<sup>2</sup> I found that this verse functioned as a calling card for Gnostics who used it as plain evidence that Jesus taught that the Jewish God was the father of the Devil. A number of Gnostics employed this verse to prove that Jesus himself instructed them that there existed a god in addition to Jesus’ true Father. This other god is the God of the Jews and is responsible for the generation of the

Devil and evil. They insisted that this verse demonstrates that determinism plays a role in human nature, especially in terms of the most wicked people, the apostates. According to these Gnostics, it is a wicked deity – the Jewish god – who fathered both the apostates and the Devil.

The early catholics faced a real dilemma when it came to explaining this verse. In order to neutralize it, they insisted that the Greek be read appositionally, “you are from the father, the Devil” even though they confess that reading it this way would be clearer if the genitive article before *father* were erased.<sup>3</sup> Their ultimate concern is that the scripture cannot say “from the father of the Devil,” so they plead that another reading of the text is necessary, a reading that they regard as ‘better’ than the plain reading. They are so certain that that text means “from the father, the Devil” that they freely render it, “You are sons of the Devil,” and attribute these words to Jesus instead of the words found in the scripture. They are uneasy about quoting the Greek in the form it appears in the biblical passage itself. So they tend to substitute for it what they think the passage should say by paraphrasing the passage whenever they reference it.<sup>4</sup>

Early in the tradition, the catholics do claim the literal reading of John 8:44f, “because he is a liar and so is his father.” However, they come up with four interpretative strategies to deal with the problem that if the Devil is the liar, then he has a father who is also a liar. They argue that the passage is interpreted with reference to the Antichrist who is the *liar* and the Devil his father.<sup>5</sup> The *liar* can refer to any evil spirit whose father is the Devil.<sup>6</sup> Or perhaps *liar* is anyone who lies, and the liar’s father refers to the liar who fathered the lie.<sup>7</sup> Some choose to allegorize the reference so that Judas and Cain are liars whose father is the Devil.<sup>8</sup> Augustine is the first to have realized that the persuasiveness of the Gnostic argument for the existence of the Devil’s father was strongly tied to 8:44f – “because he is a liar and *his* father” – because the Manichaeans emphasized  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$  to make this point. So Augustine marks this as the ‘simpleton’ reading and then retranslates it idiosyncratically to mean the Devil is the father of “it” where “it” is falsehood.<sup>9</sup>

As I worked through this Catholic–Gnostic debate, it became clear to me that this debate was not a late development that we could sever from the production and first interpretations of the Gospel of John. Rather this debate was already raging in the Johannine epistles written in the first decade of the second century. Furthermore, the catholic interpretation did not appear to be primary, but secondary, put into place to domesticate an older Gnostic sentiment written into the very fiber of the Gospel of John itself.

## A CATHOLIC–GNOSTIC DEBATE IN THE JOHANNINE EPISTLES

Just how early can we trace the dispute over the ‘authentic’ reading and meaning of John 8:44? It has long been recognized that 1 John 3:11-12a – “For this

is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was from the Evil One and murdered his brother” – references John 8:44, although most modern commentators understand this reference to be a casual allusion.<sup>10</sup> Given what I have learned about the history of interpretation of John 8:44, I have become convinced that the epistle was written as an exposition on John [chapter 8](#), in order to dispute an interpretation of this passage that the Johannine secessionists espoused. I am of the opinion that the chapter represents an authentic historical dispute that took place at the beginning of the second century, written from the perspective of the presbyter whose opponents were the secessionists. The secessionists were members of a church congregation that was using the Gospel of John. They left the congregation due to a hermeneutical rift that involved as much the formulation of theology as it did christology.<sup>11</sup> The presbyter and the secessionists were arguing over the theological implications of John 8:44 and the impact of these implications on christology, anthropology, and soteriology as framed by the Gospel of John. The presbyter’s side of the debate is preserved in 1 John.

The presbyter is an advocate for an early version of the catholic hermeneutic that was developed to tame the plain or literal reading of John 8:44. He wants to set straight exactly who the “liar” is. He has issues with some teachings about determinism, and so wishes to establish whether or not believers are sinners. Finally he wants to resolve a thorny debate that was going on about Jesus’ nature and role.

Given that the interpretation and implications of John 8:44 were at the center of the schism, throughout the epistle the presbyter is anxious to clarify the identity of the “true” God and that god’s relationship to evil and the Devil. With allusion to John 8:19 – “You neither know me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” – he claims that he and his supporters “know” the Son and the “true” God, his Father.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the epistle, the presbyter argues that the “true” God is free from evil, he is light in whom there is no darkness. But God is also “righteous.” This assures kinship between himself and those who act piously.<sup>13</sup> It also means that although he is a loving Father, he is a just god whose laws need to be obeyed.<sup>14</sup> These laws are not “miserable.”<sup>15</sup> Although there will be a judgment, the believer who is obedient to God’s laws has nothing to fear.<sup>16</sup> God’s love is apparent through his action, when he sent his Son into the world “to be the expiation for our sins.”<sup>17</sup> As for Jesus’ commandment to love one another, this is not really a “new” commandment, but is already part of the old law of God.<sup>18</sup>

Given that these were the presbyter’s emphases, what were the secessionists claiming that they knew about the “true” God? Their position appears to represent an early version of the Gnostic hermeneutic that read John 8:44 as a literal reference to the Jewish God and lawgiver as the Devil’s father, while Jesus’ Father was another God. They were claiming that they knew the “true” Father, and he is not the traditional god who gave the laws to the Jews. Rather

the Jewish God gave “miserable” laws to be obeyed because he himself was wicked, associated with the “darkness” and “the world.” They emphasized that the God Jesus preached was to be contrasted with the Jewish God of the Law. Jesus’ Father was a God of love who gave a “new” commandment, to love one another, while the God of the Jews was a malicious god who gave the old Mosaic laws to burden people. The secessionists appear to have been claiming that they knew the “true” Father preached by Jesus, and that the members of the church were part of a sinless generation connected to the Father by nature.<sup>19</sup>

The presbyter wants it to be clear that this position is nonsense. A person’s affiliation with God or the Devil has nothing to do with a fixed nature. With reference to John 8:44 and in line with later catholic interpretation of this passage, the presbyter states that physical parentage does not determine whether a person is born from God or is “from the Devil” and considered a child of the Devil. Rather this is determined by deeds.<sup>20</sup> Here the presbyter is relying on the appositional reading of John 8:44a – “you are from the father, the devil” – to prove his point. The person who does right is righteous, the presbyter says, and the person who sins is “from the devil.” The presbyter then associates the “murderer from the beginning” in John 8:44c with the Devil. He explains that sinners are the Devil’s children “because the Devil sinned from the beginning” and sinners have imitated him. He uses Cain as an example. We should “not be like Cain who was from the Evil One and murdered his brother.” Why did he murder Abel? Because Cain’s deeds were evil.<sup>21</sup> The scope of “murder” is widened to include any hatred that one person has for another.<sup>22</sup>

This reading of John 8:44 is an early version of the catholic hermeneutic that read the text appositionally – “from the father, the Devil” – and identified the Devil as the murderer from the beginning whom Cain copied. The Devil’s children are identified as those who like Cain copy the Devil and commit sin.<sup>23</sup> They do not have the “spirit of truth” but the “spirit of error.”<sup>24</sup> They can be identified because they are liars (like the Devil and Cain), people who say they love God, but then hate their brothers.<sup>25</sup>

Why this emphasis on the will to sin? Because the secessionists appear to have held a different position – that believers were not sinners because they had a fixed nature that made them children of God. Thus the presbyter criticizes, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”<sup>26</sup> The presbyter thinks that the statement – “we have no sin” – makes the Son a liar, and his word not part of their community.<sup>27</sup> This is a reference to a clash over how John 8:24 – “I have told you that you would die in your sins unless you believe I am he” – should be interpreted. The secessionists seem to have read the passage to indicate that believers are part of a sinless generation. The presbyter and his followers think different. To them the text means that even believers are sinners. It is their relationship with Jesus that absolves them of their sin.

How is this sin absolved? According to the presbyter, a doctrine of expiation is the ticket.<sup>28</sup> The presbyter is of the opinion that the believer gains God's spirit and is born into God's family through an anointing ritual.<sup>29</sup> This birth means that God's nature now lives within the believer and absolves him or her from sin. The presbyter talks about his followers being "perfected" and "purified," assuring his followers that the believer "cannot commit sin because he is born of God."<sup>30</sup>

If this is the presbyter's position, what kind of position did his opponents hold? How were they reading John 8:44? The secessionists appear to have been claiming that they knew the "true" Father preached by Jesus, and were part of a sinless generation connected to him by nature. They appear to have identified this "pure" and "perfected" generation with the church. Opposing this generation was another generation that consisted of the children of the Devil, a sinful generation associated with the Devil through a fixed nature. They appear to be assuming that the Devil and his wicked generation were created by a father god that was not Jesus' Father. Rather he was the "miserable" god who was the Lawgiver and God of the Jews.

In this debate, the presbyter intends to make clear the identity of the "liar" in John 8:44d and f. He reads it along the lines of other early catholic exegetes. The liar is anyone who disobeys God's commandments, including the worst offender, the Antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.<sup>31</sup> The liar is the person who says that he loves God while hating his brother.<sup>32</sup> He is the person who claims to "know" God, but disobeys God's commandments: "the truth is not in him."<sup>33</sup> All of these people have the Devil as their father and walk in darkness, lying and not living according to the truth.<sup>34</sup> They do not know the true Father or Jesus as they claim they do. They have not overcome the Devil but are his children.<sup>35</sup>

The presbyter plays with John 8:23, where Jesus contrasts his detractors with himself. It reads: "You are from below, I am from above. You are of this world, I am not of this world." The presbyter uses this reference to posit that the secessionists are "of this world" and are not "of the Father."<sup>36</sup> He associates "this world" with lust and pride and ignorance of the Father.<sup>37</sup> The presbyter also uses John 14:30 against the secessionists. He understands Jesus' allusion to Judas' imminent betrayal – "the ruler of this world is coming" – to be a reference to the coming of the Antichrist.<sup>38</sup> The presbyter says that his opponents, as antichrists, have come into the world. Given the presbyter's exegetical tendencies to identify the Liar with a figure other than the Devil, it is very likely that the secessionists were like the later Gnostic exegetes. They were saying that John 8:44f identifies the Liar with the Devil and his father with the malicious Lawgiver. This would be consistent with what we already recovered of their arguments about the nature of the true Father. They were saying that the father of the Devil cannot be the God of truth, but must be the malicious Lawgiver, the god of the Jews.

With these parameters, it is not surprising that the presbyter was concerned about the nature of Jesus and his role. The presbyter wants to tie him tightly to the righteous God, the Lawgiver, who will enact judgment. Jesus Christ is an advocate with his Father on behalf of the righteous, a faithful and just god who hears confessions, forgives sins and purifies.<sup>39</sup> He can do this because he functions as an expiation for sin.<sup>40</sup> He came to teach people God's laws, laws by which they will be judged. The greatest of these laws is love toward one's brother.<sup>41</sup> Thus, Jesus' "new" commandment is tied tightly to the Torah.

The presbyter emphasizes that only those who confess that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα)" is to be counted among the children of God.<sup>42</sup> Never have there been more misunderstood words than these. They have been (mis)understood again and again as solid evidence that the secessionists were docetists.<sup>43</sup> But this is only because our 'academic' histories of early Christology have been so controlled by the needs, perceptions and polemics of conventional Christianity, even today, that the traditional Christological categories have not allowed us to see clearly what was going on.<sup>44</sup>

The cry "in the flesh" was not the presbyter's cry against the docetism of the secessionists, since he is merely referring to the prologue of the Gospel of John which I assume the secessionists knew too. As far as I have been able to determine, there is no literary-critical evidence that "the Word became flesh" is a post-secessionist addition to the opening hymn. The secessionists must have been familiar with it. This means that the problem was over the *interpretation* of the passage. What did it *mean* that the Logos became flesh? It appears to me that the presbyter took the meaning of this passage to be ensoulment, that the Logos descended into flesh at Jesus' birth and functioned as Jesus' soul. Or to put it another way, the Logos was born as Jesus' *psyche* in flesh – in bones and blood.<sup>45</sup> Thus I take 1 John 5:6 to be the presbyter's testimony about Jesus' advent, that the Logos did not just come down and possess Jesus at his baptism, "by the water only (ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον)."<sup>46</sup> Rather Jesus came into being through both water *and blood* (δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος), through baptism *and birth*. The presbyter argues that Jesus' advent through water and blood is proven by the presence of the Spirit, which is one with the water and the blood.<sup>47</sup> The claim the presbyter is making is that somehow the Spirit became unified with Jesus' flesh at birth, as well as at baptism.

This suggests that the secessionists were arguing that the reference to the Logos becoming flesh should be understood as the possession of the man Jesus by a great spirit from above at his baptism, "by the water only." This is an entirely different Christological model, and a very old one at that. This model had developed out of the prophetic tradition, which understood that God's Spirit could anoint righteous men, resting in them with every generation.<sup>48</sup> This model forms the basis for the Christology in the Gospel of Mark, which uses εἰς to describe Jesus' possession by the spirit.<sup>49</sup> But remnants of it

are also found in the other synoptics and the Gospel of John, which all record the descent of the spirit at Jesus' baptism and the release of his spirit at the crucifixion.<sup>50</sup> The Gospel of John preserves a saying that must have been of interest to the secessionists: "This is indeed the prophet-who-is-to-come into this world!"<sup>51</sup>

It is also the model used by the Gnostic Christian Cerinthus according to Irenaeus who says that Cerinthus taught that the primary supreme God, the unknown Father, was separate from the ruler of this world.<sup>52</sup> Tertullian tells us that Cerinthus taught that this lesser god was an angel who represented the god of the Jews and was associated with the Mosaic Law.<sup>53</sup> Irenaeus says that Cerinthus thought that Jesus was born a normal natural child, the son of Mary and Joseph. But he grew to be more righteous than most men. So at his baptism, "Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove." From then on Jesus proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. At the crucifixion, however, Christ departed from Jesus, so that Jesus the man suffered and rose again, while Christ the Spirit remained impassible.<sup>54</sup>

I bring up Cerinthus as a point of comparison, as the type of Christian theological system that would have been very close to the system of the secessionists. Taking into account the arguments and positions of the presbyter, it appears that the secessionists were arguing from the literal reading of John 8:44 that the god of the Jews, the Lawmaker, was wicked and the father of the Devil. Jesus' Father, however, was the God of love, the true God. Jesus, himself, was a normal man possessed by the Spirit of God, born of water only.

## JOHANNINE THEOLOGY IN THE GOSPEL

Recovering the Catholic-Gnostic debate over the interpretation of John 8:44 has revealed a well-kept family secret. The plain or literal reading of John 8:44 appears to be primary. The catholic reading appears to be apologetic, responsive and secondary, put into place to tame the beast. If this is the case, what might this suggest about the theology that plays out in the Gospel of John? What happens when we let the beast loose, when we grant the literal reading of 8:44?

To start, the narrative surrounding 8:44 becomes very clear. In this narrative, Jesus is presented as the light of the world and of life.<sup>55</sup> He has come from above, having descended into the world.<sup>56</sup> His detractors, a group of Jews (identified variably as "the Pharisees," "the Jews" and "the Jews who had believed in him"), ask him questions about his identity and his Father's identity.<sup>57</sup> Jesus says that they do not know either himself or his Father.<sup>58</sup> He contrasts his Father with the Father that the Jews heed and follow.<sup>59</sup> At first, the Jews think that Jesus is referring to Abraham. But Jesus says they are mistaken in this assumption. If they were truly Abraham's children, they would not be seeking to kill Jesus. Why? Because Abraham did not murder people. Jesus concludes that they must have another Father commiserate with their wicked

actions.<sup>60</sup> His detractors then respond to him by saying that they have only one Father, God.<sup>61</sup> But Jesus insists that they must be talking about different gods, because if they had known the Father God from whom Jesus came, they would love Jesus.<sup>62</sup> So their father must be another god, whom Jesus identifies as “the father of the Devil,” who was “a murderer” and “a liar” from the beginning.<sup>63</sup> Jesus claims to be glorified by his Father, whom the Jews say is their God. But they have not known Jesus’ Father, says Jesus.<sup>64</sup>

With this literal reading of 8:12-55, we can imagine a primary Johannine theology in which there are four key players: Jesus’ Father; Jesus; the Father of the Devil who is also the God of the Jews; and the Devil who is the son of the God of the Jews. Where are these players located in the universe and what are their characteristics according to the architect of the Fourth Gospel?

### *Jesus’ Father*

Jesus’ Father is the supreme God. Jesus calls him “the only true God,” suggesting that the Johannine author is making some distinction between this God and some other god(s) who were falsely worshiped as God.<sup>65</sup> Jesus’ Father is the “righteous Father” whom the world has not known but whom Jesus knows.<sup>66</sup> He is a god of love, who wishes to save the world through the advent of his Son whom he sends into the world to bring judgment and salvation.<sup>67</sup>

### *Jesus*

The supreme God is described as spatially separated from “this world.” This spatial difference can be tracked in the person of Jesus who is the only entity who can move back and forth between the Father (who resides outside “the world”) and the world itself. This is a constant theme in the gospel, summarized in 16:28: “I came from the Father and have come into the world; also I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”<sup>68</sup> Jesus is not “of the world.”<sup>69</sup>

The gospel is very consistent that Jesus’ descent occurs into “the world” from the heavens where he has lived with his Father.<sup>70</sup> In terms of location, “heaven” is contrasted with the “earth (γῆ)” and the “world (κόσμος).”<sup>71</sup> Heaven is “above,” while earth and the world are “below.”<sup>72</sup> Jesus is the bread from heaven given by the Father to the world.<sup>73</sup> The Father glorifies Jesus (and his Name) “on earth” and in “the world.”<sup>74</sup> This “world” is identified with descriptors such as “darkness,” and it is described as something that Jesus overcomes as well as saves.<sup>75</sup> Jesus is the “light of the world” that comes into the darkness.<sup>76</sup>

Jesus is associated with creation. He is the one through whom all was made (including the world) and life given.<sup>77</sup> The world remains ignorant of him and his Father, although intimately connected to them.

The redemption Jesus brings about includes judgment, which involves the casting out of the ruler of this world, when Jesus is “lifted up from the earth” and believers are drawn up to him.<sup>78</sup> Jesus says that he must leave the world in order for the ruler of this world to be judged.<sup>79</sup> Immediately before the passion, Jesus exclaims that the ruler of this world is coming, but that he has no power to overcome Jesus.<sup>80</sup> Narratologically, this suggests that the crucifixion and death was understood to be the moment of Jesus’ triumph over the ruler of the world because Jesus does what the Father gave him to do.

### *The Father of the Devil*

Jesus’ claim to be able to reveal in the world his Father is predicated on Jesus’ exclusive residence with the Father in heaven prior to Jesus’ descent. It is predicated on Jesus’ direct knowledge of the Father whom only he has seen.<sup>81</sup> Repeatedly Jesus tells various Jewish constituencies that the Father who sent him is the true God whom they do not know while he himself does.<sup>82</sup> The text has the Jews themselves acknowledge the contrast between Jesus and the Father from whom Jesus comes, and Moses and God the Lawgiver. They rebuke the blind man whom Jesus had healed, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”<sup>83</sup>

This sets up a situation in which Jesus proclaims an unknown Father while arguing that the Jews think they worship this god, when in fact they do not. The god the Jews worship is another Father, the Father of the Devil. This is the god who gave Moses the Laws. Jesus predicts that his followers will be driven out of the synagogues and murdered by those in the synagogues who believe that they are serving God. But they are not serving the God Jesus knows because they have known neither Jesus nor the Father.<sup>84</sup>

There is tension in the text between the God Jesus preaches and the God the Samaritans and Jews are worshipping in ignorance in their temples.<sup>85</sup> The Father God whom Jesus preaches is characterized as “spirit” who must not be worshiped in the temples at Gerizim and Jerusalem. At the same time, Jesus understands the temple in Jerusalem to be “my Father’s house,” although a temple corrupted and made into “a house of trade.”<sup>86</sup> How can this tension be resolved? Could the Johannine author have understood the traditional story about the cleansing of the Temple to be an example of Jesus purging the Temple of impiety and the worship of the false god, so that he could set up the proper way to worship? Since the Johannine author a few verses later states that the Temple is Jesus’ body, I wonder if the author viewed the establishment of the church, the body of Jesus, to be the “temple” locus of the Father’s manifestation?<sup>87</sup>

In fact, this appears to be the traditional way in which Heracleon read the passage, and it puts Origen out-of-sorts. According to Origen, Heracleon

understood Jesus' reference to the Temple as "my Father's house" to affirm the existence of Jesus' Father as a god other than the creator. Jesus came to cleanse the Temple of the worship of the impious who were offering sacrifices to the creator god. He was establishing the Temple as the "church" of his Father. Origen actually agrees that the text refers to the establishment of the Church by Jesus since the author of John equates the temple with Jesus' body, but he disagrees that Jesus' Father is a god separate from the creator.<sup>88</sup>

The Johannine author distinguishes the Law of Moses from the message of Jesus: "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."<sup>89</sup> The commandments of Jesus are viewed in contrast. He gives laws he had been given directly from God his Father, and he declares the love commandment to be "new."<sup>90</sup> So it is not surprising to see in this gospel Jesus distancing himself from the Law of Moses. He refers to the Law as "your" Law when speaking to the Jews.<sup>91</sup> Jesus warns that those who are "of the world" hate him and also his Father. He explains that this fulfills what is written "in their law (ἐν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτῶν)": "They hated me without cause."<sup>92</sup> He says that the Jews have misinterpreted Moses' writings and they do not see in them the prophecies that refer to Jesus.<sup>93</sup> The gospel quotes several scriptural passages as prophecies fulfilled by Jesus, and depicts the Jews as unable to understand or observe correctly the Laws.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, the author of John presents Abraham and Isaiah as prophets who had been granted knowledge of Jesus or a vision of his Glory.<sup>95</sup>

This multivalent understanding of Jewish scriptures and the traditional Jewish heroes fits the type of Gnostic interpretation that both Irenaeus and Celsus disdained. Irenaeus tells us in his heresiological writings that some Gnostics believed Sophia occasionally in human history revealed or taught about the Christ-Anthropos, the luminous Man. Because of this, it was not uncommon to find Gnostics who thought that the prophets were inspired by both the true Father (unknowingly through Sophia's work) and the Creator, even though the prophets themselves were servants of the Creator and not the true Father.<sup>96</sup> Celsus criticizes the Christians (whom Origen identifies as Ophians) for their "blockheaded" ideas. He cannot understand why they would think that the Jewish god is accursed while also accepting his cosmogony and the inspiration of the prophets. This seems contradictory to Celsus who goes on to remark, "When your master Jesus, and Moses in whom the Jews believe, lay down contradictory laws, you try to find another god instead of this one who is the Father."<sup>97</sup>

### *The Devil*

The Devil is not developed substantially in the Gospel of John, although he is mentioned in 8:44 as having a father who is separate from the supreme Father Jesus preaches. Jesus prays that his Father will protect his followers

from the Evil One because they are not “of the world” just as he is not “of the world.”<sup>98</sup> We are told that Judas “is a devil (εἷς διάβολός ἐστιν)” chosen among the twelve by Jesus.<sup>99</sup> Judas’ selection appears to be part of some cosmic plan since Jesus insists that nothing can happen to Jesus himself unless his Father allows it to happen.<sup>100</sup> The Devil himself – called “Satan” – enters Judas when he is given the morsel by Jesus at the supper.<sup>101</sup> So whatever cosmic plan the Johannine author thought was enacted in Jesus’ life and death, it involved the ruler of the world, the Devil, Judas’ betrayal and Jesus’ crucifixion, an event which brought about the ‘casting out’ of the ruler of this world.<sup>102</sup>

### A TRANSITIONAL THEOLOGICAL SYSTEM

The theological system assumed by the Johannine author is a *transitional* system, representing a previously unrecognized theological strain that forged some forms of Gnostic transcendent theism. This newly charted theological strain is marked by the bifurcation of the Jewish god into a good, just Father who lives in the high heaven and a malicious Lawgiver who fathered the Devil and is the ruler of the world – the earth and its atmosphere (see Fig. 1.1).

Conventional Christian interpretation of the Gospel of John has identified “the ruler of the world” with the Devil. Now that we have recovered the father of the Devil who has been hiding beneath the accumulated weight of centuries of catholic interpretation, the conventional identification appears

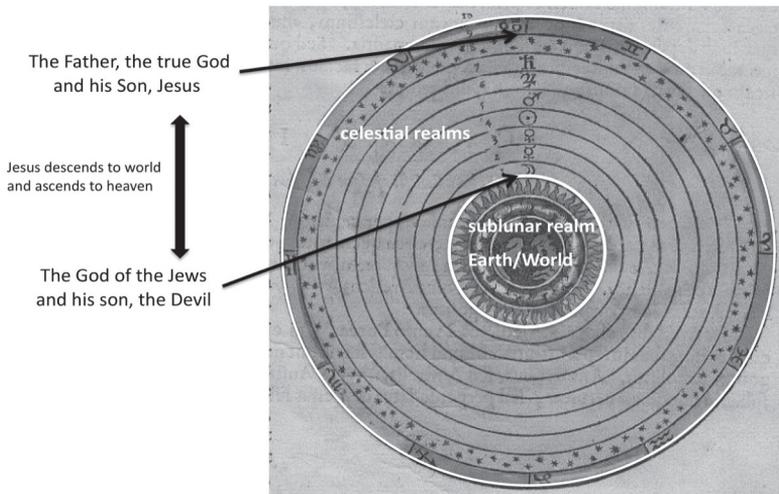


Diagram of Cosmology  
assumed by Gospel of John

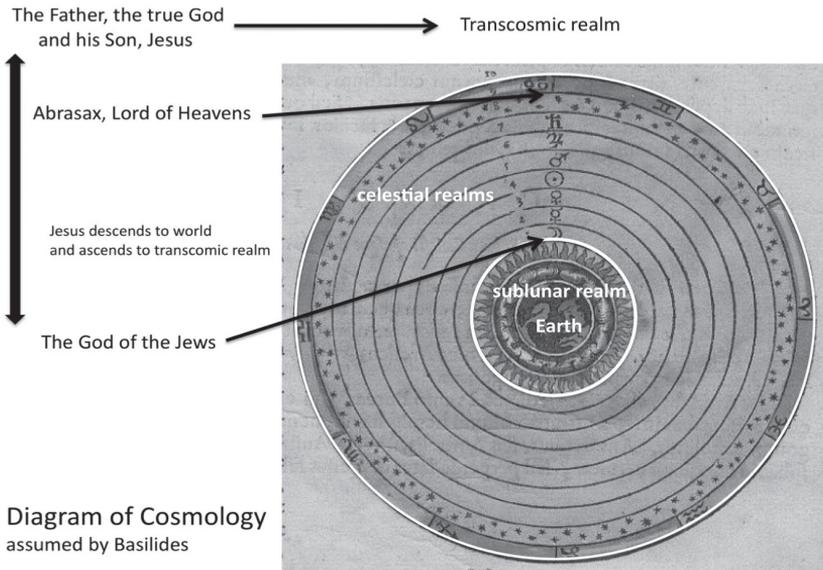
**Figure 1.1** Cosmology assumed by the Gospel of John. Illustration by April D. DeConick. Copyright: the author.

to be secondary, negotiating an orthodox interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. Critical investigation can be diverted no longer. The “ruler of the world” in the Gospel of John can no longer be understood as the Devil. We now know that the Devil has a father. This father is the Jewish God who is the creator and ruler of the world. What we have in the Gospel of John is a panastral *transitional* system where the cosmic Father rules the world with his son the Devil, just as the astral Father rules the heavens with his Son Jesus. The territory of the Lawgiver is “the world” – the earth and its atmosphere. He is not the astral Lord. The astral Lord is another god. The astral Lord, the God of the Heavens, is the supreme Father whom Jesus preached.

I want to stress this point because we are not seeing a simple addition of the Platonic transcendent Good as the supreme Father to a system in which the Jewish god has been demoted. The author of the Gospel of John is grappling with his community’s connection to Judaism and a Jewish scripture which the community still considers sacred, at least to the extent that it believes that prophecies of Jesus are hidden within the Jewish scripture. The author understands salvation to have come from Judaism, but not to have remained within traditional Judaism.<sup>103</sup> From the perspective of the Johannine author, Jesus came down out of the heavens to straighten out the religion, to teach that the just God is a god who resides in the heavens. He is a God of love and righteousness, grace and truth, whom no one knew about prior to Jesus’ advent when he revealed himself through his Son. The Jews think they worship this god, but in reality they are worshiping an inferior god, the Lawgiver, who rules the world and fathered the Devil.

Unlike later developed Gnostic systems, the supreme Father in the Johannine gospel is still part of this universe. He is not a transtheistic God. He is not living above or beyond the heavens in some distant pleromic world. He is far away, but he is still in the celestial sphere and immediately connected with creation through his Son Jesus. The system is a panastral one. In terms of the development of Gnostic traditions, this represents a crucial step. Although I am wary of creating an academic model that suggests a linear and straightforward evolution, I am certain from my study of the growth of traditions in general, that their growth usually occurs in very small increments or shifts. The shifts are not necessarily tidy, nor linear, nor the same across the board, but they are traceable.

In the case of the Gospel of John, we have evidence of a shift that has escaped our attention for centuries. It is a shift that split the Jewish God into two, leaving his “better” half *in the heavens*, and demoting his “uglier” half *to the earth and its atmosphere* to reside with the Devil who was already there in the conventional traditions. In the Johannine system at least, we do not yet have a Platonic graft, a Good transcendent god who is living outside the universe in competition with the Jewish God who is the ruler of this world, living in the highest of the heavens in the sphere above the Zodiac as he is, for instance, in the Sethian traditions.



**Figure 1.2** Cosmology assumed by Basilides. Illustration by April D. DeConick. Copyright: the author.

What we have though is something very early in the development of Gnostic traditions, a shift that represents the Gnostic tradition immediately prior to Basilides (see Fig. 1.2). According to Irenaeus' description of Basilides' system, Basilides posited a transtheistic God largely derived from the philosophical tradition, an "unborn father" from whom "Nous" is birthed along with a number of other powers who live outside the heavens.<sup>104</sup> The lowest of these powers create and populate the highest heaven with angels, who in turn create and populate a second heaven beneath the first. This proceeds until 365 heavens are fashioned.<sup>105</sup> The lowest of these heavens, the 365th, is the one "visible to us." It is populated by angels who create the world and everything in it.<sup>106</sup>

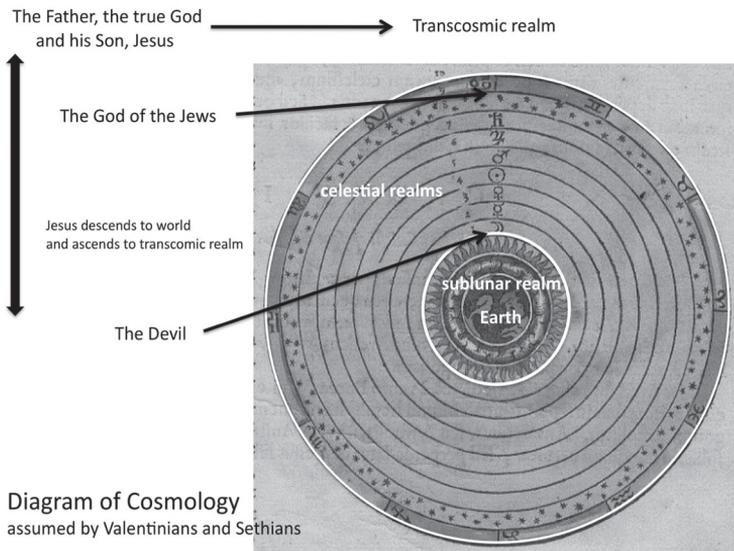
Their chief is the God of the Jews and the Lawgiver. Each of his angels was the representative of a nation on earth. Because he was the chief of the other angels in his heaven, ruling over them, he desired to have all the nations on earth be subject to his chosen people, the Jews. When the unborn Father perceived that all the other nations would be slaughtered as a result of the archontic war, he sent down Nous as the Christ to deliver all those who believed in him from the world creator via the crucifixion.<sup>107</sup>

But that is not all. Irenaeus reports that there is another figure in Basilides' system, the astral Lord Abrasax who is the chief over the 365 heavens, since his name numerically adds up to 365 in Greek.<sup>108</sup> Epiphanius also thinks that Abrasax is the power ruling the heavens and their angels, and suggests that if one were to work back up the chain of heavens, it would suggest that Abrasax was the chief creator of everything.<sup>109</sup> Pseudo-Tertullian mistakes this fact,

identifying the creator of Nous with Abrasax, and then offering an awkward explanation of the name: that Abrasax was the name given to the father of Nous in honor of the 365 heavens and the world that the angels had created.<sup>110</sup>

Even Hippolytus’ “Egyptian” rendition of Basilides’ system posits two cosmic rulers in addition to a supreme non-existent God who is “supramundane.”<sup>111</sup> Abrasax who governs the fixed stars and the planets, is called the “Great Ruler.” He is “ineffable and more powerful than the powerful and wiser than the wise, and superior to any beautiful things you might mention,” although he is ignorant of anything outside the universe.<sup>112</sup> He lives at the top of the universe, just under the firmament that separates universe from the world-beyond where the supramundane God dwells. The creation of the celestial spheres is attributed to Abrasax.<sup>113</sup> His domain extends from this universal firmament down to the moon.<sup>114</sup> The air and the earth are ruled by another figure, “much inferior to the first Ruler.” He is the creator of all that lies beneath the moon.<sup>115</sup> He is the god who spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>116</sup>

The recovered theology of the Gospel of John provides us with a piece of the puzzle that we did not have before. It confirms that the growth of some Gnostic traditions has its roots in Jewish traditions, as Christianity was emerging and beginning to shape its own identity from its Jewish past and present. In this particular strain of Gnosticism, the bifurcation of the Jewish God into a “beneficial” astral Lord and a “malicious” sublunar ruler appears to have occurred prior to the grafting of the supramundane Platonic god into the system. It also suggests that the sublunar ruler of this world was a separate entity



**Figure 1.3** Cosmology assumed by Valentinians and Sethians. Illustration by April D. DeConick. Copyright: the author.

from Satan in some of the earliest Gnostic traditions. Only later do some of the Gnostic traditions tend to consolidate the two cosmic rulers and locate in the highest heaven one chief archon, the God of the Jews, who is responsible for the creation of the world and humanity. In the case of some Valentinians, this archon appears with more beneficial characteristics, like the Abrasax deity. In other Gnostic traditions, like the Sethian, this chief archon is more in line with the Johannine sublunar ruler, “the father of the Devil” (see Fig. 1.3).

All of this said, and yet I have not even begun to unpack the further implications that this information has for the origins of the Gospel of John. Who were these betwixt people and how can their *transitional* theology be accounted for? All I can say for now is that I think Cerinthus really is lurking in the bathhouse.

## NOTES

1. Funk (1973: 1.§§128, 129.5; 2.§547); Blass *et al.* (1961: §268). Cf. Mk 4:1//Mt. 3:1; Acts 12:12; Phlm 3.
2. DeConick (2013).
3. Cf. Origen, *Commentary on John* 20.172 (Brooke 1896: 2.64).
4. Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 38.4.2 (Holl 1980: 2.66); 40.5.5 (Holl 1980: 2.85); 40.6.7 (Holl 1980: 2.87); 66.63.1, 11 (Holl 1980: 3.101, 103).
5. Cf. Origen, *Commentary on John* 20.173–5 (Brooke 1896: 2.64).
6. Cf. Origen, *Commentary on John* 20.256 (Brooke 1896: 2.79).
7. Cf. Origen, *Commentary on John* 20.266 (Brooke 1896: 2.80).
8. Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 38.4.13 (Holl 1980: 2.68); 38.5.1–3 (Holl 1980: 2.68); 40.6.2–9 (Holl 1980: 2.86–7).
9. Augustine, *Commentary on John* 42.9–15.
10. Cf. T. C. de Kruijf (1980: 47–63); Strecker (1996: 108–9); Lieu (2008: 18, 134–5, 148, 246–7).
11. I align my own interpretative work on the Epistles with the methodological sophistication established by Brown (1977: 379–93; 1978: 5–22; 1979a; 1979b). I am not convinced by the recent shift in Johannine scholarship that the Gospel of John was not known to the author of the Epistles or that the Epistles were not a polemical response to a schism that occurred over hermeneutics (cf. Lieu 2008: 9–18; Hakola 2009: 17–47). Differences between the Epistles and the Fourth Gospel are not evidence for independence. In this case, differences represent emergent hermeneutic structures among users of the Fourth Gospel and the cordons of theological territories that were being established by them.
12. 1 Jn 5:19–20.
13. 1 Jn 2:29.
14. 1 Jn 3:1; 4:7–8, 10–12, 16–17; 5:3.
15. 1 Jn 5:3.
16. 1 Jn 2:7; 4:17–21.
17. 1 Jn 4:10.
18. 1 Jn 2:7–11.
19. For more details, see DeConick (2013).
20. 1 Jn 3:4–10.
21. 1 Jn 3:7–12.
22. 1 Jn 3:15.
23. 1 Jn 3:8, 10.

24. 1 Jn 4:6.
25. 1 Jn 2:4; 4:20.
26. 1 Jn 1:8.
27. 1 Jn 1:10.
28. 1 Jn 1:7, 9; 2:2, 5; 4:10; 5:6-7.
29. 1 Jn 2:20, 27; 3:24; 4:13.
30. 1 Jn 2:5; 3:3. 1 Jn 2:27; 3:7-12.
31. 1 Jn 2:4, 22.
32. 1 Jn 4:20.
33. 1 Jn 2:4.
34. 1 Jn 2:6.
35. Cf. 1 Jn 2:12-14
36. 1 Jn 2:17.
37. 1 Jn 2:16-17; 3:1.
38. 1 Jn 2:18; 4:3.
39. 1 Jn 1:9; 2:1-2; 5:14-15.
40. 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10; 5:6-8.
41. 1 Jn 3:19-24; 4:7-19.
42. 1 Jn 4:2; 2 Jn 7.
43. Cf. Bultmann (1973: 62-3); Brown (1979: 147-64); Strecker (1996: 134-5); Lieu (2008: 10, 23, 169).
44. See my full critique and suggestions for a new system in DeConick (2007: 1-23).
45. DeConick (2007: 19-20).
46. For a summary of various scholastic readings of this passage, see Lieu (2008: 209-14).
47. 1 Jn 5:8.
48. Wisdom of Solomon 7:27.
49. Mk 1:10.
50. Mt. 3:16; 27:50; Lk. 3:22; 23:46; Jn 1:32-33; 19:30.
51. Jn 6:14.
52. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.26.1 (Rousseau & Doutreleau 1979: 344-7).
53. Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against Heresies* 3.1.2-3 (Kroymann 1954: 1405--6).
54. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.26.1 (Rousseau & Doutreleau 1979: 344-7).
55. Jn 8:12.
56. Jn 8:23.
57. Jn 8:19.
58. Jn 8:19.
59. Jn 8:38.
60. Jn 8:39-41.
61. Jn 8:41.
62. Jn 8:42.
63. Jn 8:44.
64. Jn 8:54-5.
65. Jn 17:3.
66. Jn 17:25.
67. Jn 3:16-19; 7:29; 17:18, 21, 23, 25.
68. Jn 7: 34; 13:1, 3; 17:8, 11, 13; 18:37.
69. Jn 17:14.
70. Jn 3:27, 31; 6:38, 41-2.
71. Jn 3:31.
72. Jn 3:31.
73. Jn 6:32-3, 48-51, 58.
74. Jn 12:28-32; 17:4.
75. Jn 4:42; 16:33.

76. Jn 1:9; 8:12; 9:5; 10:9-10; 12:35-6, 46.
77. Jn 1:3-4, 10.
78. Jn 12:31-2.
79. Jn 16:11.
80. Jn 14:30.
81. Jn 1:18; 5:37; 6:46.
82. Jn 7:28; 8:12-44; 8:54-5; 14:7-8; 16:2-3.
83. Jn 9:28-9.
84. Jn 16:2-3.
85. Jn 4:21-4.
86. Jn 2:16.
87. Jn 2:21.
88. Origen, *Commentary on John* 10.210-28.
89. Jn 1:17.
90. Jn 12:49-50; 13:34.
91. Jn 6:32; 7:19; 10:34.
92. Jn 15:18-25; Pss. 35:19; 69:4.
93. Jn 5:46-7.
94. Jn 5:46-7; 6:31-51; 7:19-24; 7:38; 12:37-41.
95. Jn 8:56; 12:41.
96. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.30.11 (Rousseau & Doutreleau 1979: 378-81); 2.35.2, 4; 4.35.1. Cf. Ptolemy's letter to Flora preserved in Epiphanius, *Panarion* 33.3.1-7.10 (Holl 1915: 450-57).
97. Origen, *Commentary on John* 6.29 (Borret 1969: 250).
98. Jn 17:15.
99. Jn 6:70-71.
100. Jn 6:65-71.
101. Jn 13:27.
102. Jn 12:31-2.
103. Jn 4:22.
104. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.24.3 (Rousseau & Doutreleau 1979: 324-7); cf. Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against Heresies* 1.5 (Kroymann 1954: 1402); Epiphanius, *Panarion* 24.1.7 (Holl 1915: 257).
105. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.24.3 (Rousseau & Doutreleau 1979: 324-7); cf. Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against Heresies* 1.5 (Kroymann 1954: 1402); Epiphanius, *Panarion* 24.1.8-9 (Holl 1915: 257).
106. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.24.4 (Rousseau & Doutreleau 1979: 326-9); cf. Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against Heresies* 1.5 (Kroymann 1954: 1402); Epiphanius, *Panarion* 24.2.3 (Holl 1915: 258).
107. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.24.4 (Rousseau & Doutreleau 1979: 326-9); cf. Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against Heresies* 1.5 (Kroymann 1954: 1402); Epiphanius, *Panarion* 24.2.5-3.5 (Holl 1915: 259-60).
108. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.24.6 (Rousseau & Doutreleau 1979: 330-31); cf. Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against Heresies* 1.5 (Kroymann 1954, 1402); Epiphanius, *Panarion* 24.7.2 (Holl 1915: 263-4).
109. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 24.7.1-4 (Holl 1915: 263-4); 24.8.3 (Holl 1915: 264).
110. Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against Heresies* 1.5 (Kroymann 1954: 1402).
111. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.23.2 (Marcovich 1986: 292).
112. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.23.3 (Marcovich 1986: 292).
113. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.23.7 (Marcovich 1986: 293).
114. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.24.3 (Marcovich 1986: 294).
115. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.24.3-4 (Marcovich 1986: 294).
116. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.25.4 (Marcovich 1986: 295).

## CHAPTER 2

# ADOIL OUTSIDE THE COSMOS

## GOD BEFORE AND AFTER CREATION IN THE ENOCHIC TRADITION

*Andrei A. Orlov*

... vessels shattered and collapsed, for they were not able to contain the light expanding and emanating from within them ... the saints in their death transform these sparks of holiness.

Chaim Vital, *Etz Chaim*

Unlike other early Enochic writings, the 2 (*Slavonic*) *Apocalypse of Enoch* depicts a unique story of primordial creation, revealing an elaborate course of events that preceded the visible creation of the world.<sup>1</sup> The importance of this mystical account is underlined by the fact that it was delivered to the seventh antediluvian hero by God himself. Chapter 25 of 2 *Enoch* recounts how, at the end of the patriarch's celestial tour to the Throne of Glory, the deity unveils to the seer that prior to the visible creation he had called out from nothing the luminous aeon Adoil to become the foundation of the upper things. The account describes the enigmatic event of Adoil's disintegration in the course of which the aeon becomes the cornerstone of the visible creation upon which the Deity establishes his Throne. Here, similar to the depictions found in the Lurianic Kabbalah, the bursting of the primordial vessel of light is envisioned as the first creative act of the deity that gives life to the visible order of everything.

Even more striking is that this primordial act of establishing the visible reality is then paralleled in the later chapters of the Slavonic apocalypse that focus on the eschatological demise.

Thus scholars have previously noted that the protological account in chapter 25, dealing with the establishment of the created order, appears to correspond with the order of eschatological events in chapter 65 where during his short visit to earth Enoch conveys to his children the mystery of the last times.<sup>2</sup> The patriarch reveals that after the final judgment time will collapse and all the righteous of the world will be incorporated into one single

luminous entity: the aeon of the righteous. The description of this final aeon betrays some striking similarities to the primordial aeon Adoil depicted in chapter 25. The revelation also seems to suggest that the righteous Enoch, translated to heaven and transformed into a luminous celestial creature, represents the first fruit of this eschatological aeon that will eventually gather all the righteous into a single entity.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the traditions about the primordial aeon Adoil in the Slavonic apocalypse and the role of Enoch in its eschatological restoration.

## THE AEON BEFORE CREATION

### *The Upper Foundation*

The Slavonic apocalypse underlines the portentous nature of the primordial cosmogonic account by stressing that this special knowledge has never been previously revealed to any other creatures, including the angels. This supra-angelic disclosure, given to the visionary after his celestial metamorphosis, can be seen as the pinnacle of the esoteric instruction the seventh antediluvian hero acquired in the upper realm. An extensive description of this revelation is provided by both the shorter and the longer recensions of the Slavonic text. The shorter recension<sup>3</sup> of *2 Enoch 25* offers the following account:

And I commanded the lowest things: “Let one of the invisible things come out visibly!” And Adail descended, extremely large. And I looked at him, and, behold, in his belly he had a great age. And I said to him, “Disintegrate yourself, Adail, and let what is disintegrated from you become visible.” And he disintegrated himself, and there came out from him the great age. And thus it carried all the creation which I had wished to create. And I saw how good it was. And I placed for myself a throne, and I sat down on it. To the light I spoke: “You go up higher and be solidified and become the foundation for the highest things.” And there is nothing higher than the light, except nothing itself. And I spoke, I straightened myself upward from my throne.<sup>4</sup>

The central character of the story is the aeon Adoil (“Adail” in the shorter recension)<sup>5</sup> who is envisioned in the text as the chief cosmogonic agent responsible for the “revelation” of the visible creation. This enigmatic entity is depicted as both the mother and the midwife of creation, someone that conceives and then releases the whole creation from its cosmic belly. The text emphasizes the enormous size of Adoil, defining him as “extremely large.” He is portrayed as “pregnant” with creation by containing a great aeon in

his stomach. According to the text, Adoil's disintegration provides the beginning for all visible reality and serves as the foundation on which God is able to establish the first visible manifestation of the created order: his Throne. It is noteworthy that in both recensions the Deity commands Adoil to become the foundation of the highest things.<sup>6</sup> This terminological identification of Adoil with the concept of foundation is important for our study.<sup>7</sup>

Another significant feature relevant to our subsequent discussion is the portrayal of Adoil in the longer recension as the "revealer."<sup>8</sup> Adoil's disintegration is identified in the text as the revelation of the created order: "And the great age came out, and it revealed all the creation which I had thought up to create."

Finally, another notable detail in the depiction of Adoil is the repeated references to his luminous nature. The emphasis on the luminosity of the primordial aeon is even more apparent in the longer recension, which emphasizes not only the outer shining nature of the protological agent but also his internal luminous state, depicted there as a pregnancy with great light.<sup>9</sup>

### *The cosmogony of 2 Enoch: Light inside of light*

Scholars have previously noted several parallels between the creational narrative found in the Slavonic apocalypse and some Hermetic and Gnostic cosmogonies. Further, the researchers often envisioned *2 Enoch's* account as an important early testimony to the Jewish matrix of these later cosmogonic speculations.<sup>10</sup> In light of these similarities, scholars speculated that Adoil's imagery may be connected with the myth of the Celestial Man. This imagery becomes prominent in the later Hermetic and Gnostic texts and collections,<sup>11</sup> including the *Corpus Hermeticum* where the Anthropos inherits the luminosity of the Father<sup>12</sup> and becomes the blueprint for the created order and humankind by disintegrating himself into the physical realm. This motif is conveyed in the *Poimandres*<sup>13</sup> through the erotic metaphor of Anthropos falling in love with Nature.<sup>14</sup> In commenting on the features of the Celestial Man myth in the story of Adoil, Jarl Fossum draws attention to the peculiar symbolism of light conveyed in the longer recension of the Slavonic pseudepigraphon through the expression "light out of light." He proposes that this imagery of light – possibly rendered in the Greek *Vorlage* of *2 Enoch* through the term φῶς, as in many other accounts that contain the Celestial Man ideology – might have an anthropomorphic significance.<sup>15</sup> It is well known that the heavenly Anthropos traditions often play on the ambiguity of the φῶς terminology that can designate either φῶς "a man" or φῶς "light," both pointing to the luminous and anthropomorphic nature of the Celestial Human.<sup>16</sup> In view of these conceptual developments, Adoil can be understood in the Slavonic apocalypse as an anthropomorphic entity that is predestined to serve not only as the pattern of the visible creation but also as the blueprint of humanity. The possible

“human” form of Adoil seems also reaffirmed in both recensions through references to his belly.

The anthropomorphic dimension of the φως symbolism was also evident in the Hermetic and Gnostic cosmologies that also often play on the ambiguity of this terminology in their depiction of the Heavenly Man. In this respect it is intriguing that some Gnostic anthropogonies use expressions very similar to *2 Enoch* by describing the Celestial Man “Adamas” as “a light which radiated from the light.”<sup>17</sup>

### *The anthropogony of 2 Enoch: Sophia and seven*

The enigmatic unfolding of the cosmogonic process in the Slavonic apocalypse receives further conceptual development in the account of the creation of Adam that follows this narration. Interestingly, the cosmogonic account of Adoil’s disintegration in chapters 25–7 and the anthropogonic account of Adam’s creation found in chapter 30 appear to be closely connected with each other, as some of Adam’s qualities resemble some peculiar features of the great aeon.

One of the prominent features here is a parallel between the luminosity of Adoil and the luminosity of Adam. Thus, according to *2 Enoch* 30.12, the prelapsarian Adam was a very special celestial being. The Slavonic apocalypse defines him as a second angel who was great and glorious.<sup>18</sup>

The designation of Adam as a “second angel” is also intriguing in light of previous scholarly suggestions that Adoil too appears to be envisioned in the text as an angel.<sup>19</sup> In view of the possible angelic nature of the first aeon, Adam’s designation as the second angel may have been conceived as a subtle link between the two characters by placing the patriarch in parallel with the Heavenly Man. Additional imagery found in the text seems to corroborate this connection. In this respect it is noteworthy that the account of Adam’s creation ends with an arcane hymn about the two “substances” of humanity – invisible and visible:

From invisible and visible substances I created man.  
From both his natures come both death and life.  
And (as my) image he knows the word like (no) other creature.  
But even at his greatest he is small,  
and again at his smallest he is great.<sup>20</sup>

In light of this juxtaposition of the invisible and the visible, it is worth noting that the descent of Adoil in both recensions of *2 Enoch* 25.1 is rendered through similar terminology, as transition from an invisible into a visible condition: “And I commanded the lowest things: ‘Let one of the invisible things descend visibly!’ And Adoil descended, extremely large.”<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, the aforementioned hymn makes an enigmatic juxtaposition between the invisible and visible substances of the Protoplast and the conditions of death and life, which possibly signify here the states of mortality and immortality: “From invisible and visible substances I created man. From both his natures come both death and life.”

It is striking that *Poimandres* 15 offers a very similar cluster of traditions about the twofold nature of humankind, in which the immortal part is linked with the Celestial Man: “Because of this, unlike any other living thing on earth, mankind is twofold – in the body mortal but immortal in the essential man.”<sup>22</sup>

All these parallels help to clarify the subtle correlations between Adoil and Adam, providing further insight into the relationships between *2 Enoch*'s cosmogony and anthropogony.

The unity of the cosmological and anthropological developments in the Slavonic apocalypse is also evident in the tradition about the sevenfold nature of humanity. The longer recension of *2 Enoch* 30.8–9 recounts that Adam was created from seven “components”<sup>23</sup> and endowed with seven “properties/faculties”:<sup>24</sup>

And on the sixth day I commanded my wisdom to create man out  
of the seven components:  
his flesh from earth;  
his blood from dew and from the sun;  
his eyes from bottomless sea;  
his bones from stone;  
his reason from the mobility of angels and from clouds;  
his sinews and hair from grass of the earth;  
his spirit from my spirit and from wind.

And I gave him 7 properties:<sup>25</sup>  
hearing to the flesh;  
sight to the eyes;  
smell to the spirit;  
touch to the sinews;  
taste to the blood;  
to the bones – endurance;  
to the reason – sweetness.<sup>26</sup>

The creation of Adam from seven substances is important for our study. It is again reminiscent of the Hermetic and Gnostic developments where the sevenfold anthropogonic pattern is intertwined with the sevenfold cosmogony.

For example, in *Poimandres* 16-17 the following cryptic tradition can be found:

Poimandres said: “This is the mystery that has been kept hidden until this very day. When nature made love with the man, she bore a wonder most wondrous. In him he had the nature of the cosmic framework of the seven, who are made of fire and spirit, as I told you, and without delay nature at once gave birth to seven men, androgyne and exalted, whose nature were like those of the seven governors ...

As I said, then, the birth of the seven was as follows. <Earth> was the female. Water did the fertilizing. Fire was the maturing force. Nature took spirit from the ether and brought forth bodies in the shape of the man. From life and light the man become soul and mind; from life came soul, from light came mind, and all things in cosmos of the senses remained thus until a cycle ended <and> kinds of things began to be.”<sup>27</sup>

Here humanity’s origin is traced to the seven spirits<sup>28</sup> who are responsible for “giving birth” to the seven androgynous humans.<sup>29</sup>

It is also intriguing that in *Poimandres* 16-17 the sevenfold anthropogony corresponds to the sevenfold cosmology (wherein the seven proto-humans are correlated to the seven celestial governors’-planets called “administrators”) and also to the “senses” or elements of nature and the human body. Thus a passage in *Poimandres* 9 tells about seven planetary “governors,” applying to them the terminology of “circles”:

The mind who is god, being androgyne and existing as life and light, by speaking gave birth to a second mind, a craftsman, who, as god of fire and spirit, crafted seven governors; they encompass the sensible world in circles (ἐν κύκλοις), and their government is called faith.<sup>30</sup>

The symbolism of the planetary “circles” in this passage is reminiscent of the imagery in the Slavonic apocalypse. A tradition found in the longer recension of *2 Enoch* 27.3-4 speaks of God creating seven great “circles” in the “foundation of light”:

And I made a foundation of light around the water. And I created seven great circles inside it, and I gave them an appearance of crystal, wet and dry, that is to say glass and ice, and to be the circuit for water and the other elements. And I pointed out to each one of them his route, to the seven stars, each one of them in his own heaven, so that they might travel accordingly. And I saw how good it was. And I made a division between the light and between the darkness, that is to say, in the middle of the waters, this way and that way. And I said to the light that it should be day, and to the

darkness I commanded that it should be night. And evening came, and again morning came, that is the first day.<sup>31</sup>

In this passage, the creation of the seven planetary circles and seven stars appears to be connected, as in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, with the sevenfold nature of primordial humanity. Our study will later show that in the account of Adam's creation in *2 Enoch* 30, the list of the seven planets is given immediately before the account of the Protoplast's creation from the seven components. Here, as in the Hermetic literature, the seven "governors" of the heavens appear to be envisioned as the defining cosmological pattern that precedes the sevenfold nature of primordial humanity.

A similar correspondence between the sevenfold cosmology and the sevenfold anthropogony appears in several Gnostic texts, including the *Apocryphon of John*, where the seven components of Adam's body correspond to the seven anthropogonic agents associated with planetary spheres and responsible for the fashioning of the first human's body.<sup>32</sup>

Thus the *Apocryphon of John* unveils the identities of seven rulers and their role in the creation of the psychic body of Adam:

And the rulers created seven powers for (each of) them, and the powers created for themselves six angels for each one until they became 365 angels. And these are the bodies belonging with the names: the first <is> Athoth, he has a sheep's face; the second is Eloaiou, he has a donkey's face; the third is Astaphaios, he has a [hyena's] face; the fourth is Yao, he has a [serpent's] face with seven heads; the fifth is Sabaoth, he has a serpent's face; the sixth is Adonin, he had a monkey's face; the seventh is Sabbede, he has a shining fire-face. This is the sevenness of the week.<sup>33</sup>

... And he said to the authorities which attend him, "Come, let us create a man according to the image of God and according to our likeness, that his image may become a light for us." And they created through their respective powers in correspondence with the characteristics which were given. And each authority supplied a characteristic by means of the form of the image which he had seen in its psychic (form). He created a being according to the likeness of the first, perfect Man.

And they said, "Let us call him Adam, that his name may become a power of light for us." And the powers began (to create): the first one, Goodness, created a bone-soul; and the second, Providence, created a sinew-soul; the third, Divinity, created a flesh-soul; and the fourth, Lordship, created a marrow-soul; the fifth, Kingdom, created a blood-soul; the sixth, Envy, created a skin-soul; the seventh, Understanding, created a hair-soul. And the multitude of the

angels attended him, and they received from the authorities the seven substances of the soul in order to create the proportions of the limbs and the proportions of the trunk and the proper working together of each of the parts.<sup>34</sup>

Here, as in the aforementioned Hermetic materials, the correspondence between the Heavenly Man and his “material” counterpart is mediated by the anthropogonic sevenfold pattern. Several other Gnostic texts also affirm this tradition of the seven androgynous anthropogonic “mediators.” Thus, for example, *On the Origin of the World* 16–17 reads:

Seven appeared in chaos, androgynous. They have their masculine names and their feminine names ... These are the [seven] forces of the seven heavens of [chaos]. And they were born androgynous, consistent with the immortal pattern that existed before them, according to the wish of Pistis.<sup>35</sup>

Here again, as in the aforementioned passages from the *Poimandres*, the connection is made between the seven androgynes and the sevenfold pattern according to which they were “born.” While the list of the corresponding celestial governing planets is not explicitly outlined in the versions of the *Apocryphon of John*, their authors knew these astral correlations.<sup>36</sup>

Roelof van den Broek summarizes the correspondences found in the several versions of the *Apocryphon of John* by offering the following juxtaposition of archons, powers, planets, and soul substances:<sup>37</sup>

Iaoth	Pronoia	Moon	Marrow
Eloaios	Divinity	Mercury	Bones
Astaphaios	Goodness	Venus	Sinews
Iao	Fire	Sun	Flesh
Sabaoth	Kingship	Mars	Blood
Adoni	Synesis	Jupiter	Skin
Sabbataios	Sophia	Saturn	Hair <sup>38</sup>

These correlations are thought-provoking as they show close similarities with the planetary list given in the creational narrative of the Slavonic apocalypse. It is also intriguing that in *2 Enoch* this planetary list precedes almost immediately the rosters of the seven components and properties of Adam. Thus the longer recension of *2 Enoch* 30.2–3 relates:

And on the fourth day I commanded: “Let there be great lamps on the heavenly circles.” On the first, the highest circle, I placed the star Kronos;

on the 2nd, <lower down, I placed>	Afridit;
on the 3rd	Arris;
on the 4th	the sun;
on the 5th	Zeous;
on the 6th	Ermis;
and on the 7th, the lowest	the moon. <sup>39</sup>

Although some Greek names on this planetary list appear to have been corrupted during the long transmission history of the Slavonic apocalypse,<sup>40</sup> it is not difficult to restore their original forms.

The corrupted Greek names given in the list correspond to the following planets:<sup>41</sup>

- 1st circle – Saturn (Kronos)
- 2nd circle – Venus (Aphrodite)
- 3rd circle – Mars (Ares)
- 4th circle – the sun
- 5th circle – Jupiter (Zeus)
- 6th circle – Mercury (Hermes)
- 7th circle – the moon

This list is reminiscent of the planetary list of the Archons provided by van der Broek, although it misplaces Jupiter and Venus<sup>42</sup> and reverses the order of planets, starting with Saturn (Kronos) and concluding with the moon. Van den Broek notes that, according to Origen's *Against Celsus* 6.31, this reversal of the planetary order was part of the Ophites' cosmological system.<sup>43</sup>

The cluster of traditions surrounding the creation of the Protoplast in the Slavonic apocalypse, similarly to the Gnostic and Hermetic materials, points to the unity of the cosmological and anthropogonic speculations which are tied together through the distinctive sevenfold patterns. Although the applications of the sevenfold patterns in relation to humanity have been known in various Hellenistic milieux from the most ancient times, the peculiar nature of these developments in the Slavonic apocalypse appears to draw them closer to the variants found in later Hermetic and Gnostic texts.

In this respect another, even more striking parallel between the account of creation in *2 Enoch* 30 and the Gnostic materials should be mentioned. In the longer recension<sup>44</sup> of *2 Enoch* 30.8 the deity commanded his Wisdom<sup>45</sup> to create man out the seven components.<sup>46</sup> Scholars have previously noted the parallels between this role of Wisdom (Gk. *Sophia*) in the creation of the first human in the Slavonic apocalypse and the Gnostic texts.<sup>47</sup> Some scholars even suggested that the Sophia tradition in *2 Enoch* 30 might be an early Jewish prototype of the later Gnostic developments.<sup>48</sup>

Although in the *Poimandres*' version of the anthropogonic myth Nature is responsible for the creation of the seven androgynous beings, in some Nag

Hammadi materials it is Sophia (“Wisdom”)<sup>49</sup> that generates the immortal sevenfold pattern, the portentous blueprint later imitated in the seven androgynous archons.<sup>50</sup> She is also one of the seven “powers” – the entity corresponding to the name of archon Sabbataios on the lists of rulers in the *Apocryphon of John*. It is intriguing that, as in the Slavonic apocalypse where wisdom is in charge of the sevenfold pattern, in Gnostic and some other related materials Sophia also takes charge of the seven entities responsible for the creation of the first human.

Thus *On the Origin of the World* 16–17 reads:

Seven appeared in chaos, androgynous ... And they were born androgynous, consistent with the immortal pattern that existed before them, according to the wish of Pistis (Sophia): so that the likeness of what had existed since the beginning might reign to the end.<sup>51</sup>

Here Wisdom (Sophia) is put in charge of the “immortal” sevenfold pattern according to which the seven androgynous archons are brought into existence. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* 3–4 offers a very similar tradition that puts Sophia in charge of the sevenfold pattern which lays the basis for the creation of humankind.<sup>52</sup>

The Sophia tradition found in the Slavonic apocalypse may indeed be one of the most veiled conceptual developments in the text. The true extent of this enigmatic demiurgic entity assisting the deity in his creation remains shrouded in mystery. It is possible that in *2 Enoch* Sophia is linked not only with fashioning the sevenfold human body but also with generating the seven celestial “governors.” It is intriguing that in chapter 48 *Enoch*, while outlining the process of the creation of celestial bodies, mentions that they were “fixed” by God’s own wisdom.<sup>53</sup>

In concluding this section dealing with protological developments, we should again highlight the prominence of the sevenfold patterns in the text’s cosmological and anthropological developments. While many sevenfold lists found in the Slavonic apocalypse appear to have been irreparably corrupted during the text’s long journey through various religious and linguistic milieux, these sevenfold patterns represent the paramount link connecting the protological narrative with its eschatological counterpart, where the sevenfold blueprint will again play a vital role.

## THE AEON AFTER CREATION

### *The final aeon as the reverse anthropogony*

It is time to return to the tradition of the primordial aeon in the Slavonic apocalypse. The aforementioned primeval account of creation, narrated by God in

chapters 25 and 26 of the Slavonic pseudepigraphon, is invoked in abbreviated form in the subsequent chapters of the text where Enoch unveils to his sons the knowledge he received during his celestial trip. There the reader also encounters some additional cosmological details pertaining not only to the beginning of creation but also its final destiny.

Chapter 65 of *2 Enoch* deals with the final instructions the translated hero of the faith relates to humanity immediately before his second and final departure to heaven. The final place of this revelation among the other mysteries conveyed by Enoch to humankind during his short visit underlines the significance of this disclosure. In many ways it appears to be set in parallel with the account of the Lord's own instructions about the secrets of creation, which Enoch also received from the Deity at the end of his heavenly trip after the preliminary revelations conveyed to him by his psychopomps and angel Vereveil.

This enigmatic revelation is intriguing not only in the *format* of its delivery which parallels the secrets of creation revealed by the Lord in previous chapters 25 and 26 but also in its peculiar *content* which in many ways mirrors the familiar conceptual framework of the protological revelation. The shorter recension of *2 Enoch* 65.1–11 reads:

Listen, my children! Before all things existed, (and) before all creation came about, the Lord established the age of creation, and after that he created all his creation, visible and invisible ... When the whole creation which the Lord has created, shall come to an end, and when each person will go to the Lord's great judgment, then the time periods will perish, and there will be neither years nor months nor days, and hours will no longer be counted; But they will constitute a single age.<sup>54</sup> And all the righteous, who escape from the Lord's great judgment, will be collected together with the great age. And <the age> at the same time will unite with the righteous, and they will be eternal. And there will be among them neither weariness nor suffering nor affliction nor expectation of violence nor the pain of the night nor darkness. But they will have a great light for eternity, <and> an indestructible wall, and they will have a great paradise, the shelter of an eternal residence. How happy are the righteous who will escape the Lord's great judgment, for their faces will shine forth like the sun."<sup>55</sup>

The patriarch begins his narration with references to the familiar theme of the primeval aeon already encountered in chapter 25. These protological events are then set in parallel with the chain of eschatological actions that, according to the authors of the apocalypse, will reintegrate the remnant of the creation – an elite group of humans – into a single aeon which will collect all the righteous of the world.<sup>56</sup> The final consummation of all creation

into a single aeon recalls the initial protological disintegration of Adoil who once gave birth to the multiplicity of created forms.<sup>57</sup> It appears that the final consummation of the created order “reverses” its protological unfolding in such a way that reintegration into the final aeon invokes memory of the disintegration of the primeval aeon Adoil. In comparison with the cosmogonic character of the primeval aeon, the last aeon though has distinctive anthropogonic features. In this respect it seems that the reverse cosmogenesis of the last days also presupposes the reversal of the anthropogonic process in the course of which the righteous of the world and their exemplar, the seventh antediluvian hero, inherit some qualities of the prelapsarian Adam and some distinctive features of his cosmogonic blueprint, the primordial aeon Adoil. Here, unlike in many other Jewish accounts of the last days, the eschatological humanity does not simply regain the original state of the Protoplast, instead returning to the condition of the immaterial Anthropos, that is, the anthropomorphic primordial aeon, Adoil. The text also seems to suggest that the righteous Enoch, translated to heaven and transformed into a luminous celestial creature, represents the first fruit of this eschatological aeon that will eventually gather all the righteous into one single entity.

### *The beloved seventh*

It has already been noted that chapter 65 of the Slavonic apocalypse provides a striking description of the final age. Yet some details about the eschatological entity can also be found in the longer recension of the following chapter of *2 Enoch* (chapter 66) where the seventh antediluvian patriarch tells his children about the sevenfold nature of the final aeon. *2 Enoch* 66.6–8 relates:

Walk my children in long-suffering ... having love for one another, until you go out from this age of suffering, so that you may become inheritors of the never-ending age. How happy are the righteous who shall escape the Lord’s great judgment; for they will be made to shine seven times brighter than the sun. For in that age everything is estimated sevenfold – light and darkness and food and enjoyment and misery and paradise and tortures.<sup>58</sup>

This tradition about the sevenfold nature of the final age is intriguing in that it recalls the familiar cluster of the sevenfold patterns permeating the anthropogony of the Slavonic apocalypse – the feature discussed in detail in the [first part](#) of our investigation.

In light of the “anthropogonic” nature of the final age – described in the Slavonic apocalypse as the final abode of perfected humanity, the gathering place of the righteous – invocation of the details of the Protoplast’s creation does not seem entirely inappropriate. Unlike some Gnostic texts where the

seven elements of Adam's corporeality are linked to the seven infamous anthropogenic agents responsible for fashioning Adam's psychic body, in the Slavonic apocalypse Wisdom creates, out of seven properties, the perfect human being whom the text describes as the great and glorious celestial creature.

The sevenfold nature of the final age inhabited by perfected humanity thus invokes the perfect sevenfold nature of the Protoplast before his fall. This connection seems to be further strengthened in the initial verses of chapter 65 where Enoch relates to his children the mystery of the final aeon. There some peculiar details of the Protoplast's creation are invoked, including the elements of the sevenfold pattern of his "properties."

Thus in *2 Enoch* 65.1–2 the patriarch says the following:

Listen, my children! Before ever anything existed, and before ever any created thing was created, the Lord created the whole of his creation, visible and invisible. And however much time there was went by. Understand how, on account of this, he constituted man in his own form, in accordance with a similarity. And he gave him

eyes	to see,
and ears	to hear,
and heart	to think,
and reason	to argue.

And the Lord set everything forth for the sake of man, and he created the whole of creation for his sake.<sup>59</sup>

It is interesting that in this passage the details of the primordial cosmogony and anthropology are closely tied together.

The seventh antediluvian hero's peculiarly selective memory, which strives to bring together the account of the great aeon Adoil and the story of the Protoplast's creation, points to the importance of this conceptual correlation for understanding the mystery of the sevenfold final aeon, which is predestined to shelter transformed humanity now returning to its original condition.

Further, it appears that the connection of the *seventh* antediluvian hero with this sevenfold pattern of the final age is not coincidental either. It is possible that here, as in many other Enochic texts, the seventh human being is envisioned as the first fruit of perfected humanity predestined to return to its original prelapsarian condition. The proleptic account of this portentous return is described in detail in chapter 22 of the Slavonic apocalypse where the seventh antediluvian hero undergoes a dramatic metamorphosis that transforms him into a glorious celestial being – a creature identical in its luminous nature to the Protoplast.

Therefore it does not seem coincidental that the return to the original state of humankind, once endowed with the sevenfold pattern of "components" and "properties," is executed through the seventh human being.

The portentous place of the seventh human, overshadowed by his unique role in restoring the condition of the first human, is known in many ancient interpretive traditions. In this respect, it is noteworthy that in the story of the seventh antediluvian hero one encounters another, even more ancient, Mesopotamian version of the sevenfold anthropogony, namely, the primordial myth about seven proto-humans, known in Mesopotamian pantheons as *apkallu*.<sup>60</sup> The *apkallu*<sup>61</sup> appear to be envisioned as agents responsible for bringing humanity to perfection through education and transmission of celestial knowledge. In a way, these seven *apkallu* might be seen as the spiritual entities standing behind the seven antediluvian heroes. Scholars have previously noted the connections between the *apkallu* traditions and the Sumerian King List – the roster where a prototype of Enoch, the seventh antediluvian king Enmeduranki, plays an important role.<sup>62</sup> The Enmeduranki traditions often describe the seventh antediluvian hero as the “beloved” of the great gods.<sup>63</sup> This tradition about the special place of the seventh human as the chosen vessel of the upper realm was not lost or forgotten during the long theological history of the seventh antediluvian hero. Thus even later rabbinic materials often apply the same title to Enoch, designating him as the “Beloved Seventh.”<sup>64</sup>

### *Enoch as the Righteous One*

It does not seem coincidental that the portentous revelation about the final aeon of the righteous comes from the mouth of the seventh antediluvian patriarch, the hero known in Jewish lore for his exemplary righteousness. In light of this connection, the motif of Enoch’s righteousness should be examined more closely. The epithet “righteous man” becomes an important designation of the seventh antediluvian hero already in the beginning of his story, where his righteousness is juxtaposed with the wickedness of the antediluvian generation and the transgressions of the Watchers.

Already in the very first verses of one of the earliest Enochic booklets, the *Book of the Watchers*, the patriarch is defined as a righteous man.<sup>65</sup> In *1 Enoch* 15.11 the same designation comes now from the mouth of the Deity himself: “And he answered me and said to me with his voice: Hear! Do not be afraid, Enoch, (you) righteous man and scribe of righteousness.”<sup>66</sup> Besides the patriarch’s exemplary behavior, which allowed him to become the paragon of righteousness for future generations, this passage also points to another important office of the seventh antediluvian hero as the teacher of righteousness – an office in which he was desperately attempting to rescue and sustain the moral and cosmological order of the antediluvian world by delivering oracles of doom and calls to repentance which he received from God and angels.<sup>67</sup> Early Enochic materials, *1 Enoch* 12.4 and 15.11, thus repeatedly define him as the scribe of righteousness.

It is quite possible that Enoch's connection with the eschatological destiny of the righteous may be already ascertained in the early Enochic writings. According to *1 Enoch*, the patriarch travels to the enigmatic location "the paradise of righteousness," which might represent here another designation for the eschatological gathering of the righteous.

### *Enoch-Metatron as the foundation*

It has already been noted that, in the protological account dealing with the creation of the world, Adoil is depicted as the foundation of visible things, both earthly and heavenly, including the very seat of the Deity, His Throne. In view of the aforementioned parallelism between the descriptions of the first and last aeons, it appears that the "eschatological age" is also connected with the idea of the foundation. Although the description of the eschatological gathering of the righteous does not directly refer to this entity as the foundation, the idea is evident in the text through several implicit details.

In commenting on the identification of the final aeon with the righteous, Moshe Idel notes that in Jewish mysticism the righteous are often portrayed as the cosmological foundation of the world.<sup>68</sup> He points to the tradition found in *b. Hag.* 12b, where the righteous are depicted as the cosmological foundation of the world.<sup>69</sup>

It is taught: R. Jose says: Alas for people that they see but know not what they see, they stand but know not on what they stand. What does the earth rest on? On the pillars, for it is said: Who shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble ... But the Sages say: [The world] rests on twelve pillars, for it is said: He set the borders to the peoples according to the number [of the tribes] of the children of Israel. And some say seven pillars, for it is said; she hath hewn out her seven pillars.<sup>70</sup> R. Eleazar b. Shammua says: [It rests] on one pillar, and its name is "Righteous," for it is said: But "Righteous" is the foundation of the world.<sup>71</sup>

It is no coincidence that the "revealer" and the "first fruit" of the eschatological aeon – the righteous Enoch – also appears to be conceived in some pseudepigraphical and rabbinic accounts as the pillar or foundation of the world.

As has already been noted, early Enochic booklets seek to highlight the contrast between the righteousness of Enoch and the unrighteousness of the antediluvian generation, in which the Watchers' interference causes moral and cosmological collapse leading the environment and the human race toward an imminent catastrophe. In the protological mishap leading to the annihilation of the earth's inhabitants in the waters of the Flood, one might

see a proleptic reenactment of the eschatological collapse of the last days where the seventh antediluvian hero is also predestined to play an important role. In this catastrophic chain of events affecting the whole fabric of creation, Enoch can be seen as the righteous one who attempts to sustain the created order, in many ways serving as the pillar of the antediluvian world. This important role of the seventh antediluvian hero as the sustainer and protector of creation is reaffirmed in the *Book of Jubilees* that depicts the patriarch as the cosmic dam against the waters of the Flood.<sup>72</sup>

Enoch's role as an entity sustaining the world was not forgotten in later Jewish materials. Idel's research identifies an important tradition, preserved in later Jewish mysticism, that portrays the seventh antediluvian hero as the foundation which sustains the world: "the righteous is the foundation of the world. For [the sake of] one [single] righteous the world is maintained and it is Enoch the son of Yared."<sup>73</sup> It is apparent that the author(s) of this tradition, which might stem from the early Enochic literature, were informed by the extra-biblical roles and actions of the seventh patriarch, who served there as the pillar of the world attempting to sustain creation's moral and cosmological order in the turmoil of the antediluvian generation.

This understanding of Enoch as the foundation of the world is not atypical in Jewish mystical lore where the patriarch's heavenly counterpart, the supreme angel Metatron, was traditionally understood as the force sustaining the world. These cosmological functions were exhibited first in Metatron's role as the governor or the prince of the world<sup>74</sup> (שר העולם), an office already discernable in *2 Enoch*<sup>75</sup> and further developed in Hekhalot mysticism, including traditions found in *Sefer Hekhalot*.<sup>76</sup> It is intriguing that Enoch-Metatron's governance of the world includes not only administrative functions but also the duty of the physical sustenance of the world. Moshe Idel refers to the treatise *The Seventy Names of Metatron* where the angel and God seize the world in their hands.<sup>77</sup> This motif of the Deity and his vice-regent grasping the universe in their cosmic hands invokes the conceptual developments found in the *Shīur Qomah* and Hekhalot materials, where Enoch-Metatron possesses a cosmic corporeality comparable to the physique of the Deity and is depicted as the measurement of the divine Body.<sup>78</sup>

In light of these traditions, it seems possible that already in the Slavonic apocalypse the authors try to portray Enoch as the eschatological foundation of the world<sup>79</sup> who already participates in the final aeon of the righteous and can thus be seen as the first fruit of this eschatological gathering. In this respect, like Adoil who anticipates the protological aeon that gives to all creation its beginning, Enoch too anticipates the future eschatological aeon when the creation will collapse and all the righteous will be united together. Both Adoil and Enoch can therefore be seen as outstanding exemplars preordained to manifest the protological and eschatological states through their ontological conditions, thus serving as "personifications" of these aeons. Both heroes are also united by the quality of their luminosity that serves as an important

sign of the beginning and end of time. Here, as in the Lurianic Kabbalah, the primordial divine light, dispersed during Adoil's disintegration and then the Fall of the Protoplast, must be restored by the efforts of the righteous who will become a new eschatological vessel of the uncreated light.

### *Enoch as the Vessel of Light*

2 *Enoch* 66.11 describes the condition of the righteous in the final aeon, depicting them as luminous beings: "How happy are the righteous who will escape the Lord's great judgment, for their faces will shine forth like the sun."<sup>80</sup> This tradition about righteous humans emitting light seems to be tied implicitly in the text to the story of its revealer, the seventh antediluvian patriarch, who himself underwent several chapters earlier a dramatic luminous transformation.

The passage may thus suggest that Enoch – depicted in chapter 22 as undergoing a luminous metamorphosis before the Face of God<sup>81</sup> which turns him into a shining celestial creature – becomes the very first fruit of this future aeon where all righteous persons will eventually regain the condition of luminosity. The eschatological luminosity here points to the protological condition of Adoil and, more importantly, to the incorruptible luminous state of the Protoplast, a condition humanity lost after Adam's fall.<sup>82</sup>

Here the righteous of the world are envisioned as the "gatherers" of divine light, namely, those who repair both cosmogonic and anthropogonic vessels of the primordial light by turning themselves into the luminous vessel of the last days.<sup>83</sup> One might see in this mysterious aeonic gathering of the transformed humans the eschatological refashioning of the luminous corporeality of the Heavenly Man,<sup>84</sup> who is restored by the efforts of righteous souls now able to reconstitute the particles of divine light into a single aeon.<sup>85</sup>

### *The demiurgic role of Enoch*

Although the Slavonic apocalypse insists on Deity's role as the sovereign<sup>86</sup> Creator of the universe, scholars have previously<sup>87</sup> noted that this emphasis on the sovereignty of the Deity in creation does not seem entirely monolithic in the Slavonic text *if* one considers the Deity's decision to share the secrets of creation<sup>88</sup> that He did not explain even to the angels.

Here, therefore, one might discern a delegation of the demiurgic function to God's vice-regent, a motif that will play an important role in the Metatron traditions in *Sefer Hekhalot* and the *Zohar*. In these texts, the letters on the crown given to Metatron attest to his partaking in the works of creation. Some scholars have noted that the link between Metatron and the "secrets of creation" manifested in the Hekhalot tradition may witness to his role as a demiurge, or

at least to his participation in the work of creation.<sup>89</sup> Jarl Fossum draws attention to the tradition attested in *Genesis Rabbah* 5:4 on Genesis 1:9, according to which “the voice of the Lord became a guide (מטטרון)<sup>90</sup> to the waters, as it is written: ‘The voice of the Lord is over the waters.’”<sup>91</sup> Fossum proposes that this passage might refer to the Metatron’s demiurgic role.<sup>92</sup> He also suggests that while the depiction of Metatron in *Sefer Hekhalot* is not demiurgic, it points to the matrix of ideas out of which the Gnostic concept of the demiurge possibly arose.<sup>93</sup> The beginning of the tendency towards Enoch-Metatron’s demiurgic profile might already be detected in *2 Enoch*, a text which puts great emphasis on Enoch’s knowledge of the secrets of creation and which sometimes describes Enoch as if he were a divine being.<sup>94</sup>

In this respect, Enoch’s demiurgic function – which is hinted at by his access to the esoteric knowledge of the final aeon and his revelation of this knowledge to the people of the earth – might be set in parallel to the demiurgic function of Adoil, who is depicted as the revealer of the primordial aeon.

## FINAL REMARKS

In later Metatron lore, Enoch-Metatron is portrayed as the perfecter of human souls who, like Abatur in the Mandaean tradition, is responsible for the progress of human souls<sup>95</sup> to their final destiny.<sup>96</sup> Both the Babylonian Talmud<sup>97</sup> and Hekhalot literature<sup>98</sup> hint at this mysterious office of Metatron when they depict him as the teacher of Torah to the souls of deceased children.<sup>99</sup>

In view of our previous investigation, it appears that this later Metatron’s role as the “captain” of souls<sup>100</sup> might already be hinted at in *2 (Slavonic) Enoch* via the translated hero’s enigmatic participation in the economy of the eschatological gathering of human souls in the final aeon of the righteous.<sup>101</sup>

This promise of the final gathering of righteous souls into a single luminous entity gives us hope that the aeonic vessels of primordial light, shattered in the beginning, will be eventually restored at the end of time.

## NOTES

1. The unique details of this cosmogonic account have been previously noted by scholars. See Orlov (2007: 175–95).
2. Scholem (1991: 98–101); Idel (2005: 75).
3. The longer recension, while preserving the general narrative structure of the shorter one, supplies some additional details. The longer recension of *2 Enoch* 25 reads (Andersen 1983: 144): “And I commanded the lowest things: ‘Let one of the invisible things descend visibly!’ And Adoil descended, extremely large. And I looked at him, and, behold, in his belly he had a great light. And I said to him, ‘Disintegrate yourself, Adoil, and let what is born from you become visible.’ And he disintegrated himself, and there came out a very great light. And I was in the midst of the [great] light. And light

out of light is carried thus. And the great age came out, and it revealed all the creation which I had thought up to create. And I saw how good it was. And I placed for myself a throne, and I sat down on it. And then to the light I spoke: 'You go up higher (than the throne), and be solidified [much higher than the throne], and become the foundation of the higher things.' And there is nothing higher than the light, except nothing itself. And again I bowed (?) myself and looked upward from my throne."

4. Andersen 1983: 145.
5. Much scholarship has been devoted to clarifying the etymology of the enigmatic name of the great aeon. Many scholars consider the name to provide an important clue for understanding the origins of the text. Charles (1913, 2:445) suggests that Adoil might be derived from the Hebrew אֵל יָד, translated as the "hand of God." Philonenko (1969: 114) supports this etymology, pointing to some Egyptian parallels in which "les premières créatures naissent du liquide séminal que le démiurge solitaire avait fait jaillir au moyen de sa main." Cry (1940: 201) suggests understanding Adoil as stemming from אור אל, "the light of God." In his opinion, some letters in the Hebrew word אור, "light," were altered. *Resh* was read as *daleth*; *waw* was transposed. These alterations produced Adoil. Vaillant (1976: xi) suggests that the name might be derived from the Hebrew word עַד with a suffix, "his eternity, his aeon." Scholem (1978: 73) criticizes this rendering, arguing that the Hebrew word עַד cannot carry a pronominal suffix. According to Scholem (1958: 252) Adoil derives from *Sadoqil*. Milik (1976: 113) considers the name Adoil "a Greek and Semitic hybrid: Hades + El". Quispel derives it from *Adonai-el*, where the first element is the circumlocution for the Tetragrammaton (Fossum 1985: 288). I have previously proposed (Orlov 2005: 199) that the name Adoil might be connected with "El Gadol" (the Great God) – a designation for the primordial upper foundation in the creational narrative of the *Book of Zohar* (*Zohar* 1.17b). In this respect it is intriguing that in 2 *Enoch* Adoil is called "the large one" or "the great one."
6. Sokolov (1910: 25).
7. Both recensions stress that Adoil's disintegration provides an important foundation on which the divine Throne is established. The seat of the Deity thus serves here as the portentous locale from which God supervises the unfolding creation. The Throne plays an important role in the process of creation, being envisioned as the center of the created world.
8. His revelations, however, encompass not verbal but rather "ontological" disclosure, conveyed through the act of changing his nature. This mode of revelation is very important for our subsequent analysis of Enoch's role as the revealer and his "ontological" participation in the disclosure of the eschatological aeon.
9. "And Adoil descended, extremely large. And I looked at him, and, behold, in his belly he had a great light ... there came out a very great light. And I was in the midst of the [great] light. And light out of light is carried thus" (Andersen 1983: 144).
10. See, for example, MacRae (1970: 90).
11. In his comments on the notion of the Celestial Man in the *Poimandres* and the *Apocryphon of John*, van den Broek (1998: 15) notes that "both texts know the important notion of a heavenly Man – a notion that has to be explained through its Jewish background." Van den Broek traces the origins of this concept to Ezekiel 1:26 where the prophet saw the Glory of God in the shape of a man. He then suggests that Ezekiel 1:26 "and a specific interpretation of the creation of man in Genesis eventually led to the myth of the heavenly Man."
12. *Poimandres* 12 (Copenhaver 1995: 3): "Mind, the father of all, who is life and light, gave birth to a man like himself whom he loved as his own child. The man was most fair: he had the father's image; and god, who was really in love with his own form, bestowed on him all his craftworks."
13. On the Gnostic variants of this myth, see Quispel (1953: 211–15); Gilhus (1985: 48ff).

14. *Poimandres* 16 (Copenhaver 1995: 4): “Poimandres said: ‘This is the mystery that has been kept hidden until this very day. When nature made love with the man, she bore a wonder most wondrous. In him he had the nature of the cosmic framework of the seven, who are made of fire and spirit, as I told you, and without delay nature at once gave birth to seven men, androgynous and exalted, whose natures were like these of the seven governors.’”
15. Fossum (1985: 289–90) observes that “Adoil is thus the prime cosmogonic agent, since he is the primordial *phos*, or – rather – the archetypal *phos*, which means ‘man’ as well as ‘light.’”
16. On the  $\varphi\omega\varsigma$  traditions, see Quispel (1980: 6–7); Fossum (1985: 280; 1995: 16–17); Copenhaver (1995: 109).
17. *Gospel of the Egyptians* IV 61.8–10 (Bohlig *et al.* 1975: 93): “For this one, Adamas, is a light which radiated from the light; he is the eye of the light.” Cf. also *On the Origin of the World* 5 (Layton 1989: 2.31): “Now the eternal realm (aeon) of truth has no shadow outside it, for the limitless light is everywhere within it. But its exterior is shadow, which has been called by the name ‘darkness.’ From it, there appeared a force, presiding over the darkness. And the forces that came into being subsequent to them called the shadow ‘the limitless chaos.’”
18. *2 Enoch* 30.11–12 (Andersen 1983: 152): “And on the earth I assigned him to be a second angel, honored and great and glorious. And I assigned him to be a king, to reign on the earth, and to have my wisdom. And there was nothing comparable to him on earth, even among my creatures that exist.”
19. Thus, for example, Fossum (1985: 287) observes that in the Adoil account: “the creation of the light has now become the result of its origination from an angelic being, whose stomach issues the light.”
20. *2 Enoch* 30.10, longer recension (Andersen 1983: 152).
21. *2 Enoch* 25.1, longer recension (Andersen 1983: 144).
22. Copenhaver (1995: 3).
23. A similar list of components is found also in the *Latin Life of Adam and Eve* which offers a tradition of Adam’s creation from the eight parts. Thus, the *Latin Vita* 37 [55] (Anderson & Stone 1999: 96E) reads: “It must be known that the body of Adam was formed of eight parts. The **first part** was of the dust of the earth, from which was made his flesh, and thereby he was sluggish. The next part was of the sea, from which was made his blood, and thereby he was aimless and fleeing. The **third part** was of the stones of the earth, from which his bones were made, and thereby he was hard and covetous. The fourth part was of the clouds, from which were made his thoughts, and thereby he was immoderate. The fifth part was of the wind, from which was made his breath, and thereby he was fickle. The sixth part was of the sun, from which were made his eyes, and thereby he was handsome and beautiful. The seventh part was of the light of the world, from which he was made pleasing, and thereby he had knowledge. The eighth part was of the Holy Spirit, from which was made his soul, and thereby are the bishops, priests, and all the saints and elect of God.” On the Adam Octipartite tradition attested in Latin, Old Irish and Slavonic materials, see Jagic (1893: 44–7); Förster (1907–8: 477–529; 1921: 47–8); McNamara (1975: 21–3); Böttrich (1995); Macaskill (2007: 201).
24. The origin of this tradition of the seven elements of human nature can be traced to Plato’s *Timaeus* 73B–76E. On these conceptual developments see van den Broek (1996: 75ff).
25. Although the lists of “properties” and “components” mentioned in *2 Enoch* 30 appear to have been heavily corrupted during the text’s long transmission history, they are reminiscent of the lists of the planetary melothesia found in Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* 3.12 (Robbins 1940: 319–20), where seven planets are put in correspondence with human “properties/faculties” (sight, touch, taste, smell, speech, thought etc.) and with the

“components” (bones, sinews, flesh, etc.) of the human body: “Saturn is lord of the right ear, the spleen, the bladder, the phlegm, and the bones; Jupiter is lord of touch, the lungs, arteries, and semen; Mars of the left ear, kidneys, veins, and genitals; the sun of the sight, the brain, heart, sinews and all the right-hand parts; Venus of smell, the liver, and the flesh; Mercury of speech and thought, the tongue, the bile, and the buttocks; the moon of taste and drinking, the stomach, belly, womb, and all the left-hand parts.” Scholars noted that although Ptolemy’s compendium “is perhaps the best known of its kind, his list of correspondences between planets and faculties of the human body by no means goes back to Ptolemy’s own invention. Such lists most probably stem from Hellenistic Egypt and can be traced back as far as the second century B.C.E.” (Toepel 2005: 235). On the planetary melothesia, see also Bouché-Leclercq (1899: 319–25); Roscher (1902: 3:2535–6); Touwaide (1998: 5:873). The Jewish pseudepigraphical writings are also cognizant of the sevenfold system of human properties/faculties. Thus, *The Testament of Reuben* 2.3–8 (Kee 1983: 782) provides a very similar cluster of traditions when it tells about seven spirits which were given to the protoplast at creation: “And seven other spirits are given to man at creation so that by them every human deed (is done). First is the spirit of life, with which man is created as a living being. The second is the spirit of seeing, with which comes desire. The third is the spirit of hearing, with which comes instruction. The fourth is the spirit of smell, with which is given taste for drawing air and breath. The fifth is the spirit of speech, with which comes knowledge. The sixth is the spirit of taste for consuming food and drink; by it comes strength, because in food is the substance of strength. The seventh is the spirit of procreation and intercourse, with which come sins through the fondness for pleasure.” For a discussion of these traditions, see Toepel (2005: 235ff).

26. Sokolov (1910: 29–30).
27. Copenhagen (1995: 4).
28. On the Christian traditions of seven “first created” spirits, or the so-called *protocists*, see Bucur (2009: 31–2, 38–9, 56–8, 69–70, 97–9, 135–8).
29. The tradition about the seven spirits or angels responsible for the origin of the human-kind is also found in Irenaeus’ account of Saturnilus’ teaching. Cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.24.1.
30. Nock and Festugière (1954–60: 1:9); Copenhagen (1995: 2).
31. Andersen (1983: 146).
32. Scholars have previously noted that “the easiest general clue to the identity of Archons lies in the sevenfold lists. These are given in the several versions of the document that have survived, in almost identical form – in the Berlin Codex version (BG 41,16) and in the Codex II version from Nag Hammadi (II 59,26). In the BG version they are called ‘the hebdomad of the week,’ which seems to invite us to read them as the planetary powers of the successive days of the week” (Welburn 1978: 242).
33. *Apocryphon of John* II 11.23–35 (Waldstein & Wisse 1995: 71–3).
34. *Apocryphon of John* II 15.1–23 (Waldstein & Wisse 1995: 87–93). Cf. another version of this anthropogonic myth which is reflected in *On the Origin of the World* 78–9 (Layton 1989: 2:65): “Since that day, the seven rulers have fashioned (*plassein*) man with his body resembling their body, but his likeness resembling the man that had appeared to them. His modeling (*plasma*) took place by parts, one at a time. And their leader fashioned the brain and the nervous system. Afterwards, he appeared as prior to him. He became a soul-endowed (*psychikos*) man. And he was called Adam, that is, ‘father,’ according to the name of the one that existed before him.”
35. Layton (1989: 2:37).
36. See Welburn (1978: 242). Cf. also Waldstein and Wisse (1995: 88–111).
37. It should be noted that van den Broek’s chart of the correspondences between the Archons and the planets is based on Welburn’s reconstruction. Welburn uses for his

- reconstruction the planetary lists found in *Pistis Sophia*, Origen and other materials (1978: 244).
38. Van den Broek (1996: 76). It is noteworthy that the five elements mentioned here (bones, sinews, flesh, blood, and hair) are also mentioned in the two lists found in *2 Enoch* 30.
  39. Andersen (1983: 148–50). It should be noted that the tradition of the seven planetary spheres is also mentioned in *2 Enoch* 27.3 (Andersen 1983: 146), where the deity creates seven great circles: “And I made a foundation of light around the water. And I created seven great circles inside it, and I gave them an appearance of crystal, wet and dry, that is to say glass and ice ... And I appointed out to each one of them his route, to the seven stars, each one of them in his own heaven, so that they might travel accordingly.”
  40. In this respect Andersen notes that the planetary “scheme could be no better than a garbled *Almagest* by some uninformed individual” (1983: 149, n. b).
  41. Cf. *Against Celsus* 6.22 (Chadwick 1953: 334): “They associate the first with Kronos (Saturn), taking lead to refer to the slowness of the star; the second with Aphrodite (Venus), comparing her with the brightness and softness of tin; the third with Zeus (Jupiter), as the gate that has a bronze base and which is firm; the fourth with Hermes (Mercury), for both iron and Hermes are reliable for all works and make money and are hard-working; the fifth with Ares (Mars), the gate which as a result of the mixture is uneven and varied in quality.”
  42. The planetary list found in *2 Enoch* appears to also deviate from the traditional list based on the ancient view of planets’ distance from the earth – Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon (Chadwick 1953: 335, footnote 2).
  43. Van den Broek (1996: 70); *Against Celsus* 6.31 (Chadwick 1953: 347): “And they say that the star Saturn is in sympathy with the lion-like Archon.” On the identification between Kronos/Saturn and Ialdabaoth see also Bousset (1907: 351–5).
  44. The shorter recension of *2 Enoch* 30.8 presents the tradition about Wisdom’s creation of man in very abbreviated form, without any references to the pattern of seven (Andersen 1983: 151): “When I had finished all this, I commanded my wisdom to create man.”
  45. It should be mentioned that already in Wisdom of Solomon 9:2 and 10:1–2, Wisdom is responsible for the formation, protection, deliverance, and strengthening of the protoplast: “[who] by your wisdom have formed humankind,” “Wisdom protected the first-formed father of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression, and gave him strength to rule all things.” Cf. also *2 Enoch* 30.12 (Andersen 1983: 152): “And I assigned him to be a king, to reign on the earth, and to have my wisdom.”
  46. Already in Proverbs 9:1, Wisdom is associated with the sevenfold cosmic structure: “Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars.” Yet in *2 Enoch* 30 and Gnostic cosmogonies this sevenfold pattern is applied to the creation of Adam’s body. George MacRae (1970: 93) suggests that “in the cosmogonic works it is conceivable that the seven Archons or planetary deities resulting from Sophia’s fall are an application of the image in Proverbs 9:1, although the passage is certainly not the primary source of the idea of a sevenfold Demiurge.”
  47. See, for example, MacRae (1970: 90); Good (1987: 69). On the hypostatic Wisdom in early Enochic traditions, especially in chapter 42 of the *Book of the Similitudes*, see MacRae (1970: 91–2).
  48. MacRae (1970: 90).
  49. On the imagery of Sophia in Gnostic materials, see Stead (1969: 75–104); MacRae (1970: 86–101); Wilckens and Fohrer (1971: 465–526); Yamauchi (1978: 143–75); Rudolph (1980: 220–37); Sieber (1981: 788–95); Goehring (1981: 16); Gilhus (1985: 95–104); Good (1984: 193–201; 1987); King (2000: 76–7, 96–112, 158–86, 211–27).

50. On Sophia's connection with the origin of the seven rulers, see Good (1987: 39ff).
51. Layton (1989: 2.37).
52. Layton (1989: 1.235–7): “His thoughts became blind. And, having expelled his power – that is, the blasphemy he had spoken – he pursued it down to chaos and the abyss, his mother, at the instigation of Pistis Sophia (Faith Wisdom). And *she established each of his offspring in conformity with its power – after the pattern of the realms that are above*, for by starting from the invisible world the visible world was invented. As incorruptibility looked down into the region of the waters, her image appeared in the waters; and the authorities of the darkness became enamored of her.”
53. Cf. 2 *Enoch* 48.1–5 (Andersen 1983: 174): “the sun, so that he might travel along the seven celestial circles, which are appointed with 182 thrones so that he might descend to the shortest day, and once more 182 so that he might descend to the longest day. He also has two great thrones where he pauses when he turns around in this direction and in the other direction, higher than the lunar thrones. From the month Tsivan, from the 17th day, he descends until the month Theved; and from the 17th day of Theved he ascends. And in this way the sun moves along all the celestial circles. When he comes close to the earth, then the earth is merry and makes its fruit grow. But when he goes away, then the earth laments, and the trees and all fruits have no productivity. All this is by measurement, and by the most precise measurement of the hours. He fixed it by measure, by *his own wisdom*, that is everything visible and invisible.”
54. On the Manichaean tradition about the eschatological dissolution of the world and the establishment of the new paradisaic aeon outside of the world, see Heuser (1998: 86). Cf. also *Kephalaia* 29 (Gardner 1995: 32): “entire universe in it today. Yet, at the end, in the dissolution of the universe, this very counsel of life will gather itself in and sculpt its soul in the Last Statue. Its net is its Living Spirit, because with its Spirit it can hunt after the light and the life that is in all things; and build it upon its body.”
55. Andersen (1983: 191–3). The longer recension provides the following description that differs in several details from the account found in the shorter recension (Andersen 1983: 190–92): “Listen my children! Before ever anything existed, and before ever any created thing was created, the Lord created the whole of his creation, visible and invisible ... And when the whole creation, visible and invisible, which the Lord has created, shall come to an end, then each person will go to the Lord's great judgment. And then all time will perish, and afterwards there will be neither years nor months nor days nor hours. They will be dissipated, and after that they will not be reckoned. But they will constitute a single age. And all the righteous, who escape from the Lord's great judgment, will be collected together into the great age. And the great age will come about for the righteous, and it will be eternal. And after that there will be among them neither weariness <nor sickness> nor affliction nor worry nor want nor debilitation nor night nor darkness. But they will have a great light, a great indestructible light, and paradise, great and incorruptible. For everything corruptible will pass away, and the incorruptible will come into being, and will be the shelter of the eternal residences.”
56. According to the text, “all the righteous, who escape from the Lord's great judgment, will be collected together with [into] the great age.”
57. The account describes the cataclysmic collapse of the spatial and temporal order that, according to the text, will lead to a situation when “all time will perish, and afterwards there will be neither years nor months nor days nor hours. They will be dissipated, and after that they will not be reckoned.”
58. Andersen (1983: 194).
59. Andersen (1983: 190).
60. For the influence of the Mesopotamian traditions on the Enochic materials, see Zimmern (1903: 530–43); Ludin Jansen (1939); Grelot (1958: 5–26, 181–210); Neugebauer (1985: 387); VanderKam (1984); Kvanvig (1988); Orlov (2005: 23–39).

61. For detailed analysis of the Mesopotamian sources about seven *apkallu*, see Kvanvig (1988).
62. See Finkelstein (1963: 50, n. 41); Hallo (1970: 62–3); Hartman (1972: 28, n. 10); Bryan (1987).
63. “They [deities] showed him [Enmeduranki] how to observe oil on water, a mystery of Anu, [Enlil and Ea], they gave him the tablet of the gods, the liver, a secret of heaven and [underworld], they put in his hand the cedar[-rod], *beloved* of the great gods” (Lambert 1967: 132).
64. Thus, in *Midrash Ha-Gadol*, Enoch is defined as the “Beloved Seventh.”
65. *1 Enoch* 1.2.
66. Knibb (1978: 2.100).
67. On this mediatorial office of the seventh antediluvian hero see Orlov (2005: 59–70).
68. In his book about the symbolism of pillars in Jewish mysticism, Idel refers to a passage from the *Book of Bahir* that depicts the righteous person as the pillar reaching the heaven (Abrams 1994: 160–61): “There is a pillar from earth to heaven, and its name is *Tzaddiq*, according to the name of righteous men. And when there are righteous men in the world, then the pillar is strengthened, but if not – it becomes weak. And it supports the entire world, as it is written: ‘the righteous are the foundation of the world.’ But if it is weakened, it cannot support the world. This is the reason why even if there is only one righteous [in the world], he maintains the world.” Idel (2005: 80–81) points to the assumption about the dual status of the righteous discernable in the passage from the *Book of Bahir*: there are righteous humans in the world, but there is also a cosmic righteous and the former depend on the latter. It is noteworthy that Idel traces the origins of this concept of the cosmic righteous to the conceptual developments found in the Slavonic Enoch where “the Great Aeon, which is identical to the foundation, passes for the righteous.” In light of this identification Idel proposes that in *2 Enoch* the implicit connection might exist between the protological and eschatological foundations, the first represented by the primeval aeon Adoil and the second by the eschatological aeon, which is said to be the final place where all righteous of the world will be gathered.
69. It may be tempting to construe this rabbinic passage as a mere reference to the moral behavior that “sustains” the ethical order of the world. Idel (2005: 75), however, observes that the passage from the *Hagigah* has not only a moral but also a cosmological significance; he remarks that “the *Hagigah*, a short but highly influential passage, is a part of mythical cosmology rather than a mode of making sense of religious behavior. To be clear, the basic context of the discussion is cosmology, and its influence on the way in which the righteous should be understood is only an aside.”
70. One of the striking features found in the *Hagigah*’s account is a reference to the seven-fold nature of the world’s foundation, a tradition also prominent in another passage from the *Zohar*, which speaks about the seven pillars that sustain the creation. Thus *Zohar* 1.231a (Tishby 1994: 2.571) reads: “Rabbi Jose began by quoting ‘Upon what were its foundations fastened?’ (Job 38:6). This verse was spoken by the Holy One, blessed be He, because when he created the world He created it upon pillars, the seven pillars of the world, as it is said ‘She has hewn out her seven pillars’ (Prov. 9:1), but it is not known what these seven pillars stand upon, for it is a profound mystery, the most recondite of all.” It is intriguing that both, *Hagigah*’s account and the *Zohar*, in their discussion of the foundation theme, mention a tradition about the seven pillars of Sophia from Proverbs 9:1, the tradition that might stand behind the motif of Sophia’s creation of humanity from the seven elements.
71. *b. Hagigah* 12b.
72. Thus according to *Jubilees* 4.23 (VanderKam 1989: 2.28), thanks to Enoch “the flood water did not come on any of the land of Eden because he was placed there as a sign

and to testify against all people in order to tell all the deeds of history until the day of judgment.”

73. Idel (2005: 85).
74. The term “world” (עולם) in the angelic title appears to signify the entire creation. Schäfer (1975: 55) observes that in rabbinic literature the Prince of the World is understood as an angel set over the whole creation. His duties include praying together with the earth for the coming of the Messiah and praising God’s creative work.
75. On the role of Enoch as the Governor of the World in *2 Enoch*, see Orlov (2005: 159–61).
76. Tantlevskij (2000: 185) observes that in *3 Enoch* 8, Enoch-Metatron has qualities by which, according to *b. Hagigah* 12a and *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* A 27.43, the world was created and is sustained.
77. Idel (2005: 88).
78. One of such descriptions can be found in *Synopse* §12 (*3 Enoch* 9: Alexander 1983: 263) which portrays the metamorphosis of Enoch’s body into a gigantic extent matching the world in length and breath: “I was enlarged and increased in size till I matched the world in length and breath. He made to grow on me 72 wings, 36 on one side and 36 on the other, and each single wing covered the entire world.”
79. It appears also that both Enoch and Adoil are envisioned in the text as the sacerdotal foundations. In our previous discussion about the primordial aeon Adoil, it has been noted that he seems to be identified with the upper sacred foundation that serves as the basis for the heavenly Temple represented by the Throne of God, which is envisioned in the text as the center of the created order. It is intriguing that, similar to Adoil who serves as the upper foundation of the heavenly Temple, Enoch appears to be conceived as the sacerdotal foundation of the earthly Temple. In *2 Enoch*, immediately after Enoch’s instructions to his sons before his second and final ascension to the highest heaven, the firstborn son of Enoch, Methuselah, and his brothers constructed an altar at Akhuzan, the exact location from which Enoch had been taken up. The place of the hero’s departure then becomes envisioned in the text as the sacerdotal center of the earthly realm, where priestly initiations and expiatory sacrifices involving animal blood take place. It is no coincidence, therefore, that *2 Enoch* identifies the place Akhuzan as the center of the world. This arcane Slavonic word is traced by scholars to the Hebrew word אֲזוּחָה, “special property of God,” which in Ezekiel 48:20–21 is applied to Jerusalem and the Temple (Milik 1976: 114). Here, similarly to Adoil’s protological role connected to the motif of the Throne of the Deity, Enoch’s eschatological role is tied to the idea of the earthly counterpart of the Throne, the earthly Temple. The vertical axis of the Throne and the Temple is thus explicitly reaffirmed in the text, as is the horizontal line connecting the protological and eschatological events. Later in the text Akhuzan also receives the additional protological reaffirmation of being identified with the place of Adam’s creation. Here the protological and eschatological “pillars” are erected on the same place and the starting point of creation becomes the place where eschatological consummation begins.
80. Andersen (1983: 193). See also *2 Enoch* 66.7, the longer recension (Andersen 1983: 194): “How happy are the righteous who shall escape the Lord’s great judgment; for they will be made to shine seven times brighter than the sun.”
81. Enoch’s metamorphosis before the Face is also repeated in *2 Enoch* 39. Böttrich (1992: 112–13) previously argued that these two pivotal descriptions of the divine Face in *2 Enoch* 22 and 39 represent later interpolations. Yet, in light of recently discovered Coptic fragments of *2 Enoch*, that contain a portion of *2 Enoch* 39 with a description of the divine Face, Böttrich’s hypothesis must now be dismissed as erroneous.
82. Enoch’s metamorphosis into a luminous celestial creature presupposes another eschatological trait mentioned in his descriptions of the final aeon of the righteous, namely the state of incorruptibility. In *2 Enoch* 65.8–10 (Andersen 1983: 192) Enoch says

that at the end of times all the righteous who will escape the Lord's great judgment will eventually attain the condition of incorruptibility since they "will be collected together into the great age ... And they will have a great light, a great indestructible light, and paradise, great and incorruptible. For everything corruptible will pass away, and the incorruptible will come into being, and will be the shelter of the eternal residences." The longer recension's emphasis on the incorruptibility of the future condition of the righteous gathered in the final aeon seems again to recall the patriarch's newly acquired celestial state. One of the important features hinting at the patriarch's incorruptible nature is revealed during his brief visit to earth when after his luminous transformation God sent him back to the lower realm to deliver final directions to his children. In *2 Enoch* 56, during Enoch's instructions, Methuselah asks his father for a blessing so that he may prepare some food for him to eat. The translated hero, however, politely declines the offer to share earthly food lamenting that nothing earthly is agreeable with his current condition: "Listen, child! Since the time when the Lord anointed me with the ointment of his glory, food has not come into me, and earthly pleasure my soul does not remember; nor do I desire anything earthly" (*2 Enoch* 56.2, the longer recension: Andersen 1983: 182). In the shorter recension of *2 Enoch*, the patriarch's rejection of food is even more decisive: "Listen my child! Since the time when the Lord anointed me with ointment of my glory, it has been horrible for me, and food is not agreeable to me, and I have no desire for earthly food" (Andersen 1983: 183). In this passage an important link is made between the changes in his nature during his luminous metamorphosis near the Throne of Glory and his newly acquired condition of incorruptibility, which portends the future state of the righteous in the final aeon. Here again, through his connection with the eschatological state of incorruptibility Enoch appears to be fashioned as the first fruit of the future aeon of the righteous, or maybe even as the one who already joined this final age. In this respect it is notable that in *2 Enoch* 55 Enoch tells his sons before his final departure that he shall go up to the highest heaven into his "eternal inheritance" (Andersen 1983: 182-3).

83. On the Manichaean eschatological "Statue" made from the particles of light rescued by the elect, see Widengren (1965: 68); Heuser (1998: 86-7). Cf. also *Kephalaia* 54 (Gardner 1995: 58): "Then the summons and the obedience, the great counsel that came to the elements, which are set in conjunction. It mixed with them, it was established in silence. It bears up until the end time when it can arise and stand firm in the great fire. It will gather to it its own soul, and sculpt it in the Last Statue. You will also find it sweeps out and casts from it the pollution that is foreign to it. However, the life and the light that are in all things it gathers in to it, and builds upon its body. The when this Last Statue will be perfect in all its limbs, then it can become free and ascend from that great struggle through the Living Spirit its father, the one who comes and brings a limb. He brings it up from within this gathering, the melting down and destruction of all things." *Kephalaia* 75 (Gardner 1995: 76): "the Last Statue will be sculpted from the remnant of all things." *Kephalaia* 81 (Gardner 1995: 83): "At the end also it can gather itself together and sculpt its own self in the Last Statue. And it separates light from darkness." *Kephalaia* 86 (Gardner 1995: 89): "Also another great and glorious work he will enact at the end is the Last Statue, which he will bring up to the aeons of light." On the concept of the Last Statue as the corporeal gathering of the righteous souls see also *Kephalaia* 149-50 (Gardner 1995: 157-8): "The fourth time when they weep is when the Statue will be taken up on the last day, and they will weep for the souls of the liars and blasphemers; for they may give ... because their limbs have been severed ... of the darkness. And also those souls, when the Statue will go up and they are left alone, they will weep in that will remain behind in affliction for ever. For they will be cut off and separated from the Last Statue. And it is a necessity to take these souls who are ready for loss as retribution for the deeds that they have done. They go in to this darkness

and are bound with the darkness; just as they desired it and loved it, and placed their treasure with it. At that very moment, when the Last Statue rises up, they will weep. And they will scream out loud because they will be severed from the company of this great Statue. And they remain behind for ever. This great weeping is terrible, it occurs in front of the souls.”

84. Cf. *Kephalaia* 71 (Gardner 1995: 73): “from when the First Man went down to the contest, till the time when the Statue comes in ... this time ... he appeared ...” *Kephalaia* 71 “it is the time that occurred from the coming down of the First Man till the going up of the Last Statue.”
85. Cf. *Kephalaia* 104 (Gardner 1995: 107–8): “The first death is from the time when the light fell to the darkness, and was mixed in with the rulers of darkness; until the time when the light will become pure, and be separated from the darkness in that great fire. The reminder left behind there can build and add to the Last Statue.”
86. In 2 *Enoch* 33 (Andersen 1983: 156), the Lord tells the visionary that He himself is responsible for creating everything “from the highest foundation to the lowest, and to the end.” The shorter recension (Andersen 1983: 157) also stresses the totality of the creative work of the Deity: “I have contrived it all – I created from the lowest foundation and up to the highest and out to the end.” 2 *Enoch*’s emphasis on the Deity’s role as the Creator shows a significant parallel to the Jewish mystical imagery in which God is sometimes referred as *Yoser Bereshit*, “the Creator.”
87. Orlov (2005: 191).
88. The access of the seventh antediluvian hero to the cosmological secrets is already manifested in the Enmeduranki tradition where Enmeduranki receives the secret of heaven and underworld. Later rabbinic materials also underline the expertise of Enoch-Metatron in the secrets of creation. On these developments, see Orlov (2005: 31–4).
89. Deutsch (1999: 44–5). See also Bousset (1907: 200); Fossum (1985: 310ff).
90. Variants include the words מִטְטוֹר and מִטְטוֹר.
91. *Midrash Rabbah*, 1.36.
92. Fossum (1985: 310).
93. Fossum (1985: 301).
94. 2 *Enoch* 40.2, the shorter recension (Andersen 1983: 165): “I have fully counted the stars, a great multitude innumerable.” In Psalm 147:4 God counts the number of all the stars. See also Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagoge* 79–80: “A multitude of stars fell before my knees and I counted them all.”
95. Some scholars propose that the name Metatron may be derived from מְטָרָא, which can be rendered as “keeper of the watch,” a noun possibly derived from the root מָטַר, “to guard, to protect” (Odeberg 1973: 125). Odeberg points to the earliest instance of this derivation in *Shimmusha Rabbah*, where Enoch was clothed with the splendor of light and made into a guardian of all the souls that ascend from earth.
96. Deutsch (1999: 99). On the eschatological pillar of the souls in the Manichaean and Zoharic traditions, see Idel (2005: 101–33).
97. b. *Avodah Zarah* 3b (Epstein 1935–52: 3b) depicts Metatron as a teacher of the souls of those who died in their childhood: “What then does God do in the fourth quarter? – He sits and instructs the school children, as it is said, Whom shall one teach knowledge, and whom shall one make to understand the message? Them that are weaned from the milk. Who instructed them theretofore? – If you like, you may say Metatron, or it may be said that God did this as well as other things. And what does He do by night? – If you like you may say, the kind of thing He does by day; or it may be said that He rides a light cherub, and floats in eighteen thousand worlds; for it is said, The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands shinan.”

98. *Synopse* §75 (3 *Enoch* 48C.12: Alexander (1983: 313); Schäfer *et al.* (1981: 36–7) attests to a similar tradition: “Metatron sits (יֹשֵׁב מִטְטְרוֹן) for three hours every day in the heaven above, and assembles all the souls of the dead that have died in their mother’s wombs, and of the babes that have died at their mothers’ breasts, and of the schoolchildren beneath the throne of glory, and sits them down around him in classes, in companies, and in groups, and teaches them Torah, and wisdom, and haggadah, and tradition, and he completes for them their study of the scroll of the Law, as it is written, ‘To whom shall one teach knowledge, whom shall one instruct in the tradition? Them that are weaned from the milk, them that are taken from the breasts.’” A similar tradition also can be found in the *Alphabet of R. Akiba*. See Wertheimer (1950–53: 2.333–477).
99. Metatron’s role as the leader of the souls might also be reflected in an obscure passage from *Zohar* 2.161b (Tishby 1994: 2.744–5) where one can find a description of the mysterious angelic “officer” put in charge of the souls: “The whole of [hu]mankind, even before they entered this world, were all present in their own stature and shape, just as they are in this world, in a single storehouse, where all the souls in the world are clothed with their forms. And when the time comes for them to be summoned to go down into the world, the Holy One, blessed be He, calls a particular officer whom the Holy One, blessed be He, has put in charge of all the souls that are to go down into the world. And He says to him: Go, and bring me the spirit of so-and-so. At that precise moment that very soul comes, garbed in the form of this world, and the officer presents it to the holy King. The Holy One, blessed be He, then speaks to it and makes it swear that once it has descended into the world it will study the Torah ... And whoever lives in this world and does not study the Torah in order to gain a knowledge of Him – it were better for him not to have been created, for it was for this very reason that the Holy One, blessed be He, brought man into this world.” Here similar to the Metatron passages found in *b. Avodah Zarah* and *Sefer Hekhalot* one can see again the motif of the importance of the study of the Torah that coincides with the tradition about the angelic captain of the souls. The description found in the *Zohar* also refers to the imagery of the storehouse of the souls which in its turn brings to memory the motifs found in the Slavonic apocalypse with its imagery of the protological and eschatological reservoirs in the form of the womb of the primordial aeon Adoil and the final aeon where all the righteous souls will be gathered.
100. It is possible that similar to the Manichaean traditions, Metatron can be also understood as the “Last Statue” or the corporeal collection of all righteous souls. Cf. *Kephalaia* 165 (Gardner 1995: 174): “Again, when the sun sinks from the universe and sets, and all people go in to their hiding places and houses and conceal themselves; this also pertains to the mystery of the end, as it presages the consummation of the universe. For, when all the light will be purified and redeemed in the universe at the last, the collector of all things, the Last Statue, will gather in and sculpt itself. It is the last hour of the day, the time when the Last Statue will go up to the aeon of light.”
101. It is intriguing that *Numbers Rabbah* 12.12 (Freedman and Simon 1961: 5.482–3) depicts Metatron as being in charge of the souls of the righteous whom he offers as the atonement for the sins of Israel: “R. Simon expounded: When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Israel to set up the Tabernacle He intimated to the ministering angels that they also should make a Tabernacle, and when the one below was erected the other was erected on high. The latter was the tabernacle of the youth (משכן הנוער) whose name was Metatron, and therein he offers up *the souls of the righteous* to atone for Israel in the days of their exile.”

## CHAPTER 3

# THE OLD GODS OF EGYPT IN LOST HERMETICA AND EARLY SETHIANISM

*Grant Adamson*

Amun, the name of the Egyptian god, means hidden, and the utterly transcendent deity in *Eugnostos* is described likewise. This could be attributed immediately to coincidence if it were not for several other points of interest in the text. First, the theogony in *Eugnostos* arguably once featured the same number of single and paired gods as found in the Khonsu Cosmogony, an Egyptian monumental source from the Ptolemaic period. Second, in *Eugnostos* these gods are referred to by Hermetic terms of generation, namely unbegotten, self-begotten, begotten and so on. Third, the cosmos that the gods in *Eugnostos* produce is manifestly that of the decans who govern the thirty-six weeks of the year in the Egyptian calendar.

That such cosmological and calendrical assumptions are made in *Eugnostos* is enough to wonder to what extent the text may be neither Christian nor Jewish: whereas Egyptians kept a ten-day week marked by the rising of a decan, Jews and Christians observed a seven-day week in accordance with the Decalogue. This is not to deny the influence of Jewish literature on the text at some stage of composition; indeed, the author of this didactic letter and for whom it is named could have been a Hellenized Jew living in Egypt, such as one of Philo's extreme allegorizers unconcerned with the Sabbath.<sup>1</sup> But as for the early church, in Roelof van den Broek's words, "I am unable to see any distinct and indisputable Christian influence."<sup>2</sup> It would appear that the authors of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* did not find *Eugnostos* sufficiently Christian either when they decided to rewrite the text as a revelatory dialogue between the Savior and his disciples.

In fact, since it does not employ a myth of fallen Wisdom or narrate some other tragedy in the pleroma in order to account for the creation of the visible cosmos, only with difficulty can *Eugnostos* be classified as Gnostic, despite its important affinities with the major Sethian and Valentinian traditions.<sup>3</sup> Not all of the Nag Hammadi tractates are Gnostic, of course. Codex VI, for

instance, contains several Hermetic texts. Following the lead of Douglas Parrott, Jean-Pierre Mahé and Joachim Quack among others, I suggest that Egypt and Hermetism should be taken more seriously in attempts to understand *Eugnostos*.<sup>4</sup>

Hermetism was not just the *Corpus Hermeticum* and Latin *Asclepius*. Together with the Extracts of Stobaeus, Armenian Definitions, Coptic Hermetica, astrological, medical, and alchemical literature, there are testimonia regarding the books of Hermes to consider. In a famous passage, Clement of Alexandria mentions forty-two fundamental books of Egyptian philosophy and medicine that the various temple personnel were expected to know, from the singer (ᾠδός), to the astrologer (ᾠροσκόπος), sacred scribe (ιερογραμματεύς), stolist (στολιστής), prophet (προφήτης), and image-bearers (παστοφόροι). According to Clement, the books dealt with a host of topics including the gods, king, stars, temples, sacrifice, hymns, training of priests, and the human body.<sup>5</sup> Modern discoveries like the Tebtynis temple deposit, which consists of approximately 300 texts in demotic, hieratic, hieroglyphic, and occasionally Greek, allow for some corroboration of this report, while the exact relationship of native Egyptian priestly sources to Greco-Egyptian Hermetism remains an open question.<sup>6</sup> The author of the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, for instance, would have us believe that it was first carved in hieroglyphs and intended for temple use.<sup>7</sup>

Of special relevance to the study of *Eugnostos* are the numerous books of Hermes that Iamblichus discusses in his reply to Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*.<sup>8</sup> With the possible exception of a fragment of the Salmeschiniaka, these books no longer survive. Iamblichus read them in Greek, though he maintains that they were first composed in Egyptian and then rewritten by persons with Hellenistic philosophical training. *Eugnostos* and Iamblichus' exposition of Egyptian first principles from the books of Hermes parallel each other again and again, both conceptually and lexically. Their parallelism has been noted a few times in the field of Gnostic studies, but only in part, while it seems to have been overlooked among Iamblichean specialists.

Direct dependence of Iamblichus on *Eugnostos* or vice versa it not to be argued for. Rather, they seem to share a common Greco-Egyptian tradition in which the priestly myths have been reinterpreted at a transcendent level. The two highest gods are consortless, the one unbegotten, the other self-begotten. Below them are four male-female pairs of gods, the Ogdoad of Hermopolis, followed by cosmological divisions of twelve, seventy-two and three-hundred-sixty. The old gods of Egypt have become so abstract in this tradition that they may go without proper names. And in the case of *Eugnostos*, the theogony appears to have been redacted by a proto-Sethian editor, further obscuring their identity. But the thirty-six decans, doubled to seventy-two, are perfectly recognizable. What sets this tradition apart from Sethianism in particular is its more positive view of creator and creation. Matter and the cosmos are not the result of any break in the Chain of Being. Revelation of the hidden god

begins with the self-begotten deity and continues through the male-female pairs of gods more directly responsible for creation and finally to the visible cosmos.

## DECANS: THE COSMOLOGY AND CALENDAR BEHIND *EUGNOSTOS*

One of the multiple issues in the debate between Porphyry and Iamblichus, as preserved in the *Letter to Anebo* and *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*, was whether the Egyptians believed in a transcendent god. Porphyry was of the opinion that they did not. In his letter, he criticizes them for failing to develop interpretations of their priestly myths at a sufficiently abstract level, naming a certain Chaeremon in particular and citing a written source or sources known as the *Salmeschiniaka*.<sup>9</sup> Iamblichus argued that Porphyry was wrong. In his reply to the letter, Iamblichus explains that the Egyptians have several different arrangements of first principles over and above the things discussed by Chaeremon and recorded in the *Salmeschiniaka*. Since the Hermetic writings are so numerous and past priests have not always concurred with one another, he offers to expound the truth to Porphyry, in so far as possible. He discloses an arrangement of transcendent theology from the books of Hermes, and then another equivalent arrangement, followed by gods of creation and a cosmological survey.

Before considering Iamblichus' exposition of Egyptian first principles and the parallelism between his Hermetic sources and *Eugnostos*, it will be helpful to answer two questions. Who was Chaeremon? And what were the *Salmeschiniaka*? The answer to the second will be somewhat lengthy, but an understanding of the *Salmeschiniaka* is crucial for interpreting the cosmological material in Iamblichus and in *Eugnostos*, where their mutual Greco-Egyptian heritage is most evident.

### *Egypt and the stars*

The works of Chaeremon are lost, though he is known to have written at the least a history of Egypt, a treatise concerning hieroglyphs, one on comets, and another dealing with Greek grammar. From testimonia, references and citations by a variety of authors such as the Latin poet Martial and the Jewish apologist Josephus, it is evident that Chaeremon was active in the mid first century CE. He is repeatedly said to have been an Egyptian priest (i.e. ἱερογραμματεὺς) and Hellenistic philosopher. According to some testimonia, he was head of the Alexandrian school and tutor to the young Nero in Rome.<sup>10</sup>

Why Porphyry in his letter and then Iamblichus in his reply name Chaeremon together with the *Salmeschiniaka* can only be guessed at. Perhaps he discussed them in one of his writings. But Chaeremon did not author the

Salmeschiniaka, which seem instead to have been a source for the works attributed to the legendary pharaoh Nechepso and his priest Petosiris, themselves composed as early as the last half of the second century BCE. As with the oeuvre of the historical Chaeremon, the pseudonymous writings of these Hermetic sages have not survived. In assorted fragments and testimonia, Nechepso and Petosiris are credited with having established the foundation of astrological doctrine and practice, which they are said to have learned from Hermes and/or by revelation.<sup>11</sup>

Among Pliny the Elder, Galen, and many others who mention or cite Nechepso and Petosiris is the fifth-century astrologer Hephaestio of Thebes. Discussing nativities of royal fortune, he takes several examples, including the nativity of the Roman emperor Hadrian (January 24, 76 CE), from the lost work of Antigonus of Nicaea, a second-century astrologer said to have practiced in the tradition of Nechepso and Petosiris.<sup>12</sup> Concluding his discussion, Hephaestio refers to the esteemed pharaoh (ὁ βασιλεὺς Νεχεψῶς) and the Salmeschiniaka. Besides Porphyry's letter and Iamblichus' reply, this is the only known reference to the Salmeschiniaka, where they are described as consisting of more than one book (τὰ βιβλία). From Hephaestio it can be inferred that they were used by early Greco-Egyptian astrologers like Nechepso in order to determine the position of the decans on the day a client was born. This passage is rare not only for its reference to the Salmeschiniaka but also for its theory of seven decanal Places (τόποι), beginning with the first decan found to be rising above the eastern horizon at the time of birth, followed by the twenty-eighth decan, the twenty-fifth, and so on. Each deals with a different aspect of human existence: birth (τοκετός), livelihood (βίος), sickness (ἀρρωστία), injury (σίνος), marriage (γάμος), children (τέκνα), death (θάνατος).<sup>13</sup>

In Greek and Latin astrological literature from the time of the Roman empire and thereafter, the decans most often number thirty-six, three per zodiacal sign, with each decan occupying ten degrees of the ecliptic, for a total of 360 degrees. Such an equal distribution of the decans among the zodiac represents an idealized development, the synthesis of two separate and ultimately incompatible ways of looking at the sky, the decanal and zodiacal. Going as far back as the second millennium BCE, the decans originally marked the beginning of the weeks in the Egyptian calendar, as a new decan was seen to rise at dawn every ten days, just ahead of the sun. The Egyptians had names for these stars or groups of stars which they recorded inside coffins as well as on the walls and ceilings of their tombs and temples, frequently accompanied in the case of the latter by iconographic depictions of the decans as lion-headed humans or standing serpents. With the arrival of the zodiac in Egypt during the Ptolemaic period, the subsequent institution of the Julian calendar, and the increasingly widespread use of a seven-day week, whether Jewish, Christian, or planetary, the observational function of the decans was gradually abandoned. However, the names and iconography of the decans persisted,

spreading throughout the Mediterranean and traveling as far east as India. Visually striking examples come from engraved gemstone amulets and elaborately decorated astrological boards for casting nativities.<sup>14</sup>

The Salmeschiniaka appear to have been written when the decans were still being observed as stars or groups of stars, to judge from the particulars of Hephaestio's reference. One decan is said to be directly overhead early in the morning (μεσουρανει πρωι), another in the same position at noon (μεσουρανει μεσημβριαν), and so on.<sup>15</sup> Naturally, when the sun comes up, it is not possible to see the stars, but by means of their decan lists the Egyptians were able to track these stars over the course of a year, even during daylight hours. The process is described in detail in a pair of manuscripts from the Tebtynis temple deposit, Carlsberg Papyrus I and Carlsberg Papyrus Ia, which were written in hieratic and demotic in the mid second century CE. They are in turn a commentary on a far older hieroglyphic text, the so-called Book of Nut, goddess of the sky or time, copies of which are found on the ceilings of the cenotaph and tomb of the pharaohs Seti the first (1303–1290 BCE) and Ramses the fourth (1158–52 BCE), respectively. Symbolizing the separation of the earth from the sky at the moment of creation, the god of the air, Shu, stands underneath Nut, with his hands raised to support her prone torso, as her own arms and legs extend down to the ground. The text of the Book of Nut is written in the space around the two gods as well as on her body, giving information about the course of the sun and the names and positions of the decans for specific days of the year, together with some mythological accounts. Detailed as they are, Egyptologists and historians of science disagree over the interpretation of the Carlsberg Papyri and the Book of Nut. These Roman era manuscripts nonetheless provide important evidence that knowledge of the native Egyptian practice of decanal observation (there is no zodiac here) was preserved into Christian times, if the practice itself did not also continue.<sup>16</sup>

### *Porphyry and Iamblichus on the Salmeschiniaka*

In the *Letter to Anebo* and *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*, Porphyry and Iamblichus tell us even more about the Salmeschiniaka than Hephaestio does. In the context of his charge against the Egyptians for not developing sufficiently transcendent interpretations of their priestly myths, Porphyry's reference to the Salmeschiniaka is as follows:

For Chaeremon and the others believe that there is nothing else prior to the things that are seen, placing the gods of the Egyptians in their account of the beginning, and no others except the so-called planets and the stars that fill up the zodiac and as many as rise near them (των πλανητων λεγομενων και των συμπληρουντων τον ζωδιακον και οσοι τούτοις παρανατέλλουσιν),

the sections belonging to the decans and the horoscopes and the so-called mighty leaders (τάς τε εἰς τοὺς δεκανοὺς τομὰς καὶ τοὺς ὠροσκόπους καὶ τοὺς λεγομένους κραταιοὺς ἡγεμόνας), whose names are written in the Salmeschiniaka along with their treatments for sufferings, their risings and settings and signs of the things about to happen (ῶν καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα ἐν τοῖς Σαλμεσχινιακοῖς φέρεται καὶ θεραπείαι παθῶν καὶ ἀνατολαὶ καὶ δύσεις καὶ μελλόντων σημειώσεις) ... They (i.e. Egyptians) say that the sun is the demiurge and they apply the tales concerning Osiris and Isis and all the priestly myths either to the stars and their appearances and disappearances and risings (φάνσεις καὶ κρύψεις καὶ ἐπιτολάς), or to the waxings and wanings of the moon, or to the course of the sun, or the nocturnal hemisphere, or the diurnal, or the Nile, and in general they interpret everything at the natural level (φυσικά) and nothing at the level of the incorporeal and living essence (οὐσίας).<sup>17</sup>

Iamblichus' argument is that the Egyptians do in fact place transcendent gods in their accounts of the beginning. To prove his point, he supplies Porphyry with variant theologies from the books of Hermes, followed by a brief survey of cosmological material. He then writes:

Chaeremon and such others as have dealt with the first causes of the cosmos only expound the lowest level of authorities (τάς τελευταίας ἀρχάς); and those that discourse on the planets and the zodiac, the decans and horoscopes, and the so-called mighty ones and leaders (τούς τε δεκανοὺς καὶ ὠροσκόπους καὶ τοὺς λεγομένους κραταιοὺς καὶ ἡγεμόνας) deal with the particular allotments of the authorities (τῶν ἀρχῶν). The information contained in the Salmeschiniaka comprises only a very small part (βραχύτατον) of the Hermetic arrangements; and doctrine on the appearances (φάσεων) and disappearances (κρύψεων) of the stars, or the waxings and wanings of the moon occupies the lowest place (ἐσχάτος) in the Egyptian account of the causes of things. The Egyptians do not maintain that all things are within the realm of nature (φυσικά), but they distinguish the life of the soul and that of the intellect (νοεῖον) from nature, not only as regards the universe but also in our case.<sup>18</sup>

Together with Hephaestio's reference, these passages in the *Letter to Anebo* and *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians* allow for some detailed reconstruction of the lost Salmeschiniaka. According to Porphyry, they contained several items of information about the stars: their names (τὰ ὀνόματα), their treatments for sufferings (θεραπείαι παθῶν), their risings and settings (ἀνατολαὶ καὶ δύσεις),



in *Marsanes* is followed by a lacuna that may be partially restored as referring to the thirty-six decans: ΠΜΑΛΒΕ]ϞΕ Ν[ΔΕΚΑΝΟΣ.<sup>26</sup> In addition, P. Lond. 98 attests an astrological system of thirty-six horoscopes and thirty-six decans, both with Egyptian names traceable to the pharaonic decan lists. Exactly how this system of seventy-two would have functioned is a problem waiting to be solved, since, as the editors of the nativity admit, “we know very little about the details of astrological theory before the second century [CE].”<sup>27</sup>

### *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 465*

Given our paucity of knowledge regarding this early form of Greco-Egyptian astrology, it is unfortunate that no copy of the *Salmeschiniaka* has survived, at least not in its entirety. A fragmentary manuscript nearly matching Porphyry and Iamblichus’ description of the *Salmeschiniaka* on several points was discovered among the *Oxyrhynchus papyri* in 1897. In P. Oxy. 465, the twelve months of the Egyptian calendar are coordinated with the signs of the zodiac. Each month/sign is divided into six portions of five days/degrees (i.e.  $12 \times 6 = 72$ ,  $72 \times 5 = 360$ ), and each of these seventy-two pentads is assigned to one or more astral rulers who establish terrestrial conditions during that pentad. Egypt features prominently in the text, from the predicted destruction of many of her cities (ἀπολοῦνται πολλαὶ πόλεις τῆς [Αἰ]γύπτ[του]), to references to the gods Apophis and Typhon, to kings, temple singers (ῶδοὶ ἐν ἱεροῖς), sacred scribes (ἱερογραμματεῖς), and those in Hermopolis (ἐν Ἐρμοῦ πόλει τῆι μεγάλῃ).<sup>28</sup> On paleographic grounds, Grenfell and Hunt date the manuscript to the end of the second century CE, while noting that it could easily contain “much older material,” because the text seems to presuppose a Ptolemaic not Roman form of government.<sup>29</sup> Before deteriorating, the papyrus roll must have been quite extensive in order to accommodate a text with proGnostications for all twelve months of the year. Original length has been estimated at ninety columns.<sup>30</sup>

Of the seventy-two pentads, the surviving text covers portions of eight, from Pharmouthi/Aquarius 6–10 to Pachan/Pisces 16–20, the following month and sign. The descriptions of these pentads are themselves badly damaged. Even so, the structure of the text is plain. The first month of the Egyptian calendar is coordinated with Cancer, the second with Leo, and so on, most likely because the Egyptian year began with the heliacal rise of Sirius at the summer solstice, that is, when the sun reached its annual highpoint in the sky, in Cancer, according to the zodiacal system.<sup>31</sup>

Coordination of the Egyptian calendar with the zodiac was made possible by there being the same number of months and days in the year as signs and degrees along the ecliptic. But the two are ultimately incompatible: the twelve months in the Egyptian calendar, each consisting of three ten-day weeks based on the risings of the decans, total 360 days; whereas it takes the

sun a little more than 365 days to travel through the twelve zodiacal signs.<sup>32</sup> In Greek and Latin astrological literature produced during the Roman empire and thereafter, this incompatibility is surmounted by privileging the zodiac over the decans, which are reduced to ten-degree divisions of the ecliptic with little to no observational function. This is not the case in P. Oxy. 465. Although the zodiac is present, the schema of the papyrus is predominantly that of the Egyptian calendar with its twelve months of thirty days. The secondary importance of the zodiac becomes obvious when P. Oxy. 465 is compared to the hieroglyphic inscription on the Naos of Decades, produced in the fourth century BCE, before the introduction of the zodiac into Egypt. It features a year of prognostications according to the structure of the Egyptian calendar, only in the case of this shrine events are related by decade rather than pentad, that is, by week instead of ‘half-week.’<sup>33</sup>

The structure of P. Oxy. 465 leaves little room to doubt that the astral rulers of the seventy-two pentads are the thirty-six decans and the thirty-six horoscopes, even though none of them are referred to as such in the extant fragments. Only a few of the names of the astral rulers survive, but one has been connected with that of a decan in the *Holy Book of Hermes to Asclepius* on cutting gemstone amulets.<sup>34</sup> More reliably, the iconography of the astral rulers is decanal: one is said to be lion-faced (λεοντοπρόσωπος); two others are described as standing serpents (ὄφις ὀρθός).<sup>35</sup> And not unlike the theory of the seven decanal Places reported by Hephaestio, the astral rulers are said to influence the birth of individuals, their livelihood (βίος), marital as well as extra-marital relationships, children (τέκνα), sickness (ἀρρώστημα), and death (θάνατος).<sup>36</sup> However, the prognostications in P. Oxy. 465 are not based on birth charts. Indeed, the text appears to antedate the profusion of genethliology in the Greco-Roman world during the first centuries CE.

While the terms “decan” and “horoscope” are not found in the fragments of P. Oxy. 465, there are references to a “mighty one” and a “leader” in the description of the fourth pentad of Pharmouthi/Aquarius.<sup>37</sup> The term for leader in this passage is not identical to the one that Porphyry and Iamblichus employ, being the participle (ἡγούμενος) instead of the noun (ἡγεμών).<sup>38</sup> But the reference to a mighty one (κραταίος) is patent.<sup>39</sup> And just as Porphyry states that the Salmeschiniaka contained signs of the things about to happen (μελλόντων σημειώσεις) under each decan and horoscope, the signs (σημε[ί]α) of this pentad are listed as war, discord, and battle.<sup>40</sup>

Taken together with the sicknesses of each pentad and the prescriptions given for the treatment of suffering (πλάθους θεραπεία; cf. Porphyry: *θεραπείαι παθῶν*), the similarities between P. Oxy. 465 and the Salmeschiniaka are too extensive to be the result of happenstance.<sup>41</sup> On a suggestion from Boll, Grenfell and Hunt go so far as to state that the manuscript “is to be regarded as either a fragment of the Σαλμενιχιακά or as derived from it through an intermediate author.”<sup>42</sup> Some scholars have more or less shared their opinion.<sup>43</sup>

Others have not.<sup>44</sup> However that may be, the manuscript is most significant for the calendrical and cosmological schema it preserves, namely its division of the twelve months/zodiacal signs into seventy-two pentads of five days/degrees, with six pentads in each of the twelve. As will be seen, Iamblichus refers to this self-same structure in the cosmological survey that follows his Hermetic theologies, and it is the basis for the argument in *Eugnostos*.

#### IAMBlichus' DISCLOSURE OF EGYPTIAN FIRST PRINCIPLES

So, above and beyond the things discussed by Chaeremon and recorded in the *Salmeschiniaka*, what are the Egyptian first principles that Iamblichus discloses to Porphyry? His exposition proceeds logically in the order of a compound inquiry from the *Letter to Anebo*, where Porphyry asks:

what the Egyptians consider to be the first cause, whether it is an intellect, or beyond intellect (ὕπερ νοῦν), alone or associated with another or others, and whether it is incorporeal or corporeal, and if it is the same as the demiurge or prior to him (πρὸ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ); and if everything derives from one being or from many; and if they recognize matter, or alternatively a certain number of primary bodies, and if so, how many; and whether matter is unbegotten or begotten (ἀγέννητον ἢ γέννητήν).<sup>45</sup>

Prefacing his reply, Iamblichus states that “tradition has handed down many first principles (ἀρχαί) with various arrangements (διαφόρους ἔχουσαι τάξεις), some among certain priests and other first principles among different holy men.”<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, his exposition is a composite of multiple overlapping sources. Though he does give some indication as to when he switches from one source to another, he never mentions any of them by name or title, other than to refer to the many books of Hermes.

#### *An arrangement of the two transcendent deities*

Iamblichus begins with the two most senior first principles of all (ἀρχαί πρεσβύταται πάντων). They are both nameless and consortless. The first is unbegotten; the second self-fathering (αὐτοπάτωρ) and self-begetting (αὐτόγονος). The first is described as “prior to true being (πρὸ τῶν ὄντως ὄντων)”; the second as “pre-essential being (τὸ προόντως ὄν)”. The first is said to be the One (τὸ ἓν); the second a monad from the One (μονὰς ἐκ τοῦ ἐνός). Nothing intelligible (νοητόν) is interwoven with the first, while the second is “the first principle of the intelligible realm (τῶν νοητῶν ἀρχή)”.<sup>47</sup>

*Another arrangement of the two transcendent deities*

Switching sources, under the heading of another arrangement (κατ' ἄλλην δὲ τάξιν) Iamblichus covers the same territory again with two consortless deities.<sup>48</sup> But unlike in the first arrangement, these gods have names. The first is named Eikton, which may be a variation of Heka, the Egyptian god of magic, since he is referred to as primary magical act (πρῶτον μάγευμα).<sup>49</sup> The second is named Emeph, likely scribal error for Kmeph, that is, Kematef, the great serpentine creator.<sup>50</sup> That they are interchangeable with the transcendent deities in the first arrangement and not subordinate to them is clear from the fact that the first god in each arrangement is said to be the One (Eikton: τὸ ἓν ἀμερές).<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the second god in each arrangement is self-generating. In the first arrangement, he is said to have shone himself forth (ἑαυτὸν ἐξέλαμψε) from the One.<sup>52</sup> In the second, he is described as “an intellect thinking himself and turning his thoughts towards himself (ὄν φησι νοῦν εἶναι αὐτὸν ἑαυτὸν νοοῦντα καὶ τὰς νοήσεις εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἐπιστρέφοντα),” a fitting description of the ouroboros serpent.<sup>53</sup>

*Gods of Creation, including the Hermopolitan Ogdoad*

Iamblichus then comes to other leaders (ἄλλοι ἡγεμόνες) of the “creation of the visible realm (τῶν ἐμφανῶν δημιουργίας),” such as Amun, Ptah, Osiris and their respective powers (δυνάμεις). They turn out to be aspects of the demiurgic intellect (δημιουργικός νοῦς), perhaps equivalent to the self-thinking intellect Kmeph.<sup>54</sup> In ancient Egyptian creation cycles, Osiris belongs to the Ennead of the Heliopolitan Cosmogony, according to which Atum alone brings forth Shu (air) and Tefnut (moisture). They then produce Geb (earth) and Nut (sky) who in turn generate Osiris and Isis, Seth and Nephthys. In the Memphite Theology the creation of these Nine Gods is attributed to Ptah. But the Ennead of Heliopolis was not the only divine family in ancient Egypt. Another group of eight gods was centered at Hermopolis, led by the lunar god Thoth. It consisted of four male-female pairs, often depicted with the heads of frogs or serpents, portraying the creative forces of chaos: Amun and Amaunet (hiddenness), Huh and Hauhet (formlessness), Kuk and Kauket (darkness), Nun and Naunet (watery abyss). These are the same gods said to protect the turquoise stelae on which the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* was purportedly first carved in hieroglyphs. The Ogdoad is also featured together with the Ennead in the cosmogony that precedes the week-by-week prognostications on the Naos of Decades. There the creative role of Shu is emphasized. But in the Khonsu Cosmogony, a later Ptolemaic text arguably representative of the Theban theology of the New Kingdom (1551–1070 BCE), Amun-Re is the chief creator god. He is said to be the soul

of the Kematef serpent and, somewhat paradoxically, father of the fathers of the Ogdoad, functioning as Ptah and the Theban lunar god Khonsu, also called Khonsu-Osiris.<sup>55</sup>

Not unexpectedly, following the various manifestations of the demiurgic intellect, the Eight Gods of Hermopolis next make an appearance in Iamblichus' exposition. He tells Porphyry of another certain leadership (ἄλλη τις ἡγεμονία) over all four masculine elements and their four feminine powers (τῶν περὶ γένεσιν ὄλων στοιχείων καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς δυνάμεων, τεττάρων μὲν ἀρρενικῶν τεττάρων δὲ θηλυκῶν). This leadership belongs to the sun. It is followed by another authority over all nature (ἄλλη τῆς φύσεως ὅλης τῆς περὶ γένεσιν ἀρχή), which is given to the moon.<sup>56</sup> There may be some overlapping of sources here with the aspects of the demiurgic intellect and their powers, since both Amun (ἐπὶ γένεσιν) and the elements (περὶ γένεσιν) are associated with generation, as is nature. For the Ogdoad to be equated with the elements and their powers is quite fitting. As one professor of classics and Egyptology writes, an "urge towards abstract thinking can be discerned" in the Eight Gods of Hermopolis, "recalling the early Greek desire to define the basic elements."<sup>57</sup> Priests trained in Hellenistic philosophy, such as Iamblichus claims to have rewritten his sources, apparently made the same connection between Egyptian and Greek thought.

#### *Cosmological survey, including the seventy-two 'half-decans'*

At last, summarizing the more numerous and mundane books of Hermes dealing with the stars, Iamblichus mentions that the Egyptians divide the heaven into two or four or twelve or thirty-six or the double of that or however else (εἰς δύο μοίρας ἢ τέτταρας ἢ δώδεκα ἢ ἕξ καὶ τριάκοντα ἢ διπλασίας τούτων ἢ ἄλλως ὀπωσοῦν), each with its leadership (ἡγεμονία).<sup>58</sup> In their introduction to *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*, Iamblichus' most recent editors identify the thirty-six as decans readily enough. For the other divisions of two, four, twelve and seventy-two, they "conjecture Night and Day, the four seasons, the twelve months – and perhaps some system of 'half-decans,' presiding over five-day 'weeks.'"<sup>59</sup> Hardly a point of conjecture, the seventy-two can safely be understood as referring to the thirty-six decans and thirty-six horoscopes of the Salmeschiniaka, P. Oxy. 465, and P. Lond. 98. Iamblichus seems to have known of some Hermetic texts that featured the usual decanal division of thirty-six, others with seventy-two. The reason he does not treat Egyptian cosmology in as much detail as he does theology is because it was not at issue in his debate with Porphyry. Still it is curious that no cosmological division of the seven planets is mentioned in this survey, despite reference to the planets in the discussion of Chaeremon and the Salmeschiniaka by both Porphyry and Iamblichus. The seven are not mentioned in *Eugnostos* either.

*Derivation of matter: No break in the Chain of Being*

This leaves the question of the derivation of matter. At the end of his compound inquiry in the *Letter to Anebo*, Porphyry had asked whether the Egyptians consider matter unbegotten or begotten (ἀγέννητον ἢ γέννητὴν). After explaining that the Egyptians posit two transcendent gods prior to the demiurge, one beyond intellect, the other a self-thinking intellect, Iamblichus replies:

As for matter, God derived it from essentiality (οὐσιότητος), once materiality (ύλότητος) had been extracted; this matter, which is endowed with life, the demiurge took in hand and from it fashioned the simple and impassible spheres (τὰς ἀπλᾶς καὶ ἀπαθεῖς σφαίρας), while its lowest residue he crafted into begotten and corruptible bodies (τὰ γέννητὰ καὶ φθαρτὰ σώματα).<sup>60</sup>

Here ‘God’ must refer to the self-begetting (αὐτόγονος) consortless and nameless deity in Iamblichus’ first arrangement of Hermetic theology. There he is called father of essence (οὐσιοπάτωρ) because “essentiality and essence come from him (ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἡ οὐσιότης καὶ ἡ οὐσία).”<sup>61</sup> The demiurge receives matter from this transcendent god and uses it to form the perfect spheres above and the bodies of the visible cosmos. Thus matter is not the result of any break in the Chain of Being, such as the fall of Sophia related in many iterations of Sethian and Valentinian myth. On the contrary, matter is derived from essence itself by the foremost intelligible god who, though not the highest deity, nevertheless transcends the creator of the physical world. This is a rather procosmic approach to the derivation of matter, even if the hidden god remains aloof from essentiality and materiality.

FROM HIDDEN TO REVEALED IN *EUGNOSTOS*

Can any of Iamblichus’ Hermetic sources in *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians* be identified? The answer of past scholarship has been no; to the extent that he had any, they are lost.<sup>62</sup> However, something very similar to his exposition of Egyptian first principles is found in *Eugnostos*. This is not to say that Iamblichus read a Greek version of this Nag Hammadi tractate among the numerous books of Hermes. His sources and *Eugnostos* simply share a common Greco-Egyptian tradition.

*The two transcendent deities, Unbegotten and Self-begetter*

As with Iamblichus’ interchangeable arrangements of Hermetic theology, there are two transcendent consortless deities in *Eugnostos*. They and the

gods in Iamblichus' first arrangement are particularly close, in that they go unnamed and are referred to as Unbegotten (ἀγεννητος) and Self-begetter (ἀγτογενετωρ). Furthermore, the unbegotten deity in both the first arrangement and in *Eugnostos* is said to be the “fount of all (Iamblichus: πηγή τῶν πάντων; NHC V,1: ΠΗΓΗ ΠΤΕΥΤΗΡΟΥ),” while the self-begotten deity in both is called self-father (Iamblichus: αὐτοπάτωρ; NHC III,3: ἀγτοπατωρ) and “the beginning or first principle of those that come through him.”<sup>63</sup>

Just as the self-begetting deity in Iamblichus' first arrangement shines himself forth from the One, Self-begetter is also described in *Eugnostos* as “he who put forth himself (πεῖπιρε εβο[λ] ἤμοιο ογαλα),” the luminous mirror image of Unbegotten.<sup>64</sup>

### *Gods of Creation, including the Hermopolitan Ogdoad (redacted)*

Similar to Κμεφ in Iamblichus' second arrangement, Self-begetter thinks (νοει), and his likeness is said to be an intellect (νους) whose consort is Wisdom (σοφία) and Truth (μῆε).<sup>65</sup> This Perfect Intellect resembles the figure of the demiurgic intellect in Iamblichus' Hermetic sources, there referred to as “master of truth and wisdom (τῆς ἀληθείας προστάτης καὶ σοφίας).”<sup>66</sup>

After Unbegotten and Self-begetter, it is with this third deity, the Perfect Intellect, and his consort that begetting starts. Respectively called Begetter Mind (ἄνους ἄρεφχῆρο) or Begotten (πεχ[ῆρο] and All-wise Begettress Sophia (πανσοφος σοφία ἄγενετεια), they generate another male–female pair of deities, who in turn generate another. Each of the six is a god of creation, not unlike the various aspects of the demiurgic intellect and his powers in Iamblichus' Hermetic sources. They each have titles of begetting, such as Begetter of All Things (ἄρεφχπε ἄκα ἡ[ῆ]μ) and All-begettress (πανγενετεια).<sup>67</sup>

The triad of unbegotten, self-begotten, and begotten is characteristically Hermetic, at least of *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*. As Gilles Quispel writes, “this is a very unusual and almost unique terminology to indicate the structure of the All, its unknown source, its ideal explication, its material consolidation.”<sup>68</sup> In his study of the triad, occurrences of which he identifies in *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, Iamblichus' exposition of Egyptian first principles, *Eugnostos*, and Hippolytus' *Peratics*, Jean-Pierre Mahé goes so far as to suggest that *Eugnostos* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* “depend on a Hermetic source quite close” to *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*. At any rate, given their triad of unbegotten, self-begotten, and begotten deities, Mahé concludes that “one cannot brush aside the probability of direct Hermetic influence on *Eug* and *SJC*.”<sup>69</sup>

Below the two consortless deities, the number of begotten and begetter gods in *Eugnostos* seems to have been reduced from four to three male–female pairs at some point in the text's composition history. As Douglas Parrott argues, this was done by a proto-Sethian redactor who blended his

Genesis theogony with a Ptolemaic version of the Theban theology of the New Kingdom and its Eight Gods of Hermopolis. In place of the four male–female pairs of the Ogdoad were added Man (God), Son of Man (transcendent Adam), Son of the Son of Man or Savior (transcendent Seth), and their consorts. Resulting, among other things, was the loss of one male–female pair and a shift in the titles of the remaining deities.<sup>70</sup>

Evidence for this comes from a passage in *Eugnostos* that introduces the generation of twelve pneumatic powers from the Savior and his consort: “Then the Savior consented with his consort, Pistis Sophia. He revealed six pneumatic male–females, being the type of those who preceded them (ἐπὶ τῶν πρὸ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθησαν).” They are listed with these titles:

*The Twelve Powers*

male	female
ἀΓΕΝΝΗΤΟΣ	ΠΑΝΣΟΦΟΣ ΣΟΦΙΑ
ΑΥΤΟΓΕΝΝΗΤΟΣ	ΠΑΝΗΜΤΩΡ ΣΟΦΙΑ
ΓΕΝΕΤΩΡ	ΠΑΝΓΕΝΕΤΙΡΑ ΣΟΦΙΑ
ΠΡΩΤΟΓΕΝΕΤΩΡ	ΠΡΩΤΟΓΕΝΕΤΙΡΑ ΣΟΦΙΑ
ΠΑΝΓΕΝΕΤΩΡ	ΑΓΑΠΗ ΣΟΦΙΑ
ΑΡΧΙΓΕΝΕΤΩΡ	ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΣΟΦΙΑ

These twelve powers, six male, six female, are said to be modeled on the unbegotten, self-begetting, begotten, and begetting gods. But while they have many of the same titles, due to the proto-Sethian editorial process they do not correspond in number, there being two consortless deities and only three male–female pairs above the twelve powers in the extant manuscripts of *Eugnostos*. After replacing the Ogdoad with his metaphysical speculation on the three Men of Genesis, it seems that the proto-Sethian redactor somewhat carelessly left it to others to cover his tracks by deleting the phrase “being the type of those who preceded them (ἐπὶ τῶν πρὸ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθησαν).” The phrase has in fact been deleted in NHC V,1, thereby minimizing the obvious lack of correspondence between the twelve powers and two and six gods above them.<sup>71</sup>

Thus Parrott arrives at the following reconstruction of two and eight gods on which the twelve pneumatic powers would have been modeled before activity of the proto-Sethian redactor:

*The Two and Eight Gods*

Unbegotten	(no consort)
Self-begetter	(no consort)
Begotten	All-wise Begettress Sophia
First-begotten	First-begotten Sophia, Mother
All-begetter	Love Sophia
Arch-begetter	Pistis Sophia

*The Twelve Powers*

Unbegotten	All-wise Sophia
Self-begotten	All-mother Sophia
Begetter	All-begettress Sophia
First-begetter	First-begettress Sophia
All-begetter	Love Sophia
Arch-begetter	Pistis Sophia

Such a theogony of two and eight gods is exclusive to Egyptian religion, according to Parrott, the Theban theology of the New Kingdom (1551–1070 BCE), to be more specific. For the identification of the unbegotten and self-begetting consortless deities, he points to Amun and the son of Kematef in the Khonsu Cosmogony, while the four male–female pairs below them he identifies as the Ogdoad of Hermopolis.<sup>72</sup>

The names of these Egyptian gods do not show up in any of the manuscripts of *Eugnostos* or the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (though, again, the highest god is said to be hidden, which is the meaning of the name Amun). And Parrott recognizes that whereas the Egyptians believed that the Hermopolitan Ogdoad died and was buried, in *Eugnostos* the eight gods reside eternally above the earth and sky even after the cosmogonic process is complete. He sees both features of the text as further developments in the Theban theology during the Ptolemaic period, presumably under Hellenistic influence. In order to account for the anonymity of the old gods of Egypt and their immortalization above, he appeals to the transferal of mythic history to “the supercelestial realm of the timeless.”<sup>73</sup>

That Egyptians developed abstract interpretations of their priestly myths at a highly transcendent level is exactly what Iamblichus seeks to prove in his reply to Porphyry, while simultaneously affirming that his Hermetic sources are nonetheless Egyptian for having been rewritten in Greek philosophical language. If the unbegotten and self-begetting consortless gods in *Eugnostos* are nameless, so are those in Iamblichus’ first arrangement of Hermetic theology. If the four eternal male–female pairs in *Eugnostos* are not specifically identified as the Eight Gods of Hermopolis, neither are the four male elements and their female powers led by the sun in *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*. Parrott’s reconstruction of two and eight gods is further corroborated by *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, where the Ogdoad of Hermopolis appears unmistakably along with an unbegotten (ἀγεννητος) god and a self-begotten (αὐτογεννητος) god.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, in the cosmogony on the Naos of the Decades, just prior to the Ptolemaic period, the thirty-six decans of the Egyptian calendar are said to be created from the souls of the Ogdoad.<sup>75</sup> And it is indeed a decanal cosmos that the author of *Eugnostos* assumes.

*Cosmos and calendar, including the seventy-two*

Having described the unbegotten and self-begetting consortless deities above, the pairs of gods below, and the pneumatic powers modeled on them, the author of *Eugnostos* explains how the twelve powers generated six additional powers each. The seventy-two powers are then said to have generated 360 powers of their own.<sup>76</sup> With these powers in place, a divine pattern for the visible cosmos has been established, and physical creation can begin. Twelve aeons follow, containing six heavens in each aeon, five firmaments to each heaven. These divisions of the cosmos are temporal as well as spatial:

Therefore our aeon came to be as the type of Immortal Man. Time came to be as the type of First-begetter, his son. [The year] came to be as the type of [the Savior. The] twelve months came to be as the type of the twelve powers. The three-hundred-sixty days of the year came to be as the type of the three-hundred-sixty powers who appeared from the Savior.<sup>77</sup>

For the author of *Eugnostos*, and apparently the proto-Sethian redactor also, there are thirty days in each month ( $6 \times 5$ ) and 360 days in the year ( $12 \times 30$ ). This is due to the assumed fact that the visible cosmos encompasses 360 firmaments, seventy-two heavens, and twelve aeons, with six heavens in each aeon ( $12 \times 6 = 72$ ) and five firmaments to each heaven ( $72 \times 5 = 360$ ).

In other words, the cosmological and calendrical structure of *Eugnostos* is exactly the same as that of P. Oxy. 465. And just as the astral rulers of the seventy-two pentads in P. Oxy. 465 are all but certainly the thirty-six decans and thirty-six horoscopes of the Salmeschiniaka as mentioned by Porphyry and Iamblichus, so too *Eugnostos*.

This calendrical information allows us to consider the author's social group identity, given that calendars often serve to establish solidarity within a group as well as boundaries between groups; weekly cycles, such as the Jewish Sabbath, can be particularly indicative of group identity.<sup>78</sup> Among the spatial and temporal divisions in his assumed cosmos and calendar, the author of *Eugnostos* mentions the number of months and total days in the year, but he does not state that the seventy-two 'weeks' are the type of the seventy-two powers. So the question then becomes: what kind of week did he observe? That it was a decanal week is the simplest answer, as he assumes an Egyptian calendar with thirty days in each month and 360 days in the year, to which five epagomenal days were added but always counted outside the year.<sup>79</sup> If the author of *Eugnostos* did observe a decanal week, he was likely an Egyptian, albeit Hellenized and apparently at least somewhat familiar with Judaica.

It is also possible that he observed a seven-day week, whether strictly planetary and pagan or Jewish or Christian.<sup>80</sup> The calendar of the Coptic church, for one, follows a seven-day week, all the while preserving the names of the

ancient Egyptian months and their thirty-day count held over from when the decans were still being observed.<sup>81</sup> However, there is no strong indication that the author of *Eugnostos* was Christian, and a fair amount of the Jewish material in the text could be attributed to the proto-Sethian redactor.<sup>82</sup> At any rate, use of Jewish scripture does not require Jewish identity.<sup>83</sup> As Birger Pearson writes of the first tractate in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, “[f]or all the obvious Jewish elements in the *Poimandres*, it is not a Jewish document. I see no reason to doubt that it is, in fact, a Hermetic document, even though the name ‘Hermes Trismegistus’ does not occur in the text itself.”<sup>84</sup> A similar assessment could be made of *Eugnostos*. Its author appears to be entirely unconcerned with the Jewish Sabbath or any cosmological import of the number seven. This is in stark contrast to Philo, for instance, who devotes nearly one-fourth of his *De opificio mundi* to an excursus on the hebdomad.<sup>85</sup> If the author of *Eugnostos* was Jewish, it seems that he would have been nearer to Philo’s extreme allegorizers.

### *Revelation of the hidden god*

Although the author understands space and time according to an Egyptian world view, cosmology and calendar are not the point of his writing, which may explain why none of the technical terms or names of the seventy-two are mentioned. Taking the structure of space and time for granted, what the author wants to demonstrate is that the visible cosmos is patterned on higher powers, themselves modeled on even higher gods. As explained in the opening of his didactic letter, he is arguing against “all the philosophers (νεφιλοσοφος τηροϋ),” who maintain that the cosmos governs itself or else is governed by nothing more than providence or fate. He seems to have Epicureans and Stoics, among others, in mind.<sup>86</sup>

But the author is no stranger to Hellenistic philosophy, even if he does not self-identify as a philosopher.<sup>87</sup> His concept of a divine pattern and model above the cosmos is in basic agreement with Platonism. And his epistemology is loosely that of the *Republic*, where through the Sun, Line, and Cave analogies in the sixth and seventh books, dialectical knowledge (γνώσις, νόησις, ἐπιστήμη) is said to build on and surpass the ‘knowledge’ (διάνοια, πίστις, εἰκασία) that comes from arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and so on.<sup>88</sup>

The author of *Eugnostos* has ascended from the Cave, as it were, hence his penname (εϋγνωστος).<sup>89</sup> Writing as one who already possesses gnōsis of the hidden god, he invites his readers to go from “what is hidden (πῶθη),” that is, Unbegotten, “to the end of what is revealed (πετογανη εβολ),” that is, the aeons, heavens, and firmaments of the visible cosmos:

If therefore anyone wants to believe (πιστεϋε) the words set down (here), let him go from what is hidden to the end of what is revealed,

and this thought (ἐννοία) will teach (τεταβο) him how belief (πίστις) in what has not been revealed was found in what has been revealed. This is a principle (or: beginning) of knowledge (σοφία).<sup>90</sup>

By the close of the letter, readers of *Eugnostos* will in fact have gone from what is hidden to the end of what is revealed, as the phrase serves to outline the text itself.<sup>91</sup> To his readers who are still at the level of belief (πίστις), the author gives an account of the generation of the gods and the creation of the cosmos that is suited to their present capability, with the understanding that they will eventually reach his level of knowledge (γνώσις / σοφία). As he concludes the letter: “Now all I have just said to you, I said in the way you might bear, until the one who (or: that which) need not be taught (ματ τ βω) is revealed in you, and he (or: it) will speak all these things to you joyously and in pure knowledge (σοφία).”<sup>92</sup> Until they come to know the hidden god, the readers of *Eugnostos* must content themselves with belief. Belief in the twelve aeons, seventy-two heavens, and 360 firmaments of the visible cosmos leads to belief in the same number of powers, and from the twelve powers to the two and eight gods above them – all hinging on the notion that behind every type stands a model or pattern. Knowledge of the hidden god brings immortality, and the ritual process by which it is obtained in Hermetism after progress in book learning is related in *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps at the conclusion of his letter, the author of *Eugnostos* is referring to a similar process.

Given his epistemology and the assumptions he makes about the structure of space and time, it is to be expected that the gods which the author of *Eugnostos* describes outside the Cave would be Greco-Egyptian also. From theogony to cosmology, *Eugnostos* and Iamblichus’ exposition of Egyptian first principles from the books of Hermes parallel one other. The parallels are closest with regard to the unbegotten and self-begetting gods and the cosmological divisions of twelve and seventy-two. In between, discernment of the Eight Gods of Hermopolis is more difficult, depending as it does on redaction criticism in the case of *Eugnostos*.

#### *Derivation of matter: No fall of Sophia*

Not only are their divisions of the cosmos the same, Iamblichus’ Hermetic sources and *Eugnostos* agree in their procosmism. In the former, it was seen that matter and materiality are derived from essentiality by the foremost intelligible god and then taken in hand by the demiurge. In *Eugnostos*, the visible cosmos is patterned on a divine cosmos of powers that are in turn generated by one of the male–female pairs of gods stemming from Self-begetter and ultimately from the hidden god Unbegotten. Despite reference to a defect (ἐγστερημα / ὄτα), known elsewhere in Hermetic literature, not a single

Sophia falls in *Eugnostos*.<sup>94</sup> The male–female pairs of gods consent (συμφωνει) with each other before acting, as do the pneumatic powers.<sup>95</sup> There is no break in the Chain of Being. Instead, the aeons, heavens, and firmaments are said to be “perfect and good (σεχικ αγω νανογ),” even if the defect of femaleness is introduced as a natural result of their creation.<sup>96</sup>

It was this procosmism that caused the authors of the sequel to *Eugnostos*, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, to cut out both the visible cosmos and its divine pattern, an excision of three whole manuscript pages, thereby completely disrupting the epistemology and argument of the text. That, and probably because the calendar the authors of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* followed was not the Egyptian calendar, with its decanal week.<sup>97</sup> Of the perfect and good cosmos in *Eugnostos*, all they left is one brief allusion to the twelve aeons and powers. In its place, the authors added a soteriological discourse in which Christ is said to descend to awaken and liberate the captive children of Sophia from the forgetfulness and bonds of the robbers in this impoverished world.<sup>98</sup>

Expanding on the close of the letter, the authors of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* also add a myth of fallen Wisdom, according to which she desires to create without her male consort. They further identify Arch-begetter as the demonized Ialdabaoth of Sethianism.<sup>99</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF SETHIANISM

The implications of a common Greco-Egyptian tradition shared by Iamblichus’ Hermetic sources and *Eugnostos* would make for a separate study. Touching on the relation to Sethianism alone, I will offer a few general observations as an epilogue to the preceding. Since it features a theogony of Man, Son of Man, and Son of the Son of Man or Savior also venerated by the *gnōstikoi* of Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.30, *Eugnostos* has been classified as proto-Sethian.<sup>100</sup> What this might mean for the development of Sethianism has perhaps not been fully explored.

If *Eugnostos* shares a common tradition with Iamblichus’ Hermetic sources and is proto-Sethian, then other possible instances of Greco-Egyptian tradition within Sethianism proper ought to be taken more seriously and might not necessarily represent later developments. These would include the arguably decanal (not to mention solar) leonine and serpentine iconography of Ialdabaoth, as well as the melothesia of seventy-two daemons excerpted from the ‘Book of Zoroaster’ in the longer manuscripts of *Apocryphon of John*.<sup>101</sup> As Joachim Quack has shown, several of the names of the daemons can be traced to ancient Egyptian decan lists, if only through Hermetic intermediary sources.<sup>102</sup> Also decanal, Hermetic iatromathematical practices of the sort Nechepso was famous for and such as are described in the *Holy Book of Hermes to Asclepius* would no doubt shed light on Ophite and Sethian ritual attested by Plotinus and represented by the famous missing Brummer amulet.<sup>103</sup>

As Sethian myth circulated outside Egypt, the decans may have lost some of their prominence. Hence the cosmology seems to have been modified from place to place in order to accommodate local standards of time-keeping, for instance. If the author of *Eugnostos* observed a ten-day week and was not concerned with the Sabbath or the cosmological significance of the number seven, the important testimonium in *Adversus haereses* 1.30, dateable to circa 180 CE, features a seven-day week, as do all four manuscripts of *Apocryphon of John*. Yet, the seven planetary rulers do not play as prominent a role in other Sethian texts.<sup>104</sup>

Could earliest Sethianism have lacked a myth of fallen Wisdom and been more procosmic, as *Eugnostos* does and is? The recently published *Gospel of Judas* would seem to bear directly on this issue. It has the same cosmology as *Eugnostos*, with divisions of twelve aeons, seventy-two heavens, and 360 firmaments, patterned on luminaries of corresponding number.<sup>105</sup> Sophia does not fall through a selfish act of creation. Rather an angel calls forth the ruler/s of Chaos, as in *Gospel of the Egyptians* and *Trimorphic Protennoia*, where Wisdom is described as blameless.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, Nebro/Ialdabaoth and Saklas are malevolent, and the stars play an unambiguously negative role. I submit that the *Gospel of Judas* represents an early stage in the development of Sethian mythopoesis when the line between the transcendent realm and the visible cosmos was still being drawn, an early stage perhaps before the excision from *Eugnostos* of its Greco-Egyptian cosmological and calendrical system by the authors of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*.

Proximate to the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* is *Apocryphon of John* (they were actually copied one after the other in the Berlin Codex), in which divine Wisdom does fall, acting alone, without the agreement of deity or her consort. Emphasizing the break in the Chain of Being, Ialdabaoth then moves away from and outside the divine realm to generate the visible cosmos as a much inferior copy, consisting of various numbers of authorities, aeons, angels, and powers in the four different manuscripts.<sup>107</sup> Still, traces of an earlier procosmism endure.

Conflicting calculations between the short and long manuscripts are not the only puzzling aspect of the cosmogony in *Apocryphon of John*: despite the fact that Ialdabaoth is said to model his creation on the divine realm above him, there is very little correspondence between the visible cosmos and the pleroma. According to the short manuscripts, Ialdabaoth generates twelve aeons for his twelve authorities “after the pattern of the incorruptible aeons (επιτυπος ἑννιάων ἀφάρτος).”<sup>108</sup> And following the appearance of their eighty-four angels and 252 powers, in the short manuscripts it is said that Ialdabaoth created them “according to the likeness of the first pattern, which is prior to him (κατὰ πῆνε μπερογιετ ντυπος ετρατεφερη).”<sup>109</sup> Yet the pleroma contains no such pattern. Similarly, after the names of glory of the seven kings of the heavens are listed, the short manuscripts read, “These have a firmament per heaven and aeon, according to the likeness of the aeons that

have existed since the beginning, in the pattern of the incorruptible ones (ΝΑΪ ΟΥΝΤΑΥ ΝΗΜΑΥ ΝΝΟΥΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑ ΚΑΤΑ ΠΕ ΛΥΩ ΟΥΔΙΩΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΠΕΙΝΕ ΝΑΙΩΝ ΕΤΩΟΠ ΧΙΝ ΝΩΟΡΠ ΜΠΤΥΠΟΣ ΝΝΙΑΤΤΑΚΟ).<sup>110</sup> But again, there is no such pattern in the pleroma, which is limited to twelve aeons. Was the divine pattern removed, as were the seventy-two and 360 powers of the heavens and firmaments in *Eugnostos* by the authors of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*?

The reason for this lack of correspondence in *Apocryphon of John* can be shown to be the preoccupation of its authors to establish a clear break between the divine realm and the visible cosmos. In their version of the passage just cited, the authors of the long manuscripts clarify that Ialdabaoth did not actually see the incorruptible ones, “but the power in him which he had taken from his Mother produced in him the likeness of the cosmos (ΑΛΛΑ ΤΩΟΜ ΕΤΉΡΗΤΥ ΤΑΪ ΕΝΤΑΦΧΙΤΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΙΤΉ ΤΕΦΜΑΔΥ ΕΑΧΧΠΟ ΝΞΗΤΥ ΜΠΠΝΕ ΜΠΤΣΕΝΟ).”<sup>111</sup>

Another example of such preoccupation can be found after the negative theology with which the Savior begins his revelation to John:

What am I to say to you about that [incomprehensible] One? This is (only) the likeness of the light: as I will be able to understand (ΝΟΕΙ) – for who does ever understand him – I will speak to you. As I will be able to understand I will speak. His aeon is incorruptible (ΑΦΘΑΡΤΟΣ), at rest, reposing in silence, the One who is prior to everything. (He is) the head of every aeon, because his goodness supplies all aeons (ΤΕΦΗΝΤΑΓΑΘΟΣ ΧΟΡΗΓΕΙ ΝΑΙΩΝ ΤΗΡΟΥ) – if there exists anything beside him. No one of us knows the attributes of that immeasurable One except [for him who dwelt in him], who [told it to us]. It is he who contemplates [himself alone in his light] which surrounds [him, namely the spring] of [living] water, [the light full] of purity, [and the] spring [of the Spirit], which pours forth living water from [it]. He was supplying [all the] aeons and their cosmoses (ΝΕΦΕΠΧΟΡΗΓΕΙ Ν]ΝΑΙΩ[Ν ΤΗ]ΡΟΥ ΜΉ ΝΕΥΚΟΣ[ΜΟΣ]).<sup>112</sup>

This passage is not consistent with the narrative of *Apocryphon of John*. The perspective of the speaker is a limited human perspective, not that of an omniscient divine being like the one who is supposed to be addressing his disciple. In fact the Savior is referred to in these lines in the third person as the one who revealed knowledge of the Father “to us.”

No doubt this passage goes back to an earlier source, perhaps Christian, perhaps not. It has been adapted, somewhat carelessly, in a post-resurrection dialogue. The important thing to note is that elements of the theology and cosmology presupposed here are quite different from the myth that follows. In particular, the transcendent deity is said to supply “all the aeons and their cosmoses (Ν]ΝΑΙΩ[Ν ΤΗ]ΡΟΥ ΜΉ ΝΕΥΚΟΣ[ΜΟΣ]),” suggesting that the visible

cosmos is not the only one, and that the hidden god is more or less actively involved in their establishment and maintenance. Tellingly, this phrase only appears in the short manuscripts of *Apocryphon of John*. In the long manuscripts, the deity supplies all the aeons, but there is no reference to him supplying any cosmos let alone more than one.<sup>113</sup> That much of the phrase has been removed.

Elsewhere, the phrase “the aeons and their cosmoses” appears repeatedly in *Eugnostos*.<sup>114</sup> For example, along with the kingless generation of self-begotten ones that accompany him, Self-begetter is said to be unknown “among all the aeons and their cosmoses (ἐν παντὶ τῆρου ἢ νεγκοσμος).”<sup>115</sup> The phrase is not found in the *Gospel of Judas*, but unlike the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* and *Apocryphon of John*, the divine pattern above the visible cosmos is intact. That is, like *Eugnostos*, the *Gospel of Judas* contains multiple cosmoses, each with divisions of twelve, seventy-two, and 360, even if its visible cosmos is ruled by malevolent archons.

Thus I would hazard a date of composition for the *Gospel of Judas* in the mid second century, prior to the composition of *Apocryphon of John*, placing *Eugnostos* sometime before that.<sup>116</sup> To judge from the text of P. Oxy. 465, the cosmology in *Eugnostos* could be as old as the Ptolemaic period. Revelation of the hidden god in *Eugnostos* begins with Self-begetter and ends with the visible cosmos in one continuous Chain of Being. This was broken by the authors of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* when they rewrote the text in the second century. But in the books of Hermes, the link between the transcendent deity and creation remained intact well into the third century for Egyptianizing theurgists of Iamblichus’ sort.

## NOTES

1. Philo, *De migratione Abrahami* 89–93.
2. van den Broek (1996: 23). He goes on to say that the author was probably Jewish. For a recent understanding of the text as written by a Christian and addressed to Christians, see Pasquier (2010: esp. 195–223). She takes the cosmos and calendar to be symbolic of Christology.
3. Already noted in Sumney (1989: 176–8); Trakatellis (1977/1991: 128–38).
4. Parrott (1987, 1988, 1991: 1–34); Mahé (1986); Quack (1995, 2010); also Quack’s forthcoming treatment of the Salmeschiniaka and P. Oxy. 465.
5. *Stromata* 4.4.35.1–37.3 (Stählin & Früchtel 1960: 448–50).
6. On the Tebtynis temple deposit, see Ryholt (2005).
7. *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* NHC VI,6 61.18–62.15.
8. For a general introduction to the *De mysteriis*, including “Iamblichus’ knowledge of Egyptian Religion and Mythology,” refer to E. C. Clarke *et al.* (2004, xiii–lii), while D. C. Clark (2008) treats “Iamblichus’ Egyptian Neoplatonic Theology” in detail. The fragments of Porphyry’s letter are pieced together in Sodano (1958).
9. The latest treatment of the Salmeschiniaka, however brief, appears to be A. Jones (2008), citing Heilen’s forthcoming edition of Antigonos. The Salmeschiniaka are often discussed together with P. Oxy. 465, whether it is an actual fragment of them or

- simply preserves comparable material. Quack provides a thorough discussion of the Salmeschiniaka and P. Oxy. 465, with reference to past literature, in his forthcoming monograph on the decans and their reception in the Greco-Roman world.
10. Refer to van der Horst (1984/1987: ix–xi); also Fowden (1986/1993: 54–6).
  11. The only edition of fragments is that of Riess (1892); but see also Fraser (1972: 436–7); Ray (1974); Pingree (1974); Fournet (2000); Gonsález (2005).
  12. Antigonus and this famous nativity are treated in Heilen (2005).
  13. *Apotelesmatica* 2.18.71–6 (Pingree 1973: 166–7). The reference to the Salmeschiniaka is as follows: Καὶ ἐκ τῶν Σαλμεσχοινιακῶν δὲ βιβλίων ἀναλεξάμενος ὡς ἔστιν ἐκεῖ οὕτως λέγει. Modified by ἀναλεξάμενος, it seems that Nechepso is the implied subject of λέγει, since he is the nearest antecedent. If so, the Salmeschiniaka most likely date to well before the Common Era, approximately the year 200 according to scholarly convention; cf. the stemmata in Gundel (1936: 45); Gundel & Gundel (1966: fig. 3). Otherwise, if Antigonus is the subject, the penning of his lost work circa 150 CE would be the latest possible date for their composition; refer to Quack forthcoming, 384 n. 2371.
  14. Presently, the single-volume reference work on the decans and their reception is Gundel (1936). For the ancient Egyptian sources and their disputed interpretation, see Neugebauer & Parker (1960, 1969); von Bomhard (1999, 2008); Conman (2003). The decans in India are the subject of Pingree (1963). For the magical gems, many of which are not decanal, refer to, for example, Bonner (1950), and the overview in Michel (2005). The astrological boards can be found in Abry (1993), with further discussion in J. Evans (2004).
  15. *Apotelesmatica* 2.18.75 (Pingree 1973: 167).
  16. On these two papyri and the Book of Nut, see Neugebauer & Parker (1960: 43–94); von Bomhard (2008: 239–41); Conman (2003).
  17. *Epistola ad Anebonem* 2.12b–c, apud Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 3.4.1–2 (Sodano 1958: 23–5; van der Horst 1984/1987: 14–15). Though I tend to modify them, all translations of ancient sources are in the main those of the editions cited. Whenever I follow a variant reading or unpublished fragment or restoration of a text, I state as much in the notes.
  18. *De mysteriis* 8.4.265.13–267.1 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 314–17). The translation of τελευταίας as “ultimate” in van der Horst (1984/1987: 17), and Fowden (1986/1993: 140) is potentially misleading; see the prior use of the word in 8.3.265.1.
  19. See Kákosy (1982: 163–91); Neugebauer & Parker (1969: 71, 133–9).
  20. Sources and discussion in Jackson (1985: 75–85).
  21. Editions and translations in Pitra (1888: 284–90); Ruelle (1908); Festugière (1949–1954: 1.139–43); cf. Kroll (1903: 73–8). The manuscripts of this text, sometimes referred to by the title *De mensibus ad Asclepium*, all postdate the thirteenth century, though the text itself is likely ancient. For the late Byzantine scribal context, see Pingree (1971); Rigo (2002).
  22. Stobaeus, *Excerpt* 6.
  23. The Naos of the Decades is published in von Bomhard (2008). For its possible relation to the Salmeschiniaka and/or P. Oxy. 465, see Leitz (1995: 49–50); Quack (2010: 178–9).
  24. P. Lond. 98 (Neugebauer & van Hoesen 1959: 28–38); *Asclepius* 19 (Nock & Festugière 1960: 2.319); *Marsanes* NHC X 42.6–7 (Funk *et al.* 2000: 325); cf. Iamblichus, *In Timaeum* frag. 79 (Dillon 1973: 192–3), where the seventy-two are said to proceed ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἑξ καὶ τριάκοντα δεκαδραχῶν; also Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 2.110 (Rackham 1938: 252), where the sky is divided into *duo atque septuaginta signa, hoc est rerum aut animantium effigies*. For the Old Coptic portion of P. Lond. 98 and its place in Old Coptic literature, see Černý *et al.* (1957) and Satzinger (1991). There are treatments of *Marsanes* and Iamblichean Neoplatonism in Finamore (2000) and Funk *et al.* (2000: 209–30).

25. As in the translations, notes, and commentary in Pearson (1981a: 329) and Funk *et al.* (2000: 325, 462).
26. *Marsanes* NHC X 42.9-10; proposed restoration using the facsimile edition (Robinson *et al.* 1977: 124).
27. Neugebauer & van Hoesen (1959: 35). The explanation in Neugebauer & Parker (1969: 171-4) is less than convincing.
28. P. Oxy. 465 lines 25, 31, 110, 120, 172-3, 222 (Grenfell & Hunt 1903: 128-33). Parts of this manuscript remain unedited, and I hope to publish a re-edition in the future. With the exception of a poor quality image of one column (Gundel & Gundel 1966: plate 3), it seems that there are no published photographs. Owing to the financial support of my advisor April DeConick and my department, I obtained digital images of the manuscript from the British Library. Using these images I have prepared a preliminary transcription of all fragments, incorporating suggested improvements to Grenfell & Hunt, especially those in Neugebauer & van Hoesen (1964: 61-3), which includes a line drawing.
29. Grenfell & Hunt (1903: 128).
30. Neugebauer & van Hoesen (1964: 61)
31. In actuality the beginning of the sidereal year and the wandering year only coincided at the opening of each Sothic period of 1400 years, around 4230 BCE, 2772 BCE, 1316 BCE and 139 CE; see Neugebauer & Parker (1960: 127).
32. To the 360 days of the Egyptian calendar were added five epagomenal days, but they were counted outside the year. On the Egyptian calendar, refer to von Bomhard (1999); Bagnall (2009: 180-82).
33. Largely due to the doubling of the decans, a phenomenon that is admittedly not fully understood, there has been persistent confusion over whether P. Oxy. 465 and the seventy-two pentads of the Salmeschinianka follow a Babylonian or Egyptian calendar; refer to Quack (forthcoming: 385-6, esp. nn. 2376-7), on this as well as the arguably Egyptian etymology of the word Salmeschiniaka itself. As an example of how such confusion has already affected study of the *Gospel of Judas*, see Denzey Lewis (2009: 295) as opposed to J. D. Turner (2009: 110, n. 37). For the inscription on the Naos of the Decades, with translation, notes, and commentary, refer to von Bomhard (2008: 79-189).
34. Grenfell & Hunt (1903: 137).
35. P. Oxy. 465 lines 162, 202 (Grenfell & Hunt 1903: 131, 133; plus Neugebauer & van Hoesen 1964: 62).
36. P. Oxy. 465 lines 3, 29, 33, 40, 42, 43, 67, 147, 151, 156, 158, 202 (Grenfell & Hunt 1903: 129, 131; plus Neugebauer & van Hoesen 1964: 62).
37. The letters ]δεκα[ appear in an unpublished part of the manuscript (designated as Col. ii in Grenfell & Hunt 1903), though they could belong to several words besides δεκανός.
38. P. Oxy. 465 line 20 (Grenfell & Hunt 1903: 128).
39. P. Oxy. 465 line 12 (Grenfell & Hunt 1903: 128).
40. P. Oxy. 465 lines 26-7 (Grenfell & Hunt 1903: 128).
41. P. Oxy. 465 lines 8, 190-96 (Grenfell & Hunt 1903: 132; plus Neugebauer & van Hoesen 1964: 62).
42. Grenfell & Hunt (1903: 127-8).
43. E.g. Jackson (1985: 84-5); Fowden (1986/1993: 140).
44. Such as Pingree (1963: 228); Quack (2010: 178).
45. *De mysteriis* 8.1.260.3-8 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 304-5).
46. *De mysteriis* 8.1.260.9-261.6 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 304-7).
47. *De mysteriis* 8.2.261.7-262.11 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 306-9). The first god is not explicitly referred to as unbegotten here, but see the reference to ascent beyond the

- intelligible to the Unbegotten (τὸ ἀγέννητον) at 8.6.269.8–9 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 320–21). As for the second, self-begetting god, see the discussion of self-generation in Gersh (1978: 305–7); Whittaker (1980).
48. *De mysteriis* 8.3.263.1–5 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 308–11).
  49. On this identification and the reasons for accepting the manuscript reading of μάγευμα, which has often been emended, see D. C. Clark (2008: 173–7), citing Oréal. Clark understands the primary intelligible to be Eikton not, as I do, Kmeph. Iamblichus presents the gods out of order in this arrangement, second then first, and his presentation is further complicated by repeated instances of the relative pronoun. Except for the one in 8.3.263.2 and perhaps the one in 8.3.263.5, I think they all refer to the first god, namely Eikton. Thus: τούτου [i.e. Kmeph] δὲ τὸ ἐν ἀμερὲς καὶ ὁ φησι [subject is Hermes] πρῶτον μάγευμα προτάττει, ὄν καὶ Εἰκτῶν ἐπονομάζει ἐν ᾧ [i.e. Eikton] δὴ τὸ πρῶτόν ἐστι νοοῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον νοητόν [i.e. Kmeph], ὃ [i.e. Eikton and/or Kmeph] δὴ καὶ διὰ σιγῆς μόνης θεραπεύεται. Kmeph, as primary intelligizer and primary intelligible, is in Eikton.
  50. Discussion in E. C. Clarke *et al.* (2004: xlv–xlv, 309 n. 407); D. C. Clark (2008: 194).
  51. Mahé (1978: 50) takes the two arrangements as parts of a single whole, the second arrangement continuing on where the first leaves off. Hence he identifies Eikton as the third member in the triad of unbegotten, self-begotten, and begotten. But this identification is problematic, relying as it does on an emendation of the text to read “primary delivery (μαίευμα),” in the sense of childbirth, instead of “primary magical act (μάγευμα).” However minor the emendation, begotten is an ill-suited title for Eikton, given that he contains and outranks the primary intelligible Kmeph.
  52. *De mysteriis* 8.2.262.3 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 308).
  53. *De mysteriis* 8.3.263.2–3 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 308). The aptness of the description is noted in E. C. Clarke *et al.* (2004: 309, n. 407).
  54. *De mysteriis* 8.3.263.6–264.3 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 310–13).
  55. See Lesko (1991: 89–122); Tobin *et al.* (2002: 239–64); also E. C. Clarke *et al.* (2004: xlvii–xlvii); cf. Parrott (1987: 84–8; 1991: 11). The passage in *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* is NHC VI,6 62.1–9. For the cosmogony on the Naos of the Decades, refer to von Bomhard (2008: 54–76).
  56. *De mysteriis* 8.3.264.4–7 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 312–13). The Hermopolitan Ogdoad is also associated with the sun in *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* NHC VI,6 62.1–9.
  57. Tobin *et al.* (2002: 254).
  58. *De mysteriis* 8.3.264.7–10 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 312–13).
  59. E. C. Clarke *et al.* (2004: xlvii, n. 108; see also des Places (1966/2003: 221). The division of four could have reference to winds; cf. the divisions of two (sun and moon), four (winds), twelve (zodiacal signs) and thirty-six (decans) on the astrological boards in Abry (1993).
  60. *De mysteriis* 8.3.265.5–8 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 312–15).
  61. *De mysteriis* 8.2.262.5–6 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 308–9)
  62. See e.g. Fowden (1986/1993: 137–9), who allows for the existence of lost theological Hermetica; and D. C. Clark (2008: 170–72, 190, 202), who also suggests Hermetic sources no longer extant as well as a “specific link” to *Corpus Hermeticum* 16. Neither discusses *Eugnostos*, though Fowden cites Mahé (1986), in support of the statement that “Future research is likely to reveal more and more doctrinal common ground between the Hermetica and the Nag Hammadi literature” (114). I find Clark’s suggestion regarding *Corpus Hermeticum* 16 promising, and I see the entire tractate as equally significant for understanding *Eugnostos* as for understanding Iamblichus’ Hermetic sources, as I try to signal in notes below. However, I would shy away from direct literary dependence.
  63. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 73.13, 74.23, 75.6; V,1 3.15, 4.11, 4.20 (Parrott 1991: 58, 70, 72); *De mysteriis* 8.2.261.10–262.2 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 306–8).

64. *Eugnostos* NHC V,1 5.20 (Parrott 1991: 78). The verb *rupe* could also be translated as “to shine forth”; see Crum (1962: 267a–268b), for its association with light.
65. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 75.3–13, 76.14–77.9; NHC V,1 4.16–29, 5.23–6.14 (Parrott 1991: 72–4, 80–86).
66. *De mysteriis* 8.3.263.7 (E. C. Clarke *et al.* 2004: 310–11).
67. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 77.2–82.6; V,1 6.6–10.12 (Parrott 1991: 84–116).
68. van Oort (2008: 593).
69. Mahé (1986: 147–8).
70. Parrott (1987: 82–8; 1991: 9–12).
71. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 81.21–83.2 (Parrott 1991: 114–18); cf. NHC V,1 10.13–18.
72. Parrott (1987: 86–7; 1991: 11); cf. J. D. Turner (2001: 204–8). For other tables illustrating the theogony as it is in the extant manuscripts after proto-Sethian redaction, refer to Trakatellis (1977/1991: 34); J. D. Turner (2001: 206); Rasimus (2009: 138). The text of the Khonsu Cosmogony can be found in Parker & Lesko (1988).
73. Parrott (1987: 89–91).
74. *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* NHC VI,6 57.13–17; 63.21–3 (Parrott 1979: 356–7, 372–3).
75. See von Bomhard (2008: 65–7).
76. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 83.10–20 (Parrott 1991: 122–4).
77. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 83.20–84.8 (Parrott 1991: 124–8); cf. Trakatellis (1977/1991: 34, table 1).
78. See Zerubavel (1981: esp. 70–100). His discussion of the French Republican calendar with its ten-day week provides a striking comparative case.
79. Compare the Julian calendar, for instance, which was set up in 46 BCE and consisted of 365 days divided between twelve months of varying length, from twenty-eight to thirty-one days.
80. The seven-day week began to achieve widespread acceptance in the ancient Mediterranean world only after the first century CE. On the one hand, the seven-day week has at its root astrological theory concerning the allotment of time to the seven planets, hence the names of the weekdays. This astrological theory appears to have developed in the final centuries BCE. On the other hand, Jewish tradition, of course, had been observing a seven-day week centuries before that, justified cosmologically by the six days of creation followed by a seventh day of rest in Genesis 1–2.4. For the seven-day week in general, see Colson (1926); Zerubavel (1985); Salzman (2004: 185–211).
81. Refer to Cody (1991: 433–6).
82. For my understanding of what Parrott labels Part B, see below.
83. Witness Numenius and Porphyry.
84. Pearson (1981b: 346).
85. See Runia (2001: 260–308).
86. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 70.1–71.13; V,1 1.1–2.8 (Parrott 1991: 40–48); discussion in Parrott (1988), who argues for a date of composition in the first century BCE.
87. Cf. the Egyptian self-identification of the author of *Corpus Hermeticum* 16 over and against the “foolosophy” of the Greeks, also at the opening of the text.
88. For an introduction to the Sun, Line, and Cave, see Annas (1981: 242–71).
89. In *Ennead* 2.9.6 Plotinus implies that his Sethian associates claim to have ascended from the cave. And it has been noted more than once that *Apocryphon of John* alludes to this most famous of Plato’s analogies; see Layton (1987: 45, n. 21b); M. A. Williams (1996/1999: 121).
90. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 74.12–20 (Parrott 1991: 68–71);  $\sigma\omicron\upsilon\gamma\eta$  is  $\Gamma\eta\omicron\delta\iota\varsigma$  in NHC V,1 4.8.
91. I am in basic agreement with the rhetorical analyses of Painchaud (1995) and Pasquier (2000: 16–21). However I do not see such analyses as exclusive of source and redaction criticism. Recognizing the four transitions that Painchaud identifies in *Eugnostos* does not mean that the material in between them could not have been subject to editorial

- activity. After the *exordium* (NHC III,3 70.1–13) and *narratio* (NHC III,3 73.13–74.12), both dealing with the hidden god, it is in the *probatio* that redaction appears to have occurred. Along with blending of a proto-Sethian theogony, there is evidence of a lengthy addition (NHC III,3 85.9–90.3) which Parrott (1991: 12–16) labels Part B. Not only does Part B within the *probatio* conflict in detail with the preceding theogony and cosmogony, it disrupts the flow of the text “from what is hidden to the end of what is revealed,” as stated at the opening of the *probatio*. After the completion of the visible cosmos, namely the end of what is revealed, Part B begins anew with the gods, moving up and down and up and down. It finally circles back to the completion of the aeons, heavens and firmaments. Whether an originally independent source or re-interpretive gloss, Part B is also redundant. Thus I would delineate the *probatio* as NHC III,3 74.12–85.9, immediately followed by the *peroratio* (NHC III,3 90.5–11). The transition phrase in NHC III,3 90.4 “but this much is enough (ἀγῶ εἶναι πᾶν πᾶν),” could also belong at the end of the *probatio*, as it is found at the end of the *narratio* in NHC III,3 74.7–8. Regarding the important literary contacts that Painchaud points to between *On the Origin of the World* and *Eugnostos*, I understand the two texts as coming from different but intersecting traditions, much as with the *Gospel of Judas* and *Eugnostos* mentioned below.
92. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 90.4–11 (Parrott 1991: 164–6); again, σοφῆν is γνωστῆν in NHC V,1 17.14.
  93. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 71.5–13; NHC V,1 2.2–8; *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* NHC VI,6 53.17–21. See also Porreca’s contribution to this volume.
  94. E.g. *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* NHC VI,6 54.17; 57.7.
  95. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3 81.22; 82.7; 83.2, 12 (Parrott 1991: 114, 116, 120, 122); contrast *Apocryphon of John* BG,2 45.3; 46.12.
  96. *Eugnostos* NHC,3 85.3–9 (Parrott 1991: 140).
  97. Refer to Przybylski (1980: 60–62, 65–6), though he does not recognize the calendrical assumptions in *Eugnostos* as distinctly Egyptian.
  98. *Sophia of Jesus Christ* BG,3 103.10–107.13; NHC III,4 106.24–108.25.
  99. *Sophia of Jesus Christ* BG,3 117.10–127.12; NHC III,4 114.7–119.18.
  100. J. D. Turner (2001: 201–20); Rasmus (2009: 41–62).
  101. See Jackson (1985: 45–173, esp. 74–108), for the material in question regarding Ialdabaoth.
  102. Quack (1995: 97–122); followed by King (2006: 111–12); see also Quack (2006: 272). As Quack argues, the “Book of Zoroaster” itself probably had more to do with Egypt than Persia.
  103. Plotinus, *Ennead* 2.9.14, with discussion in King (1997: 112–13); Logan (2006: 25, 49). Photographs of casts of the Brummer gem were initially published in Bonner (1949).
  104. The first strides in this direction of calendrical analysis were taken by Przybylski (1980: 56–70).
  105. *Gospel of Judas* TC,3 49.9–50.18.
  106. *Gospel of Judas* TC,3 51.4–7; *Gospel of the Egyptians* NHC III,2 56.22–57.11; *Trimorphic Protennoia* NHC XIII,1 39.13–32.
  107. *Apocryphon of John* NHC III,1 16.7–18/19; BG,2 39.4–44.9; NHC II,1 10.26–13.5; NHC IV,1 16–20.18; on which, see the commentary in Pleše (2006: 178–200).
  108. *Apocryphon of John* BG,2 39.9–10 (Waldstein & Wisse 1995: 64); cf. NHC III,1 16.11.
  109. *Apocryphon of John* BG,2 39.16–18 (Waldstein & Wisse 1995: 64); cf. NHC III,1 16.13–16.
  110. *Apocryphon of John* BG,2 44.5–9 (Waldstein & Wisse 1995: 76); NHC III,1 is not extant here.
  111. *Apocryphon of John* NHC II,1, 13.1–5; IV,1 20.15–18 (Waldstein & Wisse 1995: 77–9).
  112. *Apocryphon of John* NHC III,1 6.13–7.8 (Waldstein & Wisse 1995: 28–30).
  113. *Apocryphon of John* NHC II,1 4.21–2; NHC IV,1 6.24.

114. *De mysteriis* 8.6.269.5–6 also mentions plural cosmoses in discussing the two-souls theory as it relates to astral determinism. Again, Iamblichus claims to be reading Hermetic texts. In *Corpus Hermeticum* 16, where of the two parts of the soul, the rational is said to be free from astral powers, there are plural cosmoses, ὁ νοητὸς κόσμος and ὁ αἰσθητὸς κόσμος. What is more, there is reference to the supplying of God’s goodness, just as in the out-of-place passage in *Apocryphon of John* NHC III,1, 6.13–7.8, cited above. *Corpus Hermeticum* 16.17 reads:

The intelligible cosmos, then, depends from god, and the sensible cosmos from the intelligible. Through the intelligible and the sensible cosmos, the sun is supplied by god with the influx of the good (τὴν ἐπιρροὴν ἀπὸ θεοῦ χορηγεῖται τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ), of his demiurgy, that is. Around the sun are eight spheres that depend from it ... From these spheres depend the daemons, and then, from the daemons, humans. And thus all things and all persons are dependant from god (Nock & Festugière 1960: 2.237; Copenhaver 1992/2000: 61).

Like Iamblichus’ Hermetic sources and *Eugnostos*, but unlike *Apocryphon of John*, here there is no break in the Chain of Being.

115. *Eugnostos* NHC III,3, 76.9–10 (Parrott 1991: 78); cf. NHC III,3, 81.20–21; NHC V,1, 5.18–19; V,1 8.25–6; V,1 10.1–2.
116. For an argument that the *Gospel of Judas* dates to the third century, see J. D. Turner (2009).

## CHAPTER 4

# HIDDEN GOD AND HIDDEN SELF

## THE EMERGENCE OF APOPHATIC ANTHROPOLOGY IN CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

*Bernard McGinn*

The notion of a God who hides himself, either because that is a fundamental characteristic of the divine nature, or because God chooses to do so in relation to human attempts to know him, is widespread in many religious traditions. In the history of Christian theology this hiddenness has often been expressed as “apophatic theology” (the Greek *apophasis* literally means “unsaying”). For Christians the contention that at least in this life the mystery of God is better known by not-knowing than by knowing has roots in the Hebrew bible/Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, especially in those texts that speak of God’s hiddenness.<sup>1</sup> “Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior,” as Isaiah proclaims (Isa. 45:15). Though there is disagreement in the Hebrew Bible about whether God can ever really be seen, with some texts affirming the possibility (e.g. Gen. 32:30; Isa. 6:5), while others deny it (e.g. Exod. 33:20), there is no question in the New Testament about the radical invisibility of the Father. John’s prologue says, “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (John 1:18). The deuterio-Pauline 1 Timothy is equally emphatic: “It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). Other passages, to be sure, promise a vision of God, but in the world to come (e.g. Mt. 5:8; 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Jn 3:2). Nevertheless, the gospel message about the Son taking on flesh in Jesus Christ asserts that through the incarnate Word some kind of knowledge of the hidden Father is possible even in this life (Jn 1:18, 14:9; Mt. 11:27). The exploration of what kind of knowledge of the hidden God is possible here below, however, was a task the New Testament writers left to later believers as the Jesus movement grew and spread through the ancient world.

In creating a full-fledged apophatic theology, or reflection on God’s biblical hiddenness, early Christian thinkers and mystics turned to the speculations on the unknowability and inexpressibility of the First Principle rooted in

Plato's *Parmenides* and which were developed in a systematic way among the Middle- and Neoplatonic philosophers.<sup>2</sup> The forerunner of attempts to bring together Greek philosophy and biblical revelation was the first-century Jewish mystical philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, whose writings were well known to some Christian fathers of both East (e.g. Origen) and West (e.g. Ambrose). Philo views God as beyond all predicates. "Who is capable," he asks, "of asserting of the Primal Cause that it is incorporeal or corporeal, or that it possesses quality or is qualityless, or, in general, who could make a firm statement concerning his essence or quality or state or movement?"<sup>3</sup> Since God revealed himself to Moses as "the Existent which truly exists" (*to on ho esti alêtheian on*), however, God is not beyond being. Therefore, although no proper name can be assigned to him, humans can apprehend "the bare fact that he is."<sup>4</sup> In a way similar to the slightly later Gospel of John, Philo says that it is the elder son of God, the Logos or "second God," who is the pre-eminent revelation of the hidden Father, making known both the creating and conserving power of the Blessed One.<sup>5</sup>

Philo, like many later Christians, considered Moses as the archetypal mystic, so it comes as no surprise that in exegeting Exodus 33 he interprets the account of Moses' being denied a face-to-face vision of God but being given instead a vision of God's "back" as showing that the divine nature can never be known in itself, but only through its created effects. Philo goes a step further when he connects the incomprehensibility of God with the unknowability of the human mind to itself. Reflecting on the fact that even to Moses God remains invisible, he says: "And why is it astonishing if the Existent is inapprehensible to men when even the mind in each of us is unknown to itself? For who has seen the true nature of the soul?"<sup>6</sup> This is the earliest hint known to me of a fundamental, but often neglected, corollary of apophatic theology, namely, apophatic anthropology, the teaching that the hidden God implies a hidden self.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note that apophatic theology comes in many varieties and that not all forms of insisting that God is unknowable also claim that the human self is incomprehensible.<sup>8</sup> All Christian theologians pay homage to the divine mystery, insisting that God is in some sense beyond the human mind, but there is an important difference between "soft apophaticism," that is, an admission of general divine unknowability, and the various forms of "hard apophaticism" that develop full-fledged accounts of speaking about God designed to subvert all human modes of conceiving and predicating.<sup>9</sup> It is among the more rigorous forms of apophatic theology that the possibility of apophatic anthropology emerges. I will take a brief look at five examples of such hiddenness in the Christian tradition.<sup>10</sup>

## CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS

The earliest appearance of a strong apophatic doctrine of God in Christian theology comes from Clement of Alexandria around the year 200 CE. Clement, however, does not seem to have made a connection between God's unknowability and human unknowability. Clement's student, Origen, also lacks an apophatic anthropology, perhaps due to the fact that his doctrine of God has a limited role for apophatic theology.<sup>11</sup> For Origen the Father is Supreme Goodness and Existence, but he is not infinite. Therefore, the Alexandrian teaches that although the Father's knowledge of himself is inaccessible to humans and is even superior to the knowledge possessed by the Son, who is inferior to the Father,<sup>12</sup> due to the fact that the Father is not infinite, part of the reason for the fall of the created intelligences from their place in the first creation was the "satiety" (*koros*) they reached in their contemplation of God.<sup>13</sup> The rejection of the Origenist view of limits to God's being was to be an important catalyst in the emergence of a developed anthropological apophaticism in Gregory of Nyssa at the end of the fourth century CE.

The Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nyssa) rejected Origen's view of a "limited" God for reasons both philosophical and theological. The Cappadocians attacked Origen's notion that a limitless (*apeiron*) God was somehow a contradiction in terms, arguing that the "defining" characteristic of God was that he was without "de-finition," or limits (*finis*), as the infinite and therefore unknowable Source of all things.<sup>14</sup> Only in Gregory, however, did an apophatic theology extend into apophatic anthropology. The treatise in which Gregory argues the case for apophatic anthropology most forcefully is the *De opificio hominis* (*On the Making of Humanity*), a commentary on the sixth day of the work of creation that he wrote to complete his brother Basil's unfinished *Homilies on Creation*. Humanity's creation "in the image and likeness of God," as taught in Genesis 1:26-7, though a biblical datum shared by both Jews and Christians, was more developed in Christianity than in Rabbinic Judaism (although it is found in Philo).<sup>15</sup> An important reason why Christian authors constructed their understanding of humanity on the basis of the image anthropology of Genesis 1:26-7 was due to Paul, who identified the Son of God made flesh in Jesus as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, in whom all things in heaven and on earth were created" (Col. 1:15-16; see also 2 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 2:6). Paul did not deny that all human beings were created in the image of God (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:7), but he implies that even in the primordial creation it is more accurate to say that humans were made "according to the [true] Image" (*ad imaginem*), that is, following the pattern of the Son or Word. He also teaches that in the new creation begun by Christ's death and resurrection human fulfillment is measured by our growing conformity to the image of the Son. According to Romans 8:29: "For those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family"

(see also 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21). Paul's sense of the dynamic character of human destiny as being not so much something given, as a goal to be achieved, is evident in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "And all with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed in the same image from one degree of glory into another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit." The genius of Gregory of Nyssa was to discern an inner connection between the belief that humans were created in the image of God as taught in Genesis, the absolute unknowability of the infinite God in whose image they were made, and the progressive nature of the restoration of the image found in Paul.

Gregory's *De opificio hominis* is one of the most profound meditations on human nature and destiny in the Christian tradition, but here I will only focus on his negative anthropology. Gregory argued that if God is beyond all limits and forms of conception, and man alone among created things according to Genesis was made in God's image and likeness, this implies that an essential characteristic of human nature was that it too is without limits, that is, in some way (if not in the same way as God) outside the realm of what can be grasped by conceptual thought.<sup>16</sup> As Gregory contends in the *De opificio hominis*, to be an image means that something possesses the attributes of its exemplar. Hence, "Since one of the attributes we contemplate in the divine nature is incomprehensibility of essence, it is clearly necessary that in this point the image should be able to show its imitation of the archetype." He concludes, "Because the nature of our mind evades our knowledge, it has an accurate resemblance to the superior nature, figuring by its own unknowableness the incomprehensible nature."<sup>17</sup>

There is a significant difference between the divine hiddenness and the hiddenness of humanity in Gregory. God is hiddenness as transcendent Mystery, the source of all that is; man's nature is hidden as an infinitely progressive project, that is, humanity is the one creature whose nature is not something given or conceivable, but rather to be an open-ended invitation to an ever-deepening movement of love and knowledge into the appropriation of the divine mystery. This is what Gregory, often appealing to Philippians 3:13, called *epektasis*.<sup>18</sup> Theoretically, we might think that human nature could be defined in terms of "that being which reaches fulfillment in knowing and loving God." However, since the God who is known and loved is an ever-distant and infinite goal, every attainment of God, though replete with satisfaction, is simultaneously the onset of increased thirst for greater knowing and loving. An infinitely elusive target can only be pursued by an infinitely unsatisfied hunter; the mystery of what is sought demands a matching mystery on the part of the one who seeks.

## AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

A different apophatic anthropology appears in Gregory's younger Western contemporary, Augustine of Hippo, as Jean-Luc Marion has shown.<sup>19</sup> Augustine analyzed the trinitarian nature of the human person as *imago dei* with unrivalled sophistication in his treatise *De trinitate*, but it is rather in his reflections on the mystery of the self in the *Confessiones* that the negative aspect of the bishop's understanding of human nature appears. Briefly put, Marion argues that Augustine recognizes that the "I" is fundamentally a question rather an object of knowledge, actual or potential, and therefore the I, or self, always remains open to wonder and mystery as it pursues its own meaning in terms of its ongoing relation to God, the supreme mystery.<sup>20</sup> It is true that Augustine often speaks of his discovery of the self-as-question in the midst of reflecting on the role of sin and failure in his life. Thus, in Book 4 of the *Confessiones*, reflecting on the reason for the overwhelming grief he felt at the death of a friend, he says: "I had become a great question to myself (*factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio*), asking my soul again and again, 'Why are you so downcast? Why do you distress me?' But my soul had no answer to give."<sup>21</sup> Because at this point in his life Augustine could not find himself, he could not find God according to *Confessiones* 5.2.2, but even after his conversion to God and elevation to the episcopacy, as he reflects on the meaning of his life in Book 10, the radical mystery of the self remains. At one point, when Augustine worries over how far his delight in the pleasures of hearing, even of the singing of the psalms, may be sinful, he bursts out in a plea to God: "Look down, see, and have mercy and heal me, You in whose eyes I have become a question to myself, and this is my illness."<sup>22</sup> But if Augustine's sense of his life as a question that he cannot answer is sparked by his attempts to grapple with sin and failure, he knows that the answer he is given in his deepening awareness of God's shaping of his life, so richly explored in the *Confessiones*, is not a response in the conventional sense of a resolution of the problem, but is rather his acceptance of the mysterious workings of divine love in his life as constituting his true self – a work always in progress in this life. It is in the practice of the therapy of *confessio*, simultaneously admitting our own weakness (*confessio peccati*) and praising the God who is beyond all language (*confessio laudis*), that the self expresses its own unknowability. This is suggested at the end of the brief treatise on the divine names in *Confessiones* 1.4.4, where Augustine says: "What have we said, my God, my life, my holy sweetness? Or what does anyone say when he speaks of you? Yet woe to those who keep silent about you, though even those who say much are mute."<sup>23</sup>

## JOHN SCOTTUS ERIUGENA

The ninth-century Irish thinker John Scottus Eriugena, steeped in the thought of both Augustine and the Greek Fathers, translated Gregory of Nyssa's *De opificio hominis* into Latin and brought new dimensions to the Cappadocian version of apophatic theology and anthropology. Eriugena's *Periphyseon* can be seen as a single massive attempt at expressing the inexpressible, an immense self-consuming theological artifact. All positive language about God, according to Eriugena, is metaphorical; negative language is true but uninformative. Therefore, the best language about God is found in eminent terms, such as *superessentialis*: "For this says that God is not one of the things that are but that he is more than the things that are, but what that 'is' is, it in no way defines."<sup>24</sup> Thus, God is properly called *nihil*, the unnameable Nothing who begins to receive names when he/it flows forth in creation. (This is something that Augustine would not have countenanced.) Eriugena says: "The Divine Goodness which is called Nothing for the reason that, beyond all the things that are and that are not, it is found in no essence, descends from the negation of all essences into the affirmation of the essence of the whole universe, from itself into itself, as though from nothing into something."<sup>25</sup> The mode of this descent helps explain the distinctive character of the Irishman's apophatic anthropology.<sup>26</sup>

The subject of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* is *natura/physis*, the most general of all speculative categories, since it comprises both the things that are and the things that are not. He distinguishes four species of the genus: (1) the nature that creates and is not created; (2) the nature that creates and is created; (3) the nature that is created and does not create; and (4) the nature that neither creates nor is created.<sup>27</sup> These divisions are really aspects of God, both God in Godself and God made manifest in creation. The first division is God as Creator; the second two are God manifested in creation; and the fourth is God as the hidden end of all things, of which Eriugena says, it "neither was nor shall be nor has become nor becomes nor shall become, nor indeed is."<sup>28</sup> The second species of *natura* consists of the primordial forms or ideas created in the mind of the Word, the second person of the Trinity, which are also creative in the sense that they are the exemplars by which God produces the physical universe. Like Gregory, Eriugena holds that humanity exists on two levels – as the supreme idea, or exemplar, on the second level of nature, and as distinct human beings on level three. Hence, the truest definition of humanity is "a certain intellectual concept formed in the Mind of God," which, since it has the ability to know all particulars, functions as the created wisdom (*sapientia creata*) by which the Creative Wisdom of the Word (*sapientia creatrix*) makes all things.<sup>29</sup> Humanity has this unique role to play, because, as Genesis 1:26 makes clear, humanity alone is made in the image of God. Here the radical character of Eriugena's anthropology begins to become clear.

God is unknowable to the human mind, but Eriugena also argues that God is unknowable to Godself in so far as knowing involves defining, or conceiving the limits of a thing. God is infinite, so he cannot be defined or limited. “So,” argues Eriugena, “God does not know of himself what he is because he is not a ‘what.’”<sup>30</sup> This, of course, does not mean that God is ignorant; rather, as Eriugena puts it, “his ignorance is ineffable understanding” (*ipsius enim ignorantia ineffabilis est intelligentia*), “the highest and truest wisdom,” namely, self-awareness of his absolute transcendence above all the things that are and are therefore capable of being defined.<sup>31</sup> The same is true of humanity as the image of God – its ignorance of itself is therefore more to be praised than its knowledge. As a passage in *Periphyseon* 4 puts it:

The human mind both knows itself and does not know itself. It knows that it is; it does not know what it is. And through this ... the image of God is especially thought to be in man. For as God is comprehensible when from creatures it is deduced that he exists, and incomprehensible because by no human or angelic intellect, nor even by his own, can what he is be understood, since he is not a thing, but is superessential, so it is only given to the human mind to know that it is; what it is is in no way open to it. What is more wonderful and more beautiful to those thinking upon themselves and their God is that the human mind is to be more praised in its ignorance than in its knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

As the reference to “those thinking upon themselves” shows, apophatic anthropology is realized not only on the second level of *natura*, that is, in the idea of humanity, but also on the third level, that is, for individual thinking humans who instantiate in the world of time and space the archetype *homo*.

## THOMAS AQUINAS

The thirteenth-century Dominican Thomas Aquinas criticized some aspects of Eriugena’s negative thought, but Thomas was also a radically apophatic thinker, both in his theology and, at least by implication, in his anthropology.<sup>33</sup> Thomas’s negative theology is evident, especially in his insistence that there can be no knowledge of “what God is” (*cognitio quid sit*), but only knowledge “that God is” (*cognitio an sit*).<sup>34</sup> Eriugena’s apophaticism had led him to deny, along with many Eastern theologians, that there could ever be any vision of God’s hidden essence, even in heaven. Aquinas, following Augustine, thought that such a view smacked of heresy,<sup>35</sup> but he carefully distinguished between the necessity for seeing God as the ultimate object of our desire and the impossibility of comprehending God in the sense of understanding the divine nature.<sup>36</sup> Like Gregory of Nyssa and others, Thomas denied that any finite mind could ever understand the infinite God.

Another area where Thomas's apophatic theology differed from that of Eriugena concerns the modes of predicating terms of God. Eriugena, as well as Maimonides, who is the immediate target of Thomas's critique in *Summa theologiae* Ia, q. 13, a. 2, held that all positive language about God is not to be taken literally of the divine nature, but is either a metaphor or a mode of expressing God as cause of the world. Thomas, however, contends in q. 13, aa. 3 and 5 that perfective terms like "goodness" (*bonum*) and "existence" (*esse*) are literally, though analogically, applicable to God as the one who possesses these attributes in an absolute and transcendent way beyond our ability to conceptualize, because all our knowing is based on limited created being. Hence, as Thomas insists in q. 13, a. 3, "We have to consider two things ... in the words we use to attribute perfections to God: firstly, the perfections themselves that are signified – goodness, life, and the like – and secondly, the way in which they are signified." In the first instance, the words are literally true, but not in the second instance (*modus significandi*), because these are modes of signification which are appropriate to creatures but not to God.

What does Thomas's apophatic theology mean for his doctrine of humanity? First of all, it is important to note that the Dominican does not develop an explicit and systematic apophatic anthropology, as Eriugena did. However, as Karl Rahner, one of the great apophatic theologians of the past century, showed, thinking through the implications of Thomas's view of God reveals an implied view of man, the *imago dei*, as an unknowable mystery.<sup>37</sup> Aquinas's anthropological teaching depends on the Aristotelian view of the substantial unity of the human person as constituted of both body and soul, as well as the distinction of the powers of the soul and body.<sup>38</sup> However, as Anton C. Pegis showed in his *At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man*, Thomas set out his Aristotelian teaching on man within the framework of an Augustinian understanding of how each human person is formed by an ongoing relation to God in the course of life.<sup>39</sup> In his treatment of the revealed doctrine of man as the image of God in Ia, qq. 90–102, Thomas follows a basically Augustinian understanding of how the meaning of humanity is realized through the dignity humans enjoy as being created in the *imago trinitatis*. In the words of one student of this central aspect of Thomas's anthropology, "man is the image of the Trinity primarily because he can come to know and love God as God knows and loves himself."<sup>40</sup> Rahner takes this anthropology a step further, beyond, but not against, what Thomas explicitly said. He argues that God's incomprehensibility does not really concern God as God (therefore differing from Eriugena), but rather "is primarily a statement about man, about his finiteness and the positive character of this finiteness." Thomas's insistence on the inability of humans to know God, in Rahner's words, "really expresses the ultimate and most radical things about man when it understands him as the essence endowed by the gratuitous and free self-communication of God with infinite incomprehensibility and incomprehensible infinity, and thus also understands him as participating in the incomprehensibility of God."<sup>41</sup> The implications of

Thomas's negative anthropology, both in the medieval and modern periods, have not been pursued beyond Rahner's perceptive suggestions.

## MEISTER ECKHART

Thomas's younger Dominican confrere Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260–1328) was equally rigorous in denying real knowledge of the *quid sit* of God or of humanity. Eckhart considered himself a follower of Thomas, though in a broad sense, since he often cites Thomas for his own purposes. Despite many shared teachings, the differences between the two Dominicans were significant and may be expressed by characterizing Thomas as an analogical thinker, while Eckhart is fundamentally dialectical in the Neoplatonic, not the Hegelian, sense. A simple way to express the same point is to say that if we ask whether Thomas holds a particular position, it is always possible to answer yes or no, if the proper distinctions are invoked. With Eckhart the answer to difficult questions of interpretation is often both yes and no.

The dialectical nature of Eckhart's thought is evident in the way in which he affirms that both God and the world are nothing (*nihil/niht*).<sup>42</sup> Eckhart was not alone, as we have seen, in saying that from the perspective of what we experience and know of being, God is properly said to be nothing – that is, “no-thing.” Making use of a distinctive doctrine of reversing analogy, Eckhart says, “Nothing is formally in both a cause and its effect, if the cause is a true cause. Now God is the cause of all existence. It follows that existence (*esse formaliter inhaerens*) is not formally present in God.”<sup>43</sup> However, from the perspective of divine transcendence, or “absolute existence” (*esse absolutum*), creatures in themselves are nothing, totally dependent on God for whatever reality they possess. This teaching is also found in Thomas Aquinas.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, Eckhart's formulations of the nothingness of creation became suspect. Among the articles in John XXII's papal bull of 1329 that condemned twenty-eight propositions drawn from his preaching and writing, number twenty-six reads: “All creatures are one pure nothing. I do not say that they are a little something or anything, but that they are pure nothing.”<sup>45</sup>

These dialectically reversing patterns of affirming nothingness of God and the created world are brilliantly set forth in Eckhart's German Sermon 71 preached on the passage from Acts 9:8, “Saul rose from the ground and with eyes open saw nothing,” that is, both the nothingness of God and of creation. In his words, “He [Paul] saw the nothing which was God. God is a nothing and God is a something. Whatever is something is also nothing.” As the sermon progresses, the message is given personal application, a rare autobiographical note in Eckhart's preaching: “It seemed to a man as though in a dream – it was a waking dream – that he became pregnant with nothing as a woman does with a child, and in this nothing God was born; he was the fruit of the nothing. God was born in the nothing.”<sup>46</sup>

This account of Eckhart's birthing of God out of nothingness reveals that although all things are nothing in relation to God, human beings are nothing in a special sense, one that parallels what we have seen in Gregory of Nyssa and Eriugena, though developed in a different way. For Eckhart, humans as the image of God are not only nothing in relation to God, but also realize the nothingness of God in themselves in so far as they, like God, are identified with intellect (*intellectus/vernünfticheit*). In his *Parisian Questions* Eckhart had reversed Thomas Aquinas's insistence that *esse* was the most fundamental analogical predicate for God by saying, "I declare that it is not my present opinion that God understands because he exists, but rather that he exists because he understands. God is an intellect and understanding, and his understanding itself is the ground of his existence."<sup>47</sup> The reason for this priority is that intellect's ability to know all things shows that it is not a thing itself – a discrete reality capable of being conceived – but is the radical potentiality to create and conceive of all the individual things that do exist. It is No-Thing! Man as *imago dei*, the perfect and perfectly-equal expression of the hidden God, is identical with the divine intellect, as Eckhart makes clear in his Latin Sermon 29, where the text "God is one" (Gal. 3:20; Deut. 6:4) is explained as meaning that the one God is pure intellect. "Only God brings things into existence through intellect," says Eckhart, "because existence is understanding in him alone. Also, only he can be pure understanding." But, human beings also possess intellect, both on the created level where they are made *ad imaginem* and are therefore distinct from God, as well as on the higher level of their virtual existence in God as pure *imago* where they are not-other-than-God.<sup>48</sup> The preacher's task is to invite his hearers/readers to realize their identity with the transcendental act of understanding. Eckhart explains this in more detail in Sermon 29:

Intellect belongs to God and "God is one." Therefore, anything has as much of God and of the One and of One-Existence-with-God as it has of intellect and what is intellectual. For God is one intellect and intellect is one God ... To rise up to intellect, to be attached to it, is to be united to God ... Every kind of existence that is outside or beyond intellect is a creature; it is creatable, other than God, and it is not God. In God there is nothing other.<sup>49</sup>

This is why it is not surprising to find Eckhart, like Eriugena, affirming that the soul has no name and that it cannot know its own ground. For example, in Pr. 98 he says: "The word 'soul' does not belong to the nature of the soul. One can as little find a name for the nature of the soul as for God. The soul also does not age."<sup>50</sup>

Realizing our identity with the nothingness of the divine intellect means annihilating and destroying the nothingness of everything that is created in us. This is the ground for the radical language of so much of Eckhart's

preaching about detachment (*abgescheidenheit*), breaking-through (*durchbrechen*), decreating (*entwerden*), and mystical dying and being buried (*sterben/begraben*). Space permits no more than a glance at the Dominican's powerful and paradoxical formulations of the need for annihilation. Detachment (literally "cutting-off"), a constant theme of Eckhart's preaching, is, in Denys Turner's phrase, "the ascetic practice of the apophatic."<sup>51</sup> Detachment is a more a metaphysical virtue than a moral exercise. It is aimed at stripping away the self's attachment (*eigenschaft*) to all created things, to itself, and also to God in so far as God is conceived of as Creator and Rewarder of those who perform his will. The treatise *On Detachment*, probably not by Eckhart but by a close follower, says, "Detachment approaches so closely to nothingness that there can be nothing between perfect detachment and nothingness."<sup>52</sup> In other words, through detachment the false self is effaced so that God becomes the unknown place where the "I" used to exist and exercise its will.

Such thoroughgoing cutting away of all things is explored in detail in Eckhart's noted *Sermo 52* on "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3).<sup>53</sup> The "Poverty Sermon" presents true inner poverty as the exercise of willing nothing, knowing nothing, and having nothing. With regard to willing nothing, Eckhart appeals to the higher level of existence we enjoyed before we were created. "When I stood in my first cause, I then had no God, and I then was my own cause. I wanted nothing, I longed for nothing, for I was an empty being ... And so I stood, empty of God and of everything." Knowing nothing involves a similar distancing from ordinary knowing. "So I say that a man should be set as free of his own knowing as he was when he was not. Let God perform what he will and let man be free." Finally, having nothing, which is described as "the highest poverty," means "to keep so free of God and of all his works that if God wishes to work within the soul, he himself is the place in which he wants to work." This last form of poverty leads to invoking the language of the "breaking-through," one of Eckhart's most potent metaphors. "But in the breaking-through, when I come to be free of will of myself and God's will and of all his works and of God himself, then I am above all created things, and I am neither God nor creature, but I am what I was and what I shall remain."<sup>54</sup> In other sermons Eckhart speaks of this process as a sinking into nothingness or a mystical dying. For example, in *Sermo 83*, responding to the question how we should love God, he answers: "You should love him as he is a non-God, a non-spirit, a non-person, a non-image, but as he is a pure, unmixed, bright One, separated from all duality; and in that One we should eternally sink down, out of something into nothing. May God help us to that. Amen."<sup>55</sup> The Middle High German sequence (quite possibly by Eckhart) called the "Granum Sinapis" puts it more succinctly: *sink al min icht/ in gotis nicht* ("Sink all my 'I' in God's nothing").<sup>56</sup>

Reflecting on this brief survey of some mystical witnesses to the correlation between the hidden God and the hidden self in the Christian tradition, brings one to the realization that, while the nothingness of God and the

nothingness of the human as image of God are rooted in biblical texts about divine hiddenness and invisibility, for the mystics we have looked at, God and man are not so much hidden as erased or vanished into a mutually implicating “No-Thingness” that resists all disclosure. If we could tear away the veils covering God and the self, what would we find? Nothing, say these mystics.

## NOTES

1. This is not to say that there is in any sense a developed apophatic view of God in the Hebrew Bible where the main emphasis is on God’s revelation of his purpose in history; see Wright (1981). For essays on the contemporary problematic, Howard-Snyder and Moser (2002).
2. For a sketch of the development, Carabine (1995); see also Hochstaffl (1976), and Westerkamp (2006).
3. Philo, *Legum allegoriae* 3.206 (trans. Winston 1981: 141).
4. For God as “the true Existent,” see, for example, *De mutatione nominum* 7, and *Quod deterius* 89.
5. For Philo’s teaching on the Logos, Winston (1985).
6. From the discussion of Exodus 33 in *De mutatione nominum* 7–13 (trans. Winston 1981: 141–3). See also *De posteritate Caini* 48.169, and *De fuga et inuentione* 29.165.
7. Philo spoke of the human mind as the image, likeness, portion, or fragment of the divine Logos, often appealing to Genesis 1:26–7. Unlike later Christian thinkers, however, he did not connect man’s creation in the image of God with anthropological apophaticism.
8. The account that follows will make use of some material that appears in McGinn (2009), as well as McGinn (2002). There is an investigation of the link between negative theology and negative anthropology in the Dionysian tradition in Tomasic (1969).
9. On the “hard apophaticism” of mystical unsaying, see Sells (1994).
10. My concentration will be on the writers of the “Great Church,” or orthodox tradition, though there are important parallels and analogues in Gnostic Christianity, as shown in John Turner’s essay in this volume.
11. Origen admits that God cannot be known by the human mind (e.g. *De principiis* 1.1.5–6), but in practice he also qualifies divine unknowability and unnameability (e.g. *Contra Celsum* 6.64–5).
12. See the discussion in Origen’s *Commentarium in Iohannem* 32.350–51 (trans. Heine 1993: 408).
13. The problem of the “satiety” (*koros*), or “sloth and weariness” in the contemplation of God by the first created spirits (*noi*), is one of the neuralgic points in Origen’s theology (see *De principiis* 2.9.2). For an investigation, Harl (1966).
14. On divine infinity in Gregory, Mühlenberg (1966).
15. The comparative dimensions of “image of God” anthropology remain largely understudied, despite the important paper of Altmann (1968).
16. On Gregory’s apophatic anthropology, see von Balthasar (1995: 93–4), and Saward (1974).
17. Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis* 11.3–4 (Migne 1863: 44.156B; trans. Moore & Wilson 1893/1976: 396–7).
18. The importance of *epektasis* for Gregory’s thought seems to have been first highlighted by Daniélou (1944: 291–307).
19. See Marion (2005).

20. Augustine's view of the self, like that of most Christian thinkers, is relational, that is, the self is constituted not by self-reflection, but by relationality. Those modern philosophers who stress the relational constitution of the self, however, see relationality in terms of social and cultural interaction, whereas for Christian thinkers the fundamental relationality is with God. For more on this, McGinn (2007); also useful is Mathewes (1994).
21. *Confessiones* 4.4.9 (O'Donnell 1992: 36). The same theme is echoed in 4.14.21 (O'Donnell 1992: 41), where Augustine says, *grande profundum est ipse homo*. On Book 4 and the constitution of the self, see Wetzel (2003, esp. 59).
22. *Confessiones* 10.33.50 (O'Donnell 1992: 139).
23. *Confessiones* 1.4.4 (O'Donnell 1992: 4): "et quid diximus, deus meus, vita mea, dulcedo mea sancta, aut quid dicit aliquis cum to dicit? et vae tacentibus de te, quoniam loquaces muti sunt." On this passage, see McGinn, forthcoming. For Augustine's oft-neglected apophatic theology (e.g. *De doctrina christiana* 1.13), see Lossky (1954), and Carabine (1992).
24. The usually cited edition of the *Periphyseon* is Migne (1853) but the critical text is Jeaneau (1996–2002). I will cite *Periphyseon* by book and the column numbers of the Migne edition, which are also used by Jeaneau. This passage is from *Periphyseon* 1.462D.
25. *Periphyseon* 3.681C.
26. On Eriugena's apophatic anthropology, see McGinn (1977); Moran (1989, esp. ch. 10); and Otten (1991).
27. See *Periphyseon* 1.441AB. The fourfold division of *natura* structures the whole of *Periphyseon* 1. It is less overtly present in *Periphyseon* 2–5, which is largely devoted to an exegesis of the Hexaemeron, though the analysis of *natura* is never totally absent.
28. *Periphyseon* 3.682B.
29. *Periphyseon* 4.768B; see also *Periphyseon* 3.640AB.
30. *Periphyseon* 2.589B.
31. *Periphyseon* 2.593C–594A.
32. *Periphyseon* 4.771BC.
33. Among of the first investigators to stress the apophatic element in Thomas Aquinas was Pieper (1957).
34. The critical edition of the works of Thomas Aquinas is the Leonine edition (Ordo Fratrum Praedicatorum 1882-). I will not cite by volume, but by the titles of works. On Thomas's denial of *quid est* knowledge of God, see, for example, *Summa theologiae* (hereafter STh) Ia, q. 2, a. 1; and *In Boethium de Trinitate* q. 1, a. 2, ad 1.
35. Thomas's attack on Eriugena (e.g. *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, cap. 1, lect. 1) took place within the context of the debates over the nature of the beatific vision that disturbed Western theology between ca. 1240 and 1330. For a detailed survey, Trottmann (1995). For the contrast between Eriugena and Aquinas, O'Meara (1987).
36. For example, *Summa theologiae* Ia, q. 12, a. 1; Ia, q. 12, a. 7.
37. Rahner (1978); see also Rahner (1966).
38. The details of the relation of soul and body and their powers is laid out in *Summa theologiae* Ia, qq. 75–102, while the implications of an Aristotelianized view of human acts forms much of the vast *Illa pars* of the *Summa*.
39. Pegis (1963).
40. Merriell (1990: 245).
41. Rahner (1978: 115).
42. Eckhart's teaching on the nothingness of God and the human being has attracted a number of studies. Helpful discussions include Mojsisch (1991); Lanzetta (1992); Charles-Saget (1994); and Manstetten (2001).
43. Taken from Eckhart's Cologne Defense. For a brief presentation of Eckhart's view of analogy and the literature on it, see McGinn (2001: 91–2).

44. For example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 109, a. 2, ad 2: “Unaquaeque autem res creata, sicut esse non habet nisi ab alio, et in se considerata est nihil.”
45. For a translation of the bull, see Colledge and McGinn (1981: 77–81). This condemned passage is taken from Eckhart’s German Sermon 4, as found in Quint *et al.* (1936–). This collection is divided into two sections: *Die deutschen Werke* (here cited by volume and page); and *Die lateinischen Werke* (also cited by volume and page). The passage can be found in *Die deutschen Werke* 1:69–70.
46. Sermo 71 (*Die deutschen Werke* 3:204–31; trans. Tobin, in McGinn, Tobin & Borgstadt 1986: 320–26). For a study, see Hasebrink (1998).
47. *Quaestiones Parisienses* n. 5 (*Die lateinischen Werke* 5:40; trans. Maurer 1974: 45). For a study of the contrast of Aquinas and Eckhart on this issue, see Imbach (1976).
48. Eckhart’s teaching on *imago/bild* is central to his thought and has been much studied. The latest account is Wilde (2000).
49. Sermo 29 (*Die lateinischen Werke* 4:263–70; trans. adapted from McGinn *et al.* 1986: 223–7, quotation at 226). For a study, McGinn (2003).
50. Sermo 98 (*Die deutschen Werke* 4:236.11–237.13): “Daz wort “sêle” daz enhoeret niht ze der natûre der sêle. Der natûre der sêle mac man als wênic namen vinden als gote. Diu sêle enaltet ouch nit” (my trans.). See also Sermo 38 (*Die deutschen Werke* 2:237), Sermo 101.64–9 (*Die deutschen Werke* 4:348), and Sermo 55.4 (*Die lateinischen Werke* 4:458–9).
51. J. D. Turner (1995: 179). Also on detachment, see Dobie (2002), and Manstetten (2001, esp. 126–9).
52. *On Detachment (Vom abgescheidenheit)* (*Die deutschen Werke* 5:400–434; trans. Colledge & McGinn 1981: 285–94, quotation at 286).
53. Much has been written on this sermon; for a recent analysis, see Flasch (1998).
54. Sermo 52 (*Die deutschen Werke* 2:478–524; trans. Colledge & McGinn 1981: 199–203).
55. Sermo 83 (*Die deutschen Werke* 3:434–49; trans. Colledge & McGinn 1981: 208).
56. See Ruh (1984) for the text and commentary.

## CHAPTER 5

# GOD'S OCCULTED BODY

## ON THE HIDDENNESS OF CHRIST IN ALAN OF LILLE'S *ANTICLAUDIANUS*

*Claire Fanger*

While God is always a more or less hidden presence in monotheistic traditions, nevertheless in a Christian context it is fundamental that the incarnation of Christ mediates this hiddenness. Both figuring and operating God's intent for humanity, Christ is God made visible. The body of Christ is memorialized in the Eucharist and the events of his human life structure the main feast days of the Church – events that help to keep God present in the lives of practicing Christians, despite the ongoing hiddenness of God's true nature (understood as a product of the embodied human separation from the divine).

It thus creates a particularly interesting enigma when, in a work designed to shadow the Christian dispensation, it is Christ himself that goes missing. My analysis here will concern the manner in which God's body is hidden in just such a work: a twelfth-century Latin cosmological fable, the *Anticlaudianus* of Alan of Lille, alternately titled *The Good and Perfect Man*. Written in the 1180s,<sup>1</sup> the *Anticlaudianus* in some respects seems to be a repositioning of an ethical system, suitable for the fallen world, on top of the Neoplatonic cosmology which everywhere imbues Alan's writing. The story of the *Anticlaudianus* is clearly redemptive. Yet the idea of redemption is complicated by the fact that, although the action clearly takes place after Christ's incarnation, the agent of redemption does not appear to be Christ himself (who is mentioned only in passing),<sup>2</sup> but instead another man, a New Man, whose creation is a project instigated by Nature.

In brief, Alan's story opens in the earthly paradise which is Nature's home. Nature is lamenting her past errors; to redeem herself, she proposes to create a New Man. For this project, a soul must be procured from heaven. Since Nature cannot travel beyond the moon, the heavenly journey is undertaken by Fronesis (a figure alternately known as Prudence and Sophia in the poem). She is accompanied by Reason in a chariot fashioned by the liberal arts. Entering the region of unbounded light, heaven's outermost sphere, Fronesis

must leave both chariot and companion to be escorted by a *puella poli* – a Star Maid (generally, though not quite universally,<sup>3</sup> identified by scholars as Theology). The soul is fashioned by Noys and anointed with celestial dew to protect it from baleful planetary influences. Fronesis returns to earth where the carefully protected soul is conjoined with its new and perfect body. In the final books, the New Man is attacked by the vices, but with his army of virtues the New Man ushers in the Golden Age.

The New Man is clearly intended to shadow the allegory of Ephesians 4 and 5 which urges the perfection of man, understood as all individuals collectively composing the members of the body of Christ; yet it does so with a few twists, because it seems to have a more primary focus on this man's natural body than on the body of Christ. It does not begin with Christ's plea for human perfection, but rather with Nature's plea for her own redemption. Thus, despite all, the poem tends to appear more as a Neoplatonic answer to a Neoplatonic enigma than its interpretation through a Christian (or Christological) framework. In fact, Christ's absence in the poem has been a node or knot over which the poem's interpreters have worried since the Middle Ages.

In this essay, I want to examine the contours of this enigma more closely. Alan is explicit that his work has an allegorical level available to those of sharper intellect; he also identifies the work as a prophecy.<sup>4</sup> These claims, too, have puzzled readers, and there is no common consensus as to what they really mean. I would suggest that the claim to allegory means specifically that he sees the work as embedding Christian theological meanings – that is, the meanings that are harder to find precisely because the *involucrum* is pagan and more or less secular – and that the claim to prophecy points the work towards a telos: the story frames, in some sense, a cosmic beyond, or a cosmic future. To read the work theologically and teleologically, we need help from Alan's more explicitly theological works. Thus, chasing up a suggestion made in a footnote to Peter Dronke's *Fabula*,<sup>5</sup> in a chapter on Alan's *Discourse on the Intelligible Sphere*, I argue that the *Anticlaudianus* does have a Christological sense which is occulted in the structure of the cosmos itself. By showing how Alan figures the nature of Christ as part of the cosmic nature within the Platonic scheme of procession and return, I hope to close some of the gaps remaining in our Christological understanding of the poem.

#### RECEPTION HISTORY OF THE *ANTICLAUDIANTUS*

Modern readers have shown a persistent tendency to read Alan's *Anticlaudianus* as an exemplar of one flavor or another of twelfth-century humanism.<sup>6</sup> "Humanism" provides a category that validates the poets' engagement with classical and Platonic sources, assuming its ready coexistence with Christianity, but does not always explain (or indeed seek to explain) the theology of this coexistence. Despite the fact that Christianity had always been

entwined with Neoplatonism, Alan succeeds so well in disentangling the two, in representing a cosmic struggle where Christ's descent appears *not* to be the primary drama, that it seems the only way to map the *Anticlaudianus* onto a more traditional Christocentric theology is to twist the poetry out of shape.

The difficulty of reading a Christological center into Alan's poem has been addressed in a variety of ways by its interpreters. A medieval approach was simply to rewrite the *Anticlaudianus* making the New Man into Christ, a restructuring which occurs in more than one medieval *translatio* of the poem.<sup>7</sup> This twist is no longer popular, though if readers like the poem at all, they have not stopped trying to rewrite it. James Simpson, reading the poem from a political angle, argues effectively for a "preposterous" reading of the *Anticlaudianus* – a reading that places the two main actions of the poem back to front and thereby more clearly situates all the action within the *humanum*.<sup>8</sup> This facilitates Simpson's reading of the poem which stresses politics and human *informatio*, and in fact Simpson opens new ways to see the poems' evident concerns with the deification of man as real and contextually grounded; it does not, however, aim at resolving the Christ-riddle, and in effect sidesteps it by concentrating on the New Man as a model for the information of the reader.<sup>9</sup>

Others have commented on the daring nature of what Alan does in his construction of the New Man, but this daring has been more exclaimed over than explained. G. R. Evans reads the poem also in a loosely humanistic sense, but without the plot inversion: Alan's Perfect Man "stands for the perfection of man *purus*, man alone. His hero is not unaided by God, but he is solely man, not both God and man. Theologically this is astonishing in its daring, and its implication for the valuing of man in his own right is considerable."<sup>10</sup> Evans suggests that the action of grace in the poem is undertaken by the virtues,<sup>11</sup> but this does not really account for the poem's Christological omissions, which she leaves as a kind of open riddle. In a similar vein, Barbara Newman reads the *Anticlaudianus* with attention to the idea of Nature, noting the problem of Christ's absence, and arguing that Alan's *novus homo* is also a *novus Christus*. Essentially, however, her emphases show a pagan drawing on a Christian canvas:

our hero is a wealthy nobleman, an accomplished scholar, and a courtly gentleman distinguished by moderation in all things – hardly the Christ of the Gospels. Nor does he win his victory through sickness, poverty, and death, as Alan says of Jesus, for the New Man's triumphant reign takes place on this earth. In short, the *novus homo* is the Messiah Jesus failed to be – the Messiah of Virgil, perhaps, but certainly not of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.<sup>12</sup>

In understanding the New Man as the "the Messiah of Virgil," however, Newman sets up a literary project which effectively sidesteps the theological

riddle. She follows Evans in considering Alan's work "astonishing in its daring," but her interest in adumbrating the reception and use of classical poetic modes, and in showing how the feminine divine occupies space in these imaginative constructions, precludes a deep interest in resolving the more traditional theological problems that the poetry raises.<sup>13</sup>

Even readings of Alan's work that are more explicitly grounded in philosophical and theological disciplines tend to use the "literariness" of Alan's poem as a reason to leave the Christological puzzles unresolved. Of the readings that suggest a viable understructure for Alan's theological answer to this riddle, two in particular have been important to my thinking. The first is a 2006 interpretation by Eileen Sweeney, in which Alan's work is characterized as being governed by the metaphor of fighting fire with fire; she sees his theological objective as a revelation of the inadequacy of language through playful verbal constructions and paradoxes that push language to its limits: "Alan, we might say, fills the old wine skins of the liberal arts with the new wine of theology, showing how it bursts the skins, not because he does not know that that will be the result, but rather because he thinks his contemporaries need a demonstration."<sup>14</sup>

Sweeney's reading is useful in showing the purposefulness with which Alan deconstructs language throughout the poem, and I follow her in seeing this as an active and deliberate enterprise with a theological function. However Sweeney does not take on the radical problems of the New Man's identity. She accentuates the difficulty of construction, and the idea of resistance of opposites in Alan's work:

Though Alan is sometimes praised for his view of virtue as 'natural,' what we find on closer examination is a model of virtue as the *resistance* of opposite vices. We might say that for Alan virtue is natural with this caveat, that nature itself is an unstable construction, a tension between opposites, possessing a good deal less than complete harmony and fulfillment.<sup>15</sup>

In essence, as I will argue later, Sweeney correctly notes a fundamental property of the poem but does not tease out the allegory all the way.

A 1992 article by Willemien Otten suggests certain significant parallels between the understandings of sin and redemption in the writings of the ninth-century Neoplatonist Eriugena and Alan of Lille.<sup>16</sup> In brief, Otten argues for a holistic anthropology in both writers, in which Nature and Human Nature are so conceptually entangled that it is not really possible to separate them. This is a crucial point for Alan, and might be taken to have implications for the body of Christ as well; however Otten does not tackle the Christological problem in the *Anticlaudianus* either, moving instead to read the most important feature of the New Man as his pluriform nature, rather than his connection to shared (natural) flesh of Christ.<sup>17</sup> In a more recent work, *From Paradise*

to *Paradigm* (published in 2004), Otten reframes the problem with which these early medieval authors were engaged. Writing of the struggle to balance the Platonic emanationist cosmos which “substantially increased the esthetic value of the entire universe” with the need to maintain that “there was a built in structural weakness in this beautiful universe as well,” she goes on to say:

Since human nature is considered endowed with free will as just one of the fine creaturely qualities flowing forth from its status as *imago dei*, the question became pressingly urgent of how it could keep its will in check, preventing further derailment beyond the immediate consequences of the fall. Complicating this question even further was the preceding problem of how human authors could ever hope to extricate themselves from a universe that seemed flawed by design.<sup>18</sup>

In her view, the poets of the twelfth century deal with this in a sense by creating such baroque and beautiful poetic structures to reconcile these extreme views that the problem, rather than being theologically resolved, disappears into the chinks of the poetic structure. Viewed negatively, this may mean that Alan’s enterprise is, in a sense, *too* successful as literature, with the result that “the golden age that Alan foresees cannot but be relegated to the utopias of fiction.”<sup>19</sup> Viewed more positively, Otten suggests that her authors attempt a theologizing whose *texture* is of more importance than its content:

God, nature and humanity enter into a trialogue of sorts [which] ... seems to have as its main goal not the matter of establishing identity ... but to bring out and bring about the archetypal relatedness of all kinds of knowledge with respect to human nature ... Thus their aim seems to have been to keep the debate open rather than settling it.<sup>20</sup>

Yet it seems clear that Alan means not only to pose questions, but to settle them, and to do so in a way that does not merely relegate his work to the status of utopian fiction. To solve this enigma, Alan’s poem in some way *does* need to be tied to a Christological frame.

#### THEOLOGICAL COSMOLOGY IN ALAN OF LILLE’S OTHER WORKS

As a way of suggesting a cosmic model that might plausibly underlie the divine action in the *Anticlaudianus*, I would like to consider two more explicitly philosophical works by Alan of Lille which allow us to grasp features of his Neoplatonic models, in particular the ideas attached to his sense of the cosmic telos, that seem to be present in the *Anticlaudianus* as well. The first of these

is his *Discourse on the Intelligible Sphere* which Peter Dronke analyzes in [chapter five](#) of his *Fabula*;<sup>21</sup> the second is Alan's *Theologicae regulae*.

Alan's *Discourse on the Intelligible Sphere* is a fable of four spheres which Peter Dronke suggests works as "a means towards illuminating the tension between the two ways of thinking – naturalistic and dualizing – that coexist in all his work."<sup>22</sup> There are features of this piece that are useful in explicating the sub-structure of the *Anticlaudianus*.

In the *Discourse*, Alan begins by noting that a sphere is the most apt figure for the Divine Essence, "which is alpha and omega, a beginning and end lacking in beginning and end."<sup>23</sup> He lays out four spheres which are mapped onto four traditional Neoplatonic principles: the sensible world (aligning with Nature), primordial matter (not explicitly mentioned in *Anticlaudianus*, though figured in one of the three mirrors of Reason),<sup>24</sup> the world soul (not mentioned in *Anticlaudianus*), and divine essence. In Alan's *Discourse*, the four spheres are associated with four Greek terms for types of form,<sup>25</sup> and four capacities of soul. It is easier to show the relationships in a table:

The Four Spheres according to Alan's <i>Sermo de Sphaera Intelligibili</i>			
Sensible World (center)	Ichones (images)	Nature, joining of property and subject (kissed into union)	Sense
Primordial Matter	Yconie (figurations? per Dronke)	Fluctuating matter striving to revert to true being	Imagination
World Soul	Ychome (theorems? per Dronke)	Form divided from subject, reverting to origin	Reason
Divine Essence (circumference)	Ydee (ideas)	Exemplary forms of things in their purity	Intelligence (Intellectualitas)

Dronke remarks on the originality of Alan's work here: "the fourfold distinction is once more Boethian ... but the fable that starts from it is unparalleled. I cannot here convey its richness of detail, or the heady language, sparkling with wordplay, in which it is presented."<sup>26</sup>

One feature of Alan's cosmology that can be seen from this table interestingly distinguishes Alan's model from other twelfth-century speculative cosmologies based on the *Timaeus*: Primordial Matter and the Divine Essence are not extreme antipodes, as they are, for example, in Bernardus Silvestris' *Cosmographia* – a work to which Alan was likely responding in the *Anticlaudianus*. In Bernard's work, Primordial Matter, called *Hyle* or *Silva* (following Calcidius' commentary), is depicted cosmically as the lowest emanation, most distant from God. In Alan's model, however, Nature is at the center (or bottom), and Primordial Matter comes second; World Soul is third, and the Divine Essence on the outside (or at the top).

Primordial Matter has the typical characteristics of chaos, flux, and struggle, but it is a struggle conscious of its own disability and partly engaged in the striving upward in Alan's description: "in the second (palace) exult the *yconie* which are degenerate from the power of their dignity, fluctuating from the contagion of matter in flux, bewailing that they are obscurities shadowy from the soot of their own obscurity, striving to revert to true being."<sup>27</sup> In the struggle, Primordial Matter seems to beg release from the union with form described in the first sphere of the sensible world where "Form kisses the subject with a kiss of genial inherence, from which fecundity gives birth to varied offspring."<sup>28</sup>

Alan compares the powers of the soul both to four wheels on a chariot in which the divine ascent is made, and also, more consistently, to rungs on a ladder leading upward to God: the rungs are sense, imagination, reason, and intelligence.<sup>29</sup> The second rung, corresponding to Primordial Matter, is linked to the human power of imagination, where "the human soul is brought back to the dwelling of Primordial Matter, where forms bewailing as it were the damage of their deformity may imaginatively be seen requesting the aid of a better foundation (*subiecti*)."<sup>30</sup> The struggle thus has a positive component; in however confusing a fashion, it is in search of something. The identification Alan makes here between Primordial Matter and Imagination does not occur, so far as I can determine, in other twelfth-century adaptations of the Timaeon cosmology; it is at the very least not commonplace. The ordering of this alignment of the cosmic structure with the human faculties of mind (particularly in equating Primordial Matter with Imagination) is important to the optimism of Alan's cosmos, because through it, the sphere of Primordial Matter becomes, in effect, a part of the mechanism of return in the cosmic machinery.

The *peripeteia* comes in a paragraph affirming the central position of the visible sensual world (that is, Nature), in the intelligible sphere:

What is the center of this intelligible sphere if not the work of the world (*opus mundanum*)? That is, the whole universe of things, which, by amplitude of Divine Essence, as if it were pulling from the circumference an equal (and thus in a way linear) unity of its own essence, draws it into the machinery of the world; and so all the lines from this circumference drawn all the way to the center are equal. For all things which come into the world from the immensity of God through creation are equally good.<sup>31</sup>

Alan envisions the whole world recycling (as it were) its divinity: the natural center and primordial matter itself work to pull the Divine Essence into the center, and, in the end, the Divine Essence draws back the *humanum* from the center to the circumference. The entirety of the sphere also figures Christ, alpha and omega, beginning and end without beginning or end. The theurgic "pull" represented by Christ's body is implicitly present here

in the construction of the natural body of the universe itself. The struggle of Primordial Matter – containing the energetic fantasmic forms of the imagination – is a part of embodiment, and a necessary gear in the machine.

Alan’s final description of the movement of the soul returns to a more conventional caution about the lower powers of soul, a perspective Dronke suggests does not resolve the “naturalist” and “dualist” tensions; or rather it does resolve them, but perhaps in a cooler way:

We, therefore, existing in the center of this sphere, tend from the motion of the center to the quiet of the circumference ... not by the linear motion of sensuality, not by the retrograde motion of the imagination, but by the orbicular motion of reason, so that, with the leadership of intellect, we may come to the tranquility of the divine circumference which is furnished for us.<sup>32</sup>

The reader is admonished not to cling to the more earthly spheres of perception, sense and imagination, Nature and Matter; nevertheless they are a necessary part of the cosmic body.

What is important about this model of the universe is the way that it encourages a mapping of Christ’s embodiment onto the entirety of creation – an idea that is persistent in Alan’s thought. In his *Theologicae regulae*, a set of brief and pithy theological rules in which he derives from the idea of the one, or monas, the Trinity and ultimately all that exists, he meditates more explicitly on the principles of this connection, deriving a telos from the way the alpha and omega bound the entirety of creation, and through this principle suggesting an end of the *humanum* that is guided by a principle of divinity within. Rule Five is that “only the monas is alpha and omega without alpha or omega”;<sup>33</sup> Rule Seven, that “God is an intelligible sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere” is derived from the preceding rule because “from the fact that he lacks beginning and end God is said to be a sphere, because it is a property of spherical form to lack a beginning and end.”<sup>34</sup> Between these two lies Rule Six, in which Alan again references the principle of the alpha and omega in a more complex manner: “everything limited by alpha and omega is either good from alpha, or good from alpha and omega.”<sup>35</sup> In this chapter he further explains:

If all things are from God in the beginning, therefore from the alpha, that is from the beginning, things are good from the disposition of a good beginning. But note through these words: *all is limited by alpha and omega* that what is understood to be enclosed in those limits is all creation, that is beginning and end, by act or nature ... And so every created thing either is good from alpha, that is, naturally a participant of the Good, and this it has from its author; or from the alpha and omega, as a rational creature who

tends to blessedness which is the end of all things. From the end, therefore, only the rational creature is good.<sup>36</sup>

In the *Anticlaudianus*, Alan's fable of universal redemption can be understood best if it is positioned within this scheme of cosmic machinery: in both the poem and theological propositions, we see the basic, though incomplete, goodness of Nature – a goodness deriving from the alpha point of creation – and the redemption occurring in and through the Omega point – the end (or conclusion) of Nature's work. However the *Anticlaudianus* does not offer us quite the God's eye view we get in the *Discourse on the Intelligible Sphere*; rather, it tells a story that unfolds for the most part within the created universe – at the start a damaged universe, where human powers have been fractured and Nature holds herself at fault for this damage. Yet like the more explicitly theological works, *Anticlaudianus* offers a reading of the “end of all things.” In order for the Omega point of the universe to come about, Alan posits, as in the *Discourse on the Intelligible Sphere*, Nature as the substrate of all being, kissing property and subject into form.

#### THE IMPOSSIBLE PERFECT BODY IN THE *ANTICLAUDIANUS*

But Nature is human nature too. In the fallen world, if Alan puts the need for a cosmic reparation front and center, he never imagines Nature's goals as separate from the divine telos of perfection. The *Anticlaudianus* opens with a petition on the part of the goddess Nature to perfect the cosmos. Nature wants to create a new work to square accounts for her past errors, but not less than this, to finish what she has already done: “she mints a work through which a closure to all her workmanship is attained: thus she pays for the old sins of her works, that she might make good with this one where she was in default with the rest.”<sup>37</sup> The work of recompense is a theme repeated at regular intervals in the poem, and it is significantly coupled with the idea of a *conclusion* – a finishing (or perfecting) – of the cosmic work she was made to do.

In the opening discussion, it is immediately agreed that the New Man should be made, and that an ambassador should be sent to heaven to request the soul, but there is debate between Nature, Reason, and Prudence (Fronesis) as to who should do this. Prudence (as she is called through much of the [first part](#) of the poem)<sup>38</sup> is clearly the superior candidate in the eyes of the other goddesses, but she is unsure of herself. In her first speech, she stresses the distance and difference between earth and heaven, and her own inability even to grasp what the task involves.<sup>39</sup> The soul's delivery requires, she says, a better artist; how to create it “only the Prudence of God knows, from the depth of whose breast derives everything that comes into being.”<sup>40</sup> The “Prudence of God” to which she refers here simultaneously identifies her, through her

name, with the highest divine form of God's Wisdom (that is, Providence or Noys, who actually oversees the soul-making in the poem), but also firmly maintains the distance between Divine Prudence and the more humble human emanation of which she herself is the figure. Prudence is thus, in a sense, a form of Wisdom that is embodied even before she has a body; she is already a human capacity, with all the limitations and liabilities of embodied wisdom, but also, in principle, all of its powers. Lodged in the *humanum*, then, are the powers that may perfect it.

Compelled by strong arguments from both Reason and Concord, Fronesis directs a chariot (*currus* – the word *curriculum* is its diminutive) to be built by the seven liberal arts and led by the horses of the five senses. Reason is elected as a companion for Fronesis on the journey upward. In the course of the journey, Alan dwells lovingly on the physical and emotional sensations of the goddesses traveling through the planetary spheres; however it is not possible for human faculties to pass into the divine sphere unaided. Trouble begins when the goddesses attempt to pass beyond the sphere of the fixed stars, the summit of the world and the beginning of the divine realm. The horses become frantic; there is no accessible path and Reason cannot control them.

At this point – at the limits of the stellar cosmos – there appears a *puella poli*, a Star Maid, who will serve as Fronesis's guide. The meaning of the Star Maid is ambiguous – unlike all the other characters in the allegory, she is given no abstract name – but she is deeply important in this poem, because we are close to the point at which Alan allies the powers of his poem with prophecy.

The interpretation of the Star Maid as Theology is nearly universal among the poem's readers, though Peter Dronke has tried to protect the validity of Alan's own decision to leave her unnamed.<sup>41</sup> If indeed she should be seen as theology, it is theology in a most mystical and exegetical guise. Most of her description suggests that she has a primary association with God's nature in relation to language. On her robe, we see that

a subtle needle describes the arcana of God, abyss of the divine mind, and figures its formless form, locates the immense and shows forth the hidden ... what tongue cannot speak nor picture tell: ... How God himself within himself captures all the names of things which God's own nature does not reject – all nevertheless he conceives with a mediating trope, a speaking figure, and adopts pure vocables with no earthly sense (*uoces puras sine rebus*).<sup>42</sup>

The Star Maid is thus an eternally existent possibility of language in which possible meanings are limitless; she is uncircumscribed divine speech, not embodied in or dependent on things. In essence, she represents reading beyond the letter – the skill of exegesis or perhaps more precisely allegoresis. This is not precisely an ineffability topos; it represents what is purely and completely speakable, but not in ordinary language. The Star Maid is name-

less, then, because she resists the ordinary language *involucrum*: the true hidden secret laid bare in words would be a vocable with no human sense.

In this connection she also becomes allied with Alan's project in the construction of this poem, for Alan has stated in his prologue that the writing has a spiritual level, that its higher sense requires allegorical reading. Beyond this, here at the limit of the realm of infinite light is where Alan assumes his prophetic voice: "putting aside petty things, I turn now to a greater lyre, and casting off the entire poetic role, take on for myself the new words of a prophet ... I will be the pen of this song, not its writer or author."<sup>43</sup> To finish his poem, to restore paradise, Alan must, like Fronesis, allow the divine guide to lead him across the abyss of language.

In the heavenly realm, through which Fronesis is guided to God by the *puella poli*, we have two moments that foreshadow the theme of the Golden Age. The first occurs when Fronesis explains her mission to the Star Maid. Her request for the perfect soul makes it clear that the aim of the mission is redemption for all of Nature's work, not just for some small piece of it. This indeed was what Nature herself had asked, but the phrasing of the request is more striking in the mouth of Fronesis. She tells the Star Maid that she wants:

the divine hand to send down from on high a soul who is so wise in mind, so full of virtue, so gifted with modesty ... that, dressed in the garment of flesh, he may visit the world in such a way that his piety may redeem villainy and his virtue guilt, and his modesty sexual transgression, his righteousness deceit, his glory death (*casum*, a word shadowing death, failure and the Fall): that the earthly home may prevail (*superset*, endure, triumph or simply be excellent); that the terrestrial power (*uis terrea*), the clinging corporeal garment, the mortal body may be brought forth as a work of Nature's power, thus blessed of multiplex endowment, cheated of no gift of form, that the spirit may no longer disdain the corporeal habitation, nor so great a guest grieve over any decline in the establishment, but rather reign in the court of flesh.<sup>44</sup>

This creates a context in which we can visualize how much the project concerns the redemption of *Nature*: the new, perfected soul is intended to function as a crucial link in the cosmos that is missing when the story opens.

The dependence of the Golden Age on the fullest perfection of the *humanum* is also shadowed in the description of the Virgin Mary, whom Fronesis sees after she is led into the realm of light by the Star Maid. She passes through the ranks of angelic hierarchies and the martyred souls (whose description signals that redemption is possible even for those who lead upright lives but are not wholly perfect), and comes at last to Mary, whose perfection is a triumph of concord. In Mary, "no longer are 'mother' and 'virgin' discordant

[terms], but with their very disputes shut out, they turn themselves to a kiss of peace.”<sup>45</sup> Mary is also

she who washed away the first fall and the stains of the first parent, with virtue conquering guilt, restoring what was ruined, returning what was taken away ... glowing with the newness of life after the shadows of death, at whose coming the Golden Age returns to earth.<sup>46</sup>

Her impossible stamp of human virtue and perfection are indeed – within the context of this story – mold and pattern for the kinds of virtues Alan’s perfect soul will need. Mary is the perfection of nature, the kiss of concord which preceded the incarnation and enabled it. It is not Christ as much as the human concord – Mary – who is the precondition for Christ’s enfleshment, that Alan’s man must emulate. In fact, like Mary, the New Man also appears to be an immaculate conception; and this is only the first of his special gifts.

On entering God’s realm, which is above and beyond even the abode of the angels and Mary, Fronesis faints into an *extasis*, a trance-like state from which she cannot recover. Faith is called to her aid, bestows on her a magic mirror, and advises her to leave her companion, Reason, behind. Thus protected, Fronesis meets God, and argues her case eloquently, stressing the sad condition of Nature and the importance of her redemption, for “it is a question of your own interests when the neighbor’s rampart is burning.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, Fronesis reminds God that Nature is not so distinct from himself that her perfection and completion do not matter. Indeed, as we have seen from the *Discourse on the Intelligible Sphere*, Alan understands God to have poured himself into Nature already. God agrees to deliver the soul to Fronesis, and directs Noys to construct the pattern.

Beyond the perfection of his creation, the newborn soul needs some superpowers, and he begins to receive them here, as Noys anoints him with a special dew to protect him from the baleful influences of the planets on the journey back to earth.<sup>48</sup> Fronesis is also given careful instruction on the route that will incur least damage from the planets. Thus, the natural vices are already being deflected from the special soul to enable a less distressing entry into the earthly sphere and give him the maximum chance of achieving his mission. He is ready to arrive in the body whole, as it were prebaptized, immaculate.

In this story, the creation of the body is depicted as easy for Nature, whose delight in the new soul seems to inspire her. Concord, assisted by music and arithmetic, joins the soul to the body in a subtle bond that weds body and soul, flesh and divinity, such that “No longer does the spirit draw back, abhorring the corporeal garment, but rejoices in such dwelling and shade.”<sup>49</sup>

At this point the story begins to seem more and more like a fairy tale, for a crowd of theophanies gathers round to bestow gifts on the New Man, like a cohort of good fairies. He is endowed with the seven liberal arts, and an

array of virtues which are not only of the mind and spirit, but also natural. In addition to Reason, Wisdom, Chastity, Honesty and so on, Plenty endows him with all natural advantages, Favor makes him swift footed and pleasing, Fame changes her nature to whisper only truth, and Constancy even gives him a pleasing hairstyle. There is, too, a figuration of the bad fairy – Fortune – who dwells on a rock in the middle of the sea, in a castle teetering on the brink of a cliff. She is sought by her daughter Nobility, whose gifts cannot be given without consent from her mother. With bad grace, Fortune appears at the party, alarming the assembled virtues with her ugly appearance, but she too changes her nature, and bestows only good gifts on the New Man.

In the arc of the narrative, it begins to seem inevitable that the Vices should take up arms and attempt to destroy the New Man, and this they do. It is notable that the Vices too are natural, not merely mental and spiritual. Thus he takes up arms not only against Discord, Anger, Violence, Boredom, but also Poverty, Care, Thirst, and Hunger. Iconic as it may be (one can easily imagine the battle scenes transferred to the form of a graphic novel) the battle has its tensions. A key moment occurs when the New Man faces Old Age (*Senectus*), who is preparing to commit suicide, seeing that she is losing her battle. The hero accosts her not with weapons, but with words:

Why do you make ready your destiny, you to whom nearby death destines an end, to whom life is dying, and to whom living is destiny? Why do you ineptly seek what Nature makes ready, since nearby death is imminent? Use what remains of life and do not seek to anticipate the coming days; the savings of life ease death; life repays the cost of death.<sup>50</sup>

It is the acceptance of the full term of his life, including the form of its ending, that distinguishes the full extent played by Concord in the New Man's character; for the New Man faces everything – even death – in a way that is at one with the divine plan. Paradoxically perhaps, the vanquishing of death requires an acceptance of death. If, in any event, “life is dying and living is destiny,” it seems that it is not simply the vanquishing of death that allows the Golden Age to begin, but this particular kind of vanquishing, which defeats death by accepting its necessity in this world.

#### THE OMEGA MAN, OR THE IMPOSSIBLE LAST WORD

If the ending of Alan's fable looks like a fairy tale, there is a good reason for this: it represents a string of impossibilities. Perfection apparently requires a number of gifts and superpowers: one, a divine destiny, to be called forth from the entire universe of things; two, every imaginable gift of nature and spirit, not excluding nobility, beauty, and learning; three, complete instruction by

all the Virtues. Perhaps, too, it requires that Fame and Fortune should change their natures, and behave in unaccustomed ways. Alan's story of the perfection of man is indeed a fairy tale, a story of something that cannot happen. But it is also, as he claims, a prophecy; it is something that *must* happen.

Prophecies are not intended to be road maps, but they are intended to mean something. The stress of considering the impossibility of Alan's New Man may be eased, or at least contextualized, by remembering how frequently Alan configures Christ, the Trinity, and Mary as fundamental impossibilities too; we have seen how he does this in his *Theological Rules*, as well as his *Discourse on the Intelligible Sphere* using strings of related reversals, paradoxes and oxymorons. If Christ's existence must be configured as something fundamentally impossible, we need not be unduly set back by the impossibility of the New Man – a man who is not Christ, but is also part of the Christian dispensation, the created world which Alan reminds us is bounded by alpha and omega.

Alan's work forces us to take seriously the working out of this conundrum which has a Platonic figure embedded deep in its heart. The figure is one of an impossible joining, a copula which sends every rule spinning.<sup>51</sup> A paradoxical copula is figured in Nature's works as well. In the initial enigmatic description of Nature in paradise – a paradise outside the human experience at the outset of the poem – it is possible to see that Nature remains a deputy and emanation of Providence:

Nature, determining singular things in a profound sense, keeps steady (*tenet*) her own rules of rightness (*iura*) in this seat [i.e. in the earthly paradise], and Providence figures (*figuratur* – i.e. she is a figure for as well as configures) laws which will be promulgated in the whole world bit by bit. Here she seeks out the causes of things and seeds of the world: seeks out the one who redeemed ancient Chaos with a better appearance when Silva desired a work of better form and beauty of countenance and bewailed her own tumult; she who, restraining wars by a civil knot of faith, and the strife of brothers, imparted the kiss of peace to elements and bound [them] with a better knot of number.<sup>52</sup>

Because initially the New Man must live in the world – a world where Nature's works are flawed, and her own rules are no longer sufficient to govern it – the soul and body must be joined, not by Nature, but by Concord. The union is figured as a marriage; but the role of Concord in the joining of Soul to Body also shadows Mary, whose identity makes opposite terms (Virgin and Mother) concordant with a kiss of peace, and Christ, whose entry into the body at the incarnation is commonly figured as a kiss.<sup>53</sup>

Alan references another kiss which may be lined up with these also, in the “kiss of composition” by which Nature joins form to subject in the *Discourse on the Intelligible Sphere*. In this work, too, the entirety of the intelligible sphere

contains the created world at the center, and derives its power from the making and unmaking of material forms: the kiss unites body and spirit, which is also the sensual world, and the struggle of primordial matter, which is also the imagination, enables its release. As we have seen, for Alan the entire sphere is the alpha and omega, beginning and end without beginning or end, pulling divinity into the cosmos and back, configuring Christ through the circular nature of things: the impossible transmutation of the natural world itself, through its hidden divine and visibly embodied parts. To the extent that this represents Alan's preferred metaphysics, it means that we do not need to worry about configuring the role of Christ in the *Anticlaudianus*. Christ is everywhere.

At the same time the alpha and omega, which he elsewhere defines as the limits of the created world, include a destination point that links humanity to the eternal only, from the embodied human perspective, at the end of time. Alan's New Man exists in the temporal world (he is to this extent a secular vision), but he is poised on the brink where time is drawn back to its hidden and eternal source. The New Man is Christ's Omega Man, an end point predicated by the Christian anthropology as Alan understood it, a proGnostication of that towards which human nature, in its rightness, shall tend in the fullness of time. The story of the Omega Man completes and fulfills the story begun in Adam. He is our collective nature (the collective humanity of Ephesians 4-5), but also the natural flesh, shared not only with Christ but with Mary and the other saints and elect. His enfleshment, but more than this, his triumph over the vices – the causes of mutability in this world – marks the end or goal of a sacramental mystery configured at the center. This exegesis releases us from the perceptual puzzles that result from trying to embed our whole understanding of Christ in the New Man himself; it also releases us from the need to understand the poem in exclusively secular, classicizing or humanistic terms – a project which is scarcely less difficult, and sometimes results in perceptions of the poem as a failure.

I noted earlier that Eileen Sweeney does not see the New Man as an attempt to demonstrate a resolution of the issues of instability connected to the body of Adam, but really as an extension of the same issues: the New Man is an essentially unstable being, a tense and unresolved union of opposites. However, I would argue that the tension Sweeney quite rightly points to here is a constructive one in a profound sense: the yoking of opposites in Alan's continuous play of oxymoronic rhetorical structures indicate the intransigent pull between the impossible demands of virtue (which we experience as human, rational, fallen, and embodied) and the necessary goal of human redemption (which will be, because God has said as much mystically). For Alan, however, rational impossibilities are also a mode of propulsion. In Alan's cosmic schema, as elaborated in his *Discourse on the Intelligible Sphere*, created matter (aligned with the imagination) is the engine of our return, which is continually worked out in the working of the world.

This working out resists the intelligence; indeed, to rest in the complacency of logical discursive structures and the self-evident reasonableness of philosophical propositions may constitute an integral damage to this poetic theurgic machine. Alan's story – its perpetual creative gesture toward the hidden God, whose form cannot be (and yet has been, and continues to be) impossibly embodied in the person of the second person of the Trinity and spiritually figured in the cosmos – is a prophetic casting forward to a point where the ultimate purpose of this machine has been realized in the Omega Man: the return of fallen nature to a restored paradise.

Like the verbal copula which sends reason spinning, the poem imitates this theurgy on the human verbal plane in the dynamic nature of its linked oppositions. Alan's project is not fundamentally to show the impossibility of reaching heaven with the tools of discursive reasoning (although of course it does that too); it is rather to point to the impossibilities that have already been done, through the person of Christ in the marvelous outpouring of creation. For whether we see it or not, the perfection of cosmos is already in train; its end is secreted in its process. If we accept this as true, then Alan's fable is part of that process. Its goal is not only to show the impossible, but (within reason! Or rather, within *involucra* that are designed to show how words can figure the transcendence of reason), to do it.

In effect, Alan's point is that we can do nothing to stop it: the procession implies a return. It is at the heart of that necessary impossibility, the divinely intended human return, that Christ lies hidden, not less in Alan's poem than the creation itself.

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## NOTES

1. See Sheridan (1973: 9).
2. *Anticlaudianus* 5.440–543.
3. Peter Dronke is almost the only dissenting voice here, who argues that since she is the only theophany in the work who has no name, readers should not seek to name her too quickly; see Dronke (1986: 12; also 1984: 432, n. 4).
4. In the Prose Prologue, Alan makes it clear that all the levels of exegesis are appropriate; he notes the work has a literal and moral level, and also “*acutior allegorie subtilitas proficientem acuet intellectum* (the sharper subtlety of an allegory will whet the proficient intellect)”; see Bossuat (1955: 56). The claim to prophecy is found at the midpoint of the poem, 5.265ff.
5. Dronke (1974: 148, n. 2).

6. R. W. Southern has contributed much to the use of this term, prominently in Southern (1995/2005). Otten (2004: 9, n. 1) follows Southern explicitly in understanding “humanism” as emphasizing: the dignity of human nature; the dignity of nature; and the intelligibility of the universe. Simpson (1995) also emphasizes the humanism of the *Anticlaudianus* though using a slightly modified definition of the term.
7. Evans (1983: 148ff), for a description of Ellebaut’s thirteenth-century French adaptation which makes the perfect man into Christ. Newman (2003: 83ff), brings up other interesting medieval adaptations which similarly try to repair the apparent flaws in the poem’s theology by rereading the New Man as Christ.
8. Simpson (1995: 22–125).
9. Simpson (1995: 133): “The thrust of my argument is rather that Alan’s concept of the *homo-deus* is one that he puts in reach of human capacities. The fact that the New Man is divine is not evidence that it could not be within reach of human capacities; instead it reveals just how exalted Alan’s conception of human capacities is.” In effect I agree with this, though I will argue that it is theologically incomplete unless we can read the New Man within the context of a Christological framework at the same time.
10. Evans (1983: 164).
11. Evans (1983: 158): “his hero cannot save the world by living a perfect life by his own unaided efforts. He needs the help of the virtues and the powers which made him. His perfection is fortified by both Nature and grace.”
12. Newman (2003: 82).
13. For the extended argument, see Newman (2003: 51ff).
14. Sweeney (2006: 130).
15. Sweeney (2006: 169–170).
16. Otten (1992: 329–49).
17. Otten (1992: 347).
18. Otten (2004: 265).
19. Otten (2004: 284).
20. Otten (2004: 3).
21. Dronke (1974: 144–54).
22. Dronke (1974: 145).
23. *Sermo de sphaera intelligibili* (d’Alverny 1965: 297): “que est alpha et omega, principium et finis, principio carens et fine.” I follow Dronke and d’Alverny in translating “sermo” as “discourse”; the work is not a sermon.
24. See Dronke (1974: 148, n. 2), where he elaborates the suggestion that “The nature and content of the four spheres or palaces [described in the *Discourse*] correspond in a number of details to what, in Alan’s later work *Anticlaudianus*, Ratio sees in her three mirrors.”
25. Both Dronke and d’Alverny have difficulty translating “Ychome” and “Yconie”; “figurations” and “theorems” represent Dronke’s tentative guesses; see Dronke (1974: 148, n. 1).
26. Dronke (1974: 147).
27. *Sermo de sphaera intelligibili* (d’Alverny 1965: 300–301): “In secunda vero exultant yconie, que a sue dignitatis virtute degeneres, fluitantis materie contagio fluctuantes esse caligantes umbratili de sue caligationis fuligine conquerentes, ad verum esse conantur reuerti!”
28. *Sermo de sphaera intelligibili* (d’Alverny 1965: 300): “Forma etenim geniali inherentie osculo subiectum osculatur, ex quo varie prolis fecunditas propagatur.”
29. Psychological categories common throughout medieval philosophy but most famously elaborated in Boethius (cf. *Consolation of Philosophy* 5.75ff).
30. *Sermo de sphaera intelligibili* (d’Alverny 1965: 302): “Humana anima in habitaculum primordialis materie defertur, ubi formas quasi de dampno sue infortunitatis lacrimantes, subsidia subiecti melioris postulantes, imaginabiliter intuetur.”

31. *Sermo de sphaera intelligibili* (d'Alverny 1965: 305): "Quid est huius spere centrum, nisi opus mundanum, id est uniuersitas rerum que ab amplitudine diuine essentie quasi a quadam circumferentia equalem et ita quodammodo linearem sue essentie unitatem trahens, in machinam deducit mundialem; et ita omnes linee ab hac circumferentia usque in centrum ducte sunt equales. Omnia enim que a Dei immensitate in mundum per creationem uenerunt eque bona sunt."
32. *Sermo de sphaera intelligibili* (d'Alverny 1965: 306): "Nos igitur, in centrum huius spere existentes, a centri motu tendamus in circumferentie quietem; ... non per linearem motum sensualitas, non per retrogradationem ymaginationis, sed per orbicularem motum rationis, ut intellectualitatis ductu, ad diuine circumferentie tranquillitatem perueniamus, quod nobis prestat."
33. *Theologicae regulae* 5 (Migne 1855: 625): "Sola monas est alpha et omega sine alpha et omega."
34. *Theologicae regulae* 7 (Migne 1855: 627): "ex eo enim quod principio caret, et fine Deus, spaera dicitur: proprium enim spaericae formae est principio et fine carere."
35. *Theologicae regulae* 6 (Migne 1855: 626): "Omne limitatum alpha et omega aut est bonum ab alpha, aut est bonum ab alpha et omega."
36. *Theologicae regulae* 6 (Migne 1855: 626-7): "si omnia a Deo tanquam a principio sunt, ergo ab alpha, id est ab ipso principio, habitu boni principii bona sunt. Sed nota per hoc quod dicitur: Omne limitatum alpha et omega, intelligi omne creatum, quod clauditur duobus terminis, id est principio et fine, actu vel natura ... Et sic omne creatum aut est bonum ab alpha, id est naturaliter particeps est bonitatis, et hoc habet a suo auctore: aut ex alpha et omega, ut rationalis creatura, quae ad beatitudinem, quae finis est omnium rerum, tendit. Ex fine igitur sola rationalis creatura bona est."
37. *Anticlaudianus* 1.5-7 (Bossuat 1955: 44): "Cudit opus, per quod operi cuncluditur omni;/ Pristina sic operum peccata repensat in uno, /Vt quod deliquit alias cumpenset in isto." All quotations of Latin in the *Anticlaudianus* come from this edition. All translations of Alan's Latin are mine. Sheridan translates "cuncluditur" as "throwing into shadow," which is a possible reading but unnecessarily strains the sense; Nature's emphasis, here and elsewhere, is always simultaneously on the idea of *finishing* and *redeeming* everything she has done; the verb is passive voice because she does not actually finish it herself.
38. She is mostly called Fronesis when she enters the heavenly realm, and is mostly called Prudence on earth, though in both parts she is occasionally identified with Sophia or Sapientia. The difference in balance suggests that Alan's reasons for choosing one name over another cannot have been strictly metric.
39. *Anticlaudianus* 1.391-4 (Bossuat 1955: 68): "Non uideo, non concipio, non iudico memet/ Scire modos, causas, rationes, semina, formas,/ Instrumenta quibus, nostra mediante Minerva, /Ortus celestis anime ducatur ad ortum" (I do not see, do not deem myself to know the measures, causes, reasons, seeds, forms, or instruments by which, with our Minerva as a mediator, the soul's heavenly conception may be brought to birth).
40. *Anticlaudianus* 1.383-4 (Bossuat 1955: 68): "Sola Dei nouit Prudencia, cuius ab alto/ Pectore procedit quicquid procedit in esse."
41. For references, see n. 2 above.
42. *Anticlaudianus* 5.115-27 (Bossuat 1955: 125-7): "Hic archana Dei, diuine mentis abyssum/Subtilis describit acus formaque figurat/ informem, locat immensum monstratque latentem./Incirconscripsum describit, uisibus offert / Inuisum, quod lingua nequit pictura fatetur:/ ... Qualiter ipse Deus in se capit omnia rerum/Nomina, que non ipsa Dei natura recusant,/ Cuncta tamen, mediante tropo, dictante figura/ Concipit et uoces puras sine rebus adoptat."

43. *Anticlaudianus* 5.267–73 (Bossuat 1955: 131): “parua resignans/ Maiorem nunc tendo liram totumque poetam / Deponens, usurpo michi noua uerba prophete. ... /Carminis huius ero calamus, non scriba uel actor.”
44. *Anticlaudianus* 5.227–39 (Bossuat 1955: 130): “Vt diuina manus animam demittat ab alto,/ Que sit mente sagax, uirtute referta, pudore/ Predita, presignita fide, pietate refulgens,/ Que, carnis uestita toga, sic uisitet orbem/ Quod facinus redimat pietas uirtusque reatum,/ Incestumque pudor, fraudem ius, Gloria casum,/ Quod superset terrene domus, uis terrea, uestis /Corporee masse, corpus mortale, potentis/ Nature ducatur opus, sic dote beatum/ Multiplici, nullo fraudatum munere forme,/Vt jam corporeum non dedignetur habere/ Spiritus hospicium nec tantus defleat hospes/ Hospicii tabem, sed carnis regnet in aula.”
45. *Anticlaudianus* 5.476–7 (Bossuat 1955: 137): “Nec iam discordant mater uirgoque, sed ipsis/ Litibus exclusis, se pacis ad oscula uertunt.”
46. *Anticlaudianus* 5.499–505 (Bossuat 1955: 138): “Hec est que primos casus primeque parentis/ Absternit maculas, uincens uirtute reatum,/ Diruta restituens, reddens ablata, rependens / Perdita, retaurans amissa, fugata repensans,/ Post uespertinos gemitus noua gaudia donans,/ Post mortis tenebras uite nouitate relucens; / Cuius ad aduentum redit etas aurea mundo.”
47. *Anticlaudianus* 6.314 (Bossuat 1955: 150): “Nam tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet.”
48. See *Anticlaudianus* 6.461–5 (Bossuat 1955: 154).
49. *Anticlaudianus* 7.66–7 (Bossuat 1955: 159): “Nec iam corpoream uestem fastidit abhorrens/ Spiritus, hospicio tali lettus et umbra.”
50. *Anticlaudianus* 9.197–203 (Bossuat 1955: 190–91): “Cur fata paras, cui proxima fatur/ Mors finem, cui uita mori, cui uiuere fatum?/ Cur queries tibi concessum? Cur poscis inepte/ Quod Natura parat, quod mors uicina minatur?/ Vtere que restat uita nec quere propinquos/ Anticipare dies; uite compendia mortem/ Solentur, mortis dispendia uita repenset.”
51. It is beyond the scope of this essay to draw in the many other works of Alan pertinent to this theme, but worth a gesture at Alan’s famous poem on the liberal arts, with its refrain “in hac uerbi copula/stupet omne regula.” See the edition of *Rhythmus de incarnatione Christi* in d’Alverny (1964: 126–8).
52. *Anticlaudianus* 1.188–96 (Bossuat 1955: 62–3): “Singula decernens sensu Natura profundo,/Sedibus hiis sua iura tenet legesque figurat/Prouida, quas toto sparsim promulgat in orbe./ Scrutatur rerum causas et semina mundi:/ Quis Chaos anticum uultu meliore redemit,/ Dum forme melioris opem uultusque decorum/ Quereret atque suum lugeret [S]ilua tumultum;/Quis, fidei nexu ciuilia bella refrenans/ Et fratrum rixas, elementis oscula pacis/ Indidit et numeri nodo meliore ligauit.” The reference to Silva’s lament is an allusion to the opening lines of the *Cosmographia* of Bernard Silvestris.
53. The kiss as the joining of divinity with flesh is a recurrent gloss on the line from the Song of Solomon, “let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” (Song 1.2). The kiss is a subject of meditation in various twelfth-century commentaries, perhaps most famously including the “Sermons on the Song” by Bernard of Clairvaux. Alan uses this topos in his own commentary on the Song; cf. Alan of Lille, *Compendiosa in Cantica canticorum ad laudem deiparae uirginis Mariae elucidatio*, “Prologus auctoris” (Migne 1855: 51–3).

## CHAPTER 6

# OBSCURED BY THE SCRIPTURES, REVEALED BY THE PROPHETS

## GOD IN THE PSEUDO-CLEMENTINE *HOMILIES*

*Kelley Coblentz Bautch*

One of the works associated with Clement, a romance known as the *Homilies*, suggests that the teaching of Jesus who is the True Prophet and books of Peter's preaching reveal the authentic nature of God which Scripture, in fact, obscures. These striking views illumine a community behind the Pseudo-Clementine writings that has been largely lost to contemporary audiences and a perspective on the divine that we attempt to excavate through this essay. While there are other writings associated with (Pseudo-)Clement that are indebted to common sources and share key themes, we restrict our investigation of the depiction of God to the *Homilies*; this romance's distinctive views on Scripture and prophecy influence how the *Homilies* understand the divine as both concealed and revealed.

Pseudo-Clementine literature challenges our impulse to define late antique religious texts according to the heuristic categories to which we may have become accustomed; when it comes to situating the Pseudo-Clementines, we are at a loss as to how we might locate these fascinating and rich texts amid the religious landscape of late antiquity. The Pseudo-Clementines, primarily associated with fourth century Syria, have been described simultaneously as "Jewish-Christian," "Gnostic," and "orthodox," however uncertain or ill-defined such designations and posited communities are. It should be no surprise, then, that the portrait of God to emerge from these writings is equally complex. For example, the deity that emerges from the Pseudo-Clementines recalls the God of the Hebrew scriptures and yet the latter writings are said to misrepresent the divine through falsehoods. In fact, the true God, or a proper understanding of the deity is, in some sense, hidden from outsiders; from the vantage of the Pseudo-Clementines, God is intelligible only to those in the community who safeguard their interpretation and restrict instruction to insiders.

## THE PSEUDO-CLEMENTINE ROMANCES: PROVENANCE AND SOURCES

To set the stage for our discussion, we offer some preliminary remarks about Pseudo-Clementine literature. Pseudo-Clementine writings are known primarily through the Greek *Homilies* and the Latin and Syriac *Recognitions*.<sup>1</sup> The *Homilies* and the *Recognitions* are Christian romances that narrate the reunion of Clement of Rome with his long lost mother, twin brothers, and father as the protagonist becomes acquainted with Peter and is eventually baptized.<sup>2</sup> At the same time the narrative progresses by means of recurring disputations between Peter and Simon Magus, familiar from Acts 8.9-25; these disputations serve to undercut the positions advocated by Simon Magus. The *Homilies*, so-named because this version of the romance includes twenty addresses of Peter, are preceded in manuscript traditions by two epistles, the letter of Peter to James (Epistula Petri) and the letter of Clement to James (Epistula Clementis), and by an admonition of James (Contestatio) which concerns how Peter's preachings are to be transmitted. The range of topics covered through the disputations and rather extensive narratives make for rich reading; yet establishing how the various Pseudo-Clementine writings relate to one another and delimiting the sources and pre-histories of these writings prove at times elusive.

The earliest extant manuscripts for the *Homilies* are from the eleventh or twelfth century and the fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that these manuscripts are late, the Clementine *Homilies* have a *terminus ad quem* of the very early fifth century; a Syriac version which corresponds to several of the *Homilies* dates to 411.<sup>4</sup> While conceding that the *Homilies* and *Recognitions* make use of a variety of sources, and in fact rely on a common one known typically as the *Grundschrift* or "the basic writing," consensus assigns a fourth-century date to the *Homilies* and *Recognitions* in their received forms.<sup>5</sup> Not only do the concerns and tropes of the literature seem to fit well a fourth-century context, but it is possible that Eusebius, who refers to a lengthy Clementine work containing a dialogue of Peter and Appion, may demonstrate awareness of this literature.<sup>6</sup> Both romances are also thought to derive from Syria.<sup>7</sup> In terms of the theology and background of the authors and redactions of the Pseudo-Clementine literature, the profiles we generate, especially for the Homilist, remain matters of contention. For example, some have suggested the Homilist was a proponent of Arianism<sup>8</sup> and others portray the author and final redactor as an adherent of a type of Jewish-Christianity.<sup>9</sup> While it is not uncommon for some to attempt to identify the Homilist in light of known or posited late antique religious communities, scholars are rightly noting that the *Homilies* may move us beyond existing paradigms and labels we employ for Jewish, Christian, Jewish-Christian, and Christian-Jewish groups of this time.<sup>10</sup>

Also challenging is the issue of the development of Pseudo-Clementine literature with regard to the sources used. Though differing in reconstructions of the sources, most acknowledge that the *Grundschrift*, the basic writing

known to the Homilist and Recognitionist, drew on other ancient sources as well.<sup>11</sup> Thus the Pseudo-Clementine romance consists of at least three strata interwoven: the work of the fourth-century Homilist, a *Grundschrift* of at least the third century, and earlier, varied texts that are utilized by the common source. As awareness has grown of this literature's complex history, the last decade or so has witnessed numerous objections to the "mining" for sources in the Pseudo-Clementine literature; such an approach, critics maintain, ignores the value of the final form of the writings as windows into fourth-century religious communities and obscures as well the literary form of the romances.<sup>12</sup> By explicitly examining the romances as narratives and viewing them in their fourth-century context, contemporary scholars have been working assiduously to make up for the neglect of previous scholarship in this area. We also adopt this approach in our examination of the *Homilies*, treating the Greek romance, and the writings which preface it, in the received or final form. While the depiction of the deity in the *Homilies* is no doubt indebted to earlier traditions, our study, assuming the consensus dating, speaks especially to the representation of God suggested by the fourth-century Syrian romance.

#### THE HIDDEN GOD AND THE SCRIPTURES

We consider now some of the distinctive aspects in the *Homilies* that influence the romance's depiction of the deity. That Peter proclaims worship of the one God and disputes with Simon Magus in the course of an elaborate romance is not so revolutionary vis-à-vis early Christian literature. Yet, in the *Homilies*, the apostle asserts that the Hebrew scriptures misrepresent God and that one must look instead to the oral traditions transmitted by Moses and to the teachings of Jesus, the True Prophet, for a correct understanding of the divine. Indeed, the *Homilies* are intriguing for many reasons. The romance's prophetology and positive assessment of law stand alongside a critique of Scripture as containing false pericopae and an evaluation of history that follows syzygies. Jesus is presented in the literature as the True Prophet, whose teachings are in continuity with those of Moses; these teachings which reveal God represent the authentic religion of Israel.<sup>13</sup> Interpretation of Scripture aided by the teaching of the True Prophet assists the faithful in distinguishing the genuine pericopae of Scripture from the false.<sup>14</sup> The literature also promotes esotericism by admonishing that only those who have been tested and initiated may be given access to traditions and correct instruction. This sense of secrecy may serve to heighten the status of the romance which does not attempt, in fact, to keep teachings secret; instead, the lengthy and entertaining novel presents its community's perspectives through the public disputations of Peter. The high regard for law transmitted orally, the notion of bogus Scripture, and Jesus' teaching as an interpretative key make for an interesting confluence of themes in this fourth-century romance.

The Homilist's construction of God emerges especially through Peter's debates. In these, the apostle works to defend God's omniscience, goodness and unity against the challenges and opposing views of Simon Magus. According to the *Homilies*, the goal of Simon Magus is to promote worship of himself as he seeks to diminish God, by denying that God created the world or would raise the dead.<sup>15</sup> The positions outlined reflect, in fact, fourth-century debates; just as Peter gives voice to the views of the Homilist, Simon Magus represents perspectives hostile to the community. While the figure of Simon in the *Homilies* has been thought a cipher for Paul or Marcion, it is a likely that Simon is a conflated character, associated with a host of positions that would be unacceptable to the Homilist. Thus, as Annette Yoshiko Reed observes, the Homilist's Simon can represent Marcionism, Samaritan anti-Judaism, Alexandrian philosophy, Greco-Roman magic, and more generally Hellenism.<sup>16</sup> The *Homilies*, in fact, could be thought to be a type of "heresiological discourse" in which counterarguments are mounted against the "slander of those it deems heretics."<sup>17</sup> How does the work accomplish this goal? The *Homilies* do so in part by positing a theory of God's hiddenness or obscurity within the Hebrew scriptures.

In the disputes Simon repeatedly challenges Peter's view of God on the basis of Scripture. Counter to the claim that there is one God, Simon maintains that Scripture testifies to the existence of many deities.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Simon concludes that God is not omniscient, calling attention to Genesis 18:21; in this example, Simon observes that God appears unable to foresee the future, and therefore descends so that he might know the situation on earth (Simon also evaluates the testing of Abraham in Genesis 22 thus).<sup>19</sup> On the basis of Genesis 8:21, where God is presented as enjoying the pleasing odor of sacrifice, Simon suggests that God is needy.<sup>20</sup> Simon can also call attention to the idea that God is subject to passions inasmuch as God repents of creation in Genesis 6:6.<sup>21</sup> Most pejorative, perhaps, is the charge that God is not good since God appears jealous of Adam in Genesis 3:22 and will not permit the primogenitor to live forever.<sup>22</sup>

In the narrative Peter anticipates these charges and in fact, shares with Clement his strategy for countering scriptural passages he thinks denigrate God.<sup>23</sup> Peter shares that Scripture has been infiltrated with falsehoods (*ψευδῆ*), even blasphemous words (*λόγοι βλασφημιοί*) and that spurious selections are those that misrepresent God.<sup>24</sup> Any statement in Scripture, for example, that suggests that God is one of many, that God is not omniscient, or that God is not good is said by Peter to be untrue.<sup>25</sup> The apostle traces the origin of corruptions in the text to just after the time of Moses.<sup>26</sup> Moses, after receiving the law from God, entrusted it orally to seventy elders of Exodus 24, who, in turn, transmitted the law faithfully; soon after the law is committed to writing, however, errors are introduced.<sup>27</sup> Even Jesus testifies to the false pericopae, according to the Homilist,<sup>28</sup> for Jesus urges everyone who seeks salvation to become "a judge of the books (which were) written to try" people.<sup>29</sup> From

the perspective of the Homilist, the falsehoods are not without a value or purpose; they were essentially added to Scripture to provide a test for the faithful that they might not accept blasphemous statements.<sup>30</sup> The spurious texts hide God from the impious and challenge the faithful in their spiritual journey.

Yet the whole of Scripture is not spurious for the Homilist; in the debates, Peter often relies on biblical writings as prooftexts in making his impassioned defense of God.<sup>31</sup> To the charge that God himself acknowledges other gods as one might argue from God's declaration in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make humankind," Peter cites Deuteronomy 13:2-4 that warns against following after false prophets who urge worship of other gods.<sup>32</sup> In his defense, Peter also presents other passages that refer to men and angels as gods, though that meaning is clearly not intended in Scripture.<sup>33</sup> For every unflattering depiction of God that Simon discerns, Peter counters with an alternative scriptural text to demonstrate the opposite. Yet the two reach an impasse as they both find biblical texts to support their positions.<sup>34</sup> To Simon's allegation that the Scriptures lead astray by means of these uncertainties, Peter replies that the ambiguities are meant to convict, since each finds in Scriptures what one wants.<sup>35</sup> At that point the apostle shares with Simon what is perhaps the hallmark of the unique hermeneutic here: the conviction that Scripture contains false pericopae.<sup>36</sup>

One might ask whether the approach to Scripture taken by the *Homilies* is necessitated by the threat of opponents for whom Scripture, when subjected to rigorous examination, refutes certain proto-orthodox claims such as the unity of God.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the foil in the *Homilies* pays a great deal of attention to inconsistencies in the Hebrew scriptures and demands a very literal reading of texts, eschewing allegorical and typological interpretations so prevalent among some early Christians. Far from assessing scriptural inconsistencies as a deficit, the *Homilies* interpret the contradictions as part of the divine plan and maintain that they play a vital role in soteriology.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, as we shall see, the *Homilies* respect oral tradition thought to derive from Moses that not only stands alongside Scripture, but also seems to be trustworthy and uncorrupted, in contrast to texts.

*Excursus: Scripture, oral instruction and authoritative teaching according to the Homilies*

Before considering further the hidden God, we reflect on the *Homilies'* understanding of Scripture. Written texts were assessed variously within the Greco-Roman world and were not always considered superior to oral instruction. In the *Homilies* too, orality trumps written texts, including Scripture; the bias toward oral traditions extends naturally to the sayings of Jesus as well. The fourth-century *Homilies* introduce Scripture typically with the expressions ἡ γραφή and αἱ γραφαί by which the Septuagint is intended.<sup>39</sup> Some biblical

texts appear to have been cited by memory and to have been included in the *Homilies* in rather free form.<sup>40</sup> With regard to biblical works cited in the *Homilies*, Genesis<sup>41</sup> and Deuteronomy<sup>42</sup> are especially favored. It is possible that the extensive discussion of passages from Genesis may have been necessitated by the exegetical interests of opponents' thought comparable to Marcionites.<sup>43</sup> The ubiquity of references from the Pentateuch in the *Homilies* might also be understood as a continuation of the growing reverence for the Torah rooted in Second Temple Judaism.<sup>44</sup>

From the perspective of the Homilist, the sayings of Jesus are authoritative and determinative of how one is to read the scriptures, that is the LXX.<sup>45</sup> The *Homilies* cite liberally the sayings of Jesus, including those considered today "canonical" and "non-canonical." While teachings associated with Jesus are plentiful, little of Jesus' life is presented in the *Homilies*; there is no mention of his birth and only passing reference to his death.<sup>46</sup> The *Homilies* draw especially on Matthew and occasionally on Luke, although there are a few references to John and possibly to Mark.<sup>47</sup> The manner of citing New Testament texts (for example, as mixed texts, harmonizations, and paraphrases) and the variety of sayings have seemed to some characteristic of second- and third-century Christian writers.<sup>48</sup>

The *Homilies* express a distrust of written sources and penchant for oral instruction that is not entirely novel for the Greco-Roman world and that recalls prior Jewish and Christian views on writing as well.<sup>49</sup> One thinks, for example, of the criticism in *1 Enoch* 69.8-11 of writing as a craft not intended for humankind. In this text which derives from the Parables (the last of the booklets associated with an anthology we commonly call *1 Enoch*), the art of writing is taught by a rebellious angel.<sup>50</sup> This view of writing, as a craft received from "demonic revelation," which derives from the first-century BCE or CE Parables is curious in light of the patriarch's traditional status as a scribe.<sup>51</sup> Looking forward, E. F. Osborn observed that a prejudice toward written texts was prevalent among Christians in the second century CE also.<sup>52</sup>

The reservation expressed toward writing was complemented at the same time by the preference of many Christians for "the living voice" or oral tradition. Thus, Papias, who flourished in the early second century, noted that he was partial to the spoken sayings of Jesus over those that were written.<sup>53</sup> The comment of Papias recalls also Greco-Roman emphasis on oral instruction in antiquity especially in Hellenistic school settings and among craftsmen.<sup>54</sup> The emphasis on oral instruction, moreover, reminds one, naturally, of the Oral Torah; Loveday Alexander's study of orality in the second century is important in helping us to see that preferences for orally transmitted teachings were common in rabbinic academies and hellenistic schools.

Why reticence toward written traditions? Hellenist criticisms of written documents express concern for a decline in the skills of memorization, necessary, of course, for preserving oral tradition.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, in educational settings there was an emphasis on learning under a trusted teacher. The

production of a book for a second-century Roman like Galen, in the words of Alexander, “was not an inevitable, or even necessarily a desirable end in itself: books are secondary to oral teaching, and the ideal method of learning is to use the book under the guidance of a teacher”;<sup>56</sup> transmission of information would happen ideally by means of tradents of teachers.<sup>57</sup> Further, critics of the written word knew that documents could be altered, as for example, in Revelation 22:18-19, or variously interpreted; without the benefit of transmission from a trusted source, it would be impossible to safeguard a tradition that could be amended or revised.<sup>58</sup> This same sort of rationale is presented in the letter of Peter which serves as a preface to the *Homilies*; in the letter Peter claims some unscrupulous parties have altered books of his preaching, especially through interpretation.<sup>59</sup> For this reason, books are to be guarded jealously, to be left in the care of bishops when one was away, and to be read by those properly initiated.<sup>60</sup> Such views of orality and texts suggest to us that the *Homilies*’ reaction to Scripture was rooted in a complex matrix, but that the Homilist was not alone in having reservations about written work.

#### GOD REVEALED THROUGH PROPHECY, THE TRUE PROPHET, AND THE BOOKS OF PREACHING

In addition to oral instruction, the community of the *Homilies* has another means toward accessing or learning about God. Prophecy, which the *Homilies* esteem, and the True Prophet provide correct information about the divine. The *Homilies* approach prophecy not as a phenomenon of the past nor as confined to scriptural tradition. Moreover, the *Homilies* hold Jesus in high regard precisely because of his status as a prophet. We take up both of these points in detail.

Like the *Homilies*’ nuanced view of Scripture, the appropriation of biblical prophecy also deserves some comment. With the exception of Isaiah, references to books associated with the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures are not abundant in the *Homilies*.<sup>61</sup> One might wonder why prophets other than Isaiah are virtually ignored. The *Homilies*’ criticism of sacrificial cult, the Temple and the kings of Israel could well explain the absence of prophetic texts where these subjects predominate.<sup>62</sup> Do we find an explicit diminishment of scriptural prophets on the part of the *Homilies*? Perhaps.<sup>63</sup> One telling example is the saying of Jesus familiar also from Matthew 5:17. While Matthew’s version reports that Jesus did not come to destroy the law *and* the prophets, the *Homilies* present Jesus saying: “I am not come to destroy the law.”<sup>64</sup> Similarly, whereas the letter of Peter refers to the various utterances of the prophets which confound, Jesus, the infallible Prophet, prophesies plainly.<sup>65</sup>

The *Homilies* also redefine the prophetic persona of the Hebrew scriptures, celebrating Adam, Moses, and Jesus as prophets of distinction.<sup>66</sup> The *Homilies* understand prophecy to be predictive and to give access to what is hidden;

thus according to the Homilist: “He is a true prophet who always knows all things and even the thoughts of men.”<sup>67</sup> Also, according the *Homilies*, “the one true prophet does not only know things present, but stretches out prophecy without limit as far as the world to come and needs nothing for its interpretation, not prophesying darkly and ambiguously”;<sup>68</sup> the *Homilies* also add that the prophet “looking upon all things with the boundless eye of his soul, knows hidden things.” That Moses did not *write* the law but intended oral transmission, states Peter, proves his prophetic skill for Moses must have been aware that the written Torah would have been subject to destruction at the time of Nebuchadnezzar and would be lost.<sup>69</sup> The *Homilies* present Jesus as such a prophet as well: “He spoke in plain words the things that were straightway to happen.”<sup>70</sup> One example the *Homilies* highlight is that Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple which, to the mind of the author, occurs not long thereafter.<sup>71</sup>

While prophecy and prophets are celebrated,<sup>72</sup> the *Homilies* understand there to be different sorts of prophecy. In fact, the *Homilies* distinguish all prophecy as male or female which is defined respectively as true or false.<sup>73</sup> False prophecy seems to concern what is transitory; true prophecy, testifying to an unchanging message, derives from God. Moreover, one prophet in particular is heralded, the True Prophet (ἀληθῆς προφήτης), as manifested in Adam and Jesus. This dualist means of assessment – the notion of figures being associated with either male or female prophecy – is related to the syzygies tradition, the idea that for each generation there are contrasting, or adversarial pairs. Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, Simon Magus and Peter, and the Anti-Christ and the Christ are examples of such pairs.<sup>74</sup> It is typical in the schema that the Homilist establishes that the lesser individual (to be identified with the female) comes before the greater (thus, Cain precedes Abel). But a problem arises for in the first syzygy, Adam, an example of a True Prophet, for the Homilist, comes before Eve, representative of female prophecy and this world.<sup>75</sup> Giovanni Battista Bazzana notes that in the *Homilies* the female prophetic principle is associated with polytheism and bloodshed.<sup>76</sup> For example, the *Homilies* associate Eve with Cain: “she possessed him first ... for he was a murderer and a liar”; and they then call attention to the problematic lineage of Cain: “Those who came forth by succession from him were the first adulterers. And there were psalteries, and harps, and forgers of instruments of war. Wherefore also the prophecy of his descendents being full of adulterers and of psalteries, secretly by means of pleasures excites to wars.”<sup>77</sup> Since the *Homilies* do not apparently recognize the tradition of Adam eating the fruit in the garden as described in Genesis 3, Eve, embodying the female principle and being the source for the Cainite line, provides an explanation for the origin of evil.<sup>78</sup> The Homilist presents Adam, on the other hand, as the sinless first prophet who is also the True Prophet. Adam, possessing the Holy Spirit of Christ, appears in another incarnation as Jesus.<sup>79</sup> The *Homilies* also facilitate the conclusion that Adam and Christ are the same with allusion to a form of

metempsychosis, reporting of Christ that he “has changed his forms and his names from the beginning of the world and so reappeared again and again until coming upon his own times.”<sup>80</sup>

Still, the Homilist’s soteriology sees Jesus, the True Prophet, as a concealed figure with regard to *all* the people of God. From the perspective of the Homilist, the people of God can have different teachers or prophets. Jesus may not be accepted by – and in fact, he may be concealed from – the Jewish community, who has Moses instead as a teacher or prophet. Alternatively, Jesus may be available for communities for whom Moses is not a teacher or prophet:

For on this account Jesus is *concealed* from the Jews, who have taken Moses as their teacher, and Moses is *hidden* from those who have believed Jesus. For, there being one teaching by both, God accepts him who has believed either of these. But believing a teacher is for the sake of doing the things spoken by God. And that this is so our Lord Himself says, ‘I thank thee, Father of heaven and earth, because Thou hast *concealed* these things from the wise and elder, and hast revealed them to sucking babes.’ Thus God himself has *concealed* a teacher from some, as foreknowing what they ought to do, and has revealed him to others, who are ignorant what they ought to do.<sup>81</sup>

Whereas the motif of hiddenness may assist the Gospel of John in forging a polemical view of Israel and Judaism, it leads the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* in another direction. The *Homilies* impart that both concealment and revelation can facilitate two distinct communities in their discernment of an enigmatic God.

## ESOTERIC TEACHINGS, ORAL TRADITIONS, AND RESTRICTED BOOKS

We consider finally the esoteric traditions that inform the *Homilies*. Peter declares to Clement: “The will of God has been kept in obscurity in many ways.”<sup>82</sup> How then is God revealed? In addition to the True Prophet who is said to enlighten souls so that humankind may discern the way of salvation,<sup>83</sup> the *Homilies* emphasize a tradition of oral teaching associated with Moses and books associated with Peter that are restricted to insiders.

The *Homilies* regard highly Moses and the law (described as eternal; νόμος αἰώνιος) he transmitted.<sup>84</sup> It is fascinating that the *Homilies* reject the notion of Moses writing the law. Instead, they teach that Moses shares with seventy elders an oral law.<sup>85</sup> This law, unlike that which was written,<sup>86</sup> is not subject to corruption and is preserved by those who hold the chair of Moses (καθέδρα Μωυσέως).<sup>87</sup> Oral law and oral instruction help to mediate the community’s

teaching and also keep individuals from erring when it comes to reading Scripture.<sup>88</sup>

The Epistle of Peter to James also makes reference to books of Peter's preaching that are to be shared only with those having the appropriate background, those found worthy.<sup>89</sup> Thus, writes Peter in the letter: "In order that the like may also happen to those among us as to these Seventy, give the books of my preaching to our brethren, with the like mystery of initiation. For if it be not so done, our word of truth will be rent into many opinions."<sup>90</sup>

In addition to the books of Peter's preaching, one avoids confusion and sinning against God in these matters by learning the mysteries of Scripture (τὸ μυστήριον τῶν γραφῶν).<sup>91</sup> Jesus proves to be the ultimate means to interpretation<sup>92</sup> as he is entrusted "with the key of the kingdom, which is knowledge" that "alone can open the gate of life."<sup>93</sup> As in the case of Moses' instructions to the seventy elders, the *Homilies* call attention to the oral dimension of Jesus' teaching. Sayings of Jesus are introduced, for example, with ἔφη or ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν λέγει, rather than with ἡ γραφή that precedes LXX citations.<sup>94</sup> While it is possible that the difference in citing texts from the Hebrew scriptures and New Testament exists in the *Homilies* to accommodate the literary pretense that the romance occurs in the lifetime of Peter – that is, the sayings of Jesus are presented as part of the recollection of the apostle rather than as part of a written text<sup>95</sup> – the Homilist expresses concern about how books have been misused and misinterpreted. Perhaps this explains the *Homilies'* preference for oral transmission; the teachings of Jesus are recollected as sayings because as the ultimate guarantor of veracity, they are not subject to corruption, unlike the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>96</sup> The *Homilies* communicate esoteric tendencies through teachings (especially those that are written) that are to be restricted to initiates and are safeguarded.

## FINAL REMARKS

We have explored how a fourth-century Syrian work known as the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* envisages the deity obscured through Scripture and revealed through teaching and oral tradition. En route we have also considered a number of the distinctive aspects of the *Homilies* (e.g. the idea that Scripture contains false pericopae and the notion that prophecy is male or female). The *Homilies* present a tremendous opportunity for reconsideration of early Christianity and of the diversity therein. By means of this complex work, scholars are also rethinking constructs of religious identity, especially with regard to Judaism and Christianity, and may also have a new vista for thinking about Jewish–Christian relations in antiquity. At the same time, some of the stances taken by the *Homilies* that emphasize orality over written texts and express savvy in interpretation of Scripture are recognizable in other streams of late antique Christianity. In terms of its presentation of God, one

sees ultimately in the *Homilies* a tradition that relies more on teaching and less on Scripture in revealing the deity. Moreover, concealment with the sense of discretion assists the community in guarding traditions from those who would misinterpret or challenge key teachings.

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## NOTES

1. For a helpful overview of the Pseudo-Clementine literature and its history, see Kelley (2006: 7–27) and Reed (2003: 189–231, esp. 197).
2. The *Recognitions* are not extant in Greek, which is assumed to be the original language of composition. With regard to genre, the Pseudo-Clementines are thought to be the first known Christian representatives of the romance of recognitions. See F. S. Jones (1992: 1061).
3. The MSS are referred to respectively as P, after Codex Parisinus gr. 930, and as O, after Codex Vaticanus Ottobonianus gr. 443. On the relationship between the two, see Strecker (1981: ix–x).
4. See Hort (1901: 78–81) and also Rehm *et al.* (1992: xvi–xx).
5. See, for example, Kelley (2006: 14–16). A fourth-century date is argued or assumed in numerous contributions to Amsler *et al.* (2008), a collection which offers the contemporary “state of the question” with regard to the Pseudo-Clementines.
6. For example, terminology employed appears to reflect the christological debates of this period; thus, Bigg (1890: 157–93, esp. 191–2) theorizes that the Homilist was active in the *homoousian* debate (cf. *Homilies* 16.15). See also Strecker (1981: 268), who thinks the Homilist’s Arianism anticipates the Nicene council. But see Lorenz (1979: 153–4), who finds the philosophy and cosmology of the *Homilies* inconsistent with Arianism. F. S. Jones (1982: 75) observes that Lorenz’s argument that Arianism lacks Jewish-Christian influence challenges the views of numerous Pseudo-Clementine scholars. Likewise, scholars of an earlier generation – Baur (1835: 313), Hilgenfeld (1848: 306) and Uhlhorn (1854: 435), for example – who were inclined to date the *Homilies* to the second century, did not observe Arianist tendencies. On Eusebius, see Hort (1901: 32–5).
7. Hort (1901: 89); Strecker (1981: 268). The earlier view, shared by Baur (1835: 405), Schliemann (1844: 549–51) and Hilgenfeld (1848: 306) was that the *Homilies* originated in Rome.
8. See Waitz (1904: 368–9) and Strecker (1981: 268).
9. Hort (1901: 89) suggests, for example, that the Homilist was an Elchasite. Others, for example, Bigg (1890: 175) characterized the Homilist as an Ebionite.
10. See, for example, Reed (2003: 228–31).
11. Because of shared material, one can discern that a common source was utilized by both the Homilist and Recognitionist, and subject to redaction. For a survey of the research undertaken on the *Grundschrift*, see F. S. Jones (1982: 8–14; 1997/1998:

321–3). Recent deliberations situate the *Grundschrift* in third-century Syria or the Transjordan (Strecker 1981: 259, 267, 291; F. S. Jones 1992: 1061). On the provenance of the shared source, Strecker (1981: 260) suggests: “Zölesyrien mit den vielfältigen Formen des Christentums ... wird die Heimat des Grundschriftautors sein.” Just as with the *Homilies*, the attempts to define the theological predisposition of the author of the foundational document are varied. The *Grundschrift* has long been characterized as Jewish-Christian; see F. S. Jones (1997/1998: 323), though Drijvers (1990: 314–23, esp. 323) has argued instead that the shared source is an anti-Marcionite writing that served to defend “nascent orthodoxy” in Syria. To my mind, the more circumspect location of the *Grundschrift* by Strecker (1981: 260) in a religious landscape that is not so sharply delineated is especially on target. The source critical examination of the Pseudo-Clementines extends also to the sources employed by the author/redactor of the *Grundschrift*. Since the seventeenth century, scholars have posited sources like *Kerygmata Petrou* (Preachings of Peter), *Praxeis Petrou* (Acts of Peter) and a dispute between Peter and Appion, sources they have then sought to delineate. For a survey of the research undertaken on the *Grundschrift*'s sources, see F. S. Jones (1982: 14–33). In addition to these hypothetical sources, the *Grundschrift* apparently drew upon the Septuagint, pseudepigraphical writings like Enochic literature and Jubilees, the work of Bardaisan, and philosophical handbooks; so F. S. Jones (2000: 717–19). Though differing in reconstructions of the sources, most acknowledge that this *Grundschrift* drew on other ancient sources as well.

12. See, for example, Kelley (2006: esp. 6–7, 17, 25–35).
13. The *Homilies* hold law (here νόμος) in high regard and understand it to have been passed down orally from Moses to seventy elders, a tradition comparable to the notion of the Oral Torah. In the *Homilies*, Jesus also esteems and teaches this same law which people are called to follow. νόμος is not, however, synonymous with the written Torah or the scriptures, since the latter is said to contain falsehoods, a stance unique to the *Homilies* vis-à-vis the *Recognitions*. Strecker (1981: 40) has attributed, however, this distinctive view of false pericopae to the *Grundschrift*, calling attention to a similar stance on Scripture in the *Recognitions* (see *Recognitions* 1.21 which alludes to Scripture not being plainly written and requiring someone to expound it). In contradistinction, Shuve (2008: 437–46, esp. 438) follows Jones in seeing the sentiments of *Recognitions* 1.21 as compatible with “proto-orthodox” views on the role of tradition in interpreting Scripture; that is, they argue, one need not appeal to the distinctive teaching of the *Homilies* on the false pericopae in order to make sense of this passage in the *Recognitions*.
14. The notion of false pericopae in the *Homilies* may be fueled by a desire to challenge opposing interpretations of Scripture. Other second-century Christians seem to be experimenting with critical evaluation of biblical texts perhaps as a response to the charge of inconsistencies in Scripture. See, for example, Ptolemy's Letter to Flora.
15. See *Homilies* 2.22.
16. With regard to the *Homilies*' polemics, there is a strain of anti-Paulinism in the Pseudo-Clementines romances and prefatory letters (see, for example, *Epistola Petri ad Jacobum* 2 and *Homilies* 17.13–19). See Strecker (1981: 187–96) and Piovanelli (2008: 241–8). Marcion also would appear to an opponent against whom the *Homilies* react. See Hort (1901: 109–11). Marcionites were active still in fourth-century Syria; see Drijvers (1987/1988: 153–72). On Simon as a composite figure, see, for example, Côté (2001: 513–23) and Reed (2008b: 173–216, esp. 203). Kelley (2006: 179–207) assesses Simon Magus in the *Recognitions* in a similar manner; that is, the figure is understood to represent numerous fourth-century religious rivals.
17. See Shuve (2008: 438–9). On the heresiology of the *Homilies*, see also Reed (2008a: 273–98).

18. In *Homilies* 16.5–6 alone, Simon contends evidence of polytheism in Gen. 2:16–17; 3:5, 22; Exod. 22:28; Deut. 4:34; 10:17; Jer. 10:11; Pss. 1:1; 35:10; 82:1; 86:8.
19. See *Homilies* 3.38–9.
20. *Homilies* 3.39.
21. *Homilies* 3.38–9.
22. *Homilies* 18.1.
23. *Homilies* 2.39.
24. *Homilies* 2.38; cf. also *Homilies* 2.51; 16.14.
25. *Homilies* 2.40: “Everything that is spoken or written against God is false. But we say this truly, not only for the sake of reputation, but for the sake of truth.” Throughout I follow the translations of Smith *et al.* (1886/1995), now considered by many to be dated.
26. *Homilies* 2.38.
27. *Homilies* 2.38.
28. *Homilies* 2.51, 3.50, and 18.20 provide a telling expansion of Mark 12:24: “On this account ye do err, not knowing *the true things* of the Scriptures, *on which account ye are ignorant also* of the power of God” (emphasis provided to indicate additions in the *Homilies*). See Kline (1975: 117) and Strecker (1981: 121).
29. *Homilies* 18.20; cf. also 2.51; 3.50; 18.20.
30. *Homilies* 2.38; 3.4, 5.
31. *Homilies* 2.43–44, 49–50. Simon and then Peter in his rebuttals adopt a literalist reading of Scripture. Critics of Hebrew scriptures, such as Marcion, were known for having rejected allegorical readings of biblical texts.
32. *Homilies* 16.11, 13:
 

If the Scriptures or prophets speak of gods, they do so to try those who hear. For thus it is written: “If there arise among you a prophet, giving signs and wonders, and that sign and wonder shall then come to pass, and he say to thee, Let us go after and worship other gods which thy fathers have not known, ye shall not hearken to the words of that prophet ... but if thou say in thy heart, How did he do that sign or wonder? Thou shalt surely know that he who tried thee, tried thee to see if thou dost fear the Lord thy God.”
33. For example, Peter calls attention to the angels who represent God’s presence and are ambiguously referred to as “God” or “the Lord” in Scripture (Gen. 32:25–31; Exod. 3:2) and to the language that God uses himself with regard to making Moses as God to Pharaoh (Exod. 7:1).
34. So Simon declares in *Homilies* 16.9:
 

I adduced clear passages from the Scriptures to prove that there are many gods; and you, in reply, brought forward as many or more from the same Scriptures, showing that God is one, and He the God of the Jews ... Since, then, these very Scriptures say at one time that there are many gods and at another that there is only one ... what conclusion ought we to come to in consequence of this, but that the Scriptures themselves lead us astray?
35. *Homilies* 16.10.
36. *Homilies* 3.48–51 and 18.12–20. Peter initially seems hesitant to share the teaching of the false periscope with Gentile crowds, lest they become confused about Scripture (*Homilies* 2.39).
37. Grant (1988: 162, 171–2) notes that Theophilus of Antioch, like the *Homilies*, allows the teaching of Jesus to determine the status of Scripture as true or false. Also interesting is that Theophilus presents Adam as a prophet and compares Adam and Christ.
38. Drijvers (1990: 320).

39. Cf. *Homilies* 2.38–41, 48, 50–51; 3.2–4, 9–10, 17, 38, 40–42, 49–51, 55–8; 16.2, 5, 7–9, 11–14; 17.4–5, 8, 17; 18.19–22; 19.1, 3, 8; 20.9. A citation from the Septuagint or an allusion to a biblical episode might be introduced with: ἡ γραφή λέγει; cf. *Homilies* 16.11. Though Jesus' teachings are clearly authoritative, the *Homilies* make a formal distinction between the Hebrew scriptures and works that would come to make up the New Testament canon (*Homilies* 3.55). See below and also Kline (1975: 178). Perhaps the distinction made in the *Homilies* between Scripture and the teaching of Jesus merely facilitates the pseudepigraphical context of the first century; that is, Peter, as one of the Twelve, would certainly be able to speak knowledgeably with regard to Jesus' deeds and speech. Cf. Kline (1975: 179). Strecker (1981: 117–36) demonstrates that the authors of the Pseudo-Clementines utilize the LXX, not the Masoretic text, nor an idiosyncratic Jewish-Christian translation; further examination does not reveal significant text critical variants for the scriptures.
40. It is interesting that when the *Homilies* make reference to selections from the canonical gospels that cite Hebrew scriptures, the *Homilies* provide the citations in a manner that more closely conforms to the versions in the LXX than in the gospels. See Kline (1975: 141–9). For example, *Homilies* 8.21, describing the Temptation of Christ (Mt. 4:10 and Lk. 4:8) cites Deut. 6:13; 10:20: "Therefore he (Jesus) answered and he said, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and only him shall thou serve." *Homilies* 8 and 10 feature φοβηθήσῃ as does the LXX; Mt. 4 and Lk. 4 have, however, προσκυνήσεις ("worship"). See also *Homilies* 10.5. There is also the instance of Hebrew scriptures being transformed by the Homilist into a saying of Jesus. Thus, *Homilies* 3.56 presents Jesus, much like Mt. 9:13 and 12:7, quoting Hosea 6:6; instead of having Jesus introduce the citation "If you knew what this meant ...", *Homilies* 3 simply reports: "He (Jesus) said, 'God wishes mercy, and not sacrifice, knowledge of him and not sacrifices.'" Though Mt. 9:13 and 12:7 cite only Hosea 6:6a, the Homily completes the verse almost exactly as one finds it in the LXX. See Kline (1975: 142–6).
41. Gen. 1:1–2 (x 2), 26 (x 3); 2:17; 3:5, 22; 6:6 (x 3); 8:21; 15:13–16; 18:21; 22:1 (x 2); 49:10; also composite texts Gen. 11:7a + 18:21b. See Strecker (1981: 117–36) for evaluation of each citation and also for the corresponding passage in the *Homilies*.
42. Deut. 4:34, 39; 6:4 (x 2); 10:14, 17 (x 2); composite texts: Deut. 11:16 + 13:7; 13:2–3, 10–11; 30:15; 32:7, 29; 34:5.
43. On second temple and late antique interest in Genesis, especially Gen. 6:1–4, as the text pertains to the origin of evil, see Stroumsa (1984: esp. 16–19).
44. See also Strecker (1981: 176).
45. *Homilies* 3.58.
46. *Homilies* 3.19; 11.20. Birdsall (1992: 355).
47. See Strecker (1981: 121, 218). Kline (1975: 173) argues that the *Grundschrift* relied on a harmonized sayings source based on Matthew and Luke. Strecker observes polemical allusions to Acts of the Apostles, Galatians and 1 Cor., which he attributes to his key source, *Kerygmata Petrou*. See, for example, *Homilies* 11.35 and 17.14 which are thought by Strecker to allude to Acts 9:3. See also *Homilies* 17.18 (= allusion to Gal. 1:16); *Epistola Petri ad Jacobum* 2 and *Homilies* 17.19 (= allusion to Gal. 2:11–13); *Homilies* 17.18 (= allusion to 1 Cor. 2:9–11) and *Homilies* 17.19 (= 1 Cor. 15:8). Strecker (1971: 241–85, esp. 259). While *Homilies* 3.53 may exhibit influence of Acts 3:22–3, Strecker notes that the parallel in *Recognitions* differs and thus he attributes the possible allusion to a later stratum of the *Homilies*. Like the *Didascalia*, a work of third-century Syria, the *Homilies* do not seem acquainted with the catholic epistles or the Apocalypse of John, works "slow to find acceptance in northern and eastern Syria," as Strecker (1971: 258–9; 1981: 218) observes.
48. Birdsall (1992: 350).
49. See, for example, L. Alexander (1990: 221–47) and Heszer (2001: 94–101).

50. So Baynes (2011: 40–41).
51. See also Nickelsburg and VanderKam (2011: 302–3).
52. See Osborn (1959: 335–43, here 335).
53. See Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.39.3–4. My gratitude to April DeConick for pointing out this example. See also Pliny, *Epistolae* 2.3; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 2.8.2; and L. Alexander (1990: 227).
54. See, for example, Galen, *De libris propriis* 5 and *De antidotis* 1; also Alexander (1990: 235–45).
55. See, for example, Plato, *Phaedrus* 275A, as noted by Baynes (2011: 4–5).
56. Alexander (1990: 231).
57. See, for example, Galen, *De venae sectione, adversus Erasistratum* 5.
58. Still, additions to oral traditions in the Greco-Roman world were often reckoned improvements. That is, received tradition was not always considered as “an inviolate, fixed body of doctrine, but as a developing, organic system.” So Alexander (1990: 235).
59. *Epistola Petri ad Jacobum* 2.
60. *Contestatio*.
61. Because the texts most frequently cited by the *Homilies* (with the exception of Genesis) derive from Deuteronomy, Isaiah and Psalms, it is interesting to note as well that among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the three biblical “books represented by the most manuscripts” are the Psalms, Deuteronomy and Isaiah; moreover Ulrich (1999: 19) observes that these three are also cited the most frequently in the New Testament. While the Psalms are included among the Writings in the Hebrew Bible, some Second Temple period Jews and early Christians understood them to be “prophetic” in nature, and attributing them to David, considered him a prophet as well. Birdsall (1992: 353) and Strecker (1981: 177) both call attention to the diminishment of the prophetic writings in the Scripture during the Second Temple period and Late Antiquity. Strecker explains that the reticence in part was fueled by the growing rationalism in Hellenistic Judaism that countered anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Prophets. Philo, for example, does not seem to make much use of the Prophets. Strecker and Birdsall also observe that in rabbinic tradition and in synagogue liturgy the Prophets are subordinate to the Torah.
62. *Homilies* 2.16, 44; 3.26, 45, 53; 7.4.
63. Strecker (1981: 177) and Birdsall (1992: 353) offer various suggestions as to why the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures were not as prominent in the *Homilies*. The *Homilies*, it seems to me, are not just overlooking the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures, but rather are challenging their relevance and ability to communicate God’s word. See, for example, *Homilies* 3.53.
64. *Homilies* 3.51. See also Birdsall (1992: 353).
65. *Epistola Petri ad Jacobum* 1; *Homilies* 3.11–12, 30. See also *Homilies* 2.17; 3.12–15, 53.
66. See Drijvers (1990: 315).
67. *Homilies* 3.11.
68. *Homilies* 3.12.
69. *Homilies* 3.47. A similar view of prophecy is shared by the *Genesis Rabba* 17, which considers Adam a prophet because he is able to name the animals.
70. *Homilies* 3.15.
71. *Homilies* 3.15.
72. Prophecy is said to distinguish true religion from philosophy. See *Homilies* 15.5.
73. *Homilies* 2.15–17; 3.27. This sort of gendered classification for prophecy, especially the notion of female prophecy belonging to the ephemeral cosmos in contrast the world of the divine, is an aspect of the *Homilies* that most scholars think to be Gnostic. The idea is developed as part of the *Homilies*’ teaching on syzygies (contrasting pairs or counterparts). Further, the association of female prophecy with the transitory world

- corresponds to dualist views of the world that distinguish the spiritual from the material realm. See also Strecker (1981: 154–9).
74. See *Homilies* 2.16–17; also *Recognitions* 3.59–61. The syzygies tradition is to be found in both the *Homilies* and *Recognitions*. On the background of the Clementine syzygies, see Magri (2008: 387–95). Other possible allusions to syzygies in the *Homilies* may be observed in *Homilies* 2.15; 8.21; 15.7 in which this world and the world to come are juxtaposed. *Homilies* 8.21, which contrasts Christ as king of a future period with the devil as king of this world, is especially interesting in terms of the contribution of April DeConick to this volume, in which she calls attention to the dualism in the Gospel of John and illumines a reading of the gospel in which the devil can be said to be the offspring of a demiurge in charge of this world.
  75. See Bazzana (2008: 316).
  76. Bazzana (2008: 316–17).
  77. *Homilies* 2.25.
  78. The Homilist argues, contrary to Gen. 3, that Adam had no need to sin or to take of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (*Homilies* 3.18). Instead, Adam, fashioned in the image of God, is not ignorant but has the Holy Spirit of God’s foreknowledge (*Homilies* 3.15).
  79. *Homilies* 3.17–18, 20–21.
  80. *Homilies* 3.20. Drijvers (1990: 315) may be correct to interpret this passage thus: “From the beginning of the world there was therefore a continuous prophecy appearing in different form and under different names from Adam to Christ, the first and the last True Prophet.”
  81. *Homilies* 8.6.
  82. *Homilies* 1.18.
  83. *Homilies* 1.19.
  84. *Epistola Petri ad Jacobum* 2; *Homilies* 3.51; 8.10.
  85. *Homilies* 2.38; 3.47; see also *Epistola Petri ad Jacobum* 1–3. Addressing the common tradition that Moses authored the Torah, Peter argues that Moses could not have written the law since Deuteronomy 34.6 records Moses’ death (*Homilies* 3.47).
  86. *Epistola Petri ad Jacobum* 2.
  87. Pharisees and scribes, “those who know the law more than others” (*Homilies* 11.28) appear to be included by the *Homilies* in the tradition of preserving the true law. The *Homilies* clarify that while Jesus regarded some as hypocrites, he did not make such claim with respect to all (οὐ πρὸς πάντος). Followers of Jesus, according to the *Homilies*, were to render obedience to some of the Pharisees and scribes “because they were entrusted with the chair of Moses” (*Homilies* 11.29). Further, it was proclaimed by Jesus who knew the true things of the law (*Homilies* 3.51, 54).
  88. *Epistola Petri ad Jacobum* 1. This law transmitted orally does not refer to a general moral law, but to a form of Jewish law (cf. *Homilies* 4.22). See Strecker (1981: 163). Thus the narrative champions Gentile converts who consent to the law. Once the Syro-Phoenician woman (cf. Mt. 15:21–28; Mk 7:24–30) accedes to living a life according to the law, for example, she obtains healing for her daughter (*Homilies* 2.19). Further, special emphasis is given to observing purity laws that pertain to the separation of men and women during a woman’s menstrual cycle or to purification after intercourse (*Homilies* 7.8; 11.28–30). On these matters of purity, the *Homilies* do not appear to have much disagreement with the tradition represented by Pharisees and scribes. After citing Mt. 23:25–6, *Homilies* 11.29 adds that “the pure man can purify both that which is without and that which is within.” Dietary restrictions that concern table fellowship are also upheld (*Homilies* 13.4) but are reinterpreted so that baptism determines social boundaries. Perhaps as a rejoinder to Gal. 2:11–14, table fellowship is determined by the status of the diner, which, in the *Homilies*, relates to baptism. A Gentile convert

- proclaims of her new faith: “we (do not) take our food from the same table as Gentiles, inasmuch as we cannot eat along with them, because they live impurely. But when we have persuaded them to have true thoughts, and to follow a right course of action, and have baptized them with a thrice blessed invocation, then we dwell with them” (*Homilies* 13.4).
89. *Epistola Petri ad Jacobum* 3.
  90. *Epistola Petri ad Jacobum* 1.
  91. *Homilies* 2.40.
  92. Hence Peter proclaims, “Obeying Christ, we learn to know what is false from the Scriptures” (*Homilies* 16.14). The notion that the scriptures contain mysteries that require the guidance of one teacher, the True Prophet, to unravel recalls to some extent the manner of biblical interpretation at Qumran. Through the direction of the Teacher of Righteousness, biblical texts, especially those subjected to the interpretative technique of the *pesharim*, revealed their hidden meaning and intent. While the interpretative key for the *pesharim* may have been determined by the group’s own situation, the hermeneutic for the *Homilies* seems far simpler: in instances of contradiction in Scripture, one is to choose the more reverential position, especially when creation bears witness to God (cf. *Homilies* 19.8).
  93. *Homilies* 3.18. The key belongs to those who possess the chair of Moses and seems to concern specifically knowledge of the law and its proper interpretation. Apparently those whom Jesus opposes among the Pharisees and scribes also have the key of the kingdom, that is knowledge, “but those wishing to enter they do not suffer to do so” (*Homilies* 3.18). See also nn. 87–8 above with regard to the *Homilies*’ perspective on Pharisees and scribes.
  94. *Homilies* 3.15 and e.g. 8.6. Comparable is the *Didascalia* which proclaims in several passages its catholic character (see 8, 9, 21, 24, 25), referring to the “holy scriptures and the gospel of God.” But it differs from the “‘orthodoxy’ with which we are familiar,” and represents a type of Jewish-Christianity, as Strecker (1971: 246) notes.
  95. Memory formulae, for example μέμνημαι, occur five times in the *Homilies* (3.50; 8.4; 19.2, 20; 20.9) and according to Kline (1975: 178–9) serve this very purpose.
  96. For the student of terms like “canonical” and “apocryphal,” there is striking irony in the thrice-repeated saying of Jesus “Be wise money-changers” (γίνεσθε τραπεζίται δόκιμοι; cf. *Homilies* 2.51; 3.50; and 18.20), a command for disciples to evaluate Scripture with care so as to distinguish the false passages from the true. It would seem to be suggesting that as bankers are able to distinguish between what is genuine and counterfeit, so too must the individual reading Scripture. Of course, the saying itself would be typically labeled as “apocryphal” today.

## CHAPTER 7

# HOW HIDDEN WAS GOD?

## REVELATION AND PEDAGOGY IN ANCIENT AND MIEVEAL HERMETIC WRITINGS

*David Porreca*

The aim of this essay is to shed some light on the place of the hidden, trans-cosmic god in the corpus of philosophical and sacred writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, I would like to juxtapose what I believe to be a clear didactic intent in the Hermetic writings with the exhortations to secrecy that are the hallmark of many works of esoteric revelation, including the Hermetic corpus. Why did the Hermetic authors think that there should be recorded teachings about a fundamentally hidden god? In other words, how hidden was the Hermetic god, and hidden from whom?

The answers to these questions will depend to some extent on the chronological parameters set for the study, which are to examine the Hermetica in the context of their initial elaboration in antiquity as well as their reception and use in the Middle Ages. My essay will focus first on a broad description of the nature and origin of the Hermetic corpus, followed by an assessment of its initial didactic intent. The use of Hermetic texts in didactic contexts continues into the medieval period, under considerably altered circumstances. I shall then focus on examining the various exhortations to secrecy in the Hermetic writings. The mandates toward secrecy are not universal in the Hermetic tradition, since it is explicitly permitted for the teacher to reveal his knowledge of the divine, but only to those deemed worthy. I suggest that the mechanism for determining the worthiness of pupils is precisely a form of progressive initiation. The exact nature of the Hermetic god to be revealed in teachings or hidden from unworthy eyes will be the focus of the final section of this essay, with reference in particular to the characteristics that make God either knowable, or transcendent, imperceptible, and unknowable.

## NATURE AND ORIGIN OF THE HERMETIC CORPUS

The surviving collection of works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus – a mythical Egyptian sage – is generally datable to the first three centuries CE. Therefore, the movement responsible for these texts developed around the same time as Gnosticism, Christianity and other revealed mystery religions that flourished under the *pax Romana*. The surviving works represent only a small fraction of the works written under the name of Hermes at the time.<sup>2</sup> The philosophical orientation of the material was broadly Neoplatonic – the Hierarchy of Being looms large in the background of the Hermetic writings – with some input from Stoic and Aristotelian physics.<sup>3</sup> Hermes' reputation was one of great antiquity and wisdom, especially with regard to knowledge of the divine order of the universe, including occult influences in the created world that enabled the functioning of such *technē* as astrology, alchemy, magic, and divination.<sup>4</sup> The works that will be the focus of this essay are religious and philosophical, since the more technical and operational material has little to say about the nature of God, hidden or not.

The original audience of the Hermetic corpus appears to have been composed of small circles of individuals motivated to explore questions surrounding the interface between the human and the divine.<sup>5</sup> These Hermetic conventicles seem to have elaborated a liturgy of sorts, complete with hymns, prayers, and rituals. Their perspective is one of theurgistic monotheism which incorporates the traditional pagan polytheistic gods within its scheme, while also expressing cosmogonic and theological ideas that were broadly consonant with the Christian doctrine that was coalescing around the same time. There is ample internal evidence within the Hermetic material that these small groups of people interested in the divine went through various stages of initiation into the knowledge revealed to and transmitted by Hermes.<sup>6</sup>

Originally written in Greek, the Hermetic material survives translated into Latin, Coptic, Armenian, Syriac, and Arabic.<sup>7</sup> There is a strong Egyptianizing streak in the *Hermetica*, and scholars still dispute the extent to which this focus on the country of the Nile is authentic or merely a veneer designed to lend the religious *gravitas* associated with Egypt in antiquity to the writings.<sup>8</sup> There is definitely a North African focus to the transmission and knowledge of the *Hermetica* during Antiquity, since the vast majority of the Church Fathers who show an extensive knowledge of the Hermetic texts were either Egyptian themselves, or more broadly North African. Examples include Tertullian, Arnobius, Lactantius, St Augustine, and Quodvultdeus on the Latin side, and Clement of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, Didymus of Alexandria, and Zosimus of Panopolis among the Greeks.<sup>9</sup> Even the manuscript transmission of the sole surviving Hermetic treatise in Latin, the *Asclepius*, has North African associations: it gets transmitted in the Middle Ages along with Apuleius' philosophical works, and the translation of the *Asclepius* from the Greek is also attributed to Apuleius, who was himself a North African from the same area

as St Augustine. Indeed, Clement of Alexandria, writing around 200 CE, mentions the existence of forty-two books of Hermes that were indispensable to the Egyptian pagan priests of his day.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the fact that important Hermetic works appear in Coptic – including significant excerpts from the *Asclepius* as well as the Hermetic work most clearly associated with initiatory ritual and mystical revelation, entitled *The Ogdoad and the Ennead* – seals the link between the Hermetica and Egypt. They may have been intended for a Hellenized audience, but the relevance and popularity of the teachings were rooted in the deep soils of the Egyptian *prisca theologia*.

## DIDACTIC FOCUS

The didactic nature of the Hermetic treatises can be demonstrated in two ways: from the literary genre in which they are written, and by explicit internal evidence.

The vast bulk of Hermetic material appears in dialogue format. Inspired by the long tradition of Platonic writings as dialogues whose clear intent was to enlighten and instruct, the substantial surviving Hermetic texts and excerpts appear as more or less contrived dialogues between a teacher and one to three pupils. The *dramatis personae* of these writings varies somewhat, with Hermes appearing most often as the teacher, but occasionally as the student of a disembodied Mind (Nous).<sup>11</sup> Hermes' students include one or more of the following: Asclepius, associated with the semi-legendary physician and architect Imouthes; Tat, considered Hermes' son, whose name is a modified version of Thoth (pronounced 'ti-how-te')<sup>12</sup>, the Egyptian god of knowledge; and Ammon (or Hammon), whose name means 'hidden' or 'invisible.' Just as Hermes occasionally became a disciple, Asclepius and Tat also reversed their usual roles and have the authorship of one treatise apiece attributed to them, the one addressed to a King Ammon,<sup>13</sup> the other to an unnamed king.<sup>14</sup> In some of the Hermetic fragments contained in Stobaeus' anthology,<sup>15</sup> Isis is described as teaching her son Horus by relating the sacred teachings she claims to have heard from Hermes. In some of Cyril of Alexandria's fragments,<sup>16</sup> we also see a personified Agathos Daimon speaking as a teacher to Osiris. The Egyptianizing elements are ubiquitous among the stock characters involved in the Hermetic dialogues. The teaching of the master is the critical component in Hermetic revelation, and the occasional prompting question from the pupil serves as a reminder to the reader of the instructional element at work, as well as a launching board for new topics of discussion. These treatises come across as credible fictionalized transcriptions of the sorts of discussions Hermetic groups would have amongst themselves. Taking his cue from Iamblichus' description of the teaching methods of his day, Festugière points out that the whole atmosphere invoked in the dialogues reflects the realities of the Greco-Roman advanced tutorial classroom, where oral instruction was the primary

mode of delivery, but where study of written works could provide a critical supplement.<sup>17</sup> These written works could take the form of teacher's preparatory notes to deliver a class, student's notes taken from a class that had been delivered orally, or a completed treatise to be delivered to an audience. The dichotomy between the oral and the written in the *Hermetica* is most evident toward the beginning of the *Asclepius*, where Hermes welcomes Asclepius, Tat and Ammon to the discussion, while explicitly saying that he will inscribe Asclepius' name to this treatise, since the other two pupils have had other works dedicated to them.<sup>18</sup> *Corpus Hermeticum* 12.8 even sees Hermes wishing his own teacher, the Agathos Daemon, had written his teachings down rather than simply speaking them.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond the dialogue format itself, a didactic purpose of Hermetic writings can be discerned in the varying levels of complexity of content implied by such titles as the "General discourse," mentioned by Tat at *Corpus Hermeticum* 13.1 as teaching "enigmatically and with riddles,"<sup>20</sup> as opposed to the clearer expositions such as the one announced at the beginning of *Corpus Hermeticum* 9, on sensation,<sup>21</sup> or the "Detailed Discourses to Tat" quoted by Cyril of Alexandria.<sup>22</sup>

The frequent rebukes of students by the Hermetic teacher indicates that the "way of Hermes" for seeking insight into the divinity is not an easy one. In the *Asclepius*, Hermes berates his pupil for straying far from the intent of the discourse in his question;<sup>23</sup> there are multiple instances of a pupil being told to "hold his tongue" in the *Corpus Hermeticum*.<sup>24</sup> Humans' natural intuitions and intellections about god are generally erroneous and in need of correction by the teacher. True notions of god, therefore, are hidden to the unaided intellect in the Hermetic scheme, and the assistance of a teacher is necessary for attaining any knowledge of the divine. Indeed, one Hermetic fragment from Stobaeus states explicitly that opinion and sense-perception communicate with noetic reason by means of instruction.<sup>25</sup> Teaching, therefore, is an essential component of Hermetic revelation.

Toward the end of one of the most explicitly initiatory Hermetic texts, the idea of proselytizing the Hermetic revelation is explicitly laid out.<sup>26</sup> Hermes had just finished receiving his own revelation from the Divine Nous, and was "sent ... forth, empowered and instructed on the nature of the universe and on the supreme vision." He then "began proclaiming to mankind the beauty of reverence and knowledge." People gathered around with one accord to hear Hermes. He continues:

Some of them, who had surrendered themselves to the way of death, resumed their mocking and withdrew, while those who desired to be taught cast themselves at my feet. Having made them rise, I became a guide to my race, teaching them the words – how to be saved and in what manner – and I sowed the words of wisdom among them, and they were nourished by the ambrosial water.

This is a clear statement that Hermetic adherents were mandated to spread the word of their teachings.

Fragment 23 from Stobaeus' anthology is explicit in listing the things that people who have followed Hermes' teaching will know as a result.<sup>27</sup> The list is quite extensive, and ranges from the strictly practical (how to practice medicine or bury the dead) to the purely mystical (recognizing the cosmic sympathies between the material world and the heavens).

According to a fragment cited by Cyril of Alexandria and drawn from Hermes' third discourse to Asclepius, divine providence is what makes the Hermetic pedagogical mission possible, both on the teaching and on the learning sides. He says: "If the Lord of all things had not been vigilant in some way in His providence to have me reveal this doctrine, you (the hearers) would not have been possessed with the desire to seek the truth about it at this time."<sup>28</sup>

The pedagogical focus of the Hermetic movement in antiquity is clear, but what about the employment of these texts during the Middle Ages? My own expertise is limited to the Latin West, so my comments will focus on that area at the expense of the Greek and Arabic reception of Hermes. The only firmly identified Hermetic work from antiquity that circulated in the Middle Ages in Latin is the *Asclepius*, which survives in seventy-nine post-classical manuscripts.<sup>29</sup> The oldest of these, dating from the ninth century, contains glosses from the hand of Nicholas of Cusa and his secretary, Andrea Bussi.<sup>30</sup> Others have markings identified as belonging to Godefroy de Fontaines,<sup>31</sup> Francesco Petrarca,<sup>32</sup> and Coluccio Salutati.<sup>33</sup> Clearly, the *Asclepius* was of interest to scholarly men during the Middle Ages. It is, however, the numerous anonymous glosses in multiple manuscripts that hint at a wider use of the *Asclepius* in the classroom, especially during the century spanning from 1150 to 1250. Some of the glosses amount to reasonably elaborate commentaries on Hermes, ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 words.<sup>34</sup> There is even one example of a systematic scholastic commentary on the *Asclepius*, a sure sign of it being used to teach.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, this commentary survives only in fragmentary format, cutting off halfway through the fourth of the *Asclepius*' forty-one chapters. If the commentary survived intact at the same level of elaboration, it would cover about 860 pages of modern printed text.<sup>36</sup> The commentaries on the *Asclepius* tend to revolve around the basic understanding of the text, especially its neoplatonic philosophical bent. The Christian readers of it in the Middle Ages also wrestle uncomfortably with the more idolatrous passages, unsure as to whether they should follow St Augustine in condemning the lot,<sup>37</sup> or Lactantius in seeing some redeeming pre-Christian wisdom in the Hermetic text.<sup>38</sup> Although they were engaging with the *Asclepius* in pedagogical settings, medieval thinkers were certainly not involved in the Hermetic didactic program of revelation as set out in the *Poimandres*. To them, the Hermetic god was at best an incomplete pagan vision of the divinity to be corrected and supplemented, while others were happy to consider Hermes a vile idolater and magician to be condemned along with most other pre-Christian theologies.

The story of the philosophical Hermetic texts in the Middle Ages does not end there, for there is one other text of interest that circulated in Latin from the late twelfth century. It provides a link between the *Asclepius* as an authentic Hermetic dialogue and other, less typical Hermetic material. I am referring to the *Book of 24 Philosophers*, a short treatise written in Latin and in some manuscripts attributed to Hermes. It consists of a series of twenty-four definitions of God elaborated in a gnomic style similar to what Mahé suggests was the original format of Hermetic writings before later generations elaborated them into the literary dialogues that survive today.<sup>39</sup> On conceptual and stylistic grounds, the editor of the *Book of 24 Philosophers*, Françoise Hudry, claims that its original Greek version dates to the turn of the third century CE in Alexandria, precisely the place and time of composition of many of the other Hermetic texts.<sup>40</sup> As it survives, several manuscripts attribute the whole collection to Hermes, while others attribute only the first one or two definitions to him. The prologue to the text indicates that it is the result of an assembly of twenty-four philosophers each called upon to answer the question “What is God?”<sup>41</sup> The result is strikingly similar to one of the shortest Hermetic fragments preserved by Stobaeus, fragment 28.<sup>42</sup> Here, we have three sentences, one from Thales, one from Socrates and one from Hermes each defining god. Hermes’ definition states that God “is the Creator of the Universe, the perfectly wise and eternal Intellect.” This definition happens to be closely consonant with the twelfth definition of God in the *Book of 24 Philosophers*, which states that “God is the one whose will is equal both to its power and its divine wisdom,” creation being an act of divine will employing divine power.<sup>43</sup>

The significance of this apparently authentic survival of Hermetic definitions from antiquity into the Middle Ages is the impact and widespread influence they had. The first two definitions in particular were extremely popular and will be immediately recognizable to anyone who has studied medieval theology: “God is a monad begetting a monad and reflecting its own brightness within itself,” and “God is an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.”<sup>44</sup> Both of these definitions were practically ubiquitous in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century commentaries on the first book of Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, implying that Hermetic gnomic statements were indeed still being used for didactic purposes of religious enlightenment, even if the links to Hermes were not always explicit or acknowledged. The context, of course, was not one of Hermetic conventicles, but rather of flourishing medieval universities. Nevertheless, a spiritual quest mediated by teaching occurs in both instances, and in both instances Hermes appears as a key transmitter of wisdom to be considered carefully. The definitions of god as stated reflect the paradoxical, hidden nature of the transcendent Hermetic divinity, an idea to be examined in more depth when the secrecy of Hermetic ideas will be examined.

Another point about the *Book of 24 Philosophers* is that all of the manuscripts transmit a brief commentary along with the definitions which Hudry believes

is contemporaneous with the composition of the definitions themselves. It is written in the style of a *lectio cursoria*, concerned with brief definitions of the terms employed in the main text. In several manuscripts, however, there is another layer of more elaborate commentary in the style of a medieval *sententia*, or continuous commentary that involves a detailed explicatory paraphrase of the main text. According to Hudry (citing Glorieux),<sup>45</sup> this format appears around 1270, which establishes a *terminus post quem* for the composition of this second commentary. The commentator must have been a professor interested in philosophy and accustomed to the format of such commentaries, but very much concerned about the orthodoxy of his teaching. The Paris condemnations of 1277 loom large in this story as a possible motivator of scholarly restraint. Other, earlier condemnations of such unconventional speculations on the nature and definition of God led to the entire text in one manuscript of the *Book of 24 Philosophers* being crossed out by a doctrinally motivated censor.<sup>46</sup>

#### EXHORTATIONS TO SECRECY

Clearly, Hermetic ideas stirred strong feelings during the Middle Ages, but what about at the time of their composition? Despite their explicitly pedagogical intent, there are numerous references in the ancient Hermetica of a need for secrecy in handling the truths being taught. At the beginning of the *Asclepius*, once all three pupils have entered the sanctuary where the lesson is to happen, Hermes admonishes that no one else should be admitted to their discussion lest “the presence and interference of the many profane this most reverent discourse on so great a subject.” He adds that it is an irreverent mind that “would make public, by the awareness of many, a treatise so very full of divine majesty.”<sup>47</sup> In chapter 32 of the *Asclepius*, Hermes orders all three pupils to “Hide these divine mysteries among the secrets of your heart and shield them with silence.”<sup>48</sup> The Coptic Hermetic treatise entitled *Ogdoad and Ennead* is explicit about severe penalties owed to anyone who divulges its contents.<sup>49</sup> After a lofty exposition of divine truths in *Corpus Hermeticum* 13, Hermes claims that it was a difficult choice for him to divulge the hymn of praise that follows, describing it as a “secret to be kept in silence” that “cannot be taught.”<sup>50</sup> At the end of the hymn, Hermes again asks his pupil to promise to keep “silent about this miracle” and “reveal the tradition of rebirth to no one lest we be accounted its betrayers.”<sup>51</sup> An indirect confirmation of the calls for secrecy can be found in Lactantius, who quotes Hermes saying that “only very few men possess a perfect doctrine.”<sup>52</sup>

Some ancient authors aware of Hermetic material inveighed against these exhortations to secrecy. Zosimus of Panopolis was so well-acquainted with Hermetic ideas that he spoke of God as being “everywhere and nowhere,” a formulation lacking only the imagery of the sphere to match the second

definition of God in the *Book of 24 Philosophers*. He accused the Hermetic authors of jealousy and mean-spiritedness when they concealed their wisdom.<sup>53</sup>

Within the Hermetic texts themselves there is an explicit reply to the criticism of Hermetic secrecy expressed by Zosimus. In the Stobaeus fragment 11.4, Hermes tells his pupil to “avoid the crowd, not so that you jealously keep your knowledge a secret, but so as to avoid the ridicule of the masses.”<sup>54</sup> Such claims indicate that the Hermetic divinity is to be hidden not from absolutely everyone, but only from those who would not understand it, because in not understanding it, they would mock it. Indeed, it does appear that fear of ridicule is what motivated some of the Hermetic attitude toward the secrecy of their teachings, and therefore the hiddenness of their God. But the fear is also a deeper, more existential one: *Corpus Hermeticum* 9.4 explains why “those who are in knowledge (i.e. the Hermetic adherents) do not please the masses ... They appear to be mad, and they bring ridicule on themselves. They are hated and scorned and perhaps they may even be murdered.”<sup>55</sup> Additional awareness of the grave stakes involved is hinted at in two locations: Stobaeus fragment 11.4 reveals that “these [Hermetic] lessons only have a tiny audience, and they may not even have that in the future,”<sup>56</sup> implying that the survival of Hermetic teachings was already considered questionable even as they were still being written. The other instance of existential fear among Hermeticists is somewhat less explicit, but it is expressed in much more powerful language. I am referring to the passage in the *Asclepius* known as the “Apocalypse of Egypt,” where Hermes bemoans the utter downfall of Egyptian divine worship and states that only words inscribed on stone will tell of the pious deeds of his countrymen – presumably including himself – once the new, foreign gods take over.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to fear of persecution, there is an additional motivation for secrecy born out of moral considerations internal to Hermetic doctrine. One of the main Hermetic teachings relates to the trio of Fate, Necessity, and Providence that were linked through a sort of astrological determinism with respect to the material world. Immediately after the passage in Stobaeus concerning the dwindling audience for Hermetic revelation, Hermes explains that his teachings have a singular property: they excite evil-doers to do evil, because they misunderstand the miraculous power of what is taught.<sup>58</sup> According to this view, most people (the “masses” referred to by Hermes) are naturally inclined to avoid responsibility for their actions if they believe that their actions are being governed by an incontrovertible fate. Hermetic teachings on astrology and fate could easily be misunderstood in that direction, hence the cautious exhortations to secrecy.

There is another internal explanation for the secrecy of Hermetic teachings, which is related to the question of the authenticity of the Egyptian influences on the Hermetica. In *Corpus Hermeticum* 16.1–2, Asclepius explains to King Ammon that Hermetic teachings are already unclear in their native Egyptian language, even though some (presumably “the masses” again)

misunderstand them to be simple. He says that the teaching will become entirely unclear when the Greeks wish to translate them and thereby produce the greatest distortion and unclarity.<sup>59</sup> In other words, according to this treatise at least, the hiddenness of the Hermetic god is the result of misunderstandings that result from translation. Although the activity of translation has in fact produced some identifiable distortions in the Hermetic treatises as they have come down to us,<sup>60</sup> one cannot claim along with Asclepius that this factor is what causes the entire obscurity – or hiddenness – of the Hermetic ideas about God. This Egyptophilic passage may simply be a reflection of the Greek belief in the supernatural power of foreign words, as one sees in the numerous *voces magicae* in the Greek Magical Papyri that are drawn from non-Greek tongues.<sup>61</sup> In addition, there is some irony in the fact that Asclepius' discourse is addressed to King Ammon, "the Hidden One."

### PROGRESSIVE INITIATION

Although exhortations to secrecy are the stock in trade of any work described as esoteric – and I think there is a serious argument to be made that calls for secrecy are in fact the main defining criterion for any text to be considered esoteric – there seems to be a fundamental paradox at work in the Hermetic texts in particular: why should ideas which *must* be taught according to divine mandate need to be shrouded in such secrecy? Part of the answer is contained in some of the quotations cited above, in that the teaching must be restricted to worthy students. But how does one establish worthiness in a Hermetic context? By initiation.

Evidence for initiation in the Hermetic texts has been discussed at length by Garth Fowden,<sup>62</sup> and need not be regurgitated here. Some observations relating specifically to didactics and secrecy, however, need to be made. First, there appears to be a link between the level of specificity of the Hermetic teaching and the level of initiation of the pupils to whom it is directed.<sup>63</sup> God is considered completely concealed from the uninitiated, and progressively less hidden the further a Hermetic pupil would pursue his study. Second, Hermetic initiation was considered a process of rebirth and divinization sanctioned by divine grace. In the Armenian *Definitions of Hermes to Asclepius* 8.7, Hermes states that it is possible to become a god,<sup>64</sup> a statement consonant with the initiation experiences described in the Coptic *Ogdoad and Ennead*. *Corpus Hermeticum* 4 states that those who choose to participate in the divine mind (i.e. the initiates), are immortal rather than mortal, and when a human chooses the divine over the mortal (i.e. when he chooses to be initiated), it "has splendid consequences for the one who chooses – in that it makes the human a god."<sup>65</sup> Third, the secrecy required of the initiates would contribute to their interpersonal bonding as part of a community, contributing to their morale and *esprit-de-corps* in the face of ridicule or persecution. *Corpus*

*Hermeticum* 4.3 states that all men may be endowed with reason, but only some (i.e. the worthy) have mind to understand divinity.<sup>66</sup> Cyril of Alexandria quotes from Hermes' *Third Discourse to Asclepius*, saying that "[i]t is not permitted to reveal these mysteries to non-initiates," thereby making explicit the connection between secrecy and initiation.<sup>67</sup> A god who is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere is almost by definition hidden from normal perception, and according to Hermetic beliefs, must be revealed through diligent study and divine contemplation, as instructed by a master.

In sum, the Hermetica represent the most widely known and most widely circulated path to attain knowledge of the Hidden God in the Western tradition, both at the time of their original composition and much later in the Middle Ages.

## NOTES

1. Modern editions and French translations of the Greek and Latin appear in Nock and Festugière (1954–1960). A more recent edition of the Latin appears in Moreschini (1991). Copenhagen (1992) provides an English translation and scholarly commentary on the Greek and Latin texts. The Coptic and Armenian texts, along with translations into French, appear in Mahé (1978, 1982). Salaman *et al.* (2000) provides an accessible English translation of all the Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Armenian material, but without much scholarly commentary.
2. Iamblichus, around 300 CE, relates that a certain Seleucus listed twenty thousand of them, and that Manetho put the number at an even more hyperbolic 36,525 (*De mysteriis* 8.1).
3. For a recent assessment of the principal Latin Hermetic text from a broadly philosophical perspective, see Gersh (1986: 1.329–87) and Parri (2007).
4. The links between the philosophical and the practical Hermetic texts have been explored in substantial depth by Festugière (1949–1954).
5. These groups of Hermeticists, quite likely more-or-less Hellenized native Egyptian priests and their audiences, are discussed in Fowden (1986/1993: 166–8).
6. The need for various levels of initiation into the revealed wisdom of Hermes in the *Hermetica* is one of the principal arguments in Parri (2007). See also Fowden (1986/1993: 106–12) and van den Broek (2000).
7. On the links between the ancient Hermetica and their Arabic descendents, see van Bladel (2009).
8. This debate is discussed extensively in Fowden (1986/1993) and Copenhagen (1992).
9. Ancient testimonia to the Hermetic texts in antiquity have been compiled in Scott (1924–1936).
10. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.4.
11. This instance occurs in *Corpus Hermeticum* 1 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 1.1–19) also known as Poimandres, or Pimander. See Copenhagen (1992: 1–7).
12. Copenhagen (1992: 93).
13. *Corpus Hermeticum* 16 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 2.231–41; Copenhagen 1992: 58–61).
14. *Corpus Hermeticum* 17 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 2.242–7; Copenhagen 1992: 62).
15. Stobaeus fragments 23–7 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 4:1–97).
16. Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Iulianum* 2 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 4.136–40).
17. Festugière (1949–1954: 2.34–44).

18. *Asclepius* 1 (Copenhaver 1992: 67; Moreschini 1991: 40): Trismegistus said: “No jealousy keeps Hammon from us; indeed, we recall having written many things in his name, as we have also written so much on physical and popular topics for Tat, our dearest and most loving son. But this treatise I shall write in your [Asclepius’] name.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from Copenhaver (1992).
19. Copenhaver (1992: 44); Nock and Festugière (1954–1960: 1.177).
20. Nock and Festugière (1954–1960: 2.200); Copenhaver (1992: 49).
21. Nock and Festugière (1954–1960: 1.96); Copenhaver (1992: 27).
22. Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Iulianum* 1 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 4.135–6).
23. *Asclepius* 2 (Copenhaver 1992: 67; Moreschini 1991: 40): “Asclepius, how quickly you have lapsed from reason’s true restraint.” *Asclepius* 24 (Copenhaver 1992: 81; Moreschini 1991: 64): “Are you talking about statues, Trismegistus? – Statues, Asclepius, yes. See how little trust you have!”
24. Examples include *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.22 (Copenhaver 1992: 5; Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 1.14); *Corpus Hermeticum* 2.10 (Copenhaver 1992: 10; Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 1.35); *Corpus Hermeticum* 8.5 (Copenhaver 1992: 26; Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 1.89); *Corpus Hermeticum* 11.22 (Copenhaver 1992: 42; Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 1.156); *Corpus Hermeticum* 11.16 (Copenhaver 1992: 46; Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 1.180) and *Corpus Hermeticum* 13.14 (Copenhaver 1992: 52; Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 2.206).
25. Stobaeus fragment 18.2 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 3.80).
26. *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.27–9 (Copenhaver 1992: 6; Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 1.16–17).
27. Stobaeus fragment 23.65–8 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 4.21–2).
28. Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Iulianum* 1 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 4.128–9). The translation here is mine.
29. These are listed in Lucentini and Perrone Compagni (2001: 11–18) and in Klibansky and Regen (1993: 55–126).
30. These notes, from MS Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1er, 10054–6, have received a critical edition in Arfé (2004: 105–59).
31. MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 15449; see Klibansky and Regen (1993: 101).
32. MS Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 2193; see Klibansky and Regen (1993: 115–16).
33. MS Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, plut. 76, 36; see Klibansky and Regen (1993: 71–2).
34. Examples include MS København, Kongelige Bibliothek, Fabricius 91 4o and MS Reims, Bibliothèque Municipale 877. For the latter, see Porreca (2011).
35. This commentary has been edited by Lucentini (1995).
36. This figure is the result of an updated calculation from the one mentioned in Porreca (2003: 146).
37. Augustine vehemently criticizes Hermes, citing the Asclepius at length, in *De civitate Dei* 8.23–7.
38. Lactantius’ *testimonia* of Hermes are compiled in Scott (1924–1936: 4.9–27).
39. Mahé (1982: 308–12, 407–36).
40. Hudry (1997: v–xxiii). For a contrary view claiming that the *Book of 24 Philosophers* was an original invention of the second half of the twelfth century, see Lucentini (1999: 11–46).
41. Hudry (1997: 3).
42. Nock and Festugière (1954–1960: 4.97).
43. Hudry (1997: 19). Translations from the *Book of 24 Philosophers* here and elsewhere are my own.
44. Hudry (1997: 5, 7).

45. Hudry (1997: xxxvii); cf. Glorieux (1968: 115).
46. MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Lat. 6286 f.21r-v. See Plates IX and X in Hudry (1997).
47. *Asclepius* 1 (Copenhaver 1992: 67; Moreschini 1991: 40).
48. *Asclepius* 32 (Copenhaver 1992: 87; Moreschini 1991: 77).
49. Mahé (1978: 84–7).
50. *Corpus Hermeticum* 13.16 (Copenhaver 1992: 52–3; Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 2.207).
51. *Corpus Hermeticum* 13.22 (Copenhaver 1992: 54; Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 2.209).
52. Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 1.11, 61 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 4.107–8).
53. Fowden (1986/1993: 122, 125).
54. Nock and Festugière (1954–1960: 3.57). The translation here is my own.
55. Copenhaver (1992: 28); Nock and Festugière (1954–1960: 1.97).
56. Nock and Festugière (1954–1960: 3.57). The translation here is my own.
57. *Asclepius* 24–6 (Copenhaver 1992: 81–3; Moreschini 1991: 65–8).
58. Stobaeus fragment 11.5 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 3.57–8).
59. Copenhaver (1992: 58); Nock and Festugière (1954–1960: 2.231–2).
60. See the synoptic editions of parallel Hermetic passages in Mahé (1978: 160–67; 1982: 152–207).
61. H. D. Betz (1992, *passim*).
62. Fowden (1986/1993: 106–12).
63. Compare the “General Discourse” to the “Detailed Discourses” mentioned above.
64. Mahé (1982: 389).
65. *Corpus Hermeticum* 4.5 and 7 (Copenhaver 1992: 16; Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 1.51).
66. Copenhaver (1992: 15); Nock and Festugière (1954–1960: 1.50).
67. Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Iulianum* 1 (Nock & Festugière 1954–1960: 4.126–7).

## CHAPTER 8

# FROM HIDDEN TO REVEALED IN SETHIAN REVELATION, RITUAL, AND PROTOLOGY

*John D. Turner*

In this essay I offer a treatment of the concept of revelation in the Sethian literature from Nag Hammadi, in particular as a designation for the movement from “hidden” to “revealed” or “manifest” in two contexts. First, as the transmission of some kind of cognitive content or ritual action essential to the enlightenment and salvation of the recipient, and second as a fundamental ontogenetic concept in the protological metaphysics and mystical epistemology of Sethian and related literature in the first several centuries of the common era.

In the [first part](#) of this essay, I treat the notion of revelation as an epistemological category, as the transmission of discursive information – even though it is sometimes said to be “ineffable” and “unknowable” – with special attention to the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and in the [second part](#), I explore revelation or “manifestation” mainly as an ontogenetic concept, but also in the epistemological context of mystical union with the primordial source of all reality in the Sethian Platonizing treatises *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. It turns out the latter revelation is a form of self-knowledge and knowledge of God that is entirely devoid of cognitive content.

### HIDDEN AND REVEALED AS EPISTEMIC CATEGORIES: THE *TRIMORPHIC PROTENNOIA*

The *Trimorphic Protennoia* is a first-person self-predicatory aretology or recitation of the deeds and attributes of Protennoia-Barbelo, the First Thought of the Sethian supreme deity. Speaking in the first person, she recites her attributes and three salvific descents into the lower world. First, as Father, she is the audible but as yet inarticulate Voice of the essentially silent First Thought of the supreme Father/Invisible Spirit. Having presided over her self-generated Son’s establishing of the heavenly dwellings for her fallen members, she

descends to chaos to loosen their bonds. Second, as Mother, she is the somewhat more articulate Speech of the First Thought who descends to overthrow the old aeon ruled by the chief creator and his evil powers and announces the dawn of the new age. Third, as the Son, she is the fully articulate Logos who, by adopting the guise of successively lower powers, descends to and enters the “tents” of her members and leads them back to the light. In the process, she confers the baptismal ascent ritual of the Five Seals and, putting on Jesus, she rescues him from the cross. Throughout the treatise, Protennoia’s power manifests itself not so much as a theophany, but as a “*theophony*,” as audible revelation. Salvation is received not only through baptismal vision but also through sound and audition, through the revelation of “mysteries.”

*The incognito descent of the hidden and revealed Savior*

Not only does Protennoia reveal hidden mysteries, but even throughout the modalities of her three appearances she remains hidden, not only from the antagonistic forces and powers that necessitate her revelatory mission, but also even to her fallen members, the Sons of the Light. As the silent divine thought, she is the Voice hidden within the radiant waters of the primordial light from which all reality takes its rise.<sup>1</sup> Not only is Protennoia herself in all her modalities hidden, ineffable, even unknowable, but also the content of her revelations – on thirteen occasions called “mysteries” – is secret, hidden, even ineffable:<sup>2</sup>

**XIII,1 36** <sup>19</sup>I <sup>20</sup>exist as Thought for the [All] being joined <sup>21</sup>to the unknowable and incomprehensible Thought. <sup>22</sup>I revealed myself – yes, I – among <sup>23</sup>all those who recognize me. For it is I <sup>24</sup>who am joined with everyone by virtue of <sup>25</sup>the hidden Thought and an exalted <Voice>, <sup>26</sup>even a Voice from <sup>27</sup>the invisible Thought.

**XIII,1 37** <sup>3</sup>Then <sup>4</sup>the Son who is perfect in every respect—that is, <sup>5</sup>the Word who originated through that <sup>6</sup>Voice; who proceeded from the height; who <sup>7</sup>has within him the Name; who is <sup>8</sup>a Light—he (the Son) revealed the everlasting things and <sup>9</sup>all the unknowns were known. <sup>10</sup>And those things difficult to interpret <sup>11</sup>and secret, he revealed, and <sup>12</sup>as for those who dwell in Silence with the First <sup>13</sup>Thought, he preached to them. And <sup>14</sup>he revealed himself to those who dwell in darkness, and <sup>15</sup>he showed himself to those who dwell in the abyss, <sup>16</sup>and to those who dwell in the hidden treasures he told <sup>17</sup>ineffable mysteries, <sup>18</sup>and he taught unrepeatable doctrines <sup>19</sup>to all those who became Sons of <sup>20</sup>the Light.

Upon her initial descent as the Voice or Sound of the First Thought, she hides within her own members who are bound in Chaos.<sup>3</sup> Upon her second descent as the Speech of the First Thought, while the Powers and their Archigenetor

hear but cannot recognize, she hides within yet reveals herself to her fallen members who long for her.<sup>4</sup> On her third descent, she appears as the Logos, which is not only the hidden silence, intellect, and primordial light and source of all reality,<sup>5</sup> but also reveals herself in her members' "tents," in the "likeness of their shape," indeed wearing their "garments,"<sup>6</sup> although – like the hostile powers at her second descent – even they do not initially recognize her identity. By adopting the appearance of the powers inhabiting each successive level through which she descends, she is completely incognito to everyone until she chooses to reveal herself.<sup>7</sup>

## HIDDEN AND REVEALED AS ONTOGENETIC CATEGORIES

Although mysteries are by nature hidden, they are also by nature intended to be revealed to those who are regarded as worthy to know them. But the movement from hidden to revealed is not restricted merely to speech acts and epistemology or matters of knowing, for it also has its application in the generation of ontic reality, as is evident in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* itself.

### *The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Stoic Logos endiathetos and prophorikos*

Throughout her revelatory discourses, Protennoia, the silent divine Thought, successively manifests herself first as audible sound or Voice, then as uttered Speech, and finally as the fully articulate Logos. The creative act of the original author of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* was an interpretation of the sequence of Protennoia's successive revelatory descents according to a theory of the increasing articulateness of verbal communication in which a completely hidden, interior thought becomes outwardly expressed. This notion surely derives from the Stoic distinction between internal reason (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) and uttered or expressed reason (λόγος προφορικός), which in turn has various degrees of articulation.<sup>8</sup>

### *From revelation of knowledge to ontogenetic production*

In the later Platonic tradition, this distinction became applied also to the thought, not just of humans, but also of the divine mind as well as to the distinction between the intelligible and perceptible realms. Thus in *De Vita Mosis* Philo of Alexandria holds that the divine Logos is twofold: the *logos endiathetos* represents the archetypal ideas as the thoughts of the divine mind and the *logos prophorikos* as the power that instantiates those archetypes in the physical world.<sup>9</sup> Thus just as in the case of the epistemological progression from hidden and ineffable to manifest and expressible, there is also the ontogenetic progression from potentiality and latency to actual and manifest.

While the *Trimorphic Protennoia* clearly applies the progression from interior to outwardly expressed thought to the notion of progressively articulate revelation from Silence to Sound to Speech to Statement (Logos), it may also have intended to suggest a progressively articulate ontogenesis of the divine First Thought from an initial silence resident within the supreme deity to its actual emergence as the divine Son of God.

**XIII,1 36** <sup>4</sup> I [descended to the] midst of the underworld <sup>5</sup> and I shone [down upon the] darkness. It is I who <sup>6</sup> made the [water] surge. It is I who am hidden within <sup>7</sup> [radiant] waters. I am the one who <sup>8</sup> gradually made the All radiant by my <sup>9</sup> Thought.

In the second century, the Stoic distinction between the immanent and the expressed Logos provided a way to explain how Christ had preexisted as the immanent Logos in the Father's mind and then became incarnate in time, as in Theophilus of Antioch.<sup>10</sup> In the third century, Plotinus could employ a similar notion to the genesis of the cosmos from the cosmic soul. For Plotinus, the Cosmos is not a created order planned by a deity whom one can blame for producing evil whether intentionally or inadvertently; it is rather the self-expression of the cosmic Soul, which corresponds roughly to Philo's λόγος προφορικός, whose λόγος ἐνδιάθετος would be the divine Intelligence (νοῦς):

*Ennead* 5.1[10].3.5–9: Take then the soul's upper neighbor (Intellect), more divine than this divine thing after which and from which the soul derives. For although it is a thing of the kind which our discourse has shown it to be, it is an image of Intellect (εἰκὼν τίς ἐστι νοῦ); just as a thought in its utterance is an image of the thought in soul, so soul is itself the expressed thought of Intellect and its whole activity and the life, which it sends out to establish another reality (οἷον λόγος ὁ ἐν προφορᾷ λόγου τοῦ ἐν ψυχῇ, οὕτω τοι καὶ αὐτὴ λόγος νοῦ καὶ ἡ πᾶσα ἐνέργεια καὶ ἦν προίεται ζωὴν εἰς ἄλλου ὑπόστασιν).

As is well known, Plotinus expressed this emanative self-expression as an undiminished circumradiation of luminescence from the One.<sup>11</sup> Thus:

How the Divine Mind comes into being must be explained: Everything moving has necessarily an object towards which it advances; but since the Supreme can have no such object, we may not ascribe motion to it: anything that comes into being after it can be produced only as a consequence of its reversion upon itself (ἐπιστραφέντος αἰεὶ ἐκείνου πρὸς αὐτὸ); of course, we dare not talk of generation in time, dealing as we are with eternal Beings: where we speak of origin in such reference, it is in the sense, merely, of

cause and subordination: origin from the Supreme must not be taken to imply any movement in it: that would make the Being resulting from the movement not a second principle but a third: the Movement would be the second hypostasis. Given this immobility in the Supreme, it can neither have yielded assent nor uttered decree nor stirred in any way towards the existence of a secondary. What happened then? What are we to conceive as rising in the neighborhood of that immobility? It must be a circumradiation – produced from the Supreme but from the Supreme without alteration (περίλαμψιν ἐξ αὐτοῦ μὲν, ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ μένοντος) – and may be compared to the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that unchanging substance.<sup>12</sup>

The motif of ontogenetic radiation adumbrated in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and explicit in Plotinus also finds direct application in the *Apocryphon of John*, whose introductory theogony expresses the emergence of the of the second principle from the first in somewhat similar terms, whereby the supreme Monad or Invisible Spirit instantiates his First Thought, Triple-Powered Barbelo, by contemplating himself in the luminous “living water” circumradiating from him:

**BG,2 [26]** <sup>14</sup> It is he (the Invisible Spirit) ... <sup>15</sup> who contemplates himself alone <sup>16</sup> in his own light that <sup>17</sup> surrounds him, which he himself is, the source <sup>18</sup> of living water, the light that <sup>19</sup> is full of purity, the fountain of the <sup>20</sup> Spirit. It flowed from the <sup>21</sup> living water of the light and <sup>22</sup> provided all aeons and **[27]** <sup>1</sup> worlds. In every direction <sup>2</sup> he contemplated his own image, beholding <sup>3</sup> it in the <sup>4</sup> pure luminous water that surrounds him. And <sup>5</sup> his Thought (ἔννοια) became active and <sup>6</sup> appeared and stood at rest before <sup>7</sup> him in the brilliance <sup>8</sup> of the light.

Here, a first moment of procession or circumradiation is complemented by a second moment of self-contemplation in which the act of thought becomes exteriorized as an entity distinct from its luminous source. Although the notion of self-contemplation probably goes back to Aristotle’s self-thinking intellect,<sup>13</sup> by the second century it becomes a mechanism of theogonical ontogenesis through productive self-contemplation, and is widely attested in both Sethian and non-Sethian theogonies.<sup>14</sup>

Such self-contemplation can easily complement the epistemological movement from hidden thought to manifest discourse or from obscurity to clarity to yield an ontogenetic movement from potentiality to actuality conceived as the progressive yet self-reflexive revelation of a hierarchy of increasingly determinate and articulate levels of reality that can in turn become the subject of revelatory discourse.

*Later Platonic theories of ontogenesis through emanation*

One of the novel developments in the transition from the rather static ontologies typical of Middleplatonism to the dynamic emanationism of Neoplatonism is the doctrine of the unfolding of the world of true being and intellect from its source in an ultimate unitary principle beyond being itself. As in Neoplatonism, the Nag Hammadi Sethian Platonizing treatises *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Marsanes* envisage emanation as a three-stage process: first, an initial identity of the product with its source, a sort of potential or prefigurative existence; second, an indefinite procession or spontaneous emission of the product from its source; and third, a contemplative visionary reversion of the product upon its own prefiguration still latent in its source, whereby the product receives its own distinct reality. The later Neoplatonists named these three stages Permanence or Remaining, Procession, and Reversion, and often characterized the three successive modes of the product's existence during this process by the terms of the noetic triad of Being, Life, and Intellect

*The Kalyptos–Protophanes–Autogenes Triad*

The Nag Hammadi Sethian Platonizing treatises *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes* likewise envisage emanation as a three-stage process. Their metaphysical hierarchy is headed by a supreme and pre-existent Unknowable One, often named the Invisible Spirit, who, as in Plotinus, is clearly beyond being and conceivable only through negative predication and a cognition devoid of discursive content. Below the supreme One, at the level of determinate being, is the Barbelo Aeon, conceived along the lines of a Middle Platonic tripartite divine Intellect.<sup>15</sup> It contains a triad of ontological levels, conceived as sub-intellecets or subaeons of the Barbelo Aeon: a contemplated intellect (νοῦς νοητός) that contains the archetypal ideas (τὰ ὄντως ὄντα), called Kalyptos or “hidden”; a contemplating intellect (νοῦς θεωρητικός or νόερος) that contains intellecets united with their objects of thought, called Protophanes or “first appearing”; and a discursive and demiurgic intellect (νοῦς διανοούμενος) that contains discrete forms of individuals, called Autogenes or “self-generated.”

Originally, the names of these three subaeons seem to have been derived from epithets that earlier Sethian literature applied to the members of their supreme trinity: the Invisible Spirit as Father, the Mother Barbelo as his First-appearing Thought, and their self-generated Child Autogenes. Thus the triad of terms Kalyptos–Protophanes–Autogenes would have designated the dynamic process by which the Barbelo Aeon itself gradually unfolds from the Invisible Spirit:<sup>16</sup> at first “hidden” (καλυπτός)<sup>17</sup> or latent within the Spirit as its prefigurative intellect, then “first appearing” (πρωτοφανής)<sup>18</sup> as the

Spirit's separately existing thought or intellect, and finally "self-generated" (αὐτογενής) as a distinct demiurgical mind that operates on the physical world below in accordance with its vision of the archetypal ideas emerging in the divine intellect, Protophanes.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, in the *Apocryphon of John*, Autogenes, the third member of the Father–Mother–Child trinity, also "first appears" from Barbelo:

**BG,2 [29]** <sup>18</sup> Barbelo <sup>19</sup> gazed intently into <sup>20</sup> the pure Light, **[30]** <sup>1</sup> and she turned herself to it and gave rise to <sup>2</sup> a spark of blessed light, <sup>3</sup> though it was not equal to her in <sup>4</sup> magnitude. This is the <sup>5</sup> only-begotten (μονογενής) one, who appeared from <sup>6</sup> the Father (~ *patrofaēs*), the divine Self-generated One (αὐτογενής), <sup>7</sup> the first-born (~ *prōtogenos*) Child of the <sup>8</sup> entirety of the Spirit of pure light. <sup>9</sup> Now the <sup>10</sup> Invisible Spirit rejoiced over <sup>11</sup> the light that had come into being, <sup>12</sup> who first appeared (ἡταρῶρπῖ ἡογῶνῆ εβολ ~ *prōtofanēs*) from the <sup>13</sup> first power, his Forethought (πρόνοια), <sup>14</sup> Barbelo.

In the Platonizing Sethian treatises, these attributes of "hidden," "first-appearing," and "self-generated," which seem to have originally applied to the emergence of Barbelo as the Invisible Spirit's *feminine* First Thought (ἔννοια), have become designations for the tripartite structure of the *masculine* Aeon (ἄων) of Barbelo, reconceived as a distinct divine Intellect.<sup>20</sup>

Marius Victorinus also exhibits a similar hidden, first appearing, and self-generated scheme:

[God the Father] is known neither as τὸ ὄν (being) nor as μὴ ὄν (not being), but as knowable in ignorance since He is simultaneously ὄν and not ὄν who by His own power has produced and led τὸ ὄν into manifestation ... For that which is above ὄν is the hidden ὄν. Indeed the manifestation of the hidden is begetting, if indeed the ὄν in potentiality begets the ὄν in actuality. For nothing is begotten without cause. And if God is cause of all, He is cause also of the begetting of the ὄντα, since He is certainly above τὸ ὄν although He is in contact with τῷ ὄντι as both its father and begetter. Indeed, the one who is pregnant has hidden within what will be begotten. For the embryo is not nonexistent before birth but it is in hiding and by birth there comes into manifestation the ὄν in action which was ὄν in potentiality; and so that, to tell the truth, τοῦ ὄντος comes to manifestation by the action of ὄν. Indeed the action begets outside. But what begets It? That which was within. What therefore was within, in God? Nothing other than τὸ ὄν, the truly ὄν or rather the προόν (preexistence) which is above the universally existent genus, which is above the ὄντως ὄντα (really existing), the ὄν in potentiality now in actuality.<sup>21</sup>

*The Noetic Triad of Being, Mind, and Life*

Despite the simplicity and attractiveness of the Kalyptos–Protophanes–Autogenes nomenclature as a denotation for the primordial generation of all subsequent reality from a supreme unitary principle, the Sethian Platonizing treatises have consistently demoted this triad to a subordinate level, where the phases of hidden, first-manifesting, and self-generated have become conceived as an “*intellectual*” triad of distinct sub-intelligences that comprise the second principle, the Barbelo Aeon, playing the role of the divine intelligence. As a result, when it came to working out the actual dynamics of this emanative process, these treatises ended up employing a quite different terminology to account for the emergence of the Barbelo Aeon from the supreme Invisible Spirit. In addition to the lower *intellectual* triad of Kalyptos–Protophanes–Autogenes, they introduce a higher, *intelligible* triad, namely, the noetic triad of Being, Life, and Mind. Although Plotinus also occasionally employed the terms of this noetic triad to designate distinctly *non-hypostatic* phases in the emanation of Intellect from the One,<sup>22</sup> just as the Sethians ended up confining the Kalyptos–Protophanes–Autogenes triad to their second hypostasis Barbelo, Plotinus too mostly confined the function of the noetic triad to his second hypostasis, Intellect, as a way of portraying it, not as a realm of merely static being, but instead as living and creative thought.<sup>23</sup> By contrast with Plotinus’ implementation, the Platonizing Sethian treatises conceive this intelligible triad as the Invisible Spirit’s Triple Power, which serves as the means by which the supreme Invisible Spirit gives rise to the Aeon of Barbelo.<sup>24</sup> It is composed of the three powers of Existence (ὑπαρχις rather than ὄν, Being), Vitality (ζωότης rather than ζωή, Life), and Mentality (νοότης or Blessedness, μακαριότητα rather than Intellect νοῦς), essentially a de-substantified version of the Being–Life–Mind triad. Each of its powers designates a distinct phase in the emanation of the Barbelo Aeon: (1) In its initial phase as a purely infinitival Existence (ὑπαρχις or ὄντοτης), the Triple Power is latent within and identical with the supreme One; (2) in its emanative phase it is an indeterminate Vitality (ζωότης) that proceeds forth from One; and (3) in its final phase it is a Mentality (νοήτης) or Blessedness that contemplates its prefigurative source in the supreme One, thereby conceptually defining itself as a distinct divine Intellect, the Aeon of Barbelo.<sup>25</sup>

In *Allogenes* Triple Powered One is a quasi-hypostatic entity interposed between the Invisible Spirit and Aeon of Barbelo:

**XI,3 48**<sup>14</sup> It is<sup>15</sup> with [the] hiddenness (cf. Kalyptos) of Existence that he (the Triple Powered One) provides<sup>16</sup> Being, [providing]<sup>17</sup> for [it in] every way, since it is this<sup>18</sup> that [shall] come into being when he<sup>19</sup> intelligizes himself.

**XI,3 53**<sup>9</sup> And]<sup>10</sup> that one (the Triple Power) moved motionlessly<sup>11</sup> in his<sup>12</sup> navigation, lest he sink<sup>13</sup> into indeterminateness by means

<sup>14</sup> of another act of <sup>15</sup> Mentality. And he entered <sup>16</sup> into himself and appeared <sup>17</sup> completely determinate (ΔΦΟΥΩΝ̅̅̅ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΦΕ Ν̅̅̅Τ̅̅̅ΤΟΥ ΝΙΜ).

**XI,3 53** <sup>23</sup> On account of the <sup>24</sup> third silence of <sup>25</sup> Mentality and the undivided secondary <sup>26</sup> activity (i.e. Vitality) that appeared (ΕΤΑΔΟΥΩΝ̅̅̅ ΕΒΟΛ) <sup>27</sup> in the First Thought – <sup>28</sup> that is, the Barbelo-Aeon – <sup>29</sup> and the undivided <sup>30</sup> semblance of division, even the Triple-Powered <sup>31</sup> One and the non-substantial Existence, <sup>32</sup> it (fem., the activity, ἐνέργεια) appeared (ΔΟΥΩΝ̅̅̅ ΕΒΟΛ) <sup>33</sup> by means of an activity <sup>34</sup> that is stable <sup>35</sup> and silent.

The resulting metaphysical hierarchy can be schematized as follows:

Invisible Spirit/ Unknowable One	Exists	Lives	Knows
The Triple Powered One	Essentiality	Vitality	Mentality
The Aeon of Barbelo (universal Intellect) Kalyptos <i>contemplated intellect</i> (contains True Being) Protophanes <i>contemplating intellect</i> (contains the “Unified”) Autogenes <i>discursive intellect</i> (contains the “Individuals”)	Being	Life	Mind
Nature (sensible cosmos)			

A similar process is described in *Zostrianos*, where the three powers of Existence, Life, and Blessedness (rather than Mentality) do not explicitly form a distinct quasi-hypostatic entity like the Triple Powered One of *Allogenes*, but rather reside in the Invisible Spirit itself as its own three powers:

**VIII,1 16** <sup>2</sup> Not only [did they dwell] <sup>3</sup> in thought, but he [made room for] <sup>4</sup> them, since he is [Being] in the following <sup>5</sup> way: he set a [limit] upon <sup>6</sup> Being, lest it become <sup>7</sup> endless and formless; <sup>8</sup> yet it was truly delimited while it was a <sup>9</sup> new entity in order that [it] might become <sup>10</sup> something having <sup>11</sup> its own [dwelling], <sup>12</sup> Existence together with [Being], <sup>13</sup> standing with it, existing with it, <sup>14</sup> surrounding it, [and being like it] <sup>15</sup> on every side.

**VIII,1 20** <sup>17</sup> The <sup>18</sup> Invisible Spirit is [source of them all] <sup>19</sup> and [an insubstantial Existence] <sup>20</sup> [prior to essence] <sup>21</sup> and existence [and being]. <sup>22</sup> [Existences are prior to] <sup>23</sup> life, [for it is] the [cause of] <sup>24</sup> Blessed[ness].

The account of Barbelo’s emanation on pages 76–82 of *Zostrianos* reflects the same sequence of procession, reversion, and acquisition of separateness and stability. Having emanated from the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo’s further descent and potential dispersion is halted by a contemplative reversion upon her source. By foreknowing her impending aeonic status potentially prefigured

within the Invisible Spirit, she comes to stand outside him, examining him and her prefigurative self, spreading forth and becoming separate and stable as an all-perfect (παντέλιος) being, the unengendered Kalyptos. Note that in *Zostrianos*, Barbelo emanates directly from the Invisible Spirit who is himself triple powered; here the Triple Powered One lacks the quasi-hypostatic status it seems to have in *Allogenes*.

While in *Zostrianos*, ontogenesis seems to be initiated by the supreme Invisible Spirit itself, in *Allogenes* ontogenesis apparently begins, not with the First One – the Invisible Spirit, who is pure self-contained activity – but on a secondary level with the self-contraction of the Triple Powered One.<sup>26</sup> This initial self-contraction is immediately followed by its expansion into the Aeon of Barbelo, which thereupon achieves initial determination. It then becomes the fully determinate Aeon of Barbelo by an act of knowing itself and its source.

**XI,3 45** <sup>21</sup> [O] Triple-Powered One who <sup>22</sup> [truly exists]! For after it [contracted] <sup>23</sup> [it expanded], and <sup>24</sup> [it spread out] and became complete, <sup>25</sup> [and] it was empowered [with] <sup>26</sup> all of them by knowing [itself] <sup>27</sup> [and the perfect Invisible Spirit], <sup>28</sup> and it [became] <sup>29</sup> [an] aeon. By knowing [herself] <sup>30</sup> she (Barbelo) knew that one, <sup>31</sup> [and] she became Kalyptos. <sup>32</sup> [Because] she acts in those whom she <sup>33</sup> knows, <sup>34</sup> she is Protophanes, a perfect, <sup>35</sup> invisible Intellect.

Such a notion of systolic contraction and diastolic expansion draws once again on Stoic thought, namely the Stoic doctrine of a tensile motion (τονική κίνησις) directed alternately outward to produce multiple magnitudes and qualities and inward to produce unity and cohesive substance, a precursor to the Neoplatonic doctrines of procession and reversion.<sup>27</sup>

Although neither the Existence–Vitality–Mentality nor the Being–Life–Mind nomenclature for the noetic triad explicitly appears in the *Apocryphon of John*, its introductory theogony describes the emergence of the Triple-Powered Barbelo in essentially the same terminology and concepts, suggesting that it too was composed in a similar conceptual environment. Recall the two passages previously cited from the shorter version:

**BG,2 [26]** <sup>14</sup> It is he (the Invisible Spirit) ... <sup>15</sup> who contemplates himself alone (ντοϋ ετνοϊ ἄμοϋ οὔλαϋ) <sup>16</sup> in his own light that <sup>17</sup> surrounds him, which he himself is, the source <sup>18</sup> of living water, the light that <sup>19</sup> is full of purity, the fountain of the <sup>20</sup> Spirit. It flowed from the <sup>21</sup> living water of the light, and <sup>22</sup> provided all aeons and **[27]** <sup>1</sup> worlds. In every direction <sup>2</sup> he contemplated his own image, beholding <sup>3</sup> it in the <sup>4</sup> pure luminous water that surrounds him. And <sup>5</sup> his Thought (ἔννοια) became active and <sup>6</sup> appeared and stood at rest before <sup>7</sup> him in the brilliance <sup>8</sup> of the light ... **[29]** <sup>18</sup> Barbelo <sup>19</sup> gazed intently into <sup>20</sup> the pure Light, **[30]** <sup>1</sup> and she turned herself to

it and gave rise to <sup>2</sup> a spark of *blessed light*, <sup>3</sup> though it was not equal to her in <sup>4</sup> magnitude. This is the <sup>5</sup> only-begotten (μονογενής) one, who appeared from <sup>6</sup> the Father (~ *patrofaēs*), the divine Self-generated One (αὐτογενής), <sup>7</sup> the first-born (~ *prōtogenos*) Child of the <sup>8</sup> entirety of the Spirit of pure light. <sup>9</sup> Now the <sup>10</sup> Invisible Spirit rejoiced over <sup>11</sup> the light that had come into being, <sup>12</sup> who was *first manifested* (~ *prōtofanēs*) from the <sup>13</sup> first power, his Forethought (πρόνοια), <sup>14</sup> Barbelo.

Here, the supreme Monad who “always exists”<sup>28</sup> and who is “the life that gives life” and “the blessedness that gives blessedness”<sup>29</sup> implies the late second-century existence of a incipient pre-Plotinian version of the Being–Life–Mind/Blessedness triad within the first rather than the second principle as in Plotinus.<sup>30</sup>

### *Protological ontogenesis and mystical union as revelation*

While the first half of *Allogenes* is occupied with a sequence of five revelations from a revealer named Youel that largely inform the visionary Allogenes about the structure of the metaphysical hierarchy I have just described, the second half of the treatise narrates his contemplative ascent into union with the supreme unknowable One. After each of Youel’s revelations, Allogenes, who is still “in the body,” achieves a certain progression in his understanding: (1) on the basis of hearing and discursive thought he can mentally distinguish between transcendent forms and the principles beyond them; (2) on the basis of wisdom he knows the Good within himself; (3) on the basis of vision, he comes to see the glories of the Barbelo Aeon and realize the existence of principles even prior to this, even though it is impossible to fully comprehend them.

Thereupon, Allogenes enters a one hundred year period of preparation, after which he comes to *see* those about whom he had only *heard*, the entire Barbelo Aeon and even a glimpse of its originating principle, the Triple Power of the Invisible Spirit.<sup>31</sup> On completion of the hundred-year period of preparation, he receives a luminous garment by which he is taken up to “a pure place”:

**XI,3 58** <sup>26</sup> When I was seized <sup>27</sup> by the eternal light, <sup>28</sup> by <sup>29</sup> the garment that was upon <sup>30</sup> me, and was taken up to <sup>31</sup> a pure place whose <sup>32</sup> likeness cannot be <sup>33</sup> revealed in the world, <sup>34</sup> then by means of a <sup>35</sup> great Blessedness I <sup>36</sup> saw all those about whom I had <sup>37</sup> heard. And I <sup>38</sup> praised them all and I **59** <sup>1</sup> [stood at rest] upon my knowledge and [I] <sup>2</sup> turned to the Knowledge [of] <sup>3</sup> the Totalities, the Barbelo-Aeon.

At this point, a new set of revealers, the powers of the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon, reveal to Allogenes the path of contemplative ascent through the powers of the Invisible Spirit's Triple Power leading to a mystical union with the supreme One.<sup>32</sup>

The ascent beyond the Aeon of Barbelo to the Unknowable One is first revealed to Allogenes by the powers of the Luminaries<sup>33</sup> and then actually implemented and narrated<sup>34</sup> by Allogenes in a way quite similar to the revelation, yielding what amounts to two accounts of the ascent. The technique consists of an ascending series of contemplative “withdrawals” (ἀναχωρεῖν) into a kind of mystical union with the supreme Unknowable One itself. Having become inactive, still, and silent, indeed incognizant even of himself, he has become one with the object of his vision, having passed into the realm of non-knowing knowledge where there is no longer any distinction or contrast between actively knowing subject and passively known object that characterizes ordinary acts of knowledge. The repeated emphasis on seeking and knowing oneself and what is within oneself suggests that the term “withdrawal” (ἀναχωρεῖν) indicates an inner-directed self-contraction,<sup>35</sup> a kind of mental and spiritual implosion, as if Allogenes' ascent were actually a journey into his interior primordial self where knower and known have become completely assimilated to one another. He has withdrawn into the prefiguration of his self prior to or coincident with the moment of its very origination.<sup>36</sup>

**XI,3 60**<sup>13</sup> While I was listening to these things as<sup>14</sup> those there (the luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon) spoke them, there<sup>15</sup> was within me a stillness<sup>16</sup> of *silence*, and I heard the<sup>17</sup> Blessedness<sup>18</sup> whereby I knew <my> proper self.<sup>19</sup> And I withdrew (ἀναχωρεῖν) to the<sup>20</sup> Vitality as I sought it. And<sup>21</sup> I mutually entered it<sup>22</sup> and stood,<sup>23</sup> not firmly but<sup>24</sup> quietly. And I saw<sup>25</sup> an eternal, intellectual, undivided motion<sup>26</sup> peculiar to all formless powers,<sup>27</sup> not determined<sup>28</sup> by any determination. And when<sup>29</sup> I wanted to stand firmly,<sup>30</sup> I withdrew (ἀναχωρεῖν) to<sup>31</sup> the Existence, which I found<sup>32</sup> standing and at rest,<sup>33</sup> resembling and<sup>34</sup> similar (κατὰ οὐχῆικων ἴην οὐγεῖνε ~κατ' εἰκόνα τε καὶ ὁμοίωσιν) to (the standing and resting)<sup>35</sup> enveloping me. By means of a manifestation<sup>36</sup> of the Indivisible and the<sup>37</sup> Stable I was filled<sup>38</sup> with revelation. By means<sup>39</sup> of the Unknowable One's **61**<sup>1</sup> originary manifestation (οὐμντ'ωορπῖ ἡογωῖνε εβολ ~προφάνεια), [as though]<sup>2</sup> nescient of him, I [knew]<sup>3</sup> him and was empowered by<sup>4</sup> him. Having been permanently strengthened,<sup>5</sup> I knew that [which]<sup>6</sup> exists in me, even the Triple-Powered One<sup>7</sup> and the manifestation of<sup>8</sup> his indeterminateness. [And]<sup>9</sup> by means of an originary manifestation (οὐμντ'ωορπῖ ἡογωῖνε εβολ ~προφάνεια)<sup>10</sup> of the universally prime Unknowable One –<sup>11</sup> the God<sup>12</sup> beyond perfection – I saw<sup>13</sup> him and the Triple-Powered One that exists<sup>14</sup> in them all. I was seeking<sup>15</sup> the ineffable<sup>16</sup> and unknowable God

<sup>17</sup> of whom – should one <sup>18</sup> know him – one would be completely <sup>19</sup> nescient (~ἀνόητος, ἄγνωστος?), the mediator of <sup>20</sup> the Triple-Powered One, the one who subsists in <sup>21</sup> stillness and silence and is <sup>22</sup> unknowable.<sup>37</sup>

So also according to Plotinus, the contemplative union of both the mystic aspirant and the universal Intellect with the supreme One involves a similar “withdrawal” from any proactive or aggressive intellection. As the product of an indeterminate, primary life that processes forth from the One, the contemplative intellect must withdraw back into the initial manifestation of its own primordial life, which coincides with the supreme One’s initial act of emanation:

For even if we say that it is the Good and absolutely simple, we shall not be saying anything clear and distinct, even though we are speaking the truth, as long as we do not have anything on which to base our reasoning when we speak. For, again, since knowledge of other things comes to us from intellect, and we are able to know intellect by intellect, by what sort of simple intuition could one grasp this which transcends the nature of intellect? We shall say to the person to whom we have to explain how this is possible, that it is by the likeness in ourselves (τῷ ἐν ἡμῖν ὁμοίῳ). For there is something of it in us too; or rather there is nowhere where it is not, in the things which can participate in it. For, wherever you are, it is from this that you have that which is everywhere present, by setting to it that which can have it; just as if there was a voice filling an empty space, or with the empty space, men too, and by setting yourself to listen at any point in the empty space, you will receive the whole voice, and yet not the whole. What is it, then, which we shall receive when we set our intellect to it? Rather, the Intellect must first withdraw, so to speak, backwards, and give itself up, in a way, to what lies behind it (δεῖ τὸν νοῦν οἷον εἰς τοῦπίσω ἀναχωρεῖν καὶ οἷον ἑαυτὸν ἀφέντα τοῖς εἰς ὅπισθεν αὐτοῦ ἀμφίστομον ὄντα) – for it faces in both directions; and there, if it wishes to see that First Principle, it must not be altogether intellect. For it is the first life, since it is an activity manifest in the way of outgoing of all things (“Ἔστι μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸς ζωὴ πρώτη, ἐνέργεια οὐσα ἐν διεξόδῳ τῶν πάντων); outgoing not in the sense that it is now in process of going out but that it has gone out. If, then, it is life and outgoing and holds all things distinctly and not in a vague general way – for [in the latter case] it would hold them imperfectly and inarticulately – it must itself derive from something else, which is no more in the way of outgoing, but is the origin of outgoing, and the origin of life and the origin of intellect and all things (ἀρχὴ διεξόδου καὶ ἀρχὴ ζωῆς καὶ ἀρχὴ νοῦ καὶ τῶν πάντων).<sup>38</sup>

The ultimate moment of apprehension of the unknowable deity is described as a  $\text{OY}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\ \overline{\text{NOY}}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{E}}\ \text{EBOL}$  or  $\text{OY}\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\ \overline{\text{NOY}}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{E}}\ \text{EBOL}$ , which at first sight appears to mean something like “a first revelation” or “a primary revelation.”

In a brilliant and seminal essay,<sup>39</sup> Zeke Mazur has made a study of these phrases, noting that Coptic verb phrase  $\text{OY}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\ \text{EBOL}$  (or  $\text{OY}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\ \text{EBOL}$ ) may be rendered generally as “to reveal” (or the noun “revelation”). They can be translations of transitive Greek verbs like ἀναγγέλλειν, ἀποκαλύπτειν, or φανεροῦν that connote transmission of some kind of cognitive information, or they can be translations of intransitive verbs such as ἐμφανίζειν, ἐπιφαίνειν, or φαίνεσθαι and nouns such as ἐπιφάνεια or ἐμφάνεια that denote the intransitive act of manifestation or appearance, or even certain Greek verbs such as προβάλλειν or προέρχεσθαι that connote forward motion, emanation, or projection.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, when certain revelations or manifestations are qualified by the prefix  $\text{OY}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\ \overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{E}}$  or  $\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\ \overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{E}}$  (generally renditions of Greek prefixes like προ- and πρωτο- or similar adverbials), it may signify that the revelation or manifestation is considered as primary or preeminent, but it may also signify temporal or sequential priority, in the sense of initial, prior, or originary such that the phrase  $\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\ \overline{\text{NOY}}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{E}}\ \text{EBOL}$  or  $\text{OY}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\ \overline{\text{NOY}}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{E}}\ \text{EBOL}$  may be rendered as “originary manifestation” or even “protophany” as translations of Greek phrases such as πρώτη ἐκφάνσις, πρώτη ἐπιφάνεια, προφάνεια, or even adjectives (sometimes substantivized) like πρωτοφανής.

In particular, these phrases occur at the culmination of *Allogenes*’ final contemplative ascent through the three powers of the Triple Powered One – Blessedness (i.e. Mentality), Vitality, and Existence – that mediate between the supreme Unknowable One and the Barbelo Aeon. In addition to *Allogenes* 60,13–61,14 cited above, the passages are as follows:

**XI,3 59** <sup>26</sup> And should you experience <sup>27</sup> a revelation of that One by <sup>28</sup> means of a *primary revelation* <sup>29</sup> ( $\text{OY}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\ \overline{\text{NOY}}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{E}}\ \text{EBOL}$ ) of the Unknowable One, <sup>30</sup> should you <sup>31</sup> know him, you must be incognizant!

**XI,3 61** <sup>25</sup> Cease dissipating the inactivity <sup>26</sup> that exists in you <sup>27</sup> by (further) inquiry after <sup>28</sup> incomprehensible matters; rather hear <sup>29</sup> about him insofar as it is <sup>30</sup> possible by means of a *primary* <sup>31</sup> *revelation* and a *revelation* ( $\text{OY}\overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{T}}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\ \overline{\text{NOY}}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{E}}\ \text{EBOL}\ \overline{\text{M}}\overline{\text{N}}\ \text{OY}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{E}}\ \text{EBOL}$ ).

**XI,3 63** <sup>9</sup> Nor is he something <sup>10</sup> that exists that <sup>11</sup> one can know; rather <sup>12</sup> he is something else that is superior that <sup>13</sup> one cannot know, <sup>14</sup> since he is *primary revelation* ( $\text{EY}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{P}}\overline{\text{I}}\ \overline{\text{NOY}}\overline{\text{O}}\overline{\text{N}}\overline{\text{E}}\ \text{EBOL}\ \text{PE}$ ) <sup>15</sup> and self-knowledge, <sup>16</sup> since it is he alone who knows himself.

As described earlier in this essay, a similar act of self-directed mentation is attributed to the original emergence of the Barbelo Aeon from the supreme One’s Triple Power:



It is also evident that the ascending sequence of epistemological states – ending in utter cognitive vacancy – experienced by Allogenes is the exact reverse of the sequence of the ontogenetic phases or modalities by which the Invisible Spirit’s Triple Powered unfolds into the Aeon of Barbelo: Existence, Vitality and Mentality. Since the contemplation of entities on ever higher ontological levels is characterized as a form of the contemplator’s self-knowledge, it appears that the consciousness of the knowing subject is actually assimilated to the ontological character of the level that one intelligizes at any given point. Since the Spirit is beyond determinate being, so also he is beyond any kind of discursive cognition, and therefore he is “known” by not knowing him, a kind of “learned ignorance.”<sup>43</sup>

### *Learned ignorance*

Indeed, it seems that the primary manifestation conveying the ultimate vision of the supreme reality is identical with its object: the Invisible Spirit is the very primary revelation by which he is known, whether by himself or by another:

**XI,3 63** <sup>9</sup> Nor is he something <sup>10</sup> that exists, that <sup>11</sup> one can know. Rather <sup>12</sup> he is something else that is superior, which <sup>13</sup> one cannot know. <sup>14</sup> He is originary manifestation <sup>15</sup> and self-knowledge, <sup>16</sup> since it is he alone who knows himself. <sup>17</sup> Since he is not one of those things <sup>18</sup> that exist, but is another thing, <sup>19</sup> he is superior to all superlatives, <sup>20</sup> even in comparison to his character and <sup>21</sup> what is not his character.

As the anonymous Turin *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* puts it:

There is a knowledge which is knowledge of a knower, passing from ignorance to knowledge of the known, and there is also another knowledge, an absolute one which is neither knowledge proper to a knower nor knowledge of a known, but knowledge which is this One before every known or unknown and every subject coming to knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

The Invisible Spirit is so unknowable that he is in some sense his own unknowable knowledge, and forms a unity with the nescience that sees him. In fact he seems to be equated with the state of mental vacancy itself:<sup>45</sup>

**XI,3 63** <sup>28</sup> But he is self-comprehending, <sup>29</sup> like something <sup>30</sup> so unknowable, <sup>31</sup> that he exceeds those who excel <sup>32</sup> in unknowability ... **64** <sup>6</sup> And thus he <sup>7</sup> is unknowable to all of them <sup>8</sup> in every respect, and <sup>9</sup> through them all he is <sup>10</sup> in them all, <sup>11</sup> not only as the

unknowable knowledge<sup>12</sup> that is proper to him;<sup>13</sup> he is also joined through the<sup>14</sup> nescience that sees him.

Yet *Allogenes* makes it clear that one cannot simply use the equation between the unknowable deity and the primary revelation or incognizant knowledge by which he is known as a way of knowing or speaking about him. The self-knowledge and existence of the Unknown One is not something distinct from him, but identical with him. To equate him with either knowledge or non-knowledge is to miss the goal of one's quest:

**XI,3 64**<sup>14</sup> <Whether one sees><sup>15</sup> in what way he is unknowable,<sup>16</sup> or sees<sup>17</sup> him as he is<sup>18</sup> in every respect or<sup>19</sup> would say that<sup>20</sup> he is something like<sup>21</sup> knowledge, he has acted impiously against him,<sup>22</sup> being liable to judgment because he did not<sup>23</sup> know God. He will not<sup>24</sup> be judged by<sup>25</sup> that One, who<sup>26</sup> is neither concerned for anything nor<sup>27</sup> has any desire,<sup>28</sup> but it results<sup>29</sup> merely from the fact that he has not found the origin<sup>30</sup> that truly exists. He was blind<sup>31</sup> apart from the quiescent source<sup>32</sup> of revelation,<sup>33</sup> the actualization<sup>34</sup> from the triple-powered<sup>35</sup> preconception (αγορῆ πᾶνηνοια = προέννοια)<sup>36</sup> of the Invisible Spirit.<sup>46</sup>

The unknowable deity is united with the nescience that sees him, which is identical with his own self-knowledge. By implication, he is also united with the non-knowing visionary as well. The “unknowable knowledge that is proper to him” includes not only human knowledge of the Invisible Spirit, but also the Spirit's own knowledge of himself and things other than himself.<sup>47</sup> The Spirit abides in the nescience that sees him, a nescience whose image dwells also in us, as the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* makes clear:

We also lack the faculty proper to the direct apprehension (ἐπιβολή) of God, even if those who represent him in some way reveal to us something of the subject by discourse as far as it is possible for us to understand, for he himself abides beyond any discourse and every notion, in the nescience of him that is found in us (ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ περὶ ἡμᾶς ἀγνωσίᾳ καταμένοντος).<sup>48</sup>

Such a cognitively vacant apprehension of the Supreme is advocated both by the *Chaldaean Oracles*:

For there exists a certain Intelligible which you must perceive by the flower of mind. For if you should incline your mind toward it and perceive it as perceiving a specific thing, you would not perceive it. For it is the power of strength, visible all around, flashing with intellectual divisions. Therefore, you must not perceive

that Intelligible violently but with the flame of mind completely extended which measures all things, except that Intelligible. You must not perceive it intently, but keeping the pure eye of your soul turned away, you should extend an empty mind toward the Intelligible in order to comprehend it, since it exists outside of (your) mind.<sup>49</sup>

and by the anonymous commentator on Plato's *Parmenides*:

It is necessary therefore to subtract everything and add nothing: to subtract everything, not by falling into absolute non-being, but by thought attending to everything that comes to and through him, considering that he is the cause of both the multitude and the being of all things, while himself being neither one nor multiple, but beyond being in regard to all the things that exist on his account. Thus he transcends not only multiplicity, but even the concept of the One, for it is on his account that both the One and Monad exist. And thus one will be able neither to fall into the void, nor dare to attribute anything to him, but to remain in a non-comprehending comprehension and in an intellection that intuits nothing. Through such means, it will occur to you at some point, having stood apart from the intellection of the things constituted by him, to stand upon the ineffable preconception of him which represents him through silence (ἀποστάντι τῶν δι' αὐτὸν ὑπο-στάν-των τῆς νοήσεως στήναι ἐπὶ τὴν αὐτοῦ ἄρρητον προ{ζ} ἔννοιαν τὴν ἐνεικονιζομένην αὐτὸν διὰ σιγῆς), (a preconception) that is unaware of being silent and not conscious that it represents him and is cognizant of nothing at all, but which is only an image of the ineffable and is ineffably identical with the ineffable, but not as if knowing him, if you can follow me, even though imaginatively, as I venture to speak.<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly, in the *Chaldean Oracles* and the anonymous *Commentary*, this supra-rational nescience or “non-knowing knowledge” is indeed described, but it is not self-reflexive and not narratively reenacted as it is in *Allogenes*. It is also interesting that both this citation from the anonymous *Commentary* and the previously cited passages from *Allogenes*<sup>51</sup> apparently use the term “pre-conception” (ἄορπῑ ν̄εννοια = προέννοια) to refer to the nescient apprehension of the One, not only on the part of the visionary, but also on the part of the One itself. Like the concept of protophany or originary manifestation, so also the concept of preconception – defined<sup>52</sup> as an apprehension of the supreme One through a participation in the indivisible activity of the First One's “pre-vitality” – seems to play a role in both originary ontogenesis from and mystical reversion to the One.

*The negative theology*

After having nesciently “known” and “seen” the unknowable First One and its Triple Power at the point of its and his own protophany or originary manifestation, Allogenes – who apparently continues to seek the unknowable God – is then instructed by the Luminaries to “hear” about him by means of a “primary manifestation” or protophany supplemented by a “revelation”:

**XI,3 61** <sup>22</sup> And when I was confirmed <sup>23</sup> in these matters, <sup>24</sup> the powers of the Luminaries said to me: <sup>25</sup> “Cease dissipating the inactivity <sup>26</sup> that exists in you <sup>27</sup> by (further) inquiry after <sup>28</sup> incomprehensible matters; rather hear <sup>29</sup> about him insofar as it is <sup>30</sup> possible by means of a primary <sup>31</sup> manifestation together with a revelation.

The ensuing auditory revelation turns out to be a dominantly negative theology supplemented by a more affirmative theology.<sup>53</sup> The Invisible Spirit is said to be known by conceptually abstracting from him all qualities since no quality applies to him and by conceptualizing him to be prior to, more than, or superior to any conceivable entity no matter how exalted. Negation of all alternatives on one level of thought launches the mind upward to a new, more eminent level of insight. The supreme One presents a paradox: it has neither this character nor its opposite, but transcends both in a way that one cannot comprehend. What we have here is an instance of what Bernard McGinn calls a “hard apophaticism” that subverts all human modes of conceiving and predicating God.<sup>54</sup>

## FINAL REMARKS

The term “revelation” as a designation for the movement from “hidden” to “revealed” or “manifest” is clearly a central one in religious literature, where it can designate not only the transmission of some kind of cognitive content or ritual action essential to the enlightenment and salvation of the recipient, but even serve as a generic designation or even the title for entire compositions. In the case of the Sethian literature from Nag Hammadi, revelation is a dominantly epistemological phenomenon, a way of knowing ultimate – generally invisible and intangible – reality that is thought to qualify and add depth to the ordinary reality of everyday experience. In this sense, such revelations promise to transmit a knowledge that can be understood, even though in many instances these revelations are said to be “ineffable” or “incomprehensible,” or to be a “mystery” that is secret and indivulgeable, especially to those outside of the group for which its content is intended.

The case of Sethian literature is particularly interesting, owing to its indebtedness to Greek – mainly Platonic and Stoic – metaphysics that reaches

its height in the so-called Platonizing Sethian treatises *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*. In these treatises, especially *Allogenes*, the concept of revelation – without losing its original epistemological significance – has slid over into the domain of rather technical metaphysics, especially theories of protological ontogenesis. Here, the process by which reality itself is generated is depicted as a manifestation, appearance, exteriorization, deployment, or actualization of a potentiality hidden or prefigured in an originating source that transcends or is clearly “other” than what is thereby generated. This movement from hidden to manifest results in a hierarchy of increasingly determinate and articulate levels of reality that can be grasped and categorized through revelatory discourse.

Given the monistic character of this metaphysics that traces the origin of an articulated ontological hierarchy back to an absolutely simple and unitary single source in which this hierarchy is originally hidden, the initial generation or manifestation of this hierarchy also constitutes a revelation of the original source. But while the product of this manifestation is knowable by discursive thought and intellection, its originary manifestation is not. Thus, especially in *Allogenes*, the initial moment of ontogenetic manifestation is ultimately a revelation which, like its ultimate source, is not only merely “ineffable” or “incomprehensible,” but one that cannot be known at all, or is knowable only by knowing what it is not (negative theology), or indeed by not knowing it at all (learned ignorance). As *Allogenes* puts it, the source of all reality is so unknowable that it is in some sense its own unknowable knowledge, and forms a unity with the nescience that sees it. Here, it turns out that that revelation is a form of self-knowledge which is entirely devoid of cognitive content, not only on the part of the would-be knower, but also of that itself which one seeks to know. Surely the most significant feature of *Allogenes* is the irony that such a lengthy sequence of erudite metaphysical “revelations,” whose comprehension demands rather difficult mental gymnastics, has as its goal an ultimate nescience and cessation of any mentation whatsoever. *Allogenes* is to my knowledge the earliest attempt in the history of Western mysticism actually to narrate the successive stages of a mystical union with the Unknowable God who can only be known by not knowing him. Indeed, *Allogenes* is not so much a revelation of the mystical ascent or of its ultimate destination as it is a performance: the very act of reading *Allogenes* is itself to undergo the ascent.

## NOTES

1. *Trimorphic Protennoia* NHC XIII,1 35.30–36.11.
2. A “secret” (41.28 εἰρη = κεκρυμμένον), indeed “ineffable” (37.17; 41.3 ἀτῶαχε ἦμοσ = ἄρητος; 47.6–7 ἀτῶοσ = ἄρητος) or “inexpressible” (41.3–4 ἀτῶοσ = ἀνεκδιήγητος) mystery.
3. *Trimorphic Protennoia* NHC XIII,1 40.29–34.

4. *Trimorphic Protennoia* NHC XIII,1 45.21–4.
5. *Trimorphic Protennoia* NHC XIII,1 46.11–25.
6. *Trimorphic Protennoia* NHC XIII,1 47.13–16.
7. *Trimorphic Protennoia* NHC XIII,1 47–8; 49.5–22
8. Cf. the sequence φωνή, λέξις, λόγος in Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* 7.57: διαφέρει δὲ φωνή καὶ λέξις, ὅτι φωνή μὲν καὶ ὁ ἦχος ἐστὶ, λέξις δὲ τὸ ἔναρθρον μόνον. λέξις δὲ λόγου διαφέρει, ὅτι λόγος αἰεὶ σημαντικός ἐστι, λέξις δὲ καὶ ἀσήμαντος, ὡς ἡ βλίτυρι, λόγος δὲ οὐδαμῶς. In 3.107 Diogenes distinguishes between literate speech and mere sound: Ἡ φωνή διαίρειται εἰς δύο· ἓν μὲν αὐτῆς ἐστὶν ἔμψυχον, ἓν δὲ ἄψυχον. ἔμψυχον μὲν ἢ τῶν ζῴων φωνή, ἄψυχον δὲ φθόγγοι καὶ ἦχοι. τῆς τοῦ ἔμψυχου φωνῆς ἢ μὲν ἐστὶν ἐγγράμματος, ἢ δὲ ἀγράμματος. A different though similar distinction is surely intended by the Coptic words used by the *Trimorphic Protennoia* to distinguish between the progression from mere sound or voice (ἔρροϋ, masculine ← φθόγγος or perhaps ἦχος) to humanlike speech (σμη, feminine ← φωνή or perhaps λέξις) to fully articulate Logos in the sense of an intelligible proposition or statement. Perhaps a similar sequence underlies the *Apocryphon of John*'s portrayal of Barbelo as initially the Ennoia internal to the Invisible Spirit, which activates itself as his Pronoia, and is finally instantiated as his Protennoia.
9. *De Vita Mosis* 2.127: “For reason is double, both in the universe and also in the nature of mankind, in the universe there is that reason which is conversant about incorporeal and paradigmatic Ideas (παραδειγματικῶν ιδεῶν) from which the intelligible world (νοητὸς κόσμος) was made, and also that which is concerned with the visible objects of sight, which are copies and imitations of those Ideas (μιμήματα καὶ ἀπεικονίσματα τῶν ιδεῶν ἐκείνων), of which this perceptible world was made. Again, in man there is internal (ἐνδιάθετος) reason and another that is uttered (προφορικός): and the one is, as it were a spring, and the other flows from it; and the place of the one is the governing part (the mind), while the place of uttered part is the tongue, the mouth, and all the rest of the organs of the voice.” Cf. also *De vita Mosis* 2.129; *De Abrahamo* 83.2; *Quod deterius* 92.
10. Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 2.10.7–9: “God, then, having his own logos dwelling in his own inward parts generated it, having emitted it with his own wisdom before the All” (Ἐχων οὖν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ λόγον ἐνδιάθετον ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις σπλάγχνοις ἐγέννησεν αὐτὸν μετὰ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ σοφίας ἐξερευζάμενος πρὸ τῶν ὅλων). And 2.22.9–17: “But what else is this voice (of God speaking with Adam in the garden) but the Logos of God, who is also his Son? Not as the poets and writers of myths talk of the sons of gods begotten from intercourse, but as truth relates, the Logos that always exists was residing within the heart of God (τὸν λόγον τὸν ὄντα διὰ παντὸς ἐνδιάθετον ἐν καρδίᾳ θεοῦ). For before anything came into being he had him as a counsellor, being his own mind and thought. But when God wished to make whatever he resolved, he brought this Logos forth as an utterance, the firstborn of all creation, not himself being emptied of the Logos, but having generated Logos, and always conversing with his Logos (τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ἐγέννησεν προφορικόν, πρωτότοκον πάσης κτίσεως, οὐ κενωθείς αὐτὸς τοῦ λόγου, ἀλλὰ λόγον γεννήσας καὶ τῷ λόγῳ αὐτοῦ διὰ παντὸς ὁμιλῶν).” Cf. also Clement of Alexandria’s distinction between the innate knowledge of faith as opposed to the expressed knowledge of wisdom in *Stromateis* 7.55.4: “Faith is an internal (ἐνδιάθετον) good, and without searching for God, confesses His existence, and glorifies Him as existent. Whence by starting from this faith, and being developed by it, through the grace of God, the knowledge respecting Him is to be acquired as far as possible. Now we assert that knowledge (γνώσις) differs from the wisdom (σοφία) that is the result of teaching. For as far as anything is knowledge, so far is it certainly wisdom; but in as far as anything is wisdom, it is not certainly knowledge. For the term wisdom appears only in the knowledge of the uttered word (προφορικός λόγος).”

11. A notion found also in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* NHC XIII,1 36.6–9: “It is I who am hidden within [radiant] waters; it is I who gradually made put forth the All radiant by my Thought.”
12. *Ennead* 5.1[10].6.15–30 (trans. MacKenna 1992).
13. Rather than a static state of merely containing the objects of intellection, in God the activity of thought is life; indeed God is that activity, as in *Metaphysics* 11.1072b20–30: “And thought thinks itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, that is, the substance, is thought. And it is active when it possesses this object. Therefore the latter rather than the former is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state. And life also belongs to God (καὶ ζωὴ δὲ γε ὑπάρξει); for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality (ἢ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωὴ, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἢ ἐνέργεια); and God’s essential actuality is life most good and eternal (ἐνέργεια δὲ ἢ καθ’ αὐτὴν ἐκείνου ζωὴ ἀρίστη καὶ αἰδίος). We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that continuous and eternal life and duration belong to God; for this is God (φαμὲν δὴ τὸν θεὸν εἶναι ζῶν ἀίδιον ἄριστον, ὥστε ζωὴ καὶ αἰὼν συνεξῆς καὶ αἰδίος ὑπάρξει τῷ θεῷ· τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός).” Cf. also *Metaphysics* 1074b33–1075a4.
14. Cf. *Eugnostos the Blessed* NHC III,3 75.3–7 (= the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* NHC III,4 99.1–7): “the beginningless Forefather sees himself within himself, like a mirror, having appeared in his likeness (εφωαγ ερωσ ἡμην ἡμοσ ἡραῖ ἡρητῶ ἡθε ἡογιαλ· εαφογωμη εβολ ρῖ πεφαιε) as Self-Father, that is, Self-Begetter”; *Tripartite Tractate* NHC I,5 56.1–57.3: “For it is truly his ineffable self that he engenders. It is self-generation, where he conceives of himself and knows himself as he is ... by knowing himself in himself the Father bore him (the Monogenes Son) without generation, so that he exists by the Father having him as a thought – that is, his thought about himself, his sensation of himself and [...] of his eternal being”; Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 7.1: “Being unknown, the Father wished to be known to the aeons, and through his reflection, as if knowing himself ... he emitted the Monogenes.”
15. Cf. Bechtle (2000: 393–414, n. 74): “Barbelo really is equivalent to mind. It is the first thought of the Invisible Spirit and it has, principally speaking, three levels: Kalyptos, the hidden One, Protophanes, the first appearing One, Autogenes, the self-begotten One. At first this triad is an emanative triad: it represents the stages of the unfolding and proceeding of the aeon of Barbelo from its source in the Invisible Spirit. In the beginning Barbelo is hidden as purely potential intellect in the Invisible Spirit. Once Barbelo is constituted, Kalyptos will represent the realm of that which truly exists, i.e. the ideas. Next, Barbelo first appears as the male intelligence which is then conceived of as those which exist together, those which are unified (perhaps mind and ideas which are unified through intellection), represented by Protophanes who thinks the ideas of Kalyptos, on the one hand, and acts on the individuals, on the other hand. Finally, Barbelo becomes the self-begotten demiurgical mind which can be identified with the rational part of the world soul. As an established ontological level it is the individuals represented by Autogenes who has the demiurgic role of a world soul. Thus Barbelo corresponds to Numenius’ second mind. Insofar as the second mind is participated in and used by the first, i.e. insofar as the second mind is prefigured in the first and thus is the first in a certain way, we have Kalyptos. Insofar as the Numenian second mind is identical with the third and acts through the third it can be compared to Autogenes. *Stricto sensu* the second mind as second mind is comparable to the Protophanes level of the Sethians.”

16. Thus in the *Apocryphon of John*, the Invisible – and thus “hidden” – Spirit emits an overflow of luminous water in which he sees a reflection of himself; this self-vision then “first manifests” itself as the second principle Barbelo, the divine First Thought. In turn, Barbelo contemplates the same luminous water from which she had originated in order to generate the third principle, the divine Autogenes as the “First Appearance” of the Invisible Spirit’s first power.
17. In the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, Barbelo is the invisible “hidden one,” (NHC XIII,1 38.9–10; cf. 36.6–9: “It is I who am hidden within [radiant] waters. I am the one who gradually put forth the All by my Thought”), the Intellect hidden in silence (46.11–23). In Codex Bruce *Untitled*, where the term “hidden” occurs nearly forty times, the Monogenes is said to be “hidden” in the supreme Setheus (*Untitled* 235.23 [Schmidt & MacDermot 1978]) or in the “Triple Powered One” (*Untitled* 246.26 [Schmidt & MacDermot 1978]). According to the *Apocryphon of John*, not only Barbelo (NHC II,1 4.27–30; 5.11) and her self-generated child Autogenes (6.20–21; cf. also the *Gospel of the Egyptians* NHC IV,2 54.21–2; 55.25; *Eugnostos the Blessed* NHC III,3 74.14–15), but even the divine Adamas (NHC II,1 8.32) are said to be the “first to appear” (πεταξεωρη ογωνη εβολ] ~ πρωτοφανής). Cf. Codex Bruce, *Untitled* (Schmidt & MacDermot 1978) 234.12–13: “The ninth father has a hidden (καλυπτος) aspect and a first-appearing (πρωτοφανης) aspect and a self-generated (αυτογενης) aspect.” In *Untitled* 237.19–23, Phosilampses says of the Monogenes: “For his sake are those things which truly and really exist (~ τὰ ὄντως ὄντα, archetypal forms) and those which do not truly exist (~ τὰ μὴ ὄντως ὄντα, animate beings). This is he for whose sake are those that truly exist which are hidden, and those that do not truly exist which are manifest.”
18. Cf. Phanes, *Orphicorum Hymni* 52.5–6; *Papyri Graecae Magicae* 4.943–4; cf. Orphic *Argonautica*, line 16 (Dottin 1930): Φάνητα ... καλέουσι Βτοτοί: πρώτος γὰρ ἐφάνθη. Note the use of φαίνεῖν in the following Gnostic testimonia: Simon Magus *apud* Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* VI.18: “For Thought (ἔννοια) that subsists in unity processing forth became two, being rendered manifest to itself from itself (φανεῖς αὐτῷ ἀπὸ ἑαυτοῦ), the Father passed into a state of duality”; Marcus *apud* Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 6.42: “The self-existent Father opened His mouth, and sent forth a Logos similar to himself and it stood by him and showed him who he was, that he himself had been manifested as a form of the Invisible One” (ὃς παραστάς ἐπέδειξεν αὐτῷ ὃ ἦν, αὐτὸς τοῦ ἀόρατου μορφή φανείς).” Cf. Codex Bruce, *Untitled* 252.24–253.2 (Schmidt & MacDermot 1978): “Moreover the power that was given to the forefather is called first-manifest (πρωτοφανής) because it is he who first appeared (πενταφογωνη εβολ παωρη). And he was called unbegotten (ἀγέννητος) because no one had created him. And he was (called) the ineffable and the nameless one. And he was also called self-begotten (αὐτογενής) and self-willed (αυτοελητος) because he appeared (ογωνη εβολ) by his own will.”
19. In *Ad Candidum* 14.11–14, Victorinus hints at a similar progression: “For what is above ὄν is hidden (cf. Kalyptos) ὄν; indeed the manifestation (cf. Protophanes) of the hidden is generation (cf. Autogenes), since ὄν in potentiality generates ὄν in act.”
20. Marsanes NHC X 9.1–3: “For this reason the Virgin (Barbelo) became male (as νοῦς, i.e. the Aeon [m.] of Barbelo), because she had separated from the male (i.e. the Invisible Spirit).”
21. *Ad Candidum* 14.5–25 (trans. M. T. Clark 1981).
22. E.g. *Ennead* 6.7[38].17.
23. Justified by Plato, *Sophist* 248e–249b: “Are we really to be so easily persuaded that change, life, soul and intelligence have no place in the perfectly real (παντελῶς ὄν), that is has neither life (ζωή) nor intelligence (νοῦς), but stands aloof devoid of intelligence (φρόνησις)?” and *Timaeus* 39e: “the Nous beholds (καθορᾷ) the ideas resident in the veritable living being (ὃ ἐστι ζῶον); such and go many as exist therein he purposed

- (διενορήθη) that the universe should contain.” Intellect is not a lifeless being, but an act (*Ennead* 5.3[49].5.33–44; cf. 2.9[33].6.14–19; 6.9[9].9.17; 2.5[25].3.36; 5.5[32].2.9–13). This restriction perhaps owes to his aversion to Middle Platonic and even Gnostic theologies that multiply the number of transcendental hypostases beyond three, since he regarded the supreme One as entirely transcendent to Intellect; there is no being that exists between them as mediator, nor may one distinguish between a higher intellect in repose and a lower one in motion, or a One in act and another One in potency (*Ennead* 2.9[33].1); nor may one distinguish between an intellect at rest, another in contemplation and yet another that reflects or plans (*Ennead* 2.9[33].6) as did Numenius and even Plotinus himself on one occasion (*Ennead* 3.9[13].1).
24. While *Zostrianos* tends to portray this entity as the Invisible Spirit’s inherent three-fold power, *Allogenes* (and *Marsanes*) tends to hypostatize the Triple Power as a quasi-hypostatic “Triple Powered One” or “Triple-Powered Invisible Spirit” interposed between the supreme Unknowable One and the Aeon of Barbelo by identifying it in terms of its median processional phase (e.g. Vitality, Life, Activity; NHC XI,3 66.30–38: “From the One who constantly stands, there appeared an eternal Life, the Invisible and Triple Powered Spirit, the One that is in all existing things and surrounds them all while transcending them all”), although in its initial and final phases it actually is these two.
  25. E.g. *Zostrianos* NHC VIII,1 81.6–20: “She (Barbelo) [was] existing [individually] [as cause] of [the declination]. Lest she come forth anymore or get further away from perfection, she knew herself and him (the Invisible Spirit), and she stood at rest and spread forth on his [behalf] ... to know herself and the one that pre-exists.”
  26. Here it seems that Vitality, the median power of the Triple Powered One, is equivalent to the indefinite dyad of Neopythagorean metaphysics prior to its final instantiation as the fully determinate Aeon of Barbelo. If so, one can compare this process of contraction with Moderatus’ (*apud* Simplicius, *In Aristotelis de Physica commentarii* 231.7–10) “unitary Logos” that inaugurates ontogenesis on a secondary level by depriving itself of the unitary aspects of its multiple Forms, thus yielding not only the transcendent unity of the First One, but also making room for pure Quantity – perhaps the mere plurality of the Forms – deprived of all unity and proportion as a sort of relative non-being that could be identified with the receptacle of the *Timaeus*. Cf. the similar process in frags. 3–5 (Majercik 1989) of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, where the Father snatches away his own fire or hypostatical identity that occupies the highest level (... ὁ πατήρ ἤρπασσεν ἑαυτόν, οὐδ’ ἐν ἑῇ δυνάμει νοερᾷ κλείσας ἴδιον πῦρ) to yield pure indeterminate power or potential to be informed by his intellectual power on a lower level. By contrast, Numenius (frag. 52 des Places 1973) objects to certain Pythagoreans who claim “that this indeterminate and unlimited Dyad (on a secondary level) is itself brought forth from the single Unity (at the highest level), as it withdraws from its singular nature and departs into the condition of the Dyad” (Sed non nullo Pythagoreos vim sententiae non recte assecutos putasse dici etiam illam indeterminatam et immensam duitatem ab unica singularitate institutam recedente a natura sua singularitate et in duitatis abitu migrante non recte, ut quae erat singularitas esse desineret, quae non erat duitas susisteret, atque ex deo silva et ex singularitate immensa et indeterminata duitas converteretur).
  27. As applied to the Stoic universal Logos/Pneuma, Proclus, *Theologia platonica* 4.55.7–8: ἡ τοῦ πνεύματος φύσις καὶ ἡ τονικὴ κίνησις; as applied to bodies, Nemesius, *De natura hominis* 2.44–9 = Numenius, frag. 4b (des Places) = *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 2:451: “If they should say, as the Stoics do, that there exists in bodies a kind of tensile movement which moves simultaneously inwards and outwards, the outward movement produces magnitudes and qualities and the inward one unity and substance, we must ask them – since every movement issues from some power – what this power is and what substance it contains.” (εἰ δὲ λέγοιεν καθάπερ οἱ Στωϊκοὶ τονικὴν τινα εἶναι κίνησιν περὶ

τὰ σώματα εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἅμα καὶ εἰς τὸ ἔξω κινουμένην, καὶ τὴν μὲν εἰς τὸ ἔξω μεγεθῶν καὶ ποιότητων ἀποτελεσματικὴν εἶναι, τὴν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἐνώσεως καὶ οὐσίας, ἐρωτητέον αὐτοὺς ἐπειδὴ πᾶσα κίνησις ἀπὸ τινός ἐστι δυνάμεως τίς ἢ δύναμις αὕτη καὶ ἐν τίνι οὐσιώται). Cf. Hadot (1968: 1.68–77. A partial antecedent to such motion might be the Pythagorean notion that one thing became distinguished from another through the inbreathing of the Unlimited by the Limit (much as according to ancient medical speculations, the seed in the womb “breathes in” the air and is divided by it); see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 14.1091a13–19 “There is no reason to doubt whether the Pythagoreans do or do not introduce it (generation); for they clearly state that when the One had been constituted – whether out of planes or surfaces or seed or out of something that they cannot explain – immediately the nearest part of the Infinite began to be drawn in and limited by the Limit” (οἱ μὲν οὖν Πυθαγόρειοι πότερον οὐ ποιοῦσιν ἢ ποιοῦσι γένεσιν οὐδὲν δεῖ διστάζειν· φανερώς γὰρ λέγουσιν ὡς τοῦ ἐνὸς συσταθέντος, εἴτ’ ἐξ ἐπιπέδων εἴτ’ ἐκ χροιάς εἴτ’ ἐκ σπέρματος εἴτ’ ἐξ ὧν ἀποροῦσιν εἰπεῖν, εὐθὺς τὸ ἐγγίστα τοῦ ἀπείρου ὅτι εἴλκετο καὶ ἐπεραίνετο ὑπὸ τοῦ πέρατος); *Physics* 213b22–7: “The Pythagoreans, too, held that void exists, and that it enters the heaven from the unlimited breath – it, so to speak, breathes in the void. The void distinguishes the natures of things, since it is the thing that separates and distinguishes the successive terms in a series. This happens in the first case of numbers; for the void distinguishes their nature” (εἶναι δ’ ἔφασαν καὶ οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι κενόν, καὶ ἐπεισιέιναι αὐτὸ τῷ οὐρανῷ ἐκ τοῦ ἀπείρου πνεύματος ὡς ἀναπνέοντι καὶ τὸ κενόν, ὃ διορίζει τὰς φύσεις, ὡς ὄντος τοῦ κενοῦ χωρισμοῦ τινὸς τῶν ἐφεξῆς καὶ [τῆς] διορίσεως καὶ τοῦτ’ εἶναι πρῶτον ἐν τοῖς ἀριθμοῖς· τὸ γὰρ κενὸν διορίζει τὴν φύσιν αὐτῶν).

28. εἰσῶσι δει, BG,2 24.2.

29. BG,2 25.15–16.

30. In the *Apocryphon of John*, the second principle Barbelo, who originates from the first principle’s self contemplation (νοῖ, BG,2 26.15) of himself in the luminous “living” water (μοογ ἡωνῆ, 26,18) that emanates from him, is herself called Triple-Powered (BG,2 27.21–28.1: τῶο[μ]ντε ἡσον; NHC III,1 8.2–3: [τῶο]μνῆτ ἡδην[αμς]). Finally, the third principle, the Invisible Spirit’s and Barbelo’s self-generated Child is, like the Father, also identified as blessed (μακαριον; BG,2 30.2–3) and receives Mind (μογς, BG,2 31.5–9). Cf. the parallel in the longer version, NHC II,1 4.19–28. The living waters of the Sethian baptismal rite have become a transcendent emanation of luminous, living and self-reflective thinking. In turn, Barbelo’s contemplation of this same luminous water manifests itself as the self-generated Autogenes, the “first appearance” of the Invisible Spirit’s invisible first thought. Compare Codex Bruce, *Untitled* 242.24–253.2 (Schmidt & MacDermot 1978): “the power that was given to the forefather is called first-visible because it is he who was first manifest (πρωτοφανής). And he was called unbegotten because no one had created him. And he was (called) the ineffable and the nameless one. And he was also called self-begotten (αὐτογενής) and self-willed because he had revealed himself by his own will.”

31. *Allogenes* NHC XI,3 57.27–59.3.

32. *Allogenes* NHC XI,3 59.4–68.top.

33. *Allogenes* NHC XI,3 59.4–60.12.

34. *Allogenes* NHC XI,3 60.12–61.22.

35. Cf. *Zostrianos* NHC VIII,1 44.17–22: “Whenever one [wishes], then he again parts from them all and withdraws (ἀναχωρεῖν) into himself [alone], for he can become divine by having withdrawn to God.” Porphyry, *Sententiae* 40.51–6: “To those who are intellectually (νοερώς) able to withdraw (χωρεῖν) into their own being (οὐσία) and to know it, and who, by both the knowledge itself and the consciousness (εἶδησις) of that knowledge, apprehend themselves according to a unity of knower and known, to those thus present to themselves, true being (τὸ ὄν) is also present.”

36. Compare *Allogenes* NHC XI,3 6.15–20: “If you [seek with perfect] seeking, [then] you shall know the [Good that is] in you; then [you shall know yourself] as well, (as) one who [derives from] the God who truly [pre-exists].” For similar understandings of self-knowledge, see the *Book of Thomas* NHC II,7 138.16–18; *Acts of Thomas* 15.14–15; *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 78b; and *Hermetic Definitions* 9.4.
37. Cf. strengthening in *Ennead* 5.5[32].8.9–13.
38. *Ennead* 3.8[30].9.18–40 (trans. Armstrong 1967); cf. *Allogenes* XI,3 48.34.
39. Mazur (2008: 3–4).
40. Mazur (2008: 3, n. 6) cites the Graeco-Coptic vocabulary of the *Apocryphon of John* and the parallel fragments of Irenaeus’ *Adversus haereses* preserved by Theodoret: e.g. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.10.1.13: προελθούσης; cf. NHC III,1 8.9: ογῶν[ε] εβολ; BG,2 28.8–9: ογῶν[ε] εβολ; NHC II,1 4.28; 5.15, 22, 34: αςσῶλι εβολ; NHC IV,1 7.[3–4]; 8.[2–3],[25]: αςσῶλι εβολ. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.29.1.7: προελήλυθεν; cf. NHC III,1 8.16: ογῶν[ε] εβολ; BG,2 28.17: αςσῶλι εβολ; NHC II,1 5.22: [αςσῶλι]π εβολ. In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC IV,2 53.4; 54.21–2; 56.12, 21–2; 63.5, 28), ρῳορπ̄ ἵνογῶν[ε] εβολ denotes emanations on many ontological levels, and is also used of the manifestation of the aeons begotten by Christ in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* NHC XIII,1 39.8.
41. “It would appear that the Platonizing Sethian authors conceived the mystical ascent as a process of reversion towards some residual aspect of the transcendental divinity’s initial self-manifestation that is immanent within the self. Yet it also seems that the human aspirant’s mystical self-reversion is itself non-coincidentally parallel to the primordial self-reversion undertaken by the first, transcendent principle, when this principle reverts to and apprehends itself to produce the first incipient duality whence emerges the rest of reality. Indeed, it appears that these sectaries envisioned the mystical and the ontogenetic experiences of self-perception – in each case a ‘primary manifestation’ – to be identical, according to a kind of commutative principle, even if the end result in each case was thought to be quite different. One may therefore suppose the Sethian authors imagined that it was possible to reiterate the transcendent principle’s own primordial self-apprehension” (Mazur 2008: 8).
42. Cf. *Ennead* 3.8[30].9.33.
43. *Allogenes* NHC XI,3 60.13–61.22.
44. *Anonymus Taurenensis in Platonis Parmenidem commentarium* 6.4–12 (Hadot 1968: 2.82).
45. As Eriugena, *Periphyseon* 2 (Migne 1853: 593c, 594a) puts it, “his (God’s) nescience (of his essence) is ineffable understanding” (*ipsius enim ignorantia ineffabilis est intelligentia*), and “thus his nescience is the highest and truest wisdom” (*ipsa itaque ignorantia summa ac vera est sapientia*). See also discussion by McGinn elsewhere in this volume.
46. Cf. *Allogenes* NHC XI,3 48.13 and *Anonymus Taurenensis in Platonis Parmenidem commentarium* 2.20.
47. Cf. *Anonymus Taurenensis in Platonis Parmenidem commentarium* 6.4–12 (Hadot 1968: 2.82): “there is a knowledge which is knowledge of a knower, passing from ignorance to knowledge of the known, and there is also another knowledge, an absolute one which is neither knowledge proper to a knower nor knowledge of a known, but knowledge which is this One before every known or unknown and every subject coming to knowledge.”
48. *Anonymus Taurenensis in Platonis Parmenidem commentarium* 9.20–26 (Hadot 1968: 2.94–6).
49. *Frag. 1* (Majercik 1989).
50. *Anonymus Taurenensis in Platonis Parmenidem commentarium* 2.4–27 (Hadot 1968: 2.68–70; trans. Bechtle 1999).
51. *Allogenes* NHC XI,3 48.13; 64.14–36.
52. *Allogenes* NHC XI,3 48.8–38.
53. *Allogenes* NHC XI,3 61.32–62.13; 62.14–67.20.
54. See his contribution to the present volume.

## CHAPTER 9

# SHAMANISM AND THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF MODERN KABBALAH

*Jonathan Garb*

This essay is part of a series of studies tracing central themes in the history of modern Kabbalah. While classical Jewish studies have generally focused on late antiquity and the Middle Ages, currently one can discern a shift towards a far greater concern with the modern period, in which most of the Kabbalistic literature that has reached us was actually composed. Furthermore, rather than being a residual and soon-to-disappear relic, as in Gershom Scholem's secular-Zionist narrative, Kabbalah is increasingly being portrayed as a vibrant stream within the very process of modernization.<sup>1</sup> As we shall see, adopting this new perspective requires abandoning the meta-narrative of modernity as secularization, and joining the growing body of work known as post-secular.<sup>2</sup> The apparent history of modern Kabbalah is certainly more readily accessible than its nebulous origins, due to developments such as the print revolution and the current rapid digitization of Jewish books.<sup>3</sup> However, following the guiding premise of this volume and the conference upon which it is based, I shall address here its hidden history, whose very existence may not be obvious to all scholars of this lore. This term has three meanings. First, I believe that I have exposed a subterranean current, as it were, which runs below the stream of modern Kabbalistic transmission. The very exposure of the secret is indebted to its partial disclosure in contemporary Kabbalistic writing, as part of the more general process of the exotericization of Kabbalah during the last and current centuries.<sup>4</sup> From here we shall follow the textual record almost exclusively.<sup>5</sup>

The second meaning is the hidden meaning that kabbalists find in history, both the history of the cosmos and that of their own tradition. In Hayden White's terms, it is the way in which modern kabbalists have constructed their own unique historical narrative.<sup>6</sup> It is no coincidence that a large part of the development of this narrative took place in circles that have already been identified by scholars as producing a "historiosophical" discourse. It is

my contention that this concern with history is itself part and parcel of the modernization of Kabbalah.<sup>7</sup>

The third meaning is the history of the hidden, the history of the esoteric, and the secretive disclosure of the secret. Elliot Wolfson has repeatedly and eloquently argued that the “inherently duplicitous ... dialectic of esotericism” dwells at the heart of Kabbalistic discourse.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as we shall see, the kabbalists identified themselves as active participants in the life of the divine, simultaneously guarding and guardedly revealing the “concealed God.”<sup>9</sup>

It now remains but to unpack one more term in our title – shamanism. In my recent book on shamanic trance in modern Kabbalah, I argued that shamanism should not be regarded, as Eliade has famously defined it, as an archaic technique.<sup>10</sup> I join those (including Eliade himself in certain moments) who see shamanism as a phenomenological term, as a structure of religious experience, rather than being bound in a specific historical phase or geographical location. Thus, it is similar to “mysticism” or “esotericism” and perhaps also “Gnosticism.” It is like these terms an “etic” term that is nonetheless freely used, and justly so, in academic scholarship.<sup>11</sup> From this viewpoint, shamanic phenomena can manifest in modern contexts no less than in archaic ones. One should also avoid, however, the tendency to use shamanism in such a loose manner that renders it a vague and even useless term.

My book presents a working model of shamanic experience and technique. Briefly put, it involves three phases, which should be more than familiar from similar models of religious life such as we find in anthropological theory: transition or movement in imaginal or mythic space, usually vertically described as ascent or descent; accompanying dangers, ordeals, and transformation, often somatic, as result of this movement; and empowered return to consensual reality. Through examining three representative chapters in the hidden history of modern Kabbalah, I hope to demonstrate that a shamanic process of descent, transformation, and empowerment is at the center of the techniques concealed within this esoteric narrative.

## LURIA AND HIS SOURCES

Our [first chapter](#) is situated in the time and place in which modern Kabbalah acquired its distinctive form – the sixteenth century and Galilee, home of at least one major Jewish shaman of late antiquity.<sup>12</sup> In a teaching penned by his closest student, R. Hayyim Vital, R. Yitzhaq Luria of Safed, the most famous of modern kabbalists, describes a mythical process of the descent of the name of *'elohim*. It is described in terms of smallness, so as to make way for the Tetragrammaton, *YHVH* or “Name of Being,” which parallels the level of greatness. In order to fully appreciate the theosophical and theurgical significance of this myth, one must turn to another theme – the hidden God.

Already for medieval kabbalists, the hidden God is the Tetragrammaton, usually identified with the quality of mercy, which is clothed in the name of *'elohim*, or the attribute of judgment. A vivid mythic portrayal of this binary scheme is found in the oft-cited thirteenth-century Castilian manual *Sha'arei 'Orah* (Gates of Light), by R. Joseph Gikatilla, which is well worth citing at length:

The great and holy name *YHVH*, blessed be He, guides the entire world with his great power ... and all the other holy names adhere to it, and all the other attributes in the Torah, such as merciful ... are as garments which clothe the king. And these garments are not part of the actual king but rather they are as vessels and garments with which the king is en clothed and fortified. At times he puts on clothes of glory and majesty when the king is at rest and calm and secure and all of his dominion is at peace ... then the king rejoices with his servants and wears fine clothes ... and at times the king is distressed by wars and enemies and robbers despoil his land ... then he wears other clothes, armor and helmets and swords and bows ... And at times the king resides in his palace and his warriors and horsemen are not with him, but just his household, his brothers and sons and wife ... and then he removes some of the garments that he donned when the ministers and servants were with him and he remains with his household and they all behold him and his form in a more revealed manner than it was with all the garments. And several things he does with them and he does not hide with them as he was covered in his garments in the presence of the vulgate for his household are considered as one of his limbs and he does not hesitate to remove some garments before them ... and at times the king is secluded even from his household and none remain with him but the queen alone, and he is not abashed to remove his clothes before her.<sup>13</sup>

This general myth vividly describes the hiding of the Tetragrammaton with emotional, royal, martial, familial, and marital images. Gikatilla then applies this distinction between the king and his garments to specific names:<sup>14</sup>

Know that the name *YHVH*, blessed be He, garbs and adorns itself in the holy names, and all of the holy names adhere to the truth of this name and each one denotes a special matter. How so ... when God, blessed be He, is angry with the inhabitants of the world due to their evil deeds then he takes out his tools of wrath and inscribes on the flag of these tools the shape of the name *'elohim* and then metes out justice and takes revenge on the inhabitants of the world and punishes them for the evil of the deeds by inscribing on the flag of *YHVH* the shape of the name *'elohim*.<sup>15</sup>

Here we see that the name *'elohim* is equivalent to the martial clothing in which the essential divinity hides itself. Although here it is but one of a series of names, earlier in this gate Gikatilla writes at length that the union of the Tetragrammaton and *'elohim* is the “full name” and the “secret of the entire union” (whilst the name *'elohim* in and of itself is of course only complete through this union).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, in gate six, devoted to the name *'elohim*, Gikatilla expands on the significance of the biblical account of creation mentioning only this name, and by doing so accords it a certain primacy. It is in this context that he exposes what is obviously a closely-guarded secret:

After I have informed you of this, we must transmit to you a great principle and guard it greatly everywhere for several people who are wise in their own eyes have stumbled on this and misunderstood it, and this is the secret of what the ‘other *'elohim*’<sup>17</sup> are.<sup>18</sup>

Here, Gikatilla shifts to a national mode, explaining that the seventy powers controlling the nations of the world are “rooted” in this name. Thus, the other gods, or *'elohim*, in the plural, are granted power over the nations, though they are irrelevant for the Jews, who intimately belong to *YHVH*. Strikingly, Gikatilla writes here that “you should not believe the empty words of some empty people who say that there is no power in the *'elohim* of the nations, which are not called *'elohim*. But you should know that God, blessed be He, gave power and dominion to every one of the ministers of the nations.”<sup>19</sup> The myth of the “other *'elohim*”, in this national reading, is developed in a far more striking manner in the classic of medieval Kabbalah, the *Zohar*, which was written at the same time and area as Gikatilla. The verse “Thou shall have no other gods besides Me” is explained here as a prohibition on sacrificing to the name *'elohim* which is shared with “other *'elohim*” and thus with the nations of the world.<sup>20</sup> In a fourteenth-century development of the Zoharic literature, found in the anonymous and more radical *Tiqqunei Zohar*, the identification of the “other *'elohim*” is upheld, yet displaced onto the individual and psychological level: The soul of whoever transgresses the “seventy faces” of the Torah falls into the realm of the “seventy nations,” enters the cycle of reincarnations, and failing to repent, can be lost in the seventy realms of Hell. However – and this is significant for our subsequent discussion – the mere thought of repentance could suffice to enable the rescue of such a soul by a righteous person descending to Hell.<sup>21</sup> These late medieval elaborations on the theme of the hidden God demonstrate that for all of its independence, modern Kabbalah still draws on earlier sources. This being said, I would like to return to the world of Luria, for whom the *Zohar* was indeed a major source of inspiration.<sup>22</sup>

For Luria, the above-described process of shifting *'elohim* is not merely linguistic but also somatic, as the numerous permutations of the five letters comprising the name *'elohim* descend firstly from the head to the neck of the

divine body, then to the chest and so on out of the male body to the female, which alas is the lower aspect in almost all of Kabbalistic writing, then exit the divine domain altogether and relocate in the three lower worlds of the five-tiered Lurianic cosmos.<sup>23</sup> As almost always for Lurianic Kabbalah, the kabbalist himself assists in this process, by “pushing down” the name of *'elohim*.

In his rendering of this teaching in the Lurianic magnum opus *'Etz Hayyim*, Vital actually begins this discussion by considering the growth of the *tzaddiqim*, or righteous, from smallness to greatness. At the level of smallness, the forces of evil can adhere even to these exalted individuals, just as the witch of Endor could have had the power to raise that level of Samuel's soul from the dead. The somatic parallel to this psychic danger, described at length in the same chapter, is the desire of these demonic powers to latch onto the female body and especially the genital area. In light of his foregrounding of the chosen individuals, or *tzaddiqim*, it is not surprising that in the next chapter of this lengthy discussion, Vital moves into the question of personal power:

Know that there is one whose deeds are powerful enough to push down the *'elohim* of smallness from the head ... to the throat, and some can push them down to the chest ... and whoever can push them down through his deeds below ... and remove them from the *ze'ir anpin* [male aspect of the divine world] completely then he will have a wonderful memory of the Torah and will understand all the mysteries of the Torah (*razei torah*), for all memory is male, but the *'elohim* of smallness prevent the shining of the male ... but he who pushes them out of the feminine aspect to the [non-divine] world of creation, then certainly he will have no forgetfulness and the rectified mysteries of the Torah will be revealed to him.<sup>24</sup>

The *tzaddiq*, as described here by Vital or Luria, is what Moshe Idel has termed a mystical-magical figure, or what I more simply describe as a shaman.<sup>25</sup> This description is clearly biographical, accounting both for Luria's ability to transmit a vast, innovative, and complex system within his two year period in Safed, as well as his attempt to restrict this powerful and dangerous knowledge to a select group of adepts.

In an even more engendered parallel passage found in *Pri 'Etz Hayyim* (a detailed manual of meditations to accompany ritual activity), Vital describes the “pushing down” of one of the feminine aspects of God to the three lower worlds.<sup>26</sup> Again, the mystic often participates in processes in the divine worlds, especially those relating to gender, and by doing so theurgically affects them.<sup>27</sup> The kabbalist who does so, in the midnight ritual known as *tiqqun hatzot*, becomes one of the sons of the chamber of the Lady (*matronita*).<sup>28</sup> This practice can be described as a construction of emotion. It has two parts. One is to participate in the grief of the feminine aspect which has to descend into the lower world, and is mythically described as standing outside

and calling for her husband. Here the recommendation is to weep “for half an hour or more.”<sup>29</sup> A more advanced part of the rite, which includes placing dust on one’s forehead and beating one’s head on the floor, is intended as mourning for the giving over of the secrets and mysteries of the Torah to the “externals” (most likely a reference to Renaissance Christian Kabbalah).<sup>30</sup> Once again, the process of pushing is closely related to the secrets of the Torah, here in a dramatic or performative technique. The reference to the exposure of the secret is fleshed out in another Lurianic parallel which has already received some scholarly attention. In an extended discussion of the states of smallness and greatness during the Passover week found in the meditation manual *Sha’ar Ha-Kavvanot* (which parallels *Pri ‘Etz Hayyim*), Vital adds this harrowing tale:

On the day that our teacher, of blessed memory, explained this passage to us we were sitting in the field under the trees and a raven flew above and cried as was its custom and my teacher answered and said after him blessed is the true judge [the liturgical text one says when hearing of a death]. I asked him and he said that the raven said that as he revealed the secret to all publicly he was just then punished in the heavenly court and it was decreed that his small son will die and then he rushed to his house and his son was playing in the yard and on that night he sickened and died after three days ... and the matter is that is known that the externals only latch on to the intelligences (*mohin*) of smallness ... and when one is occupied in the secrets of the Torah if that is a time of supernatural greatness then ... there is not such danger as when one deals with the secrets of the time of smallness ... and the matter of the staff turning into the serpent is the aspect of the smallness of *ze’ir anpin*, which is called a serpent.<sup>31</sup>

This is a shamanic tale if there ever was one! One should especially note the literary move from the pastoral to the uncanny (as in Edgar Allan Poe) and serpentine (somewhat comparable to the picnic in C. S. Lewis’ *The Silver Chair*, which ends up with the queen being bitten to death by a witch shape-changed into a serpent).<sup>32</sup> One should also compare the use of the plural, alluding to Luria’s circle in the texts cited above, which focus on the singular mystical adept. Yehuda Liebes has discussed this text and has analyzed its continuation (not adduced here), which contains strong sexual imagery related to the snake. His discussion, which foregrounds the messianic issue, also discusses parallels dealing with Luria’s own early death as a result of revealing similar secrets.<sup>33</sup> It is highly significant that Liebes compares this account to the Lurianic rendition of the cautionary tale about the failed attempt to bring the Messiah through magical means in the circle of the late fifteenth-century Spanish magician Joseph Della Reina, and to the early sixteenth-century

activities of the Portuguese martyr R. Shlomo Molkho, against the background of the expulsions of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>34</sup> These are certainly important early chapters in the hidden history of modern Kabbalistic shamanism. Generally speaking, Marranos such as Della Reina and Molkho, as well as later Sabbatean figures of Marrano origin, played an important role in the modernization of Kabbalah, especially in terms of their preoccupation with issues of national identity.<sup>35</sup>

Our final Lurianic example is also taken from *Sha'ar Ha-Kavvanot*, in a discussion of the 'alienu prayer, which concludes the morning service.<sup>36</sup> Vital explains here that with the conclusion of the prayer, the three lower worlds, having being included in the divine world, need to return to their former place. They need to bring the subsistence to the myriad beings dependent on them, all from the influx acquired during the prayer itself. However, this descent evokes the danger of the "adherence" of the forces of evil that are drawn by this influx and desire to capture it. The 'alienu prayer acts as an apotropaic device, which draws down a surrounding protective light whose brilliance blinds the demonic powers and thus thwarts their designs. Once the forces of evil are greatly weakened and conquered by this meditation, it is safe to draw down the divine light to the very lowest of the worlds.<sup>37</sup> Although this text does not mention the name 'elohim, the general theme of drawing down divine vitality into the lower worlds, accompanied by the danger of demonic infection, as it were, is very similar.<sup>38</sup> Although the text of the prayer itself refers, in negative terms, to the "nations of the lands" and "families of the earth" and to their empty gods (this part being censored in some versions), this national angle, so prominent in his medieval sources, is interestingly absent in Luria's cosmic and mythic interpretation.

I have dealt some length with these sixteenth-century Safedian texts not merely because they provide an important link back to the earlier medieval myth, but also because they constitute the template for almost all subsequent discussions. Indeed, the proliferation and elaboration of Safedian Kabbalah, first in Mediterranean centers such as Palestine, Syria, and Italy, and later throughout the Jewish world (eventually reaching, through Lithuanian Kabbalah, as far as South Africa), is the as yet partly told story of the modernization of Kabbalah.<sup>39</sup>

## LUZZATTO AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The [second chapter](#) in this history is located in the eighteenth century, a period that I see as decisive for the development of modern Jewish shamanism, as well as modernity in general.<sup>40</sup> I am deliberately skipping the obvious case of the failed messianism of Shabbetai Tzevi in the median seventeenth century, as this quintessentially modern movement, in which the hidden history of Kabbalah momentarily came fully into the open, has probably received

an inordinate emphasis in the study of post-Lurianic Kabbalah.<sup>41</sup> I will merely note that while not dealing with the *YHVH-’elohim* dyad, Sabbateanism famously reversed classical Jewish theosophy by claiming that it is the hidden God who is demonic, the revealed God being accessible and magnanimous.<sup>42</sup>

In the beginning of the century, the controversial young kabbalist, R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto of Padua created some stir throughout the Jewish world (including Safed) when he claimed that he revealed secrets which Luria did not have permission to disclose, and by doing so he theurgically reopened access to the light brought down by Luria, but blocked and sealed shortly after, and presumably as result of, the latter’s untimely death.<sup>43</sup> What was the nature of these secrets, which transcend Luria’s teaching? One clue is provided in a manual on Kabbalistic practice, known as *Qitzur Ha-Kavvanot*, attributed to Luzzatto, but probably mostly composed by a close student of his. There, we can find the bold claim that Luzzatto’s system of meditation in prayer supercedes that of Luria. Whilst the latter confined himself to the emendation of the divine world,<sup>44</sup> the more “perfect and important” method developed in Luzzatto’s school is geared at including the three lower worlds, with equal status within the divine realm.<sup>45</sup> From these texts, one may conclude that Luzzatto saw himself as the superior *tzaddiq*, in the mold of Luria, who is able to descend to the lower worlds and rectify the forces of evil.<sup>46</sup> However, unlike the earlier master, he was allowed to reveal this secret openly, as attested by his claim to uncover an entire meditative system that is not mentioned at all in the numerous Lurianic texts. This experiential aspect of Luzzatto’s teachings has been largely overlooked in existing scholarship, which has focused more on Luzzatto’s philosophy of history and less on his perception of his own place in the hidden history of Kabbalah.<sup>47</sup>

I believe that Luzzatto saw the inclusion of the lower worlds, as closely related to the transformations of the name *’elohim*.<sup>48</sup> In his messianic work *Tiqqunim Hadashim* (which was inspired by the *Tiqqunei Zohar*), Luzzatto writes of the need for subduing the “sides of impurity.” These sides of impurity came to being through the descent of *’elohim* at their “root,” as in the transformation of the serpent into the staff by Moses. This was emulated by the Messiah’s own serpentine power. Here Luzzatto uses the numerical equivalence between the Hebrew words *mashiah* (Messiah) = 385 = *nahash* (snake), that enamored Sabbatean writers.<sup>49</sup> More generally, negative descriptions of the name of *’elohim* abound in the writings of Luzzatto and his circle. For example, it is the shadow cast by the sun-like Tetragrammaton or the flesh demanded by the mixed multitude in the desert, whose spiritual descendants are to be rectified by the Messiah’s descent.<sup>50</sup>

As in the case of Della Reina and Luria, the outcome of this practice was far from successful. Elsewhere I have described a legend transmitted by the students of Luzzatto in Eastern Europe, which recounts that Luzzatto charged his students with a series of theurgical practices. These were designed to hasten the redemption leading through the yearly cycle of festivals (starting with

Passover) and peaking at the High Holy Day of Yom Kippur.<sup>51</sup> As with Della Reina and Luria, the project of hastening redemption is regarded as collective, though centering on a charismatic or shamanic figure.<sup>52</sup> At the decisive moment of the process, against the dramatic background of a tornado, Luzzatto discarded his prayer garments and left the synagogue. When later questioned by his students, the chastened Luzzatto disclosed that the personification of the forces of evil or “other side” informed him that if he did not abandon his attempts to hasten the messianic redemption, its success will come at the price of the near-destruction of the Jewish world, leaving only, as the text chillingly puts it, one in a city and two in a family.<sup>53</sup> Needless to say Luzzatto did not choose this option.

I have suggested that this legend reflects Luzzatto’s cosmic interpretation of his gradual abandonment of attempts to spread his teaching. This was done under the pressure of the authorities, which he thought represented the self-same forces of darkness. It is probably not parenthetical to add that this persecution, while largely related to questions of messianism and esotericism, was partly due to Luzzatto’s plays and the encouragement he gave his students to study at the prestigious university at Padua.<sup>54</sup> The close encounter with the personification of evil, echoed in a modern Ashkenazi legend brought in some versions of another Eastern European text from Luzzatto’s school (*Derekh ‘Etz Hayyim*), resembling the experiences of both Della Reina and R. Shlomo Molkho, who was regarded positively in northern Italy.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the textual parallels cited above, this [second chapter](#) in our history is somewhat more speculative, as the legend naturally does not specify which practice Luzzatto’s circle attempted. However, in his discussion of Luzzatto’s ideas on the descent of the redeemer into the realm of evil and its complex relationship to the Sabbatean heretical movement, Isaiah Tishby cited a letter on the fall of the Messiah written by Luzzatto to a former teacher. This letter tellingly echoes the legend which I have described here: “You will understand, learned Sir, that this is a great and profound secret which I have disclosed to you, and you will realize that this was the source of many of the calamities decreed upon Israel.”<sup>56</sup> Further support for this is provided by the fact that the rite described in the legend focused on the festival cycle, just like the third Lurianic text which, likewise, is embedded in the context of Passover. Indeed, the strong connection between shamanic practice and the festivals reinforces my opinion that modern Jewish shamanism, though it flirts with transgression is deeply embedded in nomian practice, especially the temporal cycle.<sup>57</sup>

I would like to expand on this point by briefly considering another eighteenth-century example. The circle founded in the Near East by R. Shalom Shar’abi has only recently begun to attract scholarly attention, despite its substantial impact on the development of modern Kabbalah, not only in the Orient, but increasingly within the Ashkenazi world. The vast literary output of this tradition is usually described as abstruse elaborations on the technical details of Lurianic theory and practice, leaving aside the discussion of

material of a mythic, transgressive, or experiential nature.<sup>58</sup> However, it is striking that Shar‘abi, like Luria, is said to have met an early death when he engaged in a hazardous practice.<sup>59</sup> In light of the preceding discussion, it is highly significant that in this school, the practice of “pushing down” accompanies the ritual of counting the ‘Omer, between Passover and the Pentecost.<sup>60</sup> More generally, Shar‘abi states that the emendation of the lower worlds, fallen as result of Adam’s sin, can only take place during the festivals.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, one of Shar‘abi’s major theoretical innovations was that the festivals constitute an entire ontic realm, known as *partzuf ha-zemanim*, or the “face of the [sacred] times.”<sup>62</sup>

## LITHUANIAN KABBALAH AND ZIONISM

Before proceeding to the last chapter in this saga, I wish to pause to assemble some of the themes we have examined up to now. Successive generations of leading modern kabbalists are described as encountering early deaths due to dangerous attempts to bring about redemption by descending to the lower worlds or concomitantly due to revealing details of this practice. What is merely suggested or hinted in the texts that we have seen is explicitly presented within a multi-volume analysis of Lurianic Kabbalah, penned by the leading early twentieth-century kabbalist R. Shlomo Elyashiv of Lithuania and later Palestine. Elyashiv formed part of the tradition founded by the eighteenth-century luminary R. Eliyahu, the Gaon of Vilna. R. Eliyahu is especially famous for his opposition to the Hasidic movement, which began in his time.<sup>63</sup> Although there is a study of the messianic elements of this school, its more experiential aspects have barely been touched.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, this tradition is usually viewed as scholastic and conservative rather than experiential or radical, although at least one branch – that of R. Menahem Mendel of Shklov, who immigrated to Palestine in 1808 – produced antinomian elaborations on the permutations of ‘*elohim*’.<sup>65</sup> However, even within the more stolid branch headed by R. Hayyim of Volozhin, one finds a fascinating text relating the injunction against worshipping “other ‘*elohim*” to the dangers of adherence to charismatic and pneumatic figures, which refers to the Hasidic cult of the *tzaddiq*.<sup>66</sup>

Elyashiv, in his creative reworking of this prolific tradition, rereads human history as an ongoing series of challenges undergone by heroic figures, which need to further the process of restoring the non-divine to the divine by means of decent into realms effectively controlled by the forces of evil. The first of these was of course Adam, who was followed by a long series of central mythic persons, some of who failed the test and some of who succeeded. It may interest scholars of late antiquity that Elyashiv writes that this is the key to the Talmudic narrative of the four who entered the Pardes, only R. Aqiva emerging unscathed.<sup>67</sup> The key to success is that this is not a challenge that even a prophet should undergo voluntarily but only at the behest of a divine edict.

Those who erred in choosing the first path are likened by Elyashiv to false prophets, “and this too is the reason for all the erring and straying.”<sup>68</sup>

Is Elyashiv only dealing with mythical history or does he refer to twentieth-century Kabbalah? His forceful critiques of Luzzatto may lead one towards the first option, however I do not think that Elyashiv would have been active in publishing the latter’s works, as he himself testifies, had he regarded him as a false prophet!<sup>69</sup> Rather, I think that he discusses this issue at such length, at risk of revealing what we have seen should not be revealed, because his erst-while student R. Avraham Yitzhaq Kook attempted to rectify secular Zionism by revealing the holiness of the mundane, even of sin, and thus hastening the redemption.<sup>70</sup> As in the case of Luzzatto, the challenge of rectifying the non-divine worlds legitimized greater openness to the secular.<sup>71</sup> In his diary, this younger Lithuanian-Palestinian kabbalist wondered whether he had not fallen and become a false prophet.<sup>72</sup> To show just how far he took the idea of entering the alien realms, one may cite the following poetic diary entry of his:

The great of soul ... draw down the light of higher life into these mundane preoccupations, and sanctify them on behalf of the entire world ... when they descend to simple secular (*hol*) matters, they know and recognize how the light of life of the general holiness reaches all hiding places, and they reveal the light from there, and bring it ... with the power of the life of souls, to a high place, where the life of holiness broadly shines, openly and not in hiding ... when they descend to look at the world in an external manner, when they turn to deal with the wisdoms of the secular, also in alien matters, in magic, in alien and impure faiths, from all they draw the rays of His light and scattered sparks of holy life ... How great is this work!<sup>73</sup>

I do not think that it would be over-reading to describe this as a rather radical application of earlier models of shamanic descent and soul retrieval.

One tidbit from fieldwork. A contemporary anti-Zionist kabbalist stated that R. Kook was entirely right, but his failure was due to his revelation of what he was up to. As several scholars have shown, although R. Kook attributed great importance to his own greatness of soul, he also related his activity to that of his associates and students, as indicated here in the use of the plural.<sup>74</sup> This school, which included university-educated scholars, displayed an acute interest in modern culture and largely viewed the very process of modernization as part of the process of messianic redemption.<sup>75</sup>

## THE EXOTERICIZATION OF KABBALAH

Starting with the mass expulsions of the late fifteenth century, the condition of Jews in exile became increasingly precarious. This experience affected the

history of the modern Kabbalah. The history of modern Kabbalah is a history of a significant number of failed attempts to hasten the advent of the Messiah by riskily shifting the focus of Kabbalistic activity from the supernal worlds to the lower realms, which were increasingly perceived as demonic and alien.<sup>76</sup> As Vital put it in an oft-cited rhetorical outburst in *'Etz Hayyim*, that is embedded in a discussion of the adherence of the forces of evil to the female genitals: “this earth is the maximal thickness of the shells [forces of evil] and therefore all the deeds of this world are hard and evil and the wicked dominate it.”<sup>77</sup> The scope of this challenge necessitated a shift from individual activity, exemplified by R. Abraham Abulafia, one of the most striking of medieval messianic figures, to group efforts. Both the move to the group format as well as greater involvement in mundane history necessitated the exoterization of Kabbalah, which has gradually brought its hidden history into the open, as we have seen throughout. Following David Sorotzkin, I regard both the “assimilatory” approaches found in the circles of Luzzatto and R. Kook, as well as more “isolationist” views, typified by both Elyashiv and some followers of R. Kook’s school (to be described shortly), as complementary aspects of the precariousness of the modern Jewish condition.<sup>78</sup>

Due to this national-historical overlay, our story has led us from classical themes of religion, or at least the kind of religion discussed here, such as sin and fall, transgression and sexuality, shamanic heroism and colossal failure, to the heart of the present, at least that of Israel. As I have shown elsewhere, the political-military transgressive underground activities of messianic elements in the Israeli Right were partly inspired by R. Kook’s antinomianism.<sup>79</sup> In this sense, these were attempts to address the disappointing persistence of Jewish insecurity through suspension of legal, halakhic, and moral precepts while declaring a “state of exception,” as in Carl Schmidt’s political theology (whose influence contributed to this very insecurity).<sup>80</sup> A major contemporary messianic thinker, Giorgio Agamben, has traced the roots of antinomian mode of messianism to Paul, who Scholem has described as “the most outstanding example known to us of a revolutionary Jewish mystic,” and I myself have described elsewhere as an early Jewish shaman.<sup>81</sup> Agamben compares the state of the law in Schmidt’s state of exception to the Pauline “messianic deactivation of the law.”<sup>82</sup> This comparison enables us to place our modern analysis in a more panoramic frame, yet one should not lose sight of the more immediate concerns of the modern kabbalists. Generally one should avoid a reductionist reading of modern writing as a gloss on the great works of antiquity.<sup>83</sup>

Far from being a retreat from or resistance to history, modern Kabbalah constructs an alternative history, which reacts to the process of modernization no less than continuing classical messianic and theosophical themes.<sup>84</sup> In this context, it is not surprising that one contemporary kabbalist speculated that the early deaths of several Hasidic leaders around Passover of 1815 were related to the technique discussed here.<sup>85</sup> The background to these tragedies was the fierce debate amongst the rebbes, which was accompanied by a

magical contest. Some, taking an “assimilatory” line, attempted to transform Napoleon, as harbinger of emancipation, into the herald of the messianic age, despite his vision of forcefully removing barriers between the Jewish world and civil society. One of these, R. Menahem Mendel of Riminov, reputedly said that the messianic era should be hastened even if the Jews walk up to their knees in blood as a result (harrowingly echoing the holocaust-like description in the Luzzatto story). Others took a more “isolationist” line and saw Napoleon as spiritually dangerous and ensured his defeat by declaring: *Napoleon tipol*.<sup>86</sup>

In Hasidic memory, the magical success in defeating Napoleon came at a heavy price, as for a time it left the Hasidic world without Shamanic figures such as the Seer of Lublin or R. Israel of Kuhznitz.<sup>87</sup> Despite their intuitive sense of the dangers facing European Jewry, the Hasidic leaders were unable to prevent its destruction.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, a triumphalist view of messianism, such as that upheld by the current generation of R. Kook’s followers, would regard all of modern Jewish messianism as a failure. However, Haviva Pedaya has shown that the failed Messiah should be seen as one of several possible modes legitimated by the Jewish messianic tradition.<sup>89</sup> Here too, the Pauline dialectic of strength in weakness elaborated by Agamben offers a more complex understanding of the very notion of empowerment that is so central to our understanding of shamanism.<sup>90</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## NOTES

1. See Garb (2010b; 2012). For a book-length treatment, see Weinstein (2011) and Flatto (2010) who join Hebrew discussions by Ze’ev Gries, Maoz Kahana, Haviva Pedaya, David Sorotzkin and others. Compare also to Magid (2008) and Ruderman (2010).
2. See e.g. Pecora (2006); De Vries (2006).
3. As in the *’Otzar Ha-Hokhma* database, which comprises no less than 60,000 volumes.
4. On this process see Garb (2009); Wolfson (2009); Mark (2010). For a consciously partial interpretative disclosure of parts of the hidden history discussed here, see Morgenstern (2009: 657–705). On this contemporary kabbalist, see Garb (2010a: 29–48; 2011b).
5. There is some reason to conjecture that there is also an accompanying oral tradition, which I shall hopefully address when I write up the results of my fieldwork in the Kabbalistic world in Israel. On oral traditions and the reconstruction of the history of Kabbalah, see Idel (1988, esp. 19–22).
6. See White (1987).
7. See Foucault (2003: 171–2, 215–16).

8. This is a recent formulation, albeit in a more specific context, in Wolfson (2009: 54). See also Wolfson (2005, 2003, 1999); Halbertal (2007).
9. According to Isaiah 45:15: "You are indeed a God who concealed ('el mistater) Himself". See the comment of Luzzatto (1996: 56), a figure to be discussed below: "It does not say 'concealed' but 'concealing' [in the present tense] for He wills concealing after concealing."
10. Garb (2011c); Eliade (1964).
11. Actually, the term Judaism, enamored of conservatives inside and outside academia, even in its Hebrew and Yiddish forms (*yahadut* and *yiddishkeit*) is extremely rare in pre-modern texts.
12. See Craffert (2008).
13. Gikatilla (1883: gate 5.91) and compare to the national working of the marital-erotic image in 5.97. I prefer my own translation to the cumbersome one by Avi Weinstein in Gikatilla (1994), which loses the mythical flavor of the text. On Gikatilla's theory of language, see Morlok (2011).
14. Although Gikatilla begins by differentiating other names and attributes (*kinuyyim*), this distinction is immediately blurred and indeed entirely occluded in the subsequent discussion.
15. Gikatilla (1883: 92).
16. Gikatill (1883: 82).
17. According to Exodus 20:3: "Thou shall have no other gods (*elohim 'aherim*) besides Me."
18. Gikatilla (1883: 144).
19. Gikatilla (1883: 145).
20. See Exodus 22:19; *Zohar* 2.119b.
21. Anonymous 1867 (*Tiqqun* 32, 84b–85a). On the influence of this work on the Lurianic ideas discussed here, see Liebes (1992: 37) (in the updated online version <http://pluto.huji.ac.il/~liebes/zohar/Luria.html>). For the attitude towards non-Jews in Kabbalah, see Wolfson (2006: esp. 101–7, 158–9).
22. The most elaborate theoretical treatment of the hiding of the Tetragrammaton within 'elohim is found in the nineteenth- to twenty-first-century Habad Hasidic movement: See e.g. the *Tanya* – the classic work of this stream – where the founder of Habad, R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady, describes the name 'elohim as protecting the existence of the world by hiding the Tetragrammaton (Shneur Zalman of Lyady 1985: 156–60) and thus preventing the disclosure of the true being of God as the sole existent. In this dialectic, though this restriction of divine presence is described as judgment, it is actually a hidden grace (cf. the somewhat less sanguine description of 'elohim in Shneur Zalman of Lyady (1984: 35b)). Compare to a discourse by the fifth rebbe (Schneerson 1988: 50) on the concealment effected by 'elohim as being essentially unreal as it actually enables the revelation of the higher light to lower levels. On this elaborate ontology, see Wolfson (2009: esp. 52–65, 82–4, 94–5, 114–29).
23. For an English-language overview of Lurianic Kabbalah, see Fine (2003).
24. Vital (1910: 105a). For a brief discussion of this text, situated within a rich analysis of the Lurianic concepts of "greatness" and "smallness" and their later influence, see Pachter (2004). The issue of power was also prominent in the above-quoted medieval texts.
25. See Idel (1995); Garb (2011c).
26. On gender in Lurianic Kabbalah, see Wolfson (2005: 181–6, 386–7). See also Abrams (2004). On the Lurianic meditations on prayer, see at length in Kallus (2002). The identification of the negative aspects of 'elohim of the feminine is strongly apparent in a text by the profoundly Lurianic and understudied nineteenth-century Moroccan kabbalist R. Ya'aqov Abuhatzzeira (2001: 365), who writes that in the messianic future, as in the verse "[...] There is no god ('elohim) beside Me" (Deut. 32:39), there will be no

independent feminine, unlike today when the blemish of the feminine-as-*'elohim* must be endured. In this context, Abuhatzera mentions the numerical equivalence between *'elohim*=86=*mum* (blemish). Such texts reinforce Wolfson's overall reading of the place of the feminine in Kabbalistic messianism, as reflected in his studies cited here.

27. See Hellner-Eshed (2009: 121–45).
28. On *tiqqun hatzot* in Lurianic Kabbalah, see Idel (1998a). For a Lurianic discussion of Adam's sin in gendered terms paralleling this passage, see Vital (1910: 62b).
29. The seventeenth-century kabbalist R. Naftali Bakhrakh (1648: 11b) describes Luria in a widely circulated hagiographical account as shedding tears equal to the number of hairs in his beard over every secret he attained. On weeping as a mystical technique, see Idel (1988); Wolfson (1995b).
30. Vital (1983: 82a). See also Magid (2008: 218–19) and cf. Idel (1998a: 134, 165–9).
31. Vital (1985: 86a–b) and see in the next section for more on the images of the serpent and staff mentioned in this text.
32. C. S. Lewis (1973: 55–6). Neither the pastoral nor the serpentine imagery are mentioned in the magisterial treatment of this book in Ward (2008: 127–39).
33. In hagiographical literature (e.g. the above-cited account from Bakhrakh), Luria's early death prevented him from bringing about the messianic redemption.
34. Liebes (1992: 34–6) in the updated online version; Meroz (1988: 314, 362).
35. See Magid (2008). For della Reina specifically, see Garb (2004a: 165–6). On these figures and their contexts, see Idel (1998a, 126–31, 144–52). I believe that Idel's formulations “new model of messianic activity” (127), “fundamental reformation of the spiritual structure of contemporary Judaism” (128), “new revelation of secrets” (129), “a much more historical approach” (151), could all be rendered far more simply in terms of the transition to modernity. (One should especially note 147 on Molkho's political thought. For Molkho's views on the serpentine nature of the Messiah, which is pertinent for the texts discussed here, see 150.)
36. This discussion also contains an influential liturgical ruling on the proper form of the recitation of the prayer. For discussions of the shamanic elements in the Lurianic meditations on the *nefilat appayim* rite, which is positioned shortly before *'alienu* in the liturgical sequence and involves descent to the netherworld for the purpose of soul retrieval, see Fine (2003: 240, 242–3, 247); Garb (2011c); also Wolfson (1993), which relates this rite to similar sources in early Jewish mysticism.
37. Vital (1985: 50a).
38. Compare to one of the most transgressive Lurianic passages, see Vital (1983: 110b) on the ritual drunkenness mandated by Jewish law during the Purim festival drawing light to the sparks of divinity found in the “husks” of evil. I believe that this is an unrecognized source for radical Hasidic practices surrounding this festival, but cannot expand on this hypothesis here. It is also possible that this text is related to an overlooked Lurianic text (Vital 1985: 113a) on the emendation of one who is positioned in the lower levels of the realm of holiness and is menaced by the adherence of the “external” forces. This recipe is described as a “wonderful secret that should be concealed.”
39. For a highly detailed bibliographical discussion of the first stages of this process, see Avivi (2008).
40. See Garb (forthcoming/b).
41. Being *inter alia*, the most important scholarly project essayed by Gershom Scholem. See the assessment in Idel (2010: 9) of Scholem's work *Sabbatai Sevi* as representing the “most important Jewish scholarship in the humanities in the twentieth century.”
42. The important discussions of the technique of “pushing down” in the central theoretical text of this movement, *Sefer Ha-Beri'ah* by R. Nathan of Gaza, have yet to be discussed, as this lengthy text has not been published nor analyzed in detail.

43. For this formulation, which is Luzzatto's own, see Chriqui (2001: letter 15.49–51). Luzzatto describes the descent of the divine light throughout the history of Kabbalah in erotic terms of the emission of the “drop” from the supernal phallus. On the erotics of esotericism in Luzzatto's writings, see Wolfson (1997: esp. 294–5, 299 n. 32, 300 n. 35, 301, 312). See also Chriqui (2001: letter 13.39–40), where Luzzatto's teacher R. Isaiah Bassan uses the example of Luria's death in order to warn Luzzatto against the disclosure of secrets. On the Luzzatto controversy, see Carlebach (1994: 195–255).
44. Or in the sexualized terms employed there, all of the “coupling” of the divine attributes is contained within this world.
45. Again using the image of coupling. *Kitzur Ha-Kavvanot* (Spinner 2004: 198–9), and Carlebach (1994: 201) on the “secret of the descending *tzaddiq*.” Unlike most of the book, these particular passages are written in Luzzatto's distinctive style (and also include references to a commentary of his on a Zoharic passage).
46. On transformation of evil in Luzzatto's writings, see Wolfson (1997: 303–8).
47. See Shuchat (1998); Avivi (1992); Hansel (2004). I shall discuss these issues at far greater length in Garb (forthcoming).
48. See also the text on “other *'elohim*” discussed in Wolfson (1997: 306).
49. Luzzatto (1997: *tiqqun* 58, 124). On the staff and serpent in the context of the descent of the Messiah into the realm of evil, see the text by Luzzatto quoted in Tishby (2008: 234), the Sabbatean parallels noted on 236 (see also 239), and the more elaborate discussion of this theme in Wolfson (1997: 309–13). The Lurianic source has been discussed above. See also Liebes (1993: 17).
50. See respectively Luzzatto (1997: *tiqqun* 28, 67) and compare to Luzzatto (1984: 99); Valle ms British Museum 387, 165b and compare to Valle ms British Museum 386, 619b.
51. Garb (2011a).
52. On the theurgical role of Luzzatto's fellowship, see Tishby (2008: 289–318); Wolfson (1997: esp. 293). In Garb (forthcoming), I hope to show that there was one particular student, described as the “commander of the army of the Messiah,” who was especially charged with the dangerous mission of subduing the forces of evil.
53. Paraphrasing Jeremiah 3:14: “... I will take you, one from a town and two from a clan, and bring you to Zion.”
54. See Garb (2010c).
55. See Idel (1998a: 151–2).
56. Translated and cited in Tishby (2008: 233).
57. See Garb (2011c: 132–5).
58. For a brief overview of this school, see Giller (2008: esp. 67, 71–2), for the themes discussed here.
59. For various versions of the legends and controversies surrounding Shar'abi's death, see the excellent summary in Morgenstern (2008: 221–2). On the mortal danger accompanying inaccurate performance of the meditation on the divine names, see Shar'abi (1910: 33b, also 20a).
60. See for example, Shar'abi (1910: 32a) on the dangers of the “adherence of the externals” to the *'Omer* ritual, the discussion by Shar'abi's successor Della Rossa (1848: 61a–b), and see also Morgenstern (2007: 232, 272–6). On the connection between the *'Omer* practice and the rectification of the negative aspects of the name of *'elohim* in Lurianic practice itself, see Vital (1985: 80b, 87b). For secret transmissions from Shar'abi to Della Rossa, see Della Rossa (1848: 20a, 28a, 143b).
61. See for example, Shar'abi (1910: 32b, 34b).
62. The basic text here is Shar'abi (1910: 13a).
63. The Hasidic world could well provide several additional chapters for this hidden history, including the extensive discourses on the descent of the *tzaddiq*, already discussed in numerous studies, and especially the tales of the dramatic descents of R. Nahman

- of Bratzlav; see Mark (2009: 192–213), which also includes some further Lurianic material, as well as Rapoport-Albert (1980). And including the recorded experiences of the nineteenth Hasidic master R. Yitzhaq Yehiel Safrin of Komarno, perhaps the most shamanic of modern Jewish writers; see Garb (2011c).
64. See Shuchat (1998) as well as Liebes (2003b, 2003a), which innovatively discusses Sabbatean influences on this school, and Wolfson (1995a) for a discussion of the school's views of history.
  65. See for example, Menahem Mendel of Shklov (2001: 1.13) on the “dust of sin” and the permutations of *'elohim* (and compare to 1.28, 62, 73); see also Liebes (2003b: 40) and Liebes (2003a: 312) in the updated online versions. For further magical and mystical aspects of this tradition, see Garb (2011c: 95, 106).
  66. Hayyim of Volozhin (1973: gate 3.9, 77), which cites the above-discussed Zoharic passage on *'elohim*. This text supports the reading of Magid (2000).
  67. b. *Hagigah* 14b. For a recent and creative discussion, see Rowland & Morray-Jones (2009), especially 276–498, which relates this narrative to the experience of Paul, whose importance in the history of Jewish shamanism and messianism shall be addressed in the conclusion.
  68. Elyashiv (1912: 161–88, on the discussion of Adam's sin, see [part 2](#), 47b). Another text by Elyashiv (1924: 108b–109a), shows that Elyashiv is referring here to the descent of *'elohim*, which he creatively interprets as its transformation into the Tetragrammaton. See also Elyashiv (1924: 39b) where he describes the “bitter taste” and “shadow of death” occasioned by the adherence of the forces of evil. Elyashiv's strategy of dispersing his explication of this matter is itself a form of concealment.
  69. Elyashiv's attitude towards Luzzatto is discussed in the two existing studies of his thought: Wacks (1995) and Baumgarten (2006).
  70. On R. Kook and Elyashiv, see Garb (2009: 40, 118–19). On antinomian elements in the thought of R. Kook, see Garb (2009: 84–93). The weight of these elements has been recently much reinforced by the publication of R. Kook's attempt to compose a new *Guide for the Perplexed* (updating the famous project of Maimonides). The radical chapters and passages censored in the printed version (Kook 2010), are found in a complete edition circulated through the internet (see the download link and review by Yehudah Mirsky at <http://www.jewishideasdaily.com/content/module/2010/8/4/main-feature/1/the-kook-perplex>). This is a very late chapter in the hidden history of modern Kabbalah.
  71. Again, from a post-secular perspective, circles such as that of Luzzatto and R. Kook challenge rigid distinctions between “secularity” and “religiosity.” See for example, Betz (2009), and cf. Feiner (2004).
  72. For Kook, Zionism and prophecy, see Garb (2009). For his view of history as a nationalistic interpretation of the thought of Luzzatto and the tradition of R. Eliyahu of Vilna, see Garb (2004b).
  73. Kook (1999: 2.para.6). The underlining is mine.
  74. See Schwartz (2001) and Barak (2009).
  75. See Fischer (2007); Mirsky (2007).
  76. In a text written as late as 1899, these “terrible expulsions” haunted the national memory (Levin 2010: 2.211). Of course, I am referring not only to the expulsions themselves, but also to the preceding persecutions. Spain was one of the first examples of the crystallization of national identity destabilizing the position of the Jews, but should be seen within this wider context (cf. the broader thesis of Slezkine 2004: 36–9, 60–75). In this sense, the understanding of modern messianism presented here diverges from that of Idel (1998a: esp. 131, 133, 277), who emphasizes the continuity between pre-modern and modern messianism, in line with his general stress on continuity between modern Kabbalah and pre-modern Jewish mysticism. For a view closer to my own, see Pedaya (2007: 73–147).

77. Vital (1910: 91a).
78. See Sorotzkin (2011).
79. See Garb (2009).
80. On Schmidt, power and the state of exception, see Agamben (2005a).
81. Scholem (1996: 14); Garb (forthcoming/e). See however Agamben (2005b: 144) for an accurate analysis of the ambiguity of Scholem's locution, which in my own view exaggerates the split between Paul and the Jewish tradition in a manner belied by recent scholarship, such as that of Segal (1995: 97–8, 104–7); Segal (2004: 339). See also Agamben's astute comment (2005b: 2) on the "subterranean solidarity" between "the Church and the Synagogue in presenting Paul as the founder of a new religion," rather than as a Jewish writer; and see Agamben's critique (2005b: 124) of such a move made by Scholem's contemporary Martin Buber. Though I decided not to address Sabbateanism, one should note that the parallels between Paul and the above-mentioned Nathan of Gaza have been mined by Scholem and others.
82. Agamben (2005b: 106). I see Agamben's analysis, which – following Schmidt – describes modern political theory, and indeed modernity as such, as a secularization of messianism (see 99–100, 118), as an exceptional example of post-secular scholarship. For an overview of Agamben's messianism, see De la Durantaye (2009: 366–82).
83. Cf. Agamben (2005b: 112): "Nietzsche ... is actually only reciting a script written by Paul." Yet see his important discussion of Luther's modern interpretation of Paul and its "entirely new ethical meaning" (20–21).
84. Cf. Yerushalmi (1996). See also Idel (1998b).
85. Morgenstern (2009: 705). On this episode, see Levine (2001). For a famous literary account of this episode, see Buber (1999). In view of our discussion of the role of the festivals in such attempts, it is interesting that these dramatic events took place during the main Passover rite.
86. For the controversy occasioned by premonitions of the holocaust in nineteenth-century Kabbalah, see Scholem (1988: 85).
87. This understanding of Hasidic historiography and hagiography in terms of cultural memory and sacral narrative should be contrasted to the more positivistic reading of Assaf (2010). The secret techniques scattered throughout the writings of R. Israel of Kuhznitz, which are currently being published in excellent annotated editions, shall be discussed elsewhere.
88. This failure is vehemently emphasized in Piekarz (1990), ideologically laden.
89. Pedaya (2002: 209–36). See the text on the weakness of the Messiah from Luzzatto's circle, translated (and erroneously attributed to Luzzatto himself), in Tishby (2008: 200).
90. See Agamben (2005b: 96–8); and Agamben (2005b: 9–10, 139–41) on Paul and Scholem's correspondent Walter Benjamin.

## CHAPTER 10

# DREAMING OF PARADISE

## SEEING THE HIDDEN GOD IN ISLAM

*David Cook*

As Gustave von Grunebaum stated some forty years ago in *The Dream and Human Societies*, dreaming and the extensive recording of dreams is emblematic of classical Muslim societies.<sup>1</sup> When revelation had ceased with the death of the Prophet Muhammad dreams and dreaming became increasingly more important within Islam. Indeed, it is said that the “true” dream constitutes one forty-sixth part of prophecy. While the art and science of dream interpretation has attracted a good deal of attention during the recent past, most notably in the work of John Lamoreaux,<sup>2</sup> the extensive work of Leah Kinberg<sup>3</sup> and, for the later Sufi tradition, Jonathan Katz,<sup>4</sup> no one has taken up von Grunebaum’s challenge and actually examined the Muslim historical and biographical literature to see what dreams Muslims recorded and how they interpreted them.

The material in the historical, *adab* (fine literature), biographical, and geographical literature is vast and records thousands upon thousands of dreams. (The database upon which I will base my research contains as yet approximately 3,200 dreams, which is most likely only a small selection of what is truly available.) This practical manifestation of the Muslim interest in dreams was alluded to by von Grunebaum, who summarized a random number of themes from it, without making any attempt to categorize or summarize the whole. However, this material is of the highest interest, because it represents not the idealized form of Muslim dream interpretation as is to be found in the numerous treatises on the subject (see Lamoreaux 2002), but the actual raw material of the dreams and their on-the-spot interpretation.

The distinction is quite important when considering those subjects likely to be controversial within Islam, such as visions of the afterlife, or of God Himself. Although the prominent Sunni *hadith* collector al-Daraqutni (d. 385/995) had collected a number of *hadiths* indicating the possibility of seeing God,<sup>5</sup> the issue was usually deferred to the next world. Actually seeing God while in a dream is

problematic, both because of the general Muslim rejection of God being visible (hence quantifiable to the human perception) and most specifically because such a vision could allow the common Muslim to receive revelation from God and to thereby disregard the finality of the Prophet Muhammad's revelation.

However, early writers on dreams like Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889–90) speak about the possibility of seeing God. Ibn Qutayba states that such a vision must be metaphorical and represents the giving of sustenance and plenty to the dreamer. Even more of a blessing, however, would be God's looking at the dreamer during the course of a vision. Such a vision would represent forgiveness of sins, God's compassion and that the dreamer might be the recipient of worldly bounty including immunity from sickness and disease.<sup>6</sup> There do not appear to be any negatives connected with actually seeing God according to Ibn Qutayba. Significantly, however, he does not cite any dreams of anybody who has actually seen God, which is unlike his practice with regard to other categories of dreams.

This essay will propose an initial survey of the dream materials concerning the approach towards God within the context of paradise and hell as well as confront the direct and categorical vision of God, and attempt to place these problematic dreams within the context of mainstream Muslim teachings.

## SEEING GOD

Dreaming within Islam is legitimized by its close connection with prophecy. According to a standard tradition, "The good vision of the righteous man is one of the forty-six parts of prophecy."<sup>7</sup> Although according to the doctrine of the finality of prophethood, there will be no further divine communication, the possibility is left open that the role of prophecy will be taken to some extent by the prevalence and veracity of dreams. In addition, the dreaming process allows for a number of transgressive behaviors, including the continuation of prophecy under other guises, legitimization of a wide range of actions that might be seen as anti-Islamic, and direct communication with the Prophet Muhammad. Among these actions is the process of seeing paradise or even seeing God. Although seeing God is alluded to in the Qur'an for theological reasons – questions about God's form, corporeality, and other issues – actual vision of God became problematic within Islam by an early period.

However, on a popular level such beliefs remained fairly strong, as is demonstrated by the appearance of many dreams concerning this subject. One of the earliest (possibly) books on the subject of dreaming, that of pseudo-Ibn Sirin (d. 110/728) alludes almost immediately to the possibility of seeing God. From the beginning of his volume, he states:

Abu 'Ubayd al-Busri<sup>8</sup> said: I saw in my dream as if the Resurrection had occurred (*al-qiyama qad qamat*), and I rose from my grave. I

was given a mount and I rode it, and then was taken up (*'urija bi*) to the heavens. Behold! In it, there was a garden, and I wanted to descend, but it was said to me: "This is not your place." So I was taken up heaven by heaven – in each heaven there was a garden – until I came to the highest 'Illiyyin,<sup>9</sup> and I dismounted in it. Then I wanted to sit, but it was said to me "Will you sit before you see your Lord, most blessed and lifted up?" I said: No, and I rose, and they took me, and suddenly I was with God, mighty and majestic. Before Him was Adam [making the Reckoning]. When Adam saw me, he looked at me with the furtive eye of one who asks for help, and I said: "O Lord, the proofs have been afforded to this shaykh, so please have clemency upon him." I heard God say, "Rise, O Adam, I have had clemency upon you." The shaykh Abu Ahmad b. Bakr was present, and he heard me, and it is as if I wondered at the greatness of the position of Abu 'Ubayd. The Shaykh said to me and those who were present: "The decree and the merit return to Adam, since Abu 'Ubayd is of his descendents."<sup>10</sup>

This dream very closely parallels the Prophet Muhammad's famous Night Journey and Ascension into Heaven (*laylat al-isra wa-l-mi'raj*) alluded to in Qur'an 17.1-2. Like Muhammad, Abu 'Ubayd was given a mount (one should note not an identifiable earthly one), and ascends heaven by heaven until he reaches the top. It is assumed by the dreamer that the Muslim will go to the top, which is the heaven assigned to Abraham according to the stories of the Night Journey. But the only prophet who makes an appearance in this story is Adam, who is under the need of some intercession. Abu Ubayd speaks with God, and obtains the needed intercession, which establishes his position vis-à-vis God for his earthly audience.

The dream preserves a number of transgressive elements. The idea that one could verbally speak with God is merely the prelude. More shocking is the idea that Adam would need any form of intercession from a Sufi holy man. During the early Islamic period the idea of prophetic *'isma* or perfection from sins became prevalent very early – and was one of the major points of polemic between Islam and the earlier faiths of Christianity and Judaism. Although Adam's sin in the Qur'an is nowhere near as obvious as it is in the Bible, there was some doubt concerning Adam, even in Islam. It is interesting that probably he alone of all of the prophets could receive intercession, and most probably was chosen specifically for that purpose. The idea of intercession is quite controversial in Islam, as most rationalists rejected it with its ability to get around the committing of sins.

Abu Ubayd's claims to supremacy did not go unchallenged even in this form of the dream. It is apparent that the purpose of the dream is to present him as being equal to one of the prophets, the father of humanity (as he is called in Arabic), Adam. But Abu Ahmad b. Bakr did not accept this superiority, and

noted that even though according to the dream Abu Ubayd had demonstrated superiority over Adam, still the fact that Adam was Abu Ubayd's ancestor makes them unequal in the end. But one should note what does not get challenged in the after-dream sequence, which is the very veracity of the dream or the boldness of its claims. Hypothetically, according to the critique claims such as these could conceivably be made in a dream, even though in this specific instance the claims that Abu Ubayd made for himself do not hold up.

The form of ascension is maintained in a great many dreams, including those of legitimization. One such example is of the scholar:

Qutayba b. Sa'id said: I saw in like what the sleeper sees as if there were a ladder that was placed to the heavens, and I saw the people ascending it. I saw a number of my contemporaries from the people of knowledge [in *hadith*], and I wished to ascend as well, but was denied. It was said to me: this level is only reached by those who have gone to the *ribat* of Dihistan and prayed two *raka'as* in it.<sup>11</sup>

In this dream of heaven there are levels as with so many others, and only the worthy will be able to make it to the upper levels. Qutayba's dream implies that knowledge of *hadith* is not enough but that in order to ascend to the higher realms of heaven one has to have actions as well. Although two *raka'as* of prayer are not very many it is significant because they would be prayed within a dangerous spot, the *ribat* of Dihistan. A small amount of action is rewarded with a great reward, a message consistent with a wide range of *jihad* literature.

In this type of dream there are no descriptions of heaven, the dream is merely being used as a frame upon which to hang the moralizing ideal of visiting the *ribat* and participating in the *jihad*. This is very similar to the famous dream of the Sufi al-Junayd (d. 297/910):

Al-Khaldi<sup>12</sup> said: I saw al-Junayd in a dream, and I said: "What has God done with you?" He said: "All of those symbolic expressions were swept away, all of those interpretations have vanished, that knowledge has perished, and those formalities have been exhausted – nothing benefited us but the small bendings (*rukay'iyat*) for prayer that we would do in the mornings."<sup>13</sup>

In these types of dreams, God's rewards or punishments are merely commented on in order to give legitimacy to a type of behavior on earth or to weigh its relative worth.

One should note that transgressiveness in the matter of dreaming about God is also projected upon those of other faiths who dream of God. In the fifth/eleventh-century dream book of al-Qadiri two dreams are related of Jews who are said to have seen God, and went to rabbis (*hibr*) in order to find

their interpretation.<sup>14</sup> In one of those dreams, the Jew is said to have been spoken to by God personally and saved from a near-death situation. The rabbi cited Exodus 6:6 in interpretation. Comparatively it is rare to find such neutral allusions to Jews inside Muslim materials. There is no mention of either one of them converting to Islam. Perhaps the sensitivity of the subject of seeing God allowed for Muslim dream interpreters to relay information from other religious communities in such a fashion.

It is impossible here to summarize all of the dreams of God that one finds in the literature. In most cases God is presented merely as a voice or a present entity rather than a visual target of the dreamer. Presumably it is more the awesome experience of being in God's presence that is important for the dreamer's audience rather than informing the world what God actually looks like, or the authority that it confers upon the dreamer. The following trope is very common: al-Qushayri (d. 465/1072–3), the famous author of the *Risala al-Qushayriyya*, said "I saw the Lord of Power (*rabb al-'izza*) in a dream. He would address me, and I would address Him. During this, when the Lord, may His name be lifted up, said: A righteous man approaches, and I would turn, and behold! It was Ahmad al-Tha'labi who approached."<sup>15</sup> Innumerable dreams of this type are attested in the literature, where the appearance or presence of God is assumed, but not described in very much detail. Yet the desire to see God in dreams remained a strong one. The dream interpreter Ibn al-Wardi (d. 749/1349) for example devoted an entire poem to the description of how one should act in the presence of God if one should be granted a dream of Him.<sup>16</sup> In contradistinction to this reticence, one can get a sense of what heaven is like from the ascension dreams. These usually involve either meetings with prophets (as above) or experiences with the women of paradise, the *houris*.

#### FANTASIES OF AL-HUR AL-'IN

Dream materials about the women of heaven, eternally virginal, appear quite frequently, especially in *jihad* and martyrdom literature. It is occasionally difficult to know whether these visions are actual dreams or fantasies brought about the imminence of death or the pressures of battle, but the *jihad* literature does encourage a certain misogynism towards human women.<sup>17</sup> The general opinion was that relations with women and the attendant familial obligations tied a man to this world, and made it difficult if not impossible to want to fight in the *jihad*.

For this reason it seems that the military life encouraged fantasies of *houris*, and even battlefield "marriages" to *houris*, which indicated that one had spiritually departed from this world and was only seeking the next. The *Kitab al-jihad* of 'Abdallah b. al-Mubarak (d. 181/797) gives several examples of the *houris* appearing to fighters,<sup>18</sup> but the earliest versions of these stories appears in Ibn A'tham al-Kufi's (d. 319/931) *Kitab al-futuh*, where he relates the story

of the Umayyad commander Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. 120/738) and his troops. Maslama was amazed at the willingness of his troops to seek out death. Four of them in particular (whose names are listed) were encouraged by their leader Bishr b. Matar al-Azdi to charge, whereupon he said:

Do you see what I see ... behold, I lifted my head to heaven, looking at this cloud that overhangs the army, and I saw a wonder! I saw men – the like and form of whom I have never seen before. Together with them I saw white camps, the beauty of which I have never seen before, and I saw women coming down to us from that cloud, laughing to our brothers – those who have been killed – this is what I saw!<sup>19</sup>

The account states that this vision caused the audience's skin to crawl and for their hair to stand up, and that they desired to have what Bishr saw.

Later, more detailed descriptions appear in Ibn Abi Zamanayn (d. 399/1008–9), who tells of the following story:

We were among raiders, and I [Shahr b. Hawshab] woke up, while a man was crying in the most fierce manner, and saying “Woe, woe!” I went to him, and I said: “We will be back tomorrow, fear God, and have patience.” He said “I am not weeping for my family from whom I have parted in this world, but I was just in a dream, where it was said to me: Go to your houri wife (*zawjatika al-'ayna*), and I was taken. I was lifted to a land the likes of which I have never seen, and behold, there were young women the beauty of whom and whose clothing I had never seen. I greeted them, and they returned the greeting, and I said: Is the houri among you? They said: No, we are among her servants, but she is in front of you. So I went, and another land was before me, more beautiful than the first, and behold, there were young women more beautiful than the first ... they said: We are among her servants, she is in that pearl. So I went to it, and behold, there was a woman sitting on a throne made of red ruby, with extra large buttocks<sup>20</sup> beyond the throne. I greeted her, and she returned the greeting, and I sat on by her. We spoke together, and then she got up, and put out her wrist, and said: You will not depart from us until you promise us that you will spend the following night with us, and I promised her that. Then I awoke and it is for her that I weep.”<sup>21</sup>

The narrative continues saying that the horses were summoned then, and this man was the first one killed. It is interesting that in other lengthier versions of this story the process by which the man comes to the *houris* is elongated, and the numbers of her servant women are vastly increased to three different

groups of ten, twenty, and forty each.<sup>22</sup> The palace is also described as a “green grassy field.” It is also interesting that the physical description of the *houris*, as having enormous buttocks, is closely in conformity with the classical Arab descriptions of feminine beauty.<sup>23</sup> A very similar story is told of one Nujayh (or Ziyad) who fought in Sicily (third/ninth century). When Nujayh was knocked out by the force of the Byzantine bombardment of the Muslim positions, he apparently also had a vision of the *houris* but was sent back to this world prior to consummation.<sup>24</sup>

There are numerous other examples of fighters who were transported into the heavenly realms to be with *houris* through dreams, or witnessed the transportation of their fellows. One such story is told of a man at the Ka’ba, who was circumambulating the holy site, and calling out “Allah, Allah,” whereupon another man asked him the reason for his grief. He told of being a fighter together with six others, and being taken prisoner by the enemy. Just before the execution, he looked towards the heavens as seven gates opened upon and seven *houris* descended. Each one of the *houris* had a kerchief (*mandil*) in her hand. The other six were all beheaded, but the last one was saved by one of the enemy, and his *houris* said to him: “O precious one, what it is you are missing!” Consequently, the one man who was saved felt the loss of his *houris*.<sup>25</sup> But it is not clear whether he was asking God to take his life or to place him in a situation where he could be killed in a *jihad* as the story is left unresolved.

Yet another fighter in a foreign land entered a garden in which there was a woman seated on a golden throne who was one of the *houris*. Properly for a Muslim, he lowered his eyes from her (Qur’an 24.30), and looked at another part of the garden, but distressingly he immediately saw another *houris* just like the first one, and so he had to look away from her as well. But she said “Look, because it is permitted to you. I and the one you have seen are your two wives from the *hur al-‘in*.” So then he departed, but appeared confused to his fellow soldiers, and was the first who was martyred shortly thereafter.<sup>26</sup> Other stories tell of fighters surrounded by mysterious women who disappeared when seen by outsiders.<sup>27</sup>

In general, the material concerning fighters tends to illustrate their liminal status between heaven and earth. Even while they are still alive in this world they can partake of the pleasures of the next. Their wives are not of this world, but of the next. Their dreams and waking reality blur together in a way that is strikingly similar to that of the Prophet Muhammad (referring to his initial experience of true visions that came like the breaking dawn).<sup>28</sup> It is also significant that these stories are invariably from the beginnings of Islam and are not supplemented by further stories later on (for example, there are no examples of Muslims fighting the Crusaders who saw *houris*, even in the large book of Ibn al-Nahhas al-Dumyati).

After the *jihad* literature there were a great many encounters with *houris*, but they were usually accorded to ascetics in the form of visitations. It is curious that one of these is associated with the famous proto-Sufi ascetic Rabi’a

al-'Adawiyya, concerning whom it was said that she "used to see jinn with her eyes, and she used to see *al-hur al-'in* going and coming in her house, while they would conceal themselves from me with their sleeves (*akmam*)."<sup>29</sup> The significance of this statement is not clear. Usually *houris* did not seem to reveal themselves to human women, but even if they did why the *houris* would see the need to conceal themselves from Rabi'a is not made clear by the sources.

Most dreams or waking visions of *houris* are standard "this *hour* belongs to this person" types of dreams. They imply that the (future) possessor of the *hour* is certain to gain entrance into heaven. A good example of this type of vision is the following:

Ibrahim b. al-Sari b. al-Mughallas al-Saqati (d. third/tenth century) said: I heard my father say: I was in my mosque one day alone, after I had prayed the 'asr prayer,<sup>30</sup> and I had placed water to cool in the aperture of the mosque for my breakfast. Sleep overcame me, and I saw as if a number of *al-hur al-'in* had entered the mosque, and were clasping their hands.<sup>31</sup> I said to one of them: To whom do you belong? She said: To Thabit al-Bunani, and I said to another: And you? She said: To 'Abd al-Wahid. I said to another: And you? She said: To 'Utba. I said to another, and she said: To Farqad, until there was only one left, and I said: And to whom do you belong? She said: I belong to the one who does not cool his water for his breakfast. I said to her: If you are telling the truth, then break the mug, and so she overturned the mug and it fell from the aperture. I woke up at the breaking of the mug from my dream.<sup>32</sup>

One should note first of all, that unlike the *jihad* dreams above, there is no issue of modesty, and the *houris* do not have any trouble directly conversing with a man to whom they do not belong. Also, it appears that the numbers of the *houris* are fixed at one per man, rather than the higher numbers listed above. However, this was not always the case. In the *tabaqat* literature we find that Muhammad b. Sahnun was seen in a dream, and said that he was married to fifty of the *houris*, "because of my love for women that [God] knew."<sup>33</sup> Others, such as Yahya b. Mu'in, were married to 300 of the *houris*, according to a dream seen by Hubaysh b. Mubashshir.<sup>34</sup> Both of these figures are well-known in the world of *hadith*.

Sufis such as Abu Madyan (d. 594/1197-8) also receive larger numbers of *houris*. According to a dream by 'Umar al-Sabbagh in which he was praying together with Abu Madyan he saw three or four *houris* come into the mosque. He asked them who they belonged to, and they said Abu Madyan, and 'Umar conversed with them a short while.<sup>35</sup>

Another difference between the *jihad* *houris* and the Sufi-ascetic *houris* is the fact that the dreams of the latter do not generally emphasize the physical attributes of the *houris*. It appears to be much more important to establish

the spiritual level of the Sufi by means of the fact that he obtains *houris* or the number of *houris* that one obtains rather than their beauty. Even the one tradition that does speak of the beauty of the *houris* contains a moral message:

Abu Bakr al-Kattani al-'Awfi<sup>36</sup> said: I saw a *hawra'* in my dream – I have never seen a more beautiful [woman] than her. I said: Marry yourself to me. She said: Ask for my hand from my master. I said: What is your dowry? She said: Stopping the soul from its mad-nesses (*ma'luqatiha*).<sup>37</sup>

If this story is to be taken literally, it seems to imply that a *houris* could be taken from her master. But it seems to stand alone.

## DREAMS OF HELL

It is quite unusual to have dreams of hell associated with a Muslim figure. In all of the accounts of the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey and Ascension the element of the description of hell is included. However, one does not linger in hell according to these accounts, and later literature – unlike Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* – do not give anywhere near the vivid description of hell that you find in Christianity. This tendency is reflected in the dreams as well.

One example is the following, placed in the mouth of the famous companion of the Prophet 'Abdallah b. 'Umar (d. 73 or 74/692 or 693), who was also the son of 'Umar b. al-Khattab, the second caliph:

'Abdallah b. 'Umar said: Men from the Messenger of God's Companions used to see visions during the time of the Messenger of God, and they would tell of them. He would say concerning them whatever God willed, while I was a youth (*ghulam*), young of age, sleeping in the mosque prior to when I married. I said to myself: If there was good in you, you would see what they are seeing! I said that very night: "O God! If you know of good in me, show me a vision like those see!" When I was in that state, two angels came to me, in each of whose hands there were iron sticks to drive me into hell. I was between them, calling out: "O God! I take refuge in You from hell!" Then an angel who met me was shown to me, who had in his hand an iron stick, and he said: "You will never fear the mercies of ..." <sup>38</sup> If only you had prayed much!" He took me until we stood on the edge of Hell. It was spiraled, like the spiral-wall of a well, having spikes like the spikes of a well. On every spike there was an angel who had an iron stick, and behold! There were men hanging from chains, with their heads downward. I recognized men from Quraysh there. They took me away from *dhat al-yamin*.<sup>39</sup>

Since the position of 'Abdallah b. 'Umar within the *sunni* structure cannot be challenged, there is no fear that any reader would actually believe that he was going to go to hell. His position is something like that of the Prophet in the Night Journey: he can safely describe the torments of hell, and the bar-est possibility that he might be sent there, without anyone believing that he would actually go. Indeed, being one of the most pious and respected figures in Sunnism, son of the second caliph, it is impossible to believe otherwise.

But the dream very strongly recalls Jonathan Edwards. There is the inexorable force of the angels driving 'Abdallah into hell, despite his many protests. These protests are precisely the ones that a pious Muslim could be expected to say at this point, and raise the question of if such a pious man could be tormented in such a way, what is the hope for others? (On the other hand, 'Abdallah is described as being a youth in the story, and so had not attained his later spiritual station.) As the angels remonstrate 'Abdallah with his supposed lack of prayer, this once again makes one think about the possibility that ordinary Muslim pietistic activities might not be sufficient to save oneself from the torments of hell.

As expected the actual descriptions of hell are minimal. After all, they are quite graphic in the Qur'an. More significant is the fact that 'Abdallah recognized people hanging from the iron spikes and chains, indicating that hell is not just for the anonymous, but for the famous and well-connected as well. 'Abdallah's own terrifying experience illustrates that.

## DREAMS AND PROPHECY AFTER MUHAMMAD

Dreams are an as-yet-almost-unexplored element of the popular religiosity of classical and contemporary Islam. Although many have worked on the dream interpretation books, only von Grunebaum appears to have actually collected the dreams as they appear in the literature – unfettered from the interpretations of the religious elite. Dreams of God and of heaven are critical to that type of research, because of the possibility of radically challenging the mainstream interpretation of Islam – as did Ahmad al-Tijani for example in his foundation of the Tijaniyya, and others – through the use of dreams. Seeing God, seeing the Resurrection of the Dead, experiencing the pleasures of heaven or the torments of hell are all methods by which prophecy can be verified, continued, and even extended to the broader mass of Muslims well beyond the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

al-Qadiri states in his introduction to his standard work on dreams that “Whoever sees God in his sleep according to His light and radiance did not really see a description (*sifa*), form (*sura*) or image (*mathal*) but he saw Him in his heart as something awesome, as if may He be praised has ennobled him and brought him close, and forgiven him his sins.”<sup>40</sup> This is the standard outlook of the mainstream Muslim community, especially of the *'ulama*. It was

very strongly in their interest to make sure that uncontrolled visions of God, heaven, or hell did not proliferate among the Muslims, as such visions would have undercut the value of the knowledge (primarily in the form of *hadith*) upon which the scholars based their status. It is thus a testimony to the power of the popular religion that such dreams have continued to be cited and interpreted even within the scholars' books.

Every attempt was made to interpret such dreams away from actual visions of God, to associate them with his intangible qualities of mercy or justice rather than actually seeing God. Although the above has been only a tiny selection of the possibilities of dreams with regard to the eschatological, the major themes have been presented. A great deal of work needs to be done in collecting the dreams, identifying the symbolism inherent in them, and analyzing the messages, audiences, and effects of dreams upon the Muslim world.

## NOTES

1. See von Grunebaum (1966: 3–21).
2. Lamoreaux (2002).
3. See, for example, the bibliography in Kinberg (1994), where many of her articles are cited.
4. Katz (1996; 1997: 7–24; 1994: 157–180; 1991: 497–521).
5. al-Daraqutni (1991).
6. Ibn Qutayba (2001: 102–3).
7. al-Bukhari (1991: 8.88, no. 6983); compare Wensinck (1992) s.v. *ru'ya* for numerous references.
8. Unidentified (called Abu 'Abdallah al-Tatari in pseudo-Ibn Sirin).
9. Qur'an 83.18–19.
10. Pseudo-Ibn Sirin (n.d.: 20–21); corrected by Ibn 'Asakir (1995–99: 52.281).
11. al-Sama'ni (1998: 3.417–18).
12. Probably Ja'far b. Muhammad b. Nusayr al-Khaldi (d. 348/959–60); see Ibn al-Jawzi (2001: 2.684–5, no. 325).
13. al-Ghazali (1959: 11); often cited (e.g. Ibn Abi Ya'la n.d.: 1.129).
14. al-Qadiri (2000: 1.121; additional Jewish dreams of God are on 123).
15. Ibn al-Qifti (n.d.: 1.120).
16. Ibn al-Wardi (2002: 18).
17. Ibn al-Nahhas al-Dumyati (2002: 1.129, no. 60); and see Cook (2005: 36–7, 56–7); compare also Ibn Abi al-Dunya (1991: 78, no. 116) where one is encouraged to “ignore your wife so that you will be married to the *hur al-'in*.”
18. Ibn al-Mubarak (1971: 38, 117–18, 124–5, nos. 22, 143, 150); on Ibn al-Mubarak's own *houris*, see Ibn al-Jawzi (2001: 4.147).
19. Ibn A'tham al-Kufi (n.d.: 7.181).
20. Ibn al-Athir n.d. 3.186; in the version in Ibn al-Jawzi (2003: 328) the word *janbaha* (sides) is used in place of '*ajizatuha*. The large buttocks of the *houris* are described in Ibn Abi al-Dunya (1997: 227, no. 355).
21. Ibn Abi Zamanayn (1989: 239–40, no. 109); Ibn al-Nahhas al-Dumyati (2002: 2.772–3).
22. Ibn al-Jawzi (2003: 327–8); Ibn 'Asakir (1995–99: 66.20); additional versions in Ibn al-Nahhas al-Dumyati (2002: 2.774–8).
23. Note the popular saying in Ibn Qutayba (1998: 4.6); and see stories in al-Baladhuri (1959–: 7.61) and al-Raghib al-Isfahani (1999: 3.272).

24. Ibn Abi Zamanayn (1989: 241–2, no. 111); the Ziyad version is in Ibn al-Mubarak (1971: 140, no. 145); Ibn Abi al-Dunya (1993: 39–41) (considerably longer); Ibn al-Jawzi (2003: 402–3). It is difficult to imagine that Ibn al-Mubarak could have related materials from an invasion of Sicily as he died in 181/797.
25. Ibn al-Jawzi (2003: 235–6).
26. Ibn al-Mubarak (1971: 117, no. 143); Ibn al-Jawzi (2003: 409–10); Ibn al-Nahhas al-Dumyati (2002: 2.771).
27. Ibn Abi al-Dunya (1993: 41–2, no. 39).
28. Cf. al-Bukhari (1991: 1.4, no. 3).
29. al-Munawi (1999: 1.204).
30. The *'asr* prayer takes place approximately during the late afternoon.
31. Reading with the editor *yasfiqanna*.
32. Ibn 'Asakir (1995–99: 53.322).
33. al-Qadi 'Iyad (1963–65: 4.220); Ibn Farhun n.d. 2.173.
34. Ibn Abi Ya'la (n.d. 1.406); al-'Ulaymi (1984: 1.158).
35. Ibn Qunfudh (1965: 38).
36. Died 322/934.
37. al-Safadi (2000: 4.112); a very similar version in al-Munawi (1999: 1.598).
38. There is a difference in the reading between al-Bayhaqi, *fa-qala: lan naza'a ni'am al-rajul anta*, and al-Bukhari, *lan tura'a ni'am al-rajul anta*.
39. al-Bayhaqi (1985: 7.13), citing al-Bukhari (1991: 8.102, *ta'bir al-ru'ya*, 35).
40. al-Qadiri (2000: 1.117).

## CHAPTER 11

# REVEALING AND CONCEALING GOD IN ANCIENT SYNAGOGUE ART

*Shira Lander*

Jewish representations of the divinity in late antique synagogue art reflect a simultaneity of revelation and concealment that parallels Targumic interpretations of the human–divine encounter. The use of *memra* for the active divine principle, or *logos*, suggests a simultaneous aural immanence and visual hiddenness that synagogue artists expressed through their use of the *manus dei*. This visual syntax of *coincidentia oppositorum* uses a boundary or distinction between heavenly and earthly realms to distinguish the aspect of god that remained hidden to the viewer from that aspect of god which was revealed.

The synagogues of both third-century Dura Europos, Syria and sixth-century Palestine Beth Alpha in the Jezereel valley, offer visual representations of god in *pars pro toto*. This essay discusses the depiction of the hand of god in illustrations of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac, as described in Genesis 22 in light of Targumic interpretations and liturgical poetry. This study employs the “holistic” methodology adapted from Byzantine Christian art history by historian of Jewish art Steven Fine, who proposes interpreting synagogue art in its ritual context.<sup>1</sup> This viewer-centered approach has the advantage of taking into account the polysemic quality of images while attempting to avoid the over-reading and eisegetical shortcomings of earlier scholarship.

### THE DURA EUROPOS FRESCO

The Dura synagogue fresco depicting the binding of Isaac is located over the central Torah niche of the Western wall (Fig. 11.1). This is the earliest known depiction of the hand of god in either Jewish or Christian art. Hachlili suggests that this motif was likely adapted from ancient Near Eastern art.<sup>2</sup> Most directly relevant is the hand wielding a thunderbolt found, among other places, at Dura. It does not appear in the Roman context until the fourth



**Figure 11.1** Third-century Dura Europos Torah Niche Fresco. *Photo:* Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection, cropped.

century, attested in both Imperial and Christian art (Fig. 11.2).<sup>3</sup> The earliest known Christian portrayal of this biblical scene on the third-century Mas d'Aire Sarcophagus lacks the divine hand, but it does appear on fourth-century sarcophagi versions (Figs 11.6–11.7).<sup>4</sup>

In the Dura fresco, a hand emerging from an irregular semi-circle appears in the upper right corner, above the figure of Isaac lying on the altar. Scholars



**Figure 11.2** Fifth-century Miracles of Moses, S. Sabina, Rome. *Photo:* Bill Storage and Laura Maish, 2007. [http://www.rome101.com/Topics/Christian/Sabina/pages/F0609\\_1266WS.htm](http://www.rome101.com/Topics/Christian/Sabina/pages/F0609_1266WS.htm). Reproduced with permission.



**Figure 11.3** Third-century Dura Europos Torah Niche line drawing. Copyright: the author.



**Figure 11.4** Sixth-century Beth Alpha Floor Mosaic. Drawing: E. L. Sukenik, *The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha* [Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1932/2003], pl. 10. Photo: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

agree that this is the hand of god, yet the surrounding shape has been variously interpreted (Fig. 11.3). Goodenough sees it as a “cloud,” which he believes “is the source ... the ‘cloud of unknowing.’”<sup>5</sup> The cloud thus represents the unseen god breaking through to the earthly realm. Gutmann writes that the whole image is “symbolic of the *bat-kol* = voice from heaven.”<sup>6</sup> This view is supported by the use of the *bat-kol* in the expansive Palestinian *Targum Neofiti* on Genesis 22.10, which proclaims the virtues of both Abraham and Isaac. According to Jensen, late antique Christianity shares this understanding of the divine hand, yet the divine voice is identified with the first person of the Trinity.<sup>7</sup> The use of the *manus dei* to convey vocalic meaning is most explicit in the Beth Alpha mosaic, where the words spoken to Abraham at the point of intervention, “Don’t touch (*al tishlach*)” serve as a label for the hand (Figs 11.4–11.5). Although both the biblical and Targumic accounts clearly attribute this directive to an angel,<sup>8</sup> the use of the hand of god suggests a type of substitution. The replacement likely troubled later Christian and Jewish (and Islamic) interpreters who depicted the scene with an angel rather than a hand emerging from heaven.<sup>9</sup>

Jensen ponders the choice of this human body part to represent god’s voice: “does God have hands?”<sup>10</sup> Hachlili explains this choice as occasioned by the many biblical descriptions of god acting with his hand.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, the depiction of the divine voice as a hand may be related to Roman statuary in which the classical oratory posture included an outstretched right arm. In a kind of sign language, each hand gesture was finely choreographed in synchronization with a speaker’s oration to convey different emotions.<sup>12</sup> Aldrete



**Figure 11.5** Beth Alpha binding of Isaac Pavement. Photo: G. Laron (Hachlili 2009: Plate IV.1b). Courtesy of Prof. Z. Weiss and the Sepphoris Expedition, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



**Figure 11.6** Third-century Mas d'Aire Sarcophagus. *Photo:* Julie Märki-Boehringer for the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Rome, in Synder 1985: Pl. 24 l'Église Ste Quitterie du Mas, Aire-sur-l'adour, France.



**Figure 11.7** Early fourth-century Lateran Museum Sarcophagus. Author's sketch from Grabar 1968, Fig. 109. *Photo:* Anderson.



**Figure 11.8** Probus Binio, 277 CE “Adlocutio Aug[usti].” Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, object no. 18216272. Photo: Lutz-Jürgen Lübke.

has pointed out that gesticulations were represented on “statues, coins, reliefs, and wall paintings.”<sup>13</sup> Depictions of an emperor’s public address or *adlocutio* on monuments and coinage often strike this pose (Fig. 11.8).<sup>14</sup> The outstretched right hand with open palm, as clearly delineated in the Dura fresco, may be derived from such imperial portraits, which date to the first century through late antiquity.<sup>15</sup> MacCormack has demonstrated that in addition to its military context, the *adlocutio* gesture was associated with the imperial *adventus* and was adopted in 4th century portraits of Christ.<sup>16</sup> This gesture captured the moment at which the emperor (or Christ) addressed his audience in the course of his ceremonial arrival.

The interpretation of the divine hand in the Genesis 22 illustrations as merely vocalic does not explain the occurrence of the motif in other scenes where the biblical text records no oral communication from heaven, as in the Dura portrayal of Ezekiel 8:3. In this case, Hachlili interprets the hand as “the intervention of God,” which comports with Gutmann and Kessler’s general understanding of the *manus dei* motif.<sup>17</sup> This interpretation is broad enough to include angelic intervention as well as the *bat kol*.<sup>18</sup> Since the gesture simultaneously conveyed speech and presence in Roman culture, its meaning could variably draw on one or both associations.

The mystical text *Sefer Yetsirah* uses the expression “succeeded” (lit. “extended his hand” *alta b’yado*) to convey Abraham’s act of harnessing the power of creation in order to “make” souls in Haran at Genesis 12:5.<sup>19</sup> By using his hand to carve (*ḥqq*) or form (*yʒr*), depending on the manuscript, the

twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, Abraham learned to imitate the divine act of creation that emanated from the alphabet.<sup>20</sup> *Sefer Yetsirah* connects God's active, creative principle to the hand. Although Biblical Hebrew does not attest this usage, the idiom "extend his hand" (*alah b'yado*) came to mean "succeed" in Roman-Byzantine period literature.<sup>21</sup> The idiom reflects a perception of the connection between hand and action.<sup>22</sup>

### THE BETH ALPHA MOSAIC

The hand motif appears in another late antique synagogue illustration of the sacrificial scene, from the sixth-century Beth Alpha mosaic in the Jezereel valley of Palestina Secunda (Fig. 11.4). In the mosaic, the division between heaven and earth is clearly demarcated by a horizontal line. A hand emerges from what the excavator describes as a "dark-colored circle (a cloud) from which radiate beams of light – mostly outside the limits of the [upper] panel."<sup>23</sup> Unlike the cloud, which is horizontally centered on the line, the hand is contained entirely within the lower panel, beneath the line (Fig. 11.5). Sukenik interprets the whole motif as symbolizing "the angel of God who called to Abraham from heaven," yet in the Dura frescos, the hand appears in scenes where no angel is mentioned in either the biblical or Targumic accounts.<sup>24</sup> More likely, the hand is used to convey divine action, analogous to the Targum's use of the term *memra*. *Memra*, or *memar*, is Aramaic for "statement, speech," deriving from the root 'mr.<sup>25</sup> In antiquity, since language was primarily oral, texts were read aloud rather than silently. Public speech, as discussed earlier, entailed physical gestures, thus "speech-act" better conveys the sense of *memar*, similar to the Greek word *logos*.<sup>26</sup>

### EXEGETICAL AND ARTISTIC CONTESTATION BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

The artistic quandary of how to represent the unseeable faced Christians as well as Jews. The hand of god appears in a broad range of biblical scenes on a wide variety of media, both Jewish and Christian. Kessler has demonstrated that Byzantine iconography represented the active divine presence as Christ, whose image was fully depicted because of his incarnation. The *manus dei*, on the other hand, was reserved for the first person of the trinity, particularly in ante-lapsarian scenes or scenes where both god the father and Christ appeared (such as his baptism).<sup>27</sup> In Jewish art, the hand was used to convey god's visibility and hiddenness simultaneously, and may have even emerged in response to Christian claims about the incarnate, or visible, god. Kessler notes that in Christian iconography, "the deployment of hand or anthropomorphic Deity came to be used actually to track the devolution of humanity's state of grace."<sup>28</sup>

The human capacity to see god was considered lost with the expulsion from Eden, and only indirect communication was possible, as symbolized by the hand.<sup>29</sup> This trope is already apparent in the fifth-century Cotton Genesis manuscript.<sup>30</sup> The use of the *manus dei* on the fifth-century doors of Santa Sabina Church in Rome is also limited to Old Testament scenes (Fig. 11.2).

Early Christian exegetes contrasted the limited visibility of god during the period of the Old Law with the fullness of god's revelation in the New Covenant. In a sermon given by the fourth-century bishop, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jesus appeared in visible form because the sight of the godhead was unbearable:

The Jews know these things, but do not understand; for they have plugged the auricles of their heart, so that they will not understand. But let us believe in Jesus Christ, as having been present in the flesh and been made man, since we could not receive him otherwise. For since we were not able to behold or enjoy him as he was, he became that which we are, so that we might be permitted to enjoy him. For if we are not able to look completely at the sun, which was made on the fourth day, would we be able to behold god, its creator? The Lord came down in fire on Mt. Sinai and the people could not bear it, but said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; and let not god speak to us, lest we die" (Exod. 20:19); and again, "For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living god speaking out of the midst of the fire, and shall live?" (Deut. 5:26).<sup>31</sup>

This contrast in visibility not only demonstrates the inferiority of the Mosaic dispensation, but the failure of Jews – both biblical and in Cyril's time – to recognize what they were seeing as Christ:

Was it without reason that Christ was made man?... But although it has been demonstrated that it was possible for him to be made man, yet if the Jews increasingly disbelieve, let us propose to them: What strange thing do we proclaim in saying that god was made man, when yourselves say that Abraham entertained the lord as a guest? What strange thing do we proclaim when Jacob says, "For I have seen god face to face, and my life is saved from death?" The lord, who ate with Abraham, also ate with us. What strange thing then do we proclaim? Furthermore we produce two witnesses, those who stood before the lord on Mount Sinai: Moses was in a cleft of the rock (Exod. 33:22), and Elijah was next in a cleft of the rock (1 Kgs 19:11).<sup>32</sup>

At the turn of the third century, both Origen of Alexandria and Melito of Sardis interpreted the Akedah as a type of Christ's sacrifice, pointing out that his salvation trumped that of Isaac who did not actually suffer or die.<sup>33</sup>

By contrast, *Targum Neofiti* on Genesis 22:14 invokes the divine obedience of Abraham as a means to secure future Jewish salvation, a principle referred to in rabbinic literature as *zechut avot* (merit of the ancestors): “When his children are in the hour of distress you shall recall the binding of their father Isaac, and listen to the voice of their supplication, and answer them and deliver them from all distress ...”<sup>34</sup> This competitive exegesis suggests that the use of the *manus dei* in Jewish and Christian art may reflect similar contestation: Jews used it to convey the concurrent presence and inapprehensibility of god, while Christians used it to convey the incomplete manifestation of the deity prior to the advent of Christ. Despite their varying interpretations, however, the motif itself remained the same.

### THE AKEDAH AS HEAVENLY VISION

Hachlili interprets the rays emanating from the hand of the Beth Alpha mosaic as depicting light.<sup>35</sup> The jagged mass emanating from the cloud surrounding the hand of the Dura fresco (obscured in many reproductions) could indicate a similar phenomenon (Fig. 11.1). That god’s body emits light is attested throughout Jewish literature.<sup>36</sup> Not only do divine and semi-divine bodies glow, but privileged human beings are often said to be clothed in garments of light upon entering heaven.<sup>37</sup> Light allows the viewer to simultaneously see and not see a luminous object; while shielding the object from view, its visual affect makes the viewer aware of the object’s presence. Light also prevents the viewer from seeing actual objects in his or her line of vision, whether temporarily or permanently. This visual effect is often described in biblical literature as blindness. Most interesting in this regard is *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Genesis 27:1: “When Isaac had grown old, his eyes were too dim to see. For when his father bound him, he looked upon the Throne of Glory, and from that time on his eyes began to grow dim.” The tradition of Isaac’s visual impairment was so widespread that it was repeated in several midrashic collections.<sup>38</sup> In the first/second-century *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the vision of the *merkabah* is assigned to Abraham:

And I saw on the air to whose height we had ascended a strong light which cannot be described. And behold, in this light ... And I said to the angel, “Why is it you now brought me here? For now I can no longer see, because I am weakened and my spirit is departing from me.” And he said to me, “...He whom you will see coming directly toward us in the great polyphonic sound of sanctification is the Eternal One who has loved you. You will not look at him himself...” And while he was still speaking, behold the fire coming toward us round about, and a voice was in the fire like a voice of many waters, like a voice of the sea in its uproar.<sup>39</sup>

Abraham and the angel respond to this aural-visual encounter by bowing low and reciting a doxology that includes a description of god's face as emitting light unceasingly.<sup>40</sup> A description of the *merkabah* (paralleling Ezekiel 1) follows this adoration. Although the later Targumic and midrashic traditions transpose the heavenly vision to Isaac, the essential content of the vision remains unchanged: sound and light. The light, or fire, allows the viewer a mediated perception of god's presence; light simultaneously obscures its source while indicating its presence.

Both the biblical text and its Targumic interpretations agree that Mt Moriah was the site of a vision, yet the Targum insists on more definitively identifying the object in view. The biblical text gives the etymology *b'har Adonai yera'eh* ("on the mount of the Lord there is vision") for the name Abraham gives the site where the Akedah took place, *Adonai-yireh* ("the Lord will see"). In the additions to *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* found in *Targum Neofiti* on Genesis 22:14, the site of the Akedah is described as where the *shechinah* was seen: "there [on this mountain] the [glory of the] *shechinah* of the Lord was revealed to him." The Hebrew pun that plays on the similarity of the words *yireh* and *yera'eh* is lost in the Aramaic's attempt to more accurately explain what was actually revealed on the mountain. Nevertheless, the Targum preserves the interpretation of what the mount is named for as a vision of the *shechinah*, the indwelling presence of god. Since the godhead could not be visually apprehended and remained hidden from view, the Targum had to explain that it was the *shechinah* that was seen. What did the *shechinah* of god look like? Did it possess its own visual qualities, or were these derived from god himself?

The most famous biblical theophany is that of Moses in Exodus 33:18-23; 34:5-7, prior to which god would speak to the prophet "face to face, as one man speaks to another," amid a "pillar of cloud" in the tent of meeting according to Exodus 33.9-11. The Targum makes clear by no less than three degrees of separation that no one actually sees god's face, because such an encounter would be fatal per Exodus 33:20. A number of important interpretations emerge in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*: the face-to-face interaction is attributed to god's *memra*; the speaking of god's indwelling presence (*shechintah*) to Israel combined with the occurrence of miracles and the communication of the holy spirit (*ruach kudshah*) renders Israel "different from all the peoples on the face of the earth," from whom the spirit of prophecy (*ruach nevuah*) has been removed, according to *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Exodus 33:16; Moses requests to see god's *glory* (*ikar*); what is recited is the name of god's *memra*; what passes before Moses is god's indwelling presence (*shechintah*) and the ministering angels (*malachayah d'kayemin um'shamshin*); what shields Moses is not god's hand, as in the Masoretic text, but god's *memra*; and what Moses actually sees is the "knot (*d'bidah*) [or revelation (*diberah*) – the editions differ] of the phylacteries of the glory of My indwelling presence." Throughout biblical and rabbinic texts *glory* indicates luminosity.<sup>41</sup> This entire theophany takes place, according to *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Exodus 34:5, in the *clouds*

of the indwelling presence's glory. Thus, the two distinguishing visual features of theophany are cloud and light.

Cloud and light are depicted literally in the Dura and Beth Alpha scenes of the Akedah, suggesting that these are what Abraham and Isaac actually saw. The hand of god, however, is more likely a metaphor, used to convey the active principle of the deity. This active divine force, like the Targumic *memra*, was understood as remaining involved in Jewish history long past the biblical period, as the use of the *bat kol* in rabbinic literature demonstrates. The *manus dei* in ancient synagogue art may have served as a visual refutation of Christian claims that, without Christ, salvation was no longer available to Jews. The hand, along with its perceptible radiance and cloud, symbolized a god that was discernibly active and revealed while remaining hidden and invisible.

## NOTES

1. Fine (2005: 165–71).
2. Hachlili (1999: 68).
3. Grabar (1968: 40, fig. 99, fig. 100); Jensen (2004: 36).
4. van Woerden (1961: 243–5).
5. Goodenough (1953: 247).
6. Gutmann (1987: 67); followed by Kessler (2004: 166).
7. Jensen (2005: 122); and Kessler (2000: 5–6); see also Spier (2007: 19).
8. Paralleled in *Jubilees* 18.9–11.
9. Gutmann (1987: 69); Schapiro (1943: 134–47).
10. Jensen (2004: 36).
11. Hachlili (1999: 66).
12. This tradition of gesticulation persisted into the Middle Ages, and remnants are still visible in the way Mediterraneans, Middle-Easteners, and Jews “talk with their hands.”
13. Aldrete (1999: 45).
14. Aldrete (1999: 46).
15. Marcian gold medallion, in Sabatier (1862: 123, no.1), as cited by MacCormack (1972: 730).
16. MacCormack (1972: 743).
17. Hachlili (1999: 66); Gutmann (1984: 117); Kessler (2000: 3).
18. The idea that the angel Adoïl of 2 *Enoch* 25 could represent the hand of God is based on an unlikely etymology; see Orlov (2005: 199), as well as his contribution to this volume.
19. *Sefer Yetsirah* 61 (Hayman 2004: 181–3). Attempts to date this text range from late second/early third century (Hayman) to sixth century (Scholem).
20. *Sefer Yetsirah* 2, 9, 17–19 (Hayman 2004: 64–5, 79, 92–102). The Babylonian Talmud claims that the fourth-century Babylonian scholar Rabbah used the book to gain the power of creation; see *b. Sanhedrin* 65b.
21. *b. Berachot* 35b.
22. *b. Nazir* 23a.
23. Sukenik (1932/2003: 40).
24. Sukenik (1932/2003: 40); see, for example, Elijah reviving the son of the Zarephath widow (1 Kgs 17:17–24).
25. Sokoloff (1990: 305).

26. Levey (1987: 15).
27. Kessler (2000: 4–6).
28. Kessler (2000: 6).
29. Kessler (2000: 6).
30. Kessler (2000: 6).
31. Cyril, *Catecheses illuminandorum* 12.13 (Gifford 1894/1995: 75); translation modified.
32. Cyril, *Catecheses illuminandorum* 12.16 (Gifford 1894/1995: 76); translation modified.
33. Wilken (1976: 64–5), citing Origen, *Homiliae in Genesim* 8.6; Melito, fragment 9.
34. For ‘merit of the ancestors,’ see also *y. Yoma* 13.2.3.1; *y. Shabbat* 55a; *y. Berachot* 27b.
35. Hachlili (1999: 66).
36. Pss. 4:6, 44:3, 76:4, 89:15, 104:2; Isa. 60:20; Dan. 2:22; 1 *Enoch* 14.20–22.
37. Ezek. 1:27; 2 *Enoch* 22.8–9.
38. *Genesis Rabbah* 65.10 (where the object of his gaze is the *shechinah*); *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 11.3 (face of the *shechinah*); *Pirqa de Rabbi Eliezer* 32 (Friedlander 1916: 236).
39. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 15.5–17.1 (Rubinkiewica 1983: 696).
40. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 17.18–19.
41. Isa. 60:19–20; Ps. 8:5; 4, fragment 11; 1 *Enoch* 62.15–16; *b. Berachot* 17b, 60b; *b. Sanhedrin* 111b; *b. Megilah* 15b; *b. Shabbat* 156b.

## CHAPTER 12

# THE INVISIBLE CHRISTIAN GOD IN CHRISTIAN ART

*Robin M. Jensen*

To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? An idol? – A workman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and cast for it silver chains. As a gift one chooses mulberry wood – wood that will not rot – then seeks out a skilled artisan to set up an image that will not topple.                      Isaiah 40:18-20

Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.  
Isaiah 45:15

These texts from Isaiah do not say that God is indiscernible, only that God is incomparable to anything in the known, material world. God is also beyond human view; according to John 1:18, no one has ever seen the Divine One. This hidden deity, immortal and dwelling in unapproachable light, is made known by the Eternal Logos, the First Born of Creation and the invisible God's image or *eikon*.<sup>1</sup> God's hiddenness safeguards God's incomprehensibility, for seeing is a mode of perceiving. As Augustine long ago explained, we say "I see," and mean "I understand."<sup>2</sup> Thus, God's absolute un-seeability signifies God's unknowability and maintains the distance (intellectual and physical) between Creator and creation. The bodily eye cannot glimpse God; the mind's eye cannot fathom the divine nature. Nevertheless, even as humans recognize the folly – even the danger – of their desire, they wish to see God.<sup>3</sup> Denied the unobtainable, they have no basis even for speculating about the deity's appearance. As the Isaiah text above says: "to whom will you liken God?"

In spite of this admonishment, scripture suggests that God deigns, at times, to be beheld by human beings, and likened to them. Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John the Revelator recount such events. All three of these visionaries describe the Holy One as having recognizable human attributes: God sits on a throne, wears a robe, and holds a scroll.<sup>4</sup> Added to accounts of divine theophanies are the numerous other places where God is said to have feet, hands, ears, lap,

and eyes.<sup>5</sup> Moses is warned in Exodus 33:20 that no one can look at God's face and live – a caution that implies that God, in fact, has a face.<sup>6</sup> God's occasional, anthropomorphic appearances simply may be condescension to human limited understanding or the prophets' descriptions may be only poetic metaphors. Yet, invisibility does not, by definition, require incorporeality.

Scripture passages, like those above, undoubtedly prompt readers or hearers to imagine what the Divine Being might look like if they could have a direct, unmediated vision of it. Jews and Christians alike can say that God could have a body, even a human-like one, with some justification. It is, after all, one way to interpret the creation story, when God says in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make humankind in our own image, according to our likeness."<sup>7</sup> If humans are theo-morphic, then God might be anthropomorphic.

Thus, despite theologians' adamant claims that the deity's appearance is beyond human imaginative capacity, humans form mental images of God. This is partly because of those anthropomorphizing biblical texts, but also because it is impossible to imagine something invisible. People tend to form some kind of shape or body when they think about or pray to God, and they do this out of their sensory experience in the mundane, external world. Once these mental images are formed, it is natural to express them in verbal descriptions or artistic representations. Here is where Isaiah's question becomes relevant: to whom or what could a poet or artist liken God?<sup>8</sup> As the prophet points out, the idols rot and topple over, they cannot move from the places where they are set, they cannot hear or answer prayers. Every earthly image, in fact, must fail, must be infinitely inadequate.

Isaiah raises the specter of idolatry, warning against images of God that look like the gods of other tribes or nations. His query implies that making any kind of divine image is folly. There is no basis for an artisan to go about such a task. Still, one could argue that a visual depiction of God is no more idolatrous than a scriptural description of God. Moreover, although mental images might seem to be less concrete than visible representations, in reality, they can be just as fixed in the imagination and difficult to eradicate. Artists simply transform internal images into external ones. Such visual representations need not be objects of veneration in themselves (i.e. idols), but merely expressive gestures of devotion to something that lies far beyond the mental or material image. Thus, Isaiah's question begs two others: first, whether, based on scriptural language, one can or should conceptualize God with some kind of body and, second, whether fabricating that mental image in pictorial art is necessarily idolatrous.

#### PICTORIAL DEPICTION: ACCEPTED AND REJECTED

In much of Christian visual art, God is not hidden. The Divine Being frequently is represented as an elderly, bearded, male (Fig. 12.1). The source for this



**Figure 12.1** God blessing the World, apse fresco, Cathedral of the Incarnation, Nashville.  
*Photo: the author.*

figuration may be the dream of Daniel, who saw a figure he called the Ancient of Days, seated on a throne, with snow-white clothing and wool-like hair.<sup>9</sup> The image also may have been an adaptation of Jupiter's portrait: a heavy-bearded and mature male, seated upon the throne of heaven: the king of the gods (Fig. 12.2). Whatever it was, the familiar old Father God of Christian iconography began to appear by the mid fourth century. The earliest examples appear on sarcophagi that depict God receiving the offerings of Cain and Abel or creating Adam and Eve (Figs 12.3–12.4). In these representations, God sits in profile, not on a throne but in a simple basket-weave chair. He is bearded and wears a tunic and *pallium*. Unlike Jupiter his chest is not bare, nor does he hold a scepter and an orb. This benevolent God figure seems to have been abandoned by the end of the century, however, not appearing again until the early Middle Ages (Fig. 12.5). From that time until the present, the old Father God has been a familiar figure in western Christian art, appearing from the clouds at the Nativity, overseeing Jesus' baptism, holding his dead son in his arms, or creating Adam (Fig. 12.6).

The ubiquity of that pictorial, figurative image does not mean its acceptance by Christian theologians. Through the centuries, they derided such representations as theologically naive or worse: sacrilegious and idolatrous, violating the commandment in Exodus 20:4 against making "graven images." Many argued that biblical references to God's body parts should be taken as metaphors, not as literal descriptions. To take it in any other way was foolishly materialistic. John of Damascus, the champion of holy icons in the eighth century, carefully draws the line at representations of God, saying that it is impossible to depict the invisible, incorporeal, formless, and uncircumscribable



**Figure 12.2** Jupiter, Roman, second century CE. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. *Photo:* the author.



**Figure 12.3** Cain and Abel presenting their offerings to God. Fourth-century sarcophagus, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican. *Photo:* the author.



**Figure 12.4** The Trinity creating Adam and Eve. Fourth-century sarcophagus, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican. *Photo: the author.*



**Figure 12.5** Nicholas Dipre, God the Father, detail of Jacob's Ladder, ca. 1500. *Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.*



**Figure 12.6** Hans Multscher, *The Holy Trinity*, ca. 1430. Painted Alabaster. *Photo:* Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

Divine One.<sup>10</sup> Eight hundred years later, John Calvin reiterated the point, and added that those who seek a visible form of God cut themselves off from salvation. Even worse, he insisted, are those who dare to make an actual physical image of how they imagine the deity.<sup>11</sup> Thus, out of respect – or fear – humans should restrain their desire for concrete representations, reign in their curiosity, and live with the mystery.

Such restraint would have been counter-cultural in most of the ancient world. Early Christians, going about their daily lives, could not have avoided divine images, albeit statues or portraits of the pagan gods and not of the Jewish or Christian one. For traditional polytheists, owning and displaying such images were a mark of piety if not social class and taste. Whether they were cult objects and the focus of worship, publically displayed civic

monuments, or lovely art objects merely intended as garden ornaments, images of the gods (*simulacra*) were ubiquitous. They were large or small; they appeared in great temples as well as on mundane pottery lamps. Their religious purpose was completely integrated with their civic, social, and aesthetic/decorative functions.<sup>12</sup> Probably no one was so naive as to confuse a statue with its model or the image with the god. Yet, because of their religious implications and cultural importance, Christian apologists expended great effort to ridicule such things as well as the artisans who fabricated them.<sup>13</sup>

One of these, the Carthaginian advocate Marcus Minucius Felix, defended the hidden Christian God to his pagan interlocutor Octavius. Octavius had scoffed at a deity that had no publicly known images, who could neither be seen by his devotees nor shown to others.<sup>14</sup> By way of answer, Minucius pointed out that his God needed no other image than the living human being who was created as such.<sup>15</sup> Statues of the gods were foolish, human-made inanimate objects in which mice could build nests or spiders weave webs.<sup>16</sup> But Minucius' reply did not deny that God might have a human-like appearance; he only insisted that mortal hands could not fashion or fabricate it. Christians neither see nor show the God they worship. This, he explained, is the very reason that they believe in him: that though they can perceive God in the natural world, or in God's works, or in signs or symbols, they can neither directly look at him nor display him to others. God is like the sun: even though we perceive its rays and light and could not see at all without it, to look at the sun directly is impossible.<sup>17</sup>

Christians who thought of God as corporeal but hidden agreed with certain Jewish contemporaries who understood the Genesis text as specifically saying the human body was in the likeness of God's.<sup>18</sup> Jews, like Christians, held a variety of viewpoints. Some Jews maintained that humans are like God in an ethical sense: they can distinguish good from evil;<sup>19</sup> others that they looked like angels, who are sometimes called "gods" in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>20</sup> Still others, reading the scriptures allegorically, insisted that the archetypal Divine Mind is the basis for the human likeness.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, documents show that some rabbis thought that humans shared a bodily likeness to God. Jewish sacred literature continued and even developed these anthropomorphic depictions of the Deity in rabbinic midrashim, in apocalyptic texts and in mystical treatises.<sup>22</sup> Yet, unlike Christians, Jews normally refrained from making pictorial depictions of God as a bodily being.<sup>23</sup>

## DEBATE OVER ANTHROPOMORPHISM, SEEING GOD

The claim that humans bear the divine image was not specifically Jewish or Christian; it existed in Greco-Roman sources from antiquity. The Homeric gods, of course, are depicted as fully anthropomorphic in art (e.g. statues, paintings, and mosaic panels) as well as in myth. Even those philosophers who

opposed Stoic materialism and deemed the ideal realm to be non-physical (and thus non-corporeal) recognized that human forms were best ascribed to the gods.<sup>24</sup> Despite this concession, philosophers regularly criticized the assumption that the gods should be corporeal or in human form.

### *Clement of Alexandria and Origen*

Xenophanes' well-known satirical hypothesis, that if cattle, horses, and lions could make images of the gods they would make them in the form of cattle, horses, and lions, was quoted more than 500 years later by both the pagan Diogenes Laërtes and his contemporary, the Christian Clement of Alexandria.<sup>25</sup> According to the tradition, Xenophanes aimed his ridicule at the anthropomorphism of Hesiod and Homer. Such skepticism also appears in the writing of Pliny the Elder, an acknowledged agnostic who asked how anyone could know what god (or the gods) look like. He asserted that the human forms of the gods, as they are known in the images set in homes, temples, and even street markets (*simulacra*) were mere condescension to human weakness. God, he insisted, is only known to himself and, as such, beyond human visual comprehension, being all sight, hearing, life, soul. The biblical anthropomorphisms are best understood by applying the principles of allegorical exegesis.<sup>26</sup> Pliny's argument resonates with Clement of Alexandria's mockery of statues carved from wood, metal or stone. Clement thought it absurd that anyone could worship senseless human-made objects and, citing the commandment against graven images, concluded that only the mind can perceive the insensible image of the invisible God.<sup>27</sup>

Clement's follower, Origen, shared his principles but aimed his criticism at Christian anthropomorphites rather than at pagan ones. Origen commented on the passage in Romans 1:22-3 in which Paul pronounces the wrath of God upon those who foolishly exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal human beings or four-footed animal or reptiles. Origen insisted that Paul was referring not only to pagan idolaters but also to those who claim that God is anthropomorphic. He hastened to correct a naive interpretation of the creation story that envisioned a human-like body for God. The *imago dei*, according to Origen is an inner image: an identification of mind or intellect, and not one of bodily likeness. To be in God's image is to share in the Divine Reason, not the Divine physique. Influenced by Platonic idealism, Origen insisted that the correct meaning of humanity's being "in the image" alludes to the "inner" not the "outer" person, by which Origen meant the cognitive faculty.<sup>28</sup>

In his debate with the pagan Celsus, Origen admitted that Christian anthropomorphites existed, but argued that their conceptions misrepresented the true faith. Celsus, he claimed, unfairly refutes beliefs that orthodox Christians do not espouse: namely that God possesses human physical features and is

corporeal in nature. And if Celsus had heard such teachings from self-proclaimed Christians, they must have been very simple or ignorant ones. To his proofs for the invisibility of God from John 1:18 and Colossians 1:15, Origen added John 4:24: “God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Audius*

Origen’s problematic anthropomorphites perhaps were more numerous than he conceded. A proportion of simple or naive Christians within any flock had never quite lost certain pagan habits of imagining God as looking like Jupiter or Zeus. Others were convinced from biblical passages that God should have human features. Certain groups who promoted that latter teaching have become historically identified with it. One of these groups, the Audians, was named for its founder, Audius (or Audaeus), a Syrian ascetic who lived in the fourth century and is mentioned in two contradictory sources, Epiphanius of Salamis’ catalogue of heresies, the *Panarion*, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus’ *Ecclesiastical History*.

According to Epiphanius (Bishop of Salamis from 365 to 403), the Audians (or Odians) were an ascetical group, founded by one Audius about the time of the First Ecumenical Council (325), and who was known for his purity of life and zeal for righteousness.<sup>30</sup> Audius traveled around reproving those, especially among the clergy, whose morals he judged as substandard. Making himself and his followers generally unwelcome, they were despised, beaten, and ultimately driven out of the church. Epiphanius’ concern is not with his ethical stance, nor even most aspects of his doctrine (Audius was fully orthodox in regard to the Trinity). He objected to two aspects of his teaching: first, that God has a bodily form that is reproduced in the human “divine likeness” and second, that they insisted on celebrating Easter on the fourteenth of Nisan (e.g. Quartodecimanism). According to Epiphanius, the Audians were stubborn on both points, citing texts of scripture to support their understanding of God’s corporeality and apostolic tradition as defense of their Easter dating.

Theodoret (ca. 393–457) provides a less positive portrait of Audius and his followers. His chronicle describes Audius as a Syrian, living during the reign of the emperors Valentinian and Valens (ca. 364–75). A shady character who encouraged his followers to practice usury and live with women outside of the bonds of matrimony, he compounded his iniquities by inventing new doctrines. According to Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Audius literally interpreted God’s words, “Let us make man in our image and after our likeness” to mean that the Divine Being has a human form. This, Audius explained, was confirmed by biblical references to God’s various body parts and demonstrated the Deity’s providential condescension to mortal inability to comprehend immaterial things.<sup>31</sup>

*Theophilus of Alexandria*

A third report of anthropomorphism comes from late fourth-century Egypt, and is described in a number of fifth-century documents including John Cassian's *Conferences*, Socrates' *History of the Church* and Sozomen's *Ecclesiastical History*. The witnesses agree that a divisive and tumultuous controversy about the corporeality of God arose among Egyptian monks in response to a denunciation of anthropomorphism by Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria (385–412). This led to a debate about the orthodoxy of Origen's writings, especially against those who argued that God had a body, the bishop's capitulation to the anti-Origenist (pro-body) faction, and the persecution of a group of pro-Origenist monks.

John Cassian, who fled Egypt largely because of the violent clashes that erupted around this matter, described the anthropomorphites' teaching as grievously flawed. He recounted the extensive refutation of this error by Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria in the year 399, which was badly received by many of Egypt's monks. Theophilus' condemnation of the anthropomorphites had been enclosed with his festal letter announcing that year's Easter date, and sent to all Egyptian churches and monasteries. According to Cassian, almost all Egyptian monks reacted to this condemnation with such outrage that they organized a protest against the bishop and resisted his decree. In the view of the monks, the bishop had impugned the Holy Scripture by denying that God had something like a human body. The controversy was so bitter that a certain Abbot Paphnutius was the only presbyter among the monks of Scete who would even allow the letter to be read or discussed in meetings.<sup>32</sup>

Among Paphnutius' charges was a certain Serapion, an elderly man of renowned holiness. Not fully able to accept what to him was a novel doctrine, Paphnutius was unsuccessful in convincing Serapion to accept the condemnation. However, a visiting deacon from Cappadocia eventually persuaded Serapion that the Genesis 3 passage should not be taken to mean that the infinite and incomprehensible divine glory should be imagined with a human form or likeness. Thus Serapion was saved from his naive ignorance. Those who witnessed this conversion and began to offer prayers of thanks, were astounded when the bewildered old man burst into tears and cast himself on the ground saying: "Alas! Wretch that I am! They have taken my God from me, and I have no one to lay hold of, nor do I know whom I should adore or address."<sup>33</sup>

Socrates' report is a bit more detailed, adding that that some of the monks had taken Theophilus' side, denying any assertion of divine corporeality. Their opponents, anthropomorphite monks, were so incensed that they travelled *en masse* to Alexandria to accuse the bishop of impiety and to seek his execution. Theophilus, realizing that he was in danger of losing his position or life, and possibly that his position was inadequately nuanced, took a conciliatory, even pastoral approach. He told the angry mob of monks that he recognized the face of God in their faces. God was, thus, in some sense visible through or in

human form. Somewhat pacified, the monks told Theophilus that if he really meant that, he should be willing to condemn Origen's writings that denied God's corporeality. Theophilus agreed to this, allowing that he found some of Origen's writings objectionable. This had a separate, unfortunate, consequence when Theophilus subsequently denounced and then persecuted the Tall Brothers, monks who had shared Origen's opinion.<sup>34</sup>

### *Cappadocians and Evagrius*

This episode suggests that anthropomorphism was, at least to some, the doctrinally orthodox position on the image of God. This made Origen's teaching on this matter (as well as on certain others) the arguably heretical view. Anthropomorphism was, apparently, an entrenched and apparently vexing belief, requiring regular condemnation. For example, the Cappadocian fathers were particularly active in refuting any argument that God is corporeal or knowable. Basil of Caesarea insisted that scripture passages in which God is described with human attributes should be interpreted allegorically.<sup>35</sup> Basil also cautioned his followers not to think, like the Jews, that God has a human form.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, Gregory of Nyssa, following Jewish practice, addressed the problem of naming God and insisted that God's name, like God's incorporeal being, is utterly incomprehensible.<sup>37</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus argued that God's appearances to Abraham, Isaiah or Ezekiel were merely provisional encounters with an indescribable and insensible mystery.<sup>38</sup> These theologians, along with others (including John Chrysostom who, as the Bishop of Constantinople, defended the Tall Brothers), adamantly asserted that God's being is unimaginable, ineffable and unquestionably incorporeal.<sup>39</sup>

Aligned with these arguments were the instructions given by spiritual masters like Evagrius of Pontus (345–99), who developed a type of meditation that required the practitioner to empty the mind of all images or propositions regarding the Divine Being. Evagrius was John Cassian's teacher as well as a devoted disciple of Origen. In his old age he lived among Egyptian monks and may have been one of those who influenced Theophilus to take his stand against the anthropomorphites. In his *Chapters on Prayer*, Evagrius expounds the principles of apophatic theology, outlining a technique that negates all conceptions, whether sensible or mental, of God in order to achieve a more profound apprehension of God's nature. He says, "When you are praying, do not fancy the Divinity like some image formed within yourself. Avoid also allowing your spirit to be impressed with the seal of some particular shape but, rather, free from all matter, draw near the immaterial Being and you will attain to understanding."<sup>40</sup> This conception-free method of meditation nevertheless turned toward visuality when Evagrius, like his mentor Origen, argued that one saw God through God's operation in the world even if not in God's form or substance.<sup>41</sup>

*Augustine of Hippo*

Perhaps the most famous refutation of anthropomorphism comes from Augustine of Hippo. In his *Confessions*, he recounts being persuaded by the Manichees that scriptures describing God as a bodily being were primitive and contradicted God's essence. The Manichees particularly ridiculed the Genesis creation text, accusing Christians of being foolish enough to believe that God might have teeth or nostrils. He says that he did not yet realize that Christianity teaches that God is a Spirit, John 4:24, and not a being with circumscribable physical mass, existence in time, or possessing any other human features.<sup>42</sup> Yet, even after he began to understand that those troubling scripture passages could be interpreted allegorically, he still struggled to wean himself from the corporeal form that he conjured in his fertile imagination:

I did not conceive of you, God, in the shape of a human body. I always shunned this, and was glad with I found the same concept in the faith of our spiritual mother, your Catholic Church. But how otherwise to conceive of you I could not see. I a mere man, and a man with profound defects, was trying to think of you the supreme, sole and true God ... My heart vehemently protested against all the physical images in my mind, and by this single blow I attempted to expel from my mind's eye the swarm of unpurified notions flying about there. Hardly had they been dispersed when in the flash of an eye they had regrouped and were back again. They attacked my power of vision and clouded it. Although you were not in the shape of the human body, I nevertheless felt forced to imagine something physical occupying space diffused either in the world or even through infinite space outside the world.<sup>43</sup>

Augustine's reflection is an excellent example of how difficult it was – and still is – to avoid forming mental images of God. This is a classic case of trying to think of anything but elephants (and being able to think of nothing else). In the next paragraph, Augustine blames his carnal habits for his inability to conceive the existence of something that did not occupy or permeate space. He had become used to such images; his heart had “become gross.”<sup>44</sup>

Augustine's writings are filled with his reflections on this problem and those considerations have been a subject of serious scholarly works.<sup>45</sup> Among the places he addresses the matter is in a series of letters, written between 408 and 414. In one, he responds to a widow, Italica, who expressed her expectation that in the resurrection humans will be allowed to see God with bodily eyes, to achieve the so-called beatific vision.<sup>46</sup> Assuring the widow that the promise is true, he corrects her understanding: the vision is to be a spiritual, not a physical, one.<sup>47</sup> In another letter, Augustine admonishes Consentius, who could not conceive of God as disembodied, like some abstract virtue.

Augustine recognizes the problem and offers his stock answer: the difficulty stems from human carnal habits. People cannot imagine God without a body because they equate existence with sensible reality; they are mostly aware of visible things. God, however, is not visible either to the eye or to the mind's eye. God cannot be grasped even by the mind. Augustine urges Consentius to drive out all those persistent mental images of God.<sup>48</sup>

A third instance appears in Augustine's response to a letter from a certain Paulina, who had asked him to write something lengthy and detailed about whether God is invisible or can be seen with bodily eyes. Complying with her request, Augustine wrote the treatise *On Seeing God*, in which he allows that humans actually can see God, but only as they see themselves inwardly, with the gaze of the mind. He takes up the scripture passages in which God seems to be outwardly visible and propounds an interesting new idea: unlike created beings and things, God can choose to be visible if God so wills, when God so wills, and in whatever form God so wills. Thus, in some fashion, the prophets and patriarchs of the Hebrew Scriptures can be said to have seen God, at God's own initiative and in a mediated sense. Meriting this sight is not due to human power, but by grace. Still, God's fullness always remains invisible, inscrutable, and immaterial. Furthermore, humans regularly believe in things that they cannot see with their eyes. Belief is in the mind, not in the eyes.<sup>49</sup>

In this treatise, Augustine also explicitly denies that the Second Person of the Trinity was the one to be manifest to human eyes, any more than the Holy Spirit is, literally, a dove. By nature the whole Trinity is invisible, no one any more or less than the others. Augustine also considers the beatific vision of God in the next life and assures his reader that this does not pertain to bodily vision, but to spiritual vision, the sight of the mind. Toward the end, he quotes his teacher, Ambrose of Milan, as saying that in the resurrection only the pure of heart will find it easy to see God.<sup>50</sup> To him this means that vision of God is something that is grasped by the heart, not beheld by the eye.

In his *Revisions*, Augustine reflects on his response to Paulina and admits that it was only at the conclusion of *The City of God*, that he finally resolved the question of how the resurrected body will comprehend the invisible God.<sup>51</sup> Here he makes a breakthrough. Whereas before, he had emphasized God's essential invisibility, here he presses the possibility of perceiving the invisible reality through bodily eyes and in the created world. By way of explanation, he asks his reader to notice that they often perceive an invisible reality, in so far as it is manifest in a physical activity and discerned through the mind. For example, humans can differentiate between a dead and living person with their eyes because they notice its animation (or lack thereof) by a living soul. Yet, the soul, itself, is invisible. Something similar will take place in the future life. Then the eye of the spiritual body will obtain superior sight, not like that of serpents or eagles, but having superior grasp or understanding of the immaterial realities; understanding still mediated by sensory observation. This superior comprehension will belong to the pure of heart. They will see

God – with their bodily eyes – by perceiving God’s activity, ordering and governing the cosmos.<sup>52</sup> Thus, beatific vision requires both body and mind; both spirit and flesh.<sup>53</sup>

Augustine’s position on the question of God’s appearance is not an argument for artists’ visual depictions of God, even if they were defended as metaphorical, rather than as literal, renderings. Augustine had derided the images of the Roman gods as disgraceful, even though he realized that those who made them had never intended them to be mistaken for actual portraits, much less divine beings *per se*. Citing the first-century Roman philosophers Varro and Cicero, Augustine conceded that the images’ intended message was that mortals shared a likeness of mind and not a physical form with the gods. He recognized that the gods’ images were only signifiers of something beyond themselves; practical props intended to instruct devotees, while assuring them that the World Soul is present to the interior eye of the mind. He also acknowledged that Varro himself believed that the ancient Romans had honored their gods more purely without recourse to images and that when finally introduced, images had led people to disrespect the gods. Eventually becoming mired in habit-forming materialism had prevented his ancestors from obtaining spiritual knowledge of the true God.<sup>54</sup> Thus, he accepted Varro’s version of history: originally aniconic, Romans were drawn away from more truthful conceptions of the divine and into the habit of thinking of their gods as having human features. Once that happened they erroneously began to make artistic likenesses of them.<sup>55</sup>

Because no surviving works of Augustine mention visual images of the Christian God, he may not have been aware of any. Yet, in one sermon he admits that certain “better-educated” pagans actually had chided Christians for venerating pictures.<sup>56</sup> His exclamation, “Would to God that we didn’t have them!” concedes the existence of saints’ images at least, but Augustine distinguishes between pagan custom and Christian weakness. At least, he says, Christians have bishops who publicly preached against the adoration of pictures. But pagans encourage the worship, not only of invisible divinities through the medium of visible images, but also of heavenly bodies that actually can be seen (e.g. the sun and moon). By worshiping an image of the sun instead of the plainly visible sun itself, they show how ridiculous they are. Likewise, Augustine condemns Christians who pray to portraits of God rather than to Divine Artisan, the source of those portraits; or those who venerate works of art instead of perceiving God’s obvious presence and power in the fact of their existence.<sup>57</sup> Making pictures of God foolishly and needlessly substitutes something false for something real; something mundane for something transcendent. In spite of that, this same theologian never denied the importance of the senses, especially of bodily vision, for perceiving the invisible existence of God.

## DEITY REPRESENTED BUT UNKNOWABLE

Artists throughout the ages have defied the theologians, ignored the denunciations, and depicted the First Person of the Trinity. They went beyond presenting a disembodied hand reaching from the sky; they fashioned portraits of God the Father with a face, body, limbs, crown, and clothing (Fig. 12.6). The significance of this apparent transgression is rarely discussed in scholarly literature although its practice is well known. One famous instance has attracted some consideration, however. This is the so-called Crescentia Affair that took place in 1745–6. Pope Benedict XIV ruled on an anthropomorphic image of the Holy Spirit, painted at the behest of a German nun, Crescentia Höss, who had a vision of the Third Person of the Trinity as a beautiful young man.<sup>58</sup> After surveying the history of the tradition which ran the gamut from saying that such images were an impious invention to the argument that they were merely metaphorical (and thus harmless), the Pope concluded that images of any person of the Godhead could be depicted in a form in which it had condescended to appear to mortals as recorded in holy scripture; those images that had biblical foundation were, therefore, legitimate. In other words, God could be represented as a burning bush, a pillar of cloud, or the Ancient of Days (with wooly white hair). The Divine Word could be depicted in so far as it appeared in the Incarnate Christ; the Holy Spirit could be shown as a dove or a tongue of flame. Even so, the Pope insisted, it would be sacrilegious to try to picture the Divine Being in its essence. Images are never more than indicators or signifiers of the reality to which they point.

Thus, the invisible God remains hidden from sight, except in so far as the Divine Being chooses when and in what form to be the object of mortal view. God, it seems, condescends to human sensible perception and need, assuming some kind of corporeal appearance from time to time. As one orthodox theologian argued, if mere mental contemplation of God had been sufficient, God would have appeared in only mental mode. But, God chooses to appear in ways that humans can see with their bodily eyes, including coming in a human body himself.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, whether or how artists choose to represent the non-incarnate God is undoubtedly problematic. Visual and mental images alike are problematic when they limit the Divine Being to being one thing and not another (e.g. Father and not Mother). Such circumscription is to mistake an obscure, provisional, or metaphorical condescension to mortal incapacities for a true, beatific encounter. Whether partially meditated by a visionary's glimpse, beholding the divine operation in the world, or a viewer's contemplation of an artist's figure, God's ultimate being must remain unknowable, hidden, and invisible.

## NOTES

1. Cf. Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16.
2. Augustine, *Confessions* 10.35.
3. Cf. Exod. 33; Jn 14:8.
4. Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26; Rev. 5:1.
5. E.g. Exod. 34:10; Pss. 10:4; 33:16; 110:1; 144:7; Isa. 40:11-12; 66:1-2. See Cherbonnier (1962: 187–206).
6. Cf. Gen. 32:30; 1 Cor. 13:20.
7. Cf. Gen. 5:1; 9:6.
8. Cf. Isa. 40:18-20; 46:5-7.
9. Dan. 7:9, 13, 22.
10. John of Damascus, *De sacris imaginibus orationes* 2.5.
11. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.11.2.
12. On this see Stewart (2003: esp. 184–222).
13. See Finney (1994: esp. 15–38).
14. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 10.
15. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 32.1.
16. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 24.9.
17. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 32.4.
18. See the discussion of Jewish exegesis of this text in Gottstein (1994: 171–94). The author is indebted to Griffin and Paulsen (2002: esp. 98–100), for helpful references. See also the earlier essay by Paulsen (1990: 105–16).
19. Cf. Gen. 3:5.
20. Cf. Gen. 18.
21. For an example of an allegorical, non-corporeal reading of Gen. 3, see Philo, *De opificio mundi* 23. Here Philo explicitly says that God is not in human form nor is the human body God-like. The Divine Being is invisible yet all-seeing, imperceptible yet all knowing.
22. See here a dated but erudite discussion of this by Marmorstein (1937); Smith (1958: 473–512; 1968: 315–26). A somewhat more recent study is included in Neusner (1988: esp. 11–21); and (even more recent and including excellent bibliography) Aaron (1997: 299–314); and S. Friedman (2007: 157–78). A classic source of information on Jewish mystical anthropomorphism is Scholem (1965, 1991).
23. The exception, of course, is the hand of God that appears in Jewish art, most notably in the Dura Synagogue. See the essay by Lander in this volume.
24. Plato, *Republic* 6.501b; Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.18.
25. Diogenes Laërtis, *Vitae philosophorum* 9.2; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.110, 7.22.
26. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia* 2.14
27. Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 4.
28. Origen, *Homiliae in Genesim* 1.13; *De principiis* 1.1; *Commentarii in Romanos* 1.19.8; 5.1.28. For a detailed study of Origen's understanding of the question of God's image, and his allegorizing solution to biblical anthropomorphism see Stroumsa (1983: 345–58); Paulsen (1990: 107–14); and Torgesen (2005: 73–84). Origen and Clement both were likely influenced by the writings of Philo who explicitly rejected the idea of God having a human-like body. Rather, the human likeness to God was found in the intellect, or *nous*. See Philo, *De opificio mundi* 69, for example. See Giblet (1948: 99–118).
29. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.27.
30. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 70.
31. Theodoret, *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.9.
32. John Cassian, *Conlationes* 10.2.
33. John Cassian, *Conlationes* 10.3.4-5 (trans. Ramsey 1997: 372–3).

34. Socrates *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.7. Theophilus' condemnation of Origen's writings led to his apparently cynical persecution of the Tall Brothers, who had taken Origen's position on the incorporeality of God. The Tall Brothers fled to Constantinople, where Theophilus was summoned to apologize for his actions. That ultimately led to the Synod of the Oak, which tried John Chryostom instead. On this controversy see also Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 8.12; and Jerome, *Epistola* 57 *Pamm.* 11.
35. See Basil of Caesarea, *Adversus Eunomium*, for example.
36. Basil of Caesarea, *Or. Hom.* 1.5.
37. Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 2.
38. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes theologicae* 2.4.
39. See Jensen (2005: 104–7) for a somewhat longer discussion of these points.
40. Evagrius, *De oratione* 66 (trans. Bamberger 1981: 66).
41. Cf. Rom. 1:20.
42. Augustine, *Confessions* 3.7.12. For Augustine's refutation of the Manichees' view, see *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.17. For more citations in Augustine and extensive discussion see van Geest (2007: 178–200). For a broader study of Augustine and divine visibility see Kloos (2011).
43. Augustine, *Confessions* 7.1 (trans. Chadwick 1992: 111).
44. Cf. Mt. 13:15.
45. See those noted above, for example.
46. Cf. 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Jn 3:2.
47. Augustine, *Epistola* 92.
48. Augustine, *Epistola* 120 (an answer to *Epistola* 119).
49. Augustine, *Epistola* 147 (which is also known by the name of the treatise). See a longer discussion of this in Jensen (2005: 109–13). See also Augustine, *Epistolae* 148 and 162. Another statement of this idea is in *De Genesi ad litteram* 12.26. Cf. Jn 20:29; 1 Pet. 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:7.
50. Cf. Mt. 5:8.
51. Augustine, *Retractiones* 2.41.
52. Cf. Eph. 1:18; Mt. 5:8.
53. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 22.29.
54. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 4.31, 7.5. Augustine knows a lost treatise of Varro, *Antiquitatem rerum humanarum et divinarum libri*. Arnobius also discussed Varro and the aniconism of the ancient Romans, see also Arnobius, *Adversus nationes* 7.1. This is discussed at more length in Jensen (2005: 84–6).
55. This tradition of ancient Roman aniconism was well established and was also mentioned by Plutarch. It was useful for Christian critique of idolatry and thus cited by Athanagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Arnobius. For source texts and discussion see Jensen (2005: 83–6) and L. R. Taylor (1931: 305–19).
56. Augustine, *Sermones* 198.17 (Dolbeau 26: newly discovered; trans. Hill 1997: 193–203).
57. Cf. Rom. 1:19–20.
58. The affair and the Pope's ruling was the subject of Boespflug (1984). See the short discussion of this in Besançon (2000: 174–7).
59. See Theodore the Studite, *Refutatio poematum iconomachorum* 1.7.

## CHAPTER 13

# ON THE MOTHMAN, GOD, AND OTHER MONSTERS

THE DEMONOLOGY OF JOHN A. KEEL

*Jeffrey J. Kripal*

Monsters are in the world but not of the world. They are paradoxical personifications of *otherness within sameness*. That is, they are threatening figures of anomaly within the well-established and accepted order of things. They represent the outside that has gotten inside, the beyond-the-pale that, much to our horror, has gotten into the pale. Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*

What is a monster? A being whose duration is incompatible with the existing order. Diderot, *Elements of Physiology*

Houstonians, myself included, are very proud of the fact that *Houston* was the first word spoken on the surface of the moon, by Apollo 11 astronaut Neil Armstrong, on July 20, 1969, to be precise: “Houston, Tranquility Base here, the Eagle has landed.”<sup>1</sup> NASA is just down the road from where I sit and write, in Clear Lake. Our professional baseball team is called the Astros, our basketball team the Rockets. In the present essay, I would like to extend this local space culture (“the outside that has gotten inside”) and explore a few of the very extensive ways that pulp fiction, science fiction, and the cold war space race have entered modern occultism and a contemporary living mythology that I have been tracing through a two-volume study of the paranormal and American popular culture.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, I would like to dwell here on a writer that I could only summarize there, the American journalist, UFO specialist, monster hunter, and self-described demonologist John A. Keel.

## ON THE MONSTROUS

I should warn you that what follows is both bizarre and unsettling. And yet, I hope, oddly, eerily familiar. And why not? As Timothy Beal has taught us in his

*Religion and Its Monsters*, this radical otherness that is so familiar is precisely what the monstrous is: a deeply unsettling, and yet powerfully alluring, combination of sameness and difference, of the outside come inside. On its most fundamental level, the experience of the monstrous is the experience of radical anomaly.

Beal invokes Freud's famous notion of the *unheimlich* here, that is, "the uncanny" or, more literally, "the unhomely." Beal explains: "If *heimlich* refers to that which belongs within the four walls of the house, inspiring feelings of restfulness and security, then *unheimlich* refers to that which threatens one's sense of 'at-homeness,' not from the outside but from *within* the house ... The horror of the unhomely experience, then, involves the awareness that something that should be outside the house is in it."<sup>3</sup> Like Freud, Beal identifies the notion of the home or house with the individual psyche or sense of self, but he also extends it to the larger structures of society and cosmos. The monstrous, then, becomes that which has invaded "the house" of one's world and challenged its assumptions. As such, it temporarily violates and transgresses the safe structures of one's world, be that world a stable sense of self, a faith, an understanding of the universe itself or, I would add now, a professional discipline that claims to encompass that self, faith, or universe.

But it can also be more. Much, much more. The monstrous can also function as a hierophany, that is, as a moment of revelation of a deeper order of things, of the sacred. This too is fundamental. Indeed, the monster, as a word at least, is sometimes said to derive from the Latin *monstrum*, literally, "that which is shown or revealed." Others trace it back to the sixth-century archbishop, scholar, and saint Isidore of Seville, who derived it from the Latin *monere* for "warn" or "portend."<sup>4</sup> Either way, as Beal writes, "a *monstrum* is a message that breaks into this world from the realm of the divine."<sup>5</sup> In short, the monster is an omen or revelation.

As historians of religions have long known through their technical category of the sacred, the holy and horror are easily interchangeable. Jeremy Biles picks up on this seeming contradiction and extends the concept of the monster further through the thought of the French philosopher Georges Bataille. Bataille, who once founded a secret society for intellectuals called *Acéphale* (or Headless), was drawn to the "left-hand" sacred. "The left-hand sacred," Biles explains, "is obscure and formless – not transcendent, pure, and beneficent [like the right-hand sacred], but dangerous, filthy, and morbid." This "combination of ecstasy and horror," moreover, is "embodied in, and communicated by, the monster."<sup>6</sup> Such monstrosity transgresses limits and boundaries, denies individuality, inverts and reverses our categories and structures, and confuses the senses. It violates and horrifies our sense of the real and the right. It returns form back to the formless. As such, it is a foreshadowing and a sign of that return to the continuity that is death.

In a similar register but with different source materials, medievalist David Williams has turned to classical figures like Pseudo-Dionysius in order to see

in the monster the supralogical structure of the mystical as the apophatic: that mind-bending, category-smashing logic that “says away” all that can be properly, that is, rationally thought in order to reveal – if always in paradoxical symbolic terms – a deeper or higher order of the real. “All monsters,” Williams writes, “are negations whose apophatic function is to raise the mind to a higher level of reality.”<sup>7</sup> Or again: “it is only through [a] monstrous combination of contrarities that the supralogical truths about divinity and humanity can be communicated.”<sup>8</sup> Thus Victoria Nelson’s most recent book on the new Gothick sensibilities of popular culture turns to popular culture’s new “bright horror” in order to explore the divinization of the human and what we might call the natural supernatural or, with just a little spin, the super natural. Referring to writers like H. P. Lovecraft and the contemporary Mexican film maker Guillermo del Toro, Nelson writes of “the ineffability of the monster whose very essence lies beyond our dimensional comprehension.”<sup>9</sup> “Beyond our dimensional comprehension.” Hold on to that notion. It will return.

I find the books of Beal, Biles, and Williams beautiful, and a certain secret headlessness will return in the pages that follow, but my own working thesis here is closest to the contemporary concerns of Nelson and her New Gothick. Basically, I ask the question: What are we to do with those cases, which are numerous and surprisingly well documented, when this anomaly, uncanny feeling, or headless, formless, contradiction takes on a definite form and enters the modern world, *our world*, as a ... well, as a monster?

There are two claims embedded in my question, an easy one and a difficult one.

The easy one involves the claim that the paranormal currents of American popular culture constitute an immense, fantastically rich field of historical resources for the comparative study of Gnosticism, esotericism, and mysticism that the study of religion has barely begun to recognize and explore, much less mine for new theory and thought. We would do well, I want to suggest, to apply the theoretical tools that we have honed vis-à-vis the pre-modern and non-Western phenomena here as well. We would do even better if we could allow this contemporary material, which has landed, sometimes quite literally, in our own backyards, to inform how we think and write about the pre-modern and non-Western material. The ancient, medieval, and non-Western materials, after all, are clearly connected to the modern American ones, although exactly how it is often difficult to say.

The difficult one involves my further claim that as we confront the full experiential scope of the contemporary paranormal encounters, it will become increasingly difficult to limit the sacred, as a paradoxical power or presence at once holy and hostile, to the easy solutions of a “construct,” a “representation,” a “discourse,” or even a “structure,” much less as a product of the confused thinking of some superstitious or pre-scientific past. It will no longer be possible to claim that we have understood the weird dialectic of the

sacred when what we have really done is trace one half of that dialectic, that is, our own intimate roles in its manifestations through the perfectly true observations that such encounters are always historically shaped by local practice and cultural representations, are filtered through a set of species-wide and yet diversely actualized cognitive capacities, and come to serve myriad psychological, social, political, and economic functions. If there is any hope of understanding what is going on here, we will have to integrate and then move beyond these precious intellectual gains of the last two centuries and turn to the other half of the dialectic, whose ontological status I do not pretend, for a moment, to understand.<sup>10</sup> One thing seems clear enough, though: we will need to stop insisting on limiting reality to what our own biological hardware and cultural software (including our science) can process at the moment and entertain the possibility that there are many moments in human experience, and so in human consciousness, when those limits are definitively crossed and effectively transcended. Beyond our dimensional comprehension, for sure.

Basically, we will have to stop insisting on being so incredibly *small*. That is what the professional study of religion looks like to me anyway as it has developed over the last few decades: like the character of Scott Carey (played by Grant Williams) in the classic sci-fi movie *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957). As we focus further and further on local construct or context and commit ourselves to a whole host of methods that are really little more than forms of modern materialism in disguise (Marxism, constructivism, postmodern relativism, postcolonial theory, historicism), we increasingly lose sight of the bigger picture. Indeed, we deny that there is a bigger picture to be seen at all. Consequently, we just get smaller and smaller and smaller.

And smaller.

There was nothing small about John Alva Keel (1930–2009). By profession, he was a writer and journalist. By avocation, he was a kind of *X-Files* Agent Mulder of the real world. As a young man, he was a stage magician and did a stint in the army as a propaganda and entertainment writer. One of his most memorable accomplishments for the latter job involved him dreaming up a Halloween radio broadcast from the original Frankenstein castle perched above the Rhine. This stunt involved taking three men up to the crumbling castle. They “handed them special portable microphones, told them the monster was supposed to return every hundred years in search of his slayer – and that *this was the night*, then turned them loose in the dark.” When they sent up to the castle their own fake Frankenstein, the three men very effectively “conveyed their fear to listeners all over Europe.”<sup>11</sup> The results were dramatic enough. People locked their homes all up the river valley; patrol cars with armed MPs dashed up the mountain; and thousands of phone calls and letters poured in. Which is all to say that John Keel was something of an expert on the dynamics and practice of illusion, trickery, and psychological warfare. This was a man who could not be easily fooled.

JADOO (1957)

Keel spent much of his early adult life tramping around the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and the Americas looking for anything that was bizarre, absurd, unusual, or fantastic. He found quite a bit of it. His first major book, on “black magic in the Orient,” was entitled simply *Jadoo*, which he named after the Hindi term for the “voodoo” or “hoodoo” of India – really anything involving claims of special powers.

“This is not a book of fiction,” Keel begins. “It is a book about magic and the ‘Impossible.’”<sup>12</sup> Part adventure story, part fantastic travelogue, Keel presents himself here as a kind of Indiana Jones figure out to expose – that is, not be fooled by – many of the apparent mysteries that have made the fakirs, wizards, witches, and holy men of the Middle East, India, Nepal, Tibet, and East Asia so famous, and so infamous, throughout the centuries. He even goes looking for the Abominable Snowman in the Himalayas in these pages.

And spots him.

That’s what the Impossible is for Keel – a maze of frauds, tricks, and manufactured illusions in which the real thing occasionally, seemingly appears.

There is no need to recount the details of this youthful global trek, from Cairo to Singapore, that Keel took in his mid-20s, but some sense of what he learned about the nature of the Impossible is well worth noting, as these lessons effectively set the stage for his later career as a sophisticated ufologist and hunter of what he would call “strange creatures from time and space.”

Keel starts out in Cairo, where he learns the magical lore of snakes, including the ruse that Moses used to impress the Pharaoh. According to Keel anyway, this is an old Egyptian trick. A special kind of snake is paralyzed by pressing a nerve on the back of its head. It just goes stiff as a staff. When it is thrown down on the ground, the shock of the impact restores the snake to its senses, and it slithers away.<sup>13</sup>

And that’s just the beginning. He travels north to Iraq. Outside of Baghdad, Keel narrowly escapes death at the hands of some devil-worshipping desert dwellers. On to India then, where he is bitten by a cobra and encounters dozens of sadhus or holy men, a few of the eight million or so who, as he puts it, are “organized into weird cults, practicing everything from homosexuality to cannibalism.”<sup>14</sup> Filled with a sense of mystery and magic but quite devoid of the usual idealization of “the East,” Keel would note the same about the Tibetan monasteries, where fantastically weird paintings scared away demons, homosexuality was “rampant,” and nuns nursed babies.<sup>15</sup> In a similar blunt vein, Keel describes how a fellow Tibetan traveler tried to steal his typewriter one night, laughs at how some magical incantations turned out to be Bengali swear words, and exposes the techniques of the Indian sadhu’s “buried alive” trick (a coffin with a slide-away bottom) and the “X-ray seeing” stunt (a see-through hood).<sup>16</sup> And on and on we go.

One of the most charming stories of his journey through South Asia involved his search for the secret of the Indian rope trick. Keel uses his own bag of cheap tricks to impress the locals as he travels from place to place. The same tricks attract the local workers in magic, some of whom confide in him as a fellow brother of the trade. An ascetic teaches him the secret of the rope trick, or at least what he claims is the secret (it involves wires strung across trees or rocks in poor light and a skilled accomplice). Keel then tries it out before some Indian journalists, but a storm scares away his accomplice and the show quickly devolves into a farce, a funny failure that appeared in the newspapers throughout India and endeared “Shree Keel” to the populace. He got tremendous mileage out of the story, including a delightful piece that he reprints in the book from Calcutta’s English daily *The Statesman* (May 26, 1955). His fame now preceded him wherever he went in India.

Including up to the tiny, mountainous state of Sikkim, where he tracks the famous Yeti otherwise known as the Abominable Snowman. Keel tells us that tracks of the creature were first seen in 1889 in the same area by a certain Colonel L. A. Waddell.<sup>17</sup> It is not clear, however, why Waddell’s “discovery” was so important, as it is patently obvious in Keel’s own narrative that the local villagers and monks hear and see the creature all the time. Keel himself heard the beast’s eerie cries, found what he took to be multiple sets of tracks in the mud and snow, and saw what he thought were two Yetis in a desolate valley high in the Himalayas.<sup>18</sup> The immense brown figures simply scaled the mountain, leaving him far behind.

Keel likens his journey through India and the Himalayan region to the road to Oz, “with a hundred wonderful wizards (and a couple of wicked witches) waiting at the end of it in places even more incredible than the Emerald City.” He even escapes a kind of poisoned poppy field, in this case a valley of nightshade plants whose very scent or floating pollen is said to be potentially fatal.<sup>19</sup> The most astonishing thing about Keel’s road to Oz, however, are the two genuine wizards he encounters on it, a Hindu ascetic named Vadramakrishna and a Tibetan Siddha (a special class of miracle-working Tantric holy men) named Nyang-Pas. Keel clearly admires both men. He describes their displays of paranormal powers, which utterly baffle him.

Vadramakrishna (the same man who taught him the alleged secret of the rope trick) was a healer who lived outside of Hyderabad and was famous for, among other things, healing an Englishman’s sister by going into a trance and visiting her (in England) in what Keel will later learn, from the Tibetan lamas, is the *linga sharira* or “subtle body” that can be projected to other locales.<sup>20</sup> According to the story, she had sensed “the presence of some invisible being” just before she got well.<sup>21</sup> Keel may have believed such a story because when he himself met Vadramakrishna, the ascetic read his thoughts and described the contents of a cable from his literary agent that he had received a few days before. He also warned him against dogmatic doubt: “Skepticism is so

blinding,” the sadhu said. “Teach yourself to be curious, not skeptical. You will learn more because you will see more.”<sup>22</sup>

The final message of Nyang-Pas was similar. The little lama just showed up while Keel was recovering outside of Gangtok. He describes the seeming telepathy of the Tibetan monks (who always seemed to know when Keel was coming) and a séance Keel had witnessed with a trance-oracle who could produce apparent poltergeist phenomena as “crude things.” He then levitates off the floor while still seated in the lotus position.<sup>23</sup> Keel cannot believe what he is seeing. But he is seeing it. Keel asks Nyang-Pas if he can teach him how to do that. It’s all a matter of the will, Nyang-Pas declares.

The reader can only feel skeptical here. And that is Keel’s point. As he prepares to depart India, the final lesson for the writer, and so for his readers, is that “there are many powers and mysteries of the mind which we skeptical westerners will never be able to penetrate or utilize.”<sup>24</sup> Not that he wouldn’t try. Indeed, John Keel would spend the rest of his days doing just that.

#### UFOS: OPERATION TROJAN HORSE (1970)

Keel did not publish another book until thirteen years later in 1970, when, after multiple men’s magazine articles, some 150 newspaper pieces, and extensive interviews with over 200 silent contactees (his term for individuals who seek no publicity for their encounters), his *UFOS: Operation Trojan Horse* appeared.<sup>25</sup> It was here that Keel formalized the metaphysical notion of “windows” – geographical areas that witness strange aerial phenomena century after century – and advanced the startling thesis that UFOs are neither truly extraterrestrial nor particularly trustworthy. In his own terms, with respect to all things paranormal, Keel had moved from (1) a position of professional skepticism (as in *Jadoo*); to (2) astonished belief (since it became patently obvious to Keel that the contactees were not lying about their experiences, even as they kept reporting, independently of one another, the same stories, even the same details); to (3) disbelief (since many of these same experiences were patently absurd and clearly made no sense within the standard UFO frame of reference).<sup>26</sup> As he put the matter in the book, “*The ufonauts are the liars, not the contactees.*”<sup>27</sup> A complex, but not exactly comforting thesis.

This latter disbelief, it should be stressed, was not at all the same thing as his earlier skepticism. I am tempted to call it an “astonished disbelief.” It was in fact a quite subtle and sophisticated position poised beyond reason and certainly beyond belief. What he had really done was shift registers. As he had it now, UFOs were not “hard” stable objects, much less high-tech space ships. They were “soft” parapsychical manifestations, “transmogrifications of energy,” as he put it, very much akin to the apparitions of traditional demonology and angelology. This is one of many reasons Keel felt that it was precisely the most bizarre and absurd cases, almost universally rejected or

ignored by the UFO enthusiasts, that were the most important to study.<sup>28</sup> Put differently, the secret of the contactee experience is not in the light shows in the sky or in some secret government file or paranoid conspiracy theory. The secret of the contactee experience is in the contactees themselves, that is, in the deepest structures of consciousness and its astonishing relationship to the cosmos.

It was also here that Keel noted the phenomenon's "reflective" quality, that is, its tendency to reflect back to the witnesses whatever cultural assumption, religious beliefs or "frames of reference" that they brought to the events: the demons and angels of medieval Catholicism and the elves, fauns, and fairies of early modern European folklore thus became the sci-fi aliens and beneficent Venusians of cold war America.<sup>29</sup> The contextualists and constructivists are right, then. Or better, as we shall see, they are half-right.

It was also in *Operation Trojan Horse* that Keel began to document in exquisite and terrifying detail how the very act of studying such things often pulls the researcher into the heart of the phenomenon itself: the writer as written. Keel thus reports any number of bizarre experiences, from mechanical voices taking over his phone lines to tell him (sometimes accurately, sometimes not) about the future, through a classic sleep-paralysis experience, to some personal journals that read, to him anyway, like the horror fiction of Edgar Allan Poe and H. P. Lovecraft.<sup>30</sup> This "getting pulled in" was a very gradual process. Keel wrote his first essay on UFOs in 1945, but he did not see his first UFO until 1954, over Egypt's Aswan Dam. The real action did not begin, however, until 1966 when he arrived in West Virginia in order to research some recent sightings of what the local residents were calling "the Mothman." In West Virginia, Keel was no longer simply reporting on another story. He was in it.

"Beware," Keel tells his readers in so many words. "The demons and deities of the ancient world are still with us, and they deal, as they have always dealt, in tricks, illusions, and distractions." If the motto of *The X-Files* was "I want to believe," the motto of John Keel was: "Don't."

Hence the central title-trope of the Trojan Horse.<sup>31</sup> The UFO phenomenon, he argued, was just the most recent manifestation of one immense, centuries-long illusion or con game designed to awe and so distract us from the real nature and intentions of these things. This was no simple or easy thesis. After all, if these modern sky-gods are propounding hi-tech hoaxes on us, "then it follows naturally that many of man's basic beliefs may be based on similar hoaxes." And no government, Keel observes, would be willing to say *that*.<sup>32</sup>

Keel believed that the "other world" from which UFOs appear and into which they disappear again has always existed alongside or within the spatial and temporal dimensions of our own world. He also concluded that such appearances have displayed – confusingly enough – both sinister and healing, both deeply destructive and profoundly positive effects. After 300 pages of reflection dominated by a certain demonological accent, Keel finally, and rather surprisingly, concludes that, in the end, we do not know enough, and

probably *cannot* know enough, to make a final judgment. Beyond our dimensional comprehension.

Then he does something very interesting. He argues that the phenomenon would be most effectively studied not by astronomers and military intelligence officers or, worse yet, by “teen-agers and wild-eyed believers,” but by professionally trained philosophers, historians, psychiatrists, and theologians who remain “unhampered by the petty causes of the cultists and the political machinations of the government agencies.”<sup>33</sup> In short, John Keel sought to remove the UFO phenomenon from the purviews of the air force (who had already decided that it did not represent a real security threat, not at least one they could address), the scientific skeptics (who insisted on dismissing it all as completely unreal), and the UFO cultists (who insisted on believing it all, and then adding a thick layer of paranoia and conspiracy to the already confusing mix). Instead, he wanted to place the UFO problem squarely among professional intellectuals who actually know something about the history and analysis of unusual states of mind, mystical illumination, possession, and apparitions, which is precisely what the UFO encounters were finally about for John Keel.<sup>34</sup> To put it more starkly, UFOs are not akin to rockets and fighter jets, but to the ghostly revelations and golden tablets of Spiritualism and Mormonism.<sup>35</sup> “The flying saucers,” Keel insisted, “do not come from some Buck Rogers-type civilization on some distant planet. They are our next-door neighbors, part of another space-time continuum where life, matter and energy are radically different from ours.”<sup>36</sup> Put most simply, the UFO phenomenon is nothing more and nothing less than a new, and ancient, sci-fi occultism – a modern demonology and angelology.

Keel remains ambivalent. So does the sacred.

For now at least, Keel concludes that the UFO phenomenon, which he now positively describes as “a new adventure” involving the “interpenetration of forces or entities from some other space-time continuum,” can be read either way: as a “new Dark Age of fear and superstition,” or as a series of signs propelling us “upward to some unexpected destiny.”<sup>37</sup> One can also read John Keel, it seems, either way. He makes much of the demonic, but he also suggests that the negative manifestations, including real cases of insanity and death, are primarily the domain of unprepared percipients and, in particular, a basic “inability to translate the signal properly.” More positively put, the UFO phenomenon is merely a minor aspect of a much larger and grander issue, namely, the human mind’s astonishing connection to “the greater source.”<sup>38</sup>

Keel’s final conclusion, at least in the final pages of this book, boils down to the suggestion that the UFO phenomenon is concerned with “cosmic patterns” in which humanity plays only a minor role. Even the “other world” or occult dimension of UFOs appears to be little more than “a part of something larger and more infinite.” So too with humanity, as can be seen in “those people who seem to possess psychic abilities and who seem to be tuned in to some

signal far beyond our normal perception.” The paranormal, in other words, is a sign of something much greater, something finally cosmic. Paranormal abilities are not about personal aggrandizement and egos. They are about cosmic connections and deep patterns.

Thus, at the very end of his magnum opus on UFOs, John Keel admits that his skepticism has “melted away,” but that he no longer turns to science for answers. The answers, he suggests, lie rather in philosophy, by which he basically means Western esotericism and the history of mysticism. He thus writes of the UFO phenomenon planting “certain beliefs which were erroneous but which would serve as stepping-stones to the higher, more complex truth.” He writes of “lies containing veiled truths” and events “that were staged to make those lies seem valid.” Such noble lies were passed down from generation to generation, with each new generation unaware that it was a mere link in the chain, that humanity was being prepared for some deeper truth that it could not yet bear. But there were also those who could bear the truth, who did know. “Many men – brilliant scholars and philosophers – have clearly seen the truth for centuries.” The world’s libraries are filled with their insights and revelations, Keel observes. But “their truths were lost in the waves of organized belief.”<sup>39</sup> By implication, John Keel places himself squarely in this hidden history, among those who are not tricked by appearances and the beliefs that they generate, who know things that others cannot bear.

#### THE MONSTER TRILOGY (1970, 1971, 1988)

The same year that *Operation Trojan Horse* appeared, Keel also published *Strange Creatures from Time and Space* (1970). Much of this third book, including its title, reads more than a little like the sci-fi, monster, and horror tales that writers like Stan Lee were telling in the 1950s and early 1960s in the pop-occult series from which the superheroes would soon emerge, comic series like *Strange Tales*, *Journey into Mystery*, and *Amazing Fantasy*, many of which, by the way, featured UFOs well before they featured superheroes. There was one big difference: Keel was suggesting that such monsters had a kind of intermediate or subtle reality of their own. This was not quite hard fact. But it was certainly not fiction either.

*Strange Creatures* can be fruitfully read as part of a Keel monster trilogy, which also includes his next book, *Our Haunted Planet* (1971), and his last book, *Disneyland of the Gods* (1988). All three popular works develop the same basic idea, namely, that the aliens and monsters of traditional and contemporary folklore (demons, jinn, faeries, the Yeti and Sasquatch, the UFO alien, Marian apparitions – you name it) are so many manifestations of “our haunted planet.” Again, they are not quite real, but they are not quite unreal either. As far back as we can see into human history, they have been here with us, taking on a variety of guises and a host of names as human cultures developed

various religious ideologies and ritual systems in response to their presence and shenanigans.

Basically, they've been screwing with us.

### THE EIGHTH TOWER (1975)

Probably the closest Keel ever came to articulating a full theory of the paranormal-as-screwing-with-us came in his two 1975 books, *The Eighth Tower* and *The Mothman Prophecies*. Whereas the former book sets out the theory in its boldest form, the latter book represents Keel's longest and most detailed case study.

The subtitle of *The Eighth Tower* announces "The Cosmic Force Behind All Religious, Occult and UFO Phenomena." That pretty much sums it up. For Keel, all religious and occult phenomena are manifestations of a single metaphysical energy, which he relates, more or less directly, to the electromagnetic spectrum of modern physics. He had already suggested as much in *Operation Trojan Horse*, showing, for example, how many UFOs "appear" and "disappear" as they move up or down the electromagnetic spectrum, appearing, for example, as purplish blobs as they manifest out of the ultra-violet end of the visual spectrum and disappearing with a burst of red in the lower infra-red end. Now he develops this idea in full color, as it were.

For Keel, the world's mythologies are *literally* vibrations or frequencies along the electromagnetic spectrum (EM) interacting with the vision-generating, myth-making organ of the human brain. We see what our cultures and religions have conditioned us to see as we interact with these energies (the contextualist/constructivist thesis), but – and this is the subtle part – there may well be something "out there" interacting with us. Though he often framed the issue in the form of a rhetorical question, Keel clearly believed that there exists in the environment "a mysterious exterior force that has the ability to manipulate us."<sup>40</sup> We are being written, and zapped, and screwed with.

By what? By the superspectrum, a hypothetical spectrum of energies that, at least at its higher reaches, cannot yet be measured with our present technology and science. Why can't we measure these higher reaches of the superspectrum? Because "it is extradimensional, meaning that it exists outside our own space-time continuum yet influences *everything* within our reality." In a word, it is *occult*. Occult or not, the superspectrum's effects on sensitive biological organisms (read: the human brain) are especially obvious. Here is "the source of all paranormal manifestations from extrasensory perception (ESP) to flying saucers, little green men and tall, hairy monsters."<sup>41</sup>

Even the Loch Ness monster gets in on Keel's act, through both the writer's monster trilogy and another author whom he approvingly cites: F. W. Holiday. Holiday's *The Dragon and the Disc* (1973) boldly argued that the consistent psychological phenomena that surround the thousands of Nessie sightings suggest

that we are not dealing with a physical creature here. Something else is in the water, something that slithers through the symbolism of ancient religions, mythology, and folklore around the world, from the Bronze Age in the British Isles to the contemporary Americas; in essence, a kind of occult dinosaur.

But the superspectrum is the source of more than Martians, Big Foot, and Nessie. It is also the source of all revelation and mysticism, of all materializations, of all human communications and unions with “God.” Indeed, for John Keel, the superspectrum is God:

God or the God-like force would be at the highest point of the superspectrum; energy vibrating at an incalculable frequency, storing all information in negative and positive charges, and operating with an intelligence so refined and so all-encompassing it defies description. Like a computer, it would be without compassion or emotion as it manipulates all the physical components in the universe from microbes and ants to whole galaxies. It would be capable of changing frequencies at will, descending down the spectrum, manipulating energy masses into the lower EM spectrum, creating matter, even living things, from energy. Hairy monsters, bug-eyed spacemen, loathsome things, and shining angels would all be its handiwork, its way of reaching down and communicating with us. The entities thus created would have no identity of their own, no past and no future. They would come from outside time and space, forever repeating the cryptic statement, “We are One.”<sup>42</sup>

And the cryptic statement is literally true. “In a real sense,” Keel admits, “we are all one with this infinite energy field. It is not a part of us. We are a trivial part of it.”

For those readers who think John Keel is joking here, or simply being overly imaginative, it is worth noting that his book features a full-page graph diagram of the superspectrum, complete with degree measurements and numerous, seemingly serious, descriptions. From the lowest to the highest, the superspectrum is laid out in great detail: very low frequency, microwave frequency, infra-red, the (tiny) visible spectrum that our senses pick up, ultra-violet, X-rays, gamma rays, cosmic rays, super energy, mediumship, clairaudience, precognition, radiations visible only to psychics, and so on. All the senses and superpowers are graphed here, and they are all explained as so many frequencies, so many energy forms, along the superspectrum of the occult.

As the graph’s references to mediums and clairaudients suggests, this is also how Keel explains the apparent psychical powers that human beings occasionally manifest, including his own. Keel relates here his own humble telepathic powers, which he knew since childhood and that he thought, naively, everyone experiences. He even acted as a subject for Dr Karl Osis, one

of the main researchers of the American Society for Psychical Research in New York.<sup>43</sup> Familiar with this literature and its implications, Keel had an explanation for the telepathic and telekinetic powers of the human mind. Since the human mind is “part of the greater mind,” it can sometimes unconsciously manipulate the energy spectrum as well and create in the process all manner of pseudo-real beings, both divine and demonic. In other words, *human beings create the supernatural world, but in relationship to a real energy spectrum that exists independently from us and in which we and our own physical world are embedded.*

That’s the both-and thesis.

Paranormal and psychical phenomena may thus appear meaningless, and in some sense they are, but they also possess “a subtle underlying purpose,” to the extent that “they provide a cover-up camouflaging the presence of the real phenomenon and its purpose.” The Trojan Horse project again. In other words, taken literally or “believed in,” paranormal phenomena are often false and dangerous, but taken as signs or signals vibrating from and pointing to a deeper source of reality, they are quite real and potentially meaningful. But, as with his final conclusion on the demonic and angelic aspects of the UFO phenomenon, it all comes down to the adequacy or inadequacy of our powers of interpretation, that is, whether or not we can properly *read* them. Indeed, “penetrating the camouflage and correctly interpreting the true nature of the phenomenon could well be the final stage of man’s evolution.”<sup>44</sup> For John Keel, in other words, our future likely hinges on how deeply and accurately we can read paranormal phenomena. Only one thing seems certain: “Man is not the final, perfect end produce of evolution. He is the beginning.”<sup>45</sup>

For Keel, at least here in 1975, things may well change in the future, as our forms of mind evolve into a greater and greater alignment with the higher frequencies of the superspectrum, as we learn not to be deluded by religious, occult and paranormal phenomena, and, most importantly, as we choose to create different temporal realities out of the metaphysical energies of the superspectrum. If this happens, the world will begin to look more like the mountain communities of meditating monks, laughing children, and colorful women that he traveled among in Sikkim than the suffering collection of overpopulated choking cities that it looks like now. Everyone will now enjoy communion with the “Godhead, total ecstatic unity with the superspectrum.” Keel’s final vision of this end-time reads like a fusion of the Buddhist *nirvana* and Hindu *moksha* or “spiritual liberation”: “Our world would grind slowly to a halt as those elusive fragments of energy we call consciousness deserted our bodies and joined the main mass. The earth’s aura, which is now decidedly black or dirty brown, would turn golden again.”<sup>46</sup>

The Golden Age. Literally.

Keel is obviously engaging in a thought experiment here, but he is also clearly dreaming quite seriously of an evolved humanity that has come into its own and taken control of its own superpowers, a humanity that refuses to be written and insists on writing itself.

His starting-date for this epic transformation? 1848 and the Industrial Revolution. Modernity for Keel is a release from the religious past, from the sky-gods, and from what he calls the “god-king system,” which he obviously loathes and traces back to Sumeria and the Fertile Crescent.<sup>47</sup> Modernity is also the beginning of a new fantastic future, a psychical future in which we will eventually be able to predict the future, avert disasters, even build new cities with telekinesis and the evolved powers of levitation. Once we achieve “direct, conscious communication with this force,” he writes, everything will change. Our materialist values and economic obsessions will evaporate like the temporary illusions they are. We will come to understand the workings of the superspectrum. We will take responsibility for our supernatural projections and “unload many of our religious and occult beliefs.” And if we’re *really* good at this, we may even be able to bring the superspectrum itself under control, “just as Dr. Frankenstein’s monster took over the castle” (there’s an inside joke for the knowing). In essence, we will begin to authorize our own realities.<sup>48</sup>

The “eighth tower” is Keel’s mythical way of referring to the origin-beacon of this superspectrum and the various “devil theories” that it produces in us. A devil theory is a religious theory, a “revelation” or “final truth” that the mythical eighth tower beams into us, causing endless wars, mindless violence, and untold human suffering. The eighth tower is also “the mysterious phonograph in the sky” that sent out the original signals of our world religions and now sends out the signals of various Spiritualist and UFO cults. Unless we can realize what is happening and choose to stop being fooled by the signals of this superspectrum, the violence, madness, and absurdity will continue.<sup>49</sup> It’s a dark vision.

Or a bright one. Again, everything depends on us and whether we can see through our own energetic projections and interpret them properly, that is, as forms of ourselves humming along with the various high and low frequencies of the superspectrum. Everything, that is, depends upon whether we can properly read the paranormal writing us.

Different sexual patterns can also be glimpsed in, really on top of, Keel’s “eighth tower.” Keel quotes the Greek historian Herodotus on the eight towers that made up the supposed Tower of Babel in the desert of Iraq: “In the top-most tower [that is, in the eighth tower] there is a great bed richly appointed and beside it a golden table. No one spends the night there save a woman designated by the God himself. The priests told me that the God descended sometimes to the temple and joined her ... I cannot believe this.”

But John Keel does believe this. Well, sort of. He notes that “horny gods” were “begetting all over the place” in the ancient world, and that every culture developed rituals “to feed beautiful young virgins to sex-crazed gods.” Unbelievable indeed, but the very universality of such myths should give us reason to pause, Keel suggests, “and make us ask if perhaps there wasn’t some grain of truth in them.” The Babylonians at least believed in “superhuman sex

practices” and went to great lengths to build what amounted to a tower of cosmic seduction. Similar pyramid structures, Keel points out, can be found all over the world, from China to South America, Europe, and Mexico, even the Pacific islands.

It is at this point that Keel asks a seeming outrageous question: “Is it possible that early peoples everywhere were actually being visited by seemingly supernatural beings who claimed to be from another planet?” He certainly thinks so, and he cites modern UFO lore about “spacemen” having sex with women, “space ladies” having sex with men, and all manner of sexual abuse, alien seduction, and extraterrestrial rape: “the lusty gods of the ancients are still around and still up to their old tricks.”<sup>50</sup>

### THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES (1975)

Keel’s most famous case of how the superspectrum and these ancient tricky gods work was the Mothman of Point Pleasant, West Virginia. In *Operation Trojan Horse*, he had already noted that great winged beings, often headless, haunt the modern contactee experience, very much like medieval demons and angels, and he told tantalizing stories of his traumatic research experiences in West Virginia.<sup>51</sup> Now, in *The Mothman Prophecies* (1975), he tells his readers the full story. For thirteen months in 1966 and 1967, a seven-foot, human-like, brown figure with huge bat-like wings, no visible head, and glowing red eyes on its upper chest terrorized a little community called Point Pleasant. The residents at first called it a “bird-like creature,” “Birdman,” and “Bird-Monster,” likened it to an immense Man-Bat, and then landed on the name “the Monster Moth Man” and eventually simply “Mothman,” probably because Batman was all the rage on TV then and this seemed like a real world super-villain to the residents of Point Pleasant (and, besides, “Batman” was already taken).

Men in Black, UFOs, scary synchronistic experiences with phone lines – the place went more or less nuts for thirteen months. Indeed, the “window” area where the UFOs were appearing – an old ammunition dump ominously called the TNT area with God-only-knows-what buried below – became a veritable parking lot, as the roads filled up with hundreds of cars driving out to watch the strange lights dart about in the sky and men armed with shotguns went “monster hunting” in the night.

But close readers of Keel already knew how it would all end, since he had given away the final chapter in *Operation Trojan Horse*. There Keel reported that in October of 1966 he had had a “lengthy long-distance call from a being who was allegedly a UFO entity” (yes, it gets that weird). He told Keel two things: that many people would die in a Ohio River disaster, and that there would be a huge black-out when President Johnson turned on the Christmas lights in the White House. On November 3, Keel wrote his journalistic colleague, Mrs Mary Hyre, in Point Pleasant about the possible river calamity. When he returned

to Point Pleasant for Thanksgiving, things got more ominous still. He learned that Mrs Virginia Thomas, who was living in the very epicenter of the apparitions, was having horrible dreams. She was dreaming “of pleading faces and brightly wrapped Christmas packages floating on the dark water of the Ohio.” Then, on December 11, Keel was awakened by another mysterious caller who informed him of an upcoming plane crash in Tucson. The next day, we are told, an air force jet careened into a shopping mall in the city.

On December 15, President Johnson hosted the annual tree-lighting ceremony. Keel watched the event on his television in New York City, waiting for the worse. Nothing happened. The tree lit up, and the East Coast stayed lit up. Then, just thirty seconds after the twinkling Christmas tree, an announcer broke into the broadcast: “A bridge between Gallipolis, Ohio, and West Virginia has just collapsed. It was heavily laden with rush-hour traffic. There are no further details as yet.” “I was stunned,” Keel writes. “There was only one bridge on that section of the river. The Silver Bridge between Point Pleasant, West Virginia and Ohio. Christmas packages were floating in the dark waters of the Ohio.”<sup>52</sup>

There were more than Christmas presents floating in those waters. There were people. Thirty-nine individuals died that evening, crushed and drowned in what was, by one account, the worst bridge disaster in American history.<sup>53</sup> To add eerie weirdness to the terrible tragedy, some claimed to see the Mothman atop the bridge just before it collapsed. Whatever he or it was, or was not, the apparitions more or less ceased after the bridge collapsed. Others would continue to encounter the being, but only sporadically now.

Keel was extremely upset by what happened around Point Pleasant. His editor convinced him that he had to write about it, which is what he eventually did. *The Mothman Prophecies* was a commercial success. The book was eventually made into a Hollywood movie starring Richard Gere, which, except for a poignant shot of those floating Christmas presents, captured almost nothing significant about the book.

As already noted, as a cultural phenomenon, Mothman appeared right alongside Batman. One of the first newspaper articles on the creature, moreover, clearly linked it with a famous line from the Superman serials: “It’s a bird ... It’s a plane ... It’s Superman!” The Mothman article began by humorously cutting things short: “Is it a plane? No, it’s a bird.”<sup>54</sup>

But it wasn’t a bird. According to different witnesses, the thing stood around seven feet tall and boasted immense shoulders; that is, its physique reproduced the standard he-man frame of the superhero. Reports described clawed hands, a running speed of up to 100 miles per hour (right beside a terrified car of terrified young people), a flight speed that could do circles around a speeding vehicle, an unnerving scream that blew up a television set, tube and all, and a strange ability to control people, like a magnet. Weirder still (if that’s possible), it seemed to provoke a kind of sacred “sixth sense” of intense fear in many, as if they could “feel” the thing before they could see it.<sup>55</sup> Most

of all though, people spoke, in awed terror, about its haunting, mesmerizing red eyes. A hint of Keel's youthful trek through Hindu India and its *jadoo* adds yet another mythical layer to the creature's descriptors in the long subtitle of the first edition of the book: "An Investigation into the Mysterious American Visits of the Infamous Feathery Garuda." Garuda is the winged mount of the Hindu god Vishnu.

But it was the pop-cultural frames, not the Hindu ones, that eventually became dominant. Indeed, such references have become more and more iconic since the 1960s, as can easily be seen in Jeff Wamsley's *Mothman: Behind the Red Eyes* (2005). Wamsley, a citizen of Point Pleasant and inveterate researcher of all things Mothman, includes in one of his books multiple drawings from different artists. Some of the most striking, those of Gary Gibeaut, are absolutely indistinguishable from comic-book art and indeed could easily appear in any superhero comic without comment. Stunningly, Gibeaut's Mothman looks very much like a cross between a winged alien and Spider-Man.

Predictably, the skeptics wanted to claim that the Mothman was a balloon (the weather balloon functions similarly in the skeptical literature on UFOs), a large sandhill crane, or a barn owl (the owl, I might add, holds a classic place in the alien abduction literature, where it is often read as a "screen memory" or "screen image" of the alien). In an only slightly more rational, but much more understandable vein, a local Evangelical witness put what he calls a "spiritual interpretation" on his experience and concluded that it was the devil.<sup>56</sup> The local residents were deeply offended by the stupid crane and barn owl "explanations." The Evangelical interpretation, we might imagine, was harder, way harder, to dismiss.

Keel would side with the Evangelical witness.

*The Mothman Prophecies* is a weird, scary book. One does not know whether one is reading fiction or reporting or, most likely, reporting mixed in with fiction. I suppose that that is precisely Keel's point, namely, that reality participates in fiction and fiction in reality. What I find most interesting, though, about Keel is not "whether it all really happened," but what I have called the "astonished disbelief" that he brings to his materials and colleagues in Point Pleasant. Simply put, John Keel "gets" the sacred, which is also the scared. We clearly have a modern Gnostic on our hands here; that is, someone who *knows* that the world is basically illusory, a sinister sham set up by a stupid deity, who is messing with us.

In this same Gnostic spirit, Keel once again rejects, outright, utterly and completely, the extraterrestrial hypothesis in *The Mothman Prophecies*. Basically, he repeats, and radicalizes, what he had already written in *Operation Trojan Horse* and *Our Haunted Planet*. There are no extraterrestrials or aliens flying in from outer space. But there is a "haunted planet," and it happens to be ours:

My long and very expensive excursions into the borderland where the real and unreal merge have failed to produce any evidence of

any kind to support the idea that we are entertaining shy strangers from some other galaxy. Rather, I have come to realize that we have been observing complex forces which have always been an essential part of our immediate environment. Instead of thinking in terms of extraterrestrials, I have adopted the concept of ultra-terrestrials – beings and forces which coexist with us but are on another time frame; that this, they operate outside the limits of our space-time continuum yet have the ability to cross over into our reality. This other world is not a place, however, as Mars or Andromeda are places, but it is a state of energy.

Keel goes on:

The UFO phenomenon itself is only one trivial fragment of a much larger phenomenon. It can be divided into two main parts. The first and most important part consists of the mysterious aerial lights which appear to have an intelligence of their own. They have been observed throughout history. Often they project powerful searchlight-like beams toward the ground. Persons caught in these beams undergo remarkable changes of personality. Their IQ skyrockets, they change their jobs, divorce their wives, and in any number of well-documented instances they suddenly rise above their previously mediocre lives and become outstanding statesmen, scientists, poets and writers, even soldiers. In religious lore, being belted by one of these light beams causes “mystical illumination.”

The [second part](#) of the phenomenon consists of the cover or camouflage for the [first part](#), the “meandering nocturnal lights” as the air force has labeled them ... The flying saucer/extraterrestrial visitants are not real in the sense that a 747 airliner is real. They are transmogrifications of energy under the control of some unknown extradimensional intelligence. This intelligence controls important events by manipulating specific human beings through the phenomenon of mystical illumination. Our religions are based upon our longtime awareness of this intelligence and our struggle to reduce it to humanly acceptable terms.

For Keel, we have failed in this struggle to reduce it all to “humanly acceptable terms” for the simple reason that this is not possible: the extradimensional intelligence cannot be fit into our petty categories of analysis and reduction. Period. We have also failed because we have chosen to believe instead of question: “We have been victimized by this phenomenon, not just since 1947 but since ever! It is the foundation of all our religious and occult beliefs, of our philosophies, and our cultures ... The gods of

ancient Greece are among us again, in a new guise but still handing out the old line. Believe.”

Keel’s response to all of this?

“Belief is the enemy.”<sup>57</sup>

## READING KEEL TODAY: COMPARATIVE GESTURES AND IMPOSSIBLE QUESTIONS

It is easy to dismiss the exaggerated forms in which an author like John Keel chooses to express his ideas. There are no doubt more than a few stretched stories here. It is more difficult to dismiss the genuine and refreshing sense of wonder and awe that animates his prose. It is all too easy to find historical errors with respect to the history of religions in Keel’s books. They abound. But it is impossible to miss his moral concerns and his rage against the destructive demigods and devil theories that are so often “religion.”

So how might we read him today?

Like my double thesis, there is an easy historical answer here, and a more difficult, perhaps impossible one. The easy historical answer contextualizes Keel’s questions and answers. The difficult or impossible answer recognizes that his questions are important and admits that his answers are provocative.

The easy answer is the historical-critical answer, that is, we can contextualize Keel within a very definite stream of thinking and writing about the paranormal. John Keel was a Fortean; that is, an author inspired by the original archival research and mind-bending, flippant, frick’n hilarious books of the American humorist turned mad collector of anomalies Charles Fort (1874–1932). I have dedicated a chapter study to Fort elsewhere.<sup>58</sup> Particularly important here is what Fort called his Intermediatism, a philosophical position that involves the refusal of all easy, polarizing answers to the problem of the paranormal and the related insistence that, whatever such phenomena are (or are not), they cannot be mapped onto the cognitive grids of mental/physical, real/unreal, subjective/objective, and so on. Most of all, Fort argued, such paranormal phenomena cannot be “believed,” as the epistemological Dominant of Religion once had it, or “explained,” as the present Dominant of Science now falsely claims. They are much more fruitfully understood as “expressions” (of what, or who, it is not at all clear) within a new Dominant of Intermediatism or, as Fort liked to call it in his more colorful phrase, the coming Era of Witchcraft and Wizards.

There are, however, other clear precedents to Keel’s paranormal readings, particularly of the UFO. Consider the English professor, departmental head and occult writer N. Meade Layne (1883–1961). In 1945, Layne founded something called the Borderland Sciences Research Associates. He also published a quarterly publication called *Round Robin*, one issue of which he appears to have sent to the FBI on July 8, 1947, just a few days after the coinage of the

phrase “flying saucer” (by journalist Bill Bequette), a national saucer hysteria, *and* the famous Roswell media fiasco. The memo, which displays clear influences from theosophy and the psychical research tradition, is well worth dwelling on for a moment, as its views are virtually identical to those of Keel.

“The writer,” the memo states in the only underlined words of the mimeographed text, “has little expectation that anything of import will be accomplished by this gesture. The mere fact that the data herein were obtained by so-called supernormal means is probably sufficient to insure its disregard ...” The author, whose name is blacked out on the FBI memo, goes on to warn his readers that the flying saucers should not be attacked (since their immediate defensive response might “create near panic and international suspicion”). He then explains the true nature of the craft. He describes, for example, how the mission of “the visitors” is a peaceful one; how they are “human-like, but much larger in size”; how they come from their own world, which is not another planet, but an “etheric planet which interpenetrates with our own and is not perceptible to us”; and how their bodies and their craft can “materialize” by “entering the vibratory rate of our dense matter,” much like apparitions are said to do in *séance* sessions.

In fact, Layne had been making similar public statements about the nature of UFOs since at least the fall of 1946, in the wake of a sighting in San Diego on October 9 of that year. More particularly, Meade and his colleague, a trance medium by the name of Mark Probert, had stated that the objects were “ether ships” from the “fourth dimension,” the same views that are spelled out in the FBI memo.<sup>59</sup> To my knowledge (which is by no means exhaustive), Keel does not refer to Layne in any extensive way in his books. Explicit references to Fort, however, abound. This particular debt is a conscious and obvious one. Keel moved in Fortean circles in New York and became a close friend to other well-known Fort-inspired researchers, like Ivan T. Sanderson and Loren Coleman, who himself wrote a book on the Mothman and monsters.<sup>60</sup> Fort and Keel in turn helped to inspire other writers, authors like: Hilary Evans and his rich study of humanoid apparitions through some kind of “quasi-material psi-substance” that interacts with our internal cognitive systems but may in fact be external in origin; Jim Brandon and his sex-magical readings of the American monster traditions as Pan-like in structure and intent; Patrick Harpur and his soul-filled notion of a dialectical “daimonic reality” that can be experienced as good or evil, external or internal (Beal’s monstrous structure again), and is likely a reflection of some larger World Soul that extends far beyond any personal ego or single body; and Colm A. Kelleher and George Knapp and their most extraordinary and most strange “hunt for the Skinwalker.”<sup>61</sup>

The latter case, named after the Navajo expression for a shape-shifting super-witch, is particularly worth flagging here, as it demonstrates in very dramatic terms that the monster-encounters of John Keel are by no means unique or a thing of the past.

Knapp is a seventeen-time Emmy Award and Peabody Award winning journalist, an anchor and investigative reporter for the CBS affiliate in Las Vegas, and an award-winning newspaper columnist. It was Knapp who, through a series of television episodes on the base in the late 1980s, first helped introduce the public to “Area 51.” Kelleher is a biochemist who spent much of his life working in cancer research before he became the project manager and team leader for real-estate tycoon Robert Bigelow’s National Institute for Discover Science (NIDS). The latter is essentially a “special-ops” team of scientists, complete with their own private jet, who dedicate themselves to getting to the bottom of real-world paranormal events by traveling to occult hot-spots.

They never got to the bottom of the Skinwalker case, and this despite eight years (1996–2003) of intensive, high-tech monitoring and scientific testing. Knapp tells the story in *Hunt for the Skinwalker*. And what a story it is. “It’s as if,” Kelleher and Knapp write, “some cosmic puppet master had written a laundry list of every spooky phenomenon of modern times and then unleashed them all in a single location, resulting in a supernatural smorgasbord that no one could possibly believe, even less understand.”<sup>62</sup>

Indeed. The reader, from the very [first chapter](#) (entitled “Wolf,” perhaps as in “The Boy Who Cried Wolf”), confronts scene after scene involving: a giant gray wolf who trots out of the trees in full daylight before multiple witnesses, tries to pull a screaming calf through a fence, is shot multiple times at close range to no effect, and then trots back into the trees, never to be seen again; prized cattle mutilated in the fields with surgical precision, their internal organs sucked out through their rears (despite almost forty years of such livestock assaults over multiple southwestern and midwestern states, not a single person has ever been caught or charged); a bizarre boxish UFO that resembled an RV from a distance and a refrigerator up close (these are documented in the ufological literature and are known as *chupas* in Brazil); local Sasquatch and Bigfoot sightings, often seen around UFOs or even with ufo-nauts; a completely silent stealth-like “plane” that resembled a small F-117 but was no such thing; multiple UFO sightings in the surrounding areas, one resembling a giant floating gray manta ray that may have been “a creature or a craft,” another estimated to be *five miles* across; an orange tear or “tunnel” in the sky through which the rancher could see into another world and through which he watched a black triangular craft fly; multiple basketball-sized, bright blue orbs filled with an incandescent blue liquid energy that cracked with static electricity and provoked a kind of primordial terror in witnesses; a camouflaged, super-fast beast, very similar to that portrayed in the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie *Predator* (1987), that roared like a bear-lion and traumatized a man who was meditating in a clearing, ironically, in order to make contact (one of the witnesses of this event saw the Schwarzenegger movie a few days after the incident and immediately recognized the uncanny similarities); beloved ranch dogs incinerated by a flying orb into a pile of biological goo; two immense animals, one cat-like in a tree, the other dog-like on the

ground, that left a single footprint, raptor-like in the snow; telepathic communications and warnings; weird magnetic anomalies (one of the few “hard” pieces of evidence the team could collect); and an immense, 400-pound, six feet tall, black creature climbing out of a kind of wormhole or tunnel of light in the sky at the exact spot of another meditating man.

I cannot begin to give due justice to such an account, particularly at the end of an already sufficiently bizarre essay. A few observations are in order, however.

The first is the obvious and somehow comforting pattern that, although numerous animals were brutally disemboweled or incinerated, no human being was ever physically harmed in any way. Whatever was haunting the ranch, it made a very clear distinction between human beings and animals, and it consistently held to this distinction in its physical violence. Emotional violence is quite another matter. It emotionally tortured and consistently terrorized the Gorman family who owned and attempted to live on the property. They were eventually forced to abandon their own dream ranch. They sold it to Bigelow’s NIDS.

Second, it is worth noting that the technology and scientific protocols of the NIDS team failed to collect any definitive evidence, and this despite the indubitable fact that the members of the team witnessed many of the occurrences up close and personal. The rancher, Tom Gorman, suspected strongly that the very presence of the scientific team provoked the presence into a cat-and-mouse game. Others wondered whether the cool objectivity of the team was exactly the wrong way to invoke and engage the presence, which seemed much more interested in the high emotions and dramatic terror of the Gorman family, almost as if it were “feeding” off the energy (a not uncommon theory in the literature, by the way, going at least as far back as Fort). Knapp has noted that the phenomenon repeatedly demonstrated a kind of precognitive sentient intelligence, that it reacted to the presence of the researchers and rancher differently (the rancher was able to see things the researchers were not), that it almost never appeared in the same place or in the same way, and that it was this relational, intelligent aspect of the phenomenon that was the most puzzling and most mysterious feature of the entire undertaking.<sup>63</sup> The dialectic of the sacred again, here the left-hand sinister sacred.

Third and finally, it is worth observing that, although it is crystal clear that Kelleher and Knapp are proposing no final conclusion or explanation (they simply do not have one), the co-authors end with a series of tentative hypotheses, many of which strongly resemble the impossible conclusions of John Keel: for example, the likely role of human consciousness as a kind of “doorway” or “channel” into other metaphysical realms and the physics of wormholes, multiple dimensions, parallel universes and a mind-blowing “multiverse.” In a similar spirit in the Epilogue, Kelleher and Knapp quote physicist Harold Puthoff. Puthoff, who pioneered the secret government “remote viewing” programs in the 1970s, is worth quoting at some length here:

Throughout mankind's cultural history ... there has existed the metaphysical concept that man and cosmos are interconnected by a ubiquitous, all-pervasive sea of energy that undergirds, and is manifest in, all phenomena ... Contemporary physics similarly posits an all-pervasive energetic field called quantum vacuum energy, or zero-point energy, a random, ambient fluctuating energy that exists in so-called empty space.

Kelleher and Knapp go on to explain that, for Puthoff, "the sea of energy described from personal experience by some mystics is the same zero-point energy field described by the mathematical equations of breakthrough physics." An exaggeration or New Age fancy? Are not these quantum realms only accessible through the super-abstractions of physics and its mathematical equations? Is it not the case that human beings "up here" have no possible access to the quantum vacuum energy and God-only-knows-what "down there"? The authors' answer is clear enough: "If the events described in this book have any merit, the answer is obviously no."<sup>64</sup>

John Keel certainly would have agreed.

## NOTES

1. Very technically, this is not quite true. The first phrase was the boring "Engine arm off," followed by the more famous Houstonian phrase.
2. See Kripal (2010, 2011).
3. Beal (2002: 4–5).
4. My thanks to Asa Mittman for this historical point.
5. Beal (2002: 7).
6. Biles (2007: 3).
7. David Williams (1996: 16).
8. David Williams (1985: 177).
9. Nelson (2012: 221). I am indebted to Nelson for the Williams references.
10. My own gut feeling is that in dramatic and extreme hierophanies we are encountering a kind of super-dimension of human consciousness that is not restricted to the brain and body, that is fundamentally "cosmic." But I do not know this. It is only a guess.
11. Keel (1957: 34).
12. Keel (1957: 18).
13. Keel (1957: 47).
14. Keel (1957: 128).
15. Keel (1957: 226).
16. Keel (1957: 209, 166, 168, 181).
17. Keel (1957: 193). The classic study of the creature remains the massive study of zoologist turned cryptozoologist (a word he himself coined) Ivan T. Sanderson (1961). Keel, a close friend of Sanderson, would later question the naturalism of such an approach by pointing out the fact that large hairy bipeds are often cited in the proximity of UFOs. More on this below.
18. Keel (1957: 233).

19. Keel (1957: 218, 223–4).
20. Keel (1957: 221). Keel quotes a *Newsweek* article (October 15, 1956) on studying the possible military uses of ESP for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in order to gloss the powers of ascetics and holy men “to ‘hitchhike’ on the minds of distant people and thus see events taking place hundreds of miles from their bodies” (*ibid.*: 121). The military “remote viewing” programs would not officially begin for another fifteen years.
21. Keel (1957: 135).
22. Keel (1957: 137).
23. Keel (1957: 235–6).
24. Keel (1957: 238).
25. Keel (1970: 212).
26. Keel (1970: 274).
27. Keel (1970: 213); italics in original.
28. Keel (1970: 255).
29. For representative discussion of demonology and angelology, see Keel (1970: 215 and 225, respectively). For more on the reflective factor, see Keel (1970: 225, 293).
30. Keel (1970: 273–4).
31. For Keel’s exposition of the Trojan Horse theme, see especially Keel (1970: 167–71, 182–3).
32. Keel (1970: 297).
33. Keel (1970: 305).
34. Keel (1970: 217, 270–72, 304).
35. Keel (1970: 234–5).
36. Keel (1970: 291).
37. Keel (1970: 307).
38. Keel (1970: 302, 301, 191–6).
39. Keel (1970: 126).
40. Keel (1975: 7). There were precedents here, including Gaddis (1967), which had offered an electromagnetic reading of UFOs eight years before.
41. Keel (1975: 59–60).
42. Keel (1975: 79).
43. Keel (1975: 63).
44. Keel (1975: 71–2).
45. Keel (1975: 188).
46. Keel (1975: 80).
47. Keel (1975: 304).
48. Keel (1975: 167).
49. Keel (1975: 206).
50. Keel (1975: 22–4).
51. Keel (1970: 255).
52. Keel (1970: 276–8).
53. Armagnac (1968: 102–5), reprinted in Wamsley (2005: 113).
54. “Strange plane turns out to be ‘bird,’” reprinted in Wamsley (2005: 26). See also Sergent and Wamsley (2002).
55. Wamsley (2005: 22, 38, 50, 72, 74).
56. Wamsley (2005: 132).
57. Keel (1991: 46–8). Keel had already employed the concept of the ultraterrestrials in Keel (1970; 1999).
58. For a fuller study of Fort, see Kripal (2010, [ch. 2](#))
59. I am indebted to Whitley Strieber for sending me this FBI memo and to Jacques Vallee for the background information about Layne, the BSRA, and Layne’s place in the history of ufology.

60. Coleman (2002).
61. H. Evans (1984: esp. 304–5); Brandon (1983); Harpur (1995); Kelleher and Knapp (2005).
62. Kelleher and Knapp (2005: 270).
63. Personal communication, 18 October, 2010.
64. Kelleher and Knapp (2005: 272–3)

## CHAPTER 14

# HIDDEN AWAY

## ESOTERICISM AND GNOSTICISM IN ELIJAH MUHAMMAD'S NATION OF ISLAM

*Stephen C. Finley*

Few academic studies have acknowledged esotericism and Gnosticism in African American religion.<sup>1</sup> The Nation of Islam, under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad offers a glimpse into the meaning and function of both notions in the context of African American religious culture.<sup>2</sup> Drawing upon esoteric sources that included theosophy, freemasonry, and nascent ufology, the Nation of Islam fashioned a unique theology and mythology that allowed it to engage a world in which its members felt marginalized and violated symbolically and actually. As a form of epistemology, this essay argues, esotericism and Gnosticism gave the Nation of Islam a sense of control over the meaning of “black” bodies against a historical condition in which black bodies had been constructed by discursive and social practices that posited them as inferior. Furthermore, that knowledge and God in the Nation of Islam were secret and hidden functioned to give them hope that their value and agency would eventually be realized, not in a heavenly realm, but rather in a millennial material existence on earth. Only Nation of Islam adepts had access to such “knowledge” of the universe that was veiled in the symbols of freemasonry and revealed by “UFOs.”

### ESOTERICISM AND GNOSTICISM IN THE HISTORY OF THE NATION OF ISLAM

The very origin and sources of the Nation of Islam bespeak the esotericism and Gnosticism that make it distinct among African American religious traditions and, as such, religious groups in North America. In exposing this history, I would like to draw close attention to freemasonry, theosophy, and the Jehovah's Witnesses since they all play pivotal roles in the development of esotericism and Gnosticism in the Nation of Islam.

### *Freemasonry*

The first of these, freemasonry, can be seen in the etiology of the Moorish Science Temple of America, and as we will see, gave rise to the Nation of Islam founder. To this end, it was the summer of 1930 when a mysterious man appeared in the Paradise Valley section of Detroit, Michigan, selling silks, performing feats of magic, and claiming to have knowledge of the true identity of the black race. Master W. D. Fard or W. D. Fard Muhammad (he was known by many names and aliases; this Muhammad is not to be confused with his pupil Elijah Muhammad) claimed to have come from Mecca and that the ghetto residents of Detroit and all “Negroes,” whose origins were the same, were “Muslim” by nature.<sup>3</sup> Strong evidence suggests that Master Fard was, in fact, a former member of the Moorish Science Temple of America, an esoteric<sup>4</sup> and “Islamic” African American<sup>5</sup> religion, founded as Moorish Temple of Science by Noble Drew Ali – formerly Timothy Drew – that has its origins in freemasonry, of which Drew was clearly a member.<sup>6</sup>

Sociologist Clifton Marsh comments on the relationship of Fard to the Moorish Science Temple of America:

During the summer of 1930, Master Fard Muhammad, often referred to as Professor Fard, appeared in the Paradise Valley community of Detroit, Michigan, claiming to be Noble Drew Ali reincarnated. Master Fard’s mission was to gain freedom, justice, and equality for people of African descent residing in the United States. Master Fard proclaimed himself the leader of the Nation of Islam with remedies to cure problems in the African American community.<sup>7</sup>

Marsh not only suggests that Master Fard claimed to be a *reincarnation* of Noble Drew Ali, but explicitly that “The Nation of Islam evolved from the Moorish Science Organization, founded by Timothy Drew.”<sup>8</sup> Journalist Karl Evanzz gleans more explicit support for the notion that Master Fard was a member of the Moorish Science Temple of America (which many in the Nation of Islam continue to deny);<sup>9</sup> but more than this – he was a close disciple of Noble Drew Ali (i.e. Timothy Drew), who held a leadership position in the organization. He locates this connection in the peculiar figure of “David Ford,” which for him was just one of the numerous aliases of Wallace D. Fard Muhammad, the Nation of Islam founder:

While Drew Ali was out on bail [in 1929] a man by the name of David Ford joined the MSTA [Moorish Science Temple of America] in Chicago, and it seemed that he was a godsend. With the trial pending and his followers abandoning the MSTA in droves, Drew Ali desperately needed someone capable of overseeing his organization. Ford, who seemed to fit the bill, was renamed David

Ford-el and promoted to Sheik. He rose rapidly to Grand Sheik and was put in charge of the Chicago temple. Less than a month after naming David Ford-el acting head of the Chicago mosque, Drew Ali died ... Arguments erupted over the issue of a successor. David Ford-el claimed that Drew Ali had left him in charge, and declared himself the “reincarnation of Noble Drew Ali” on July 29.<sup>10</sup>

The reasons given for Drew Ali’s death vary from being a result of police brutality while he was incarcerated in 1929 to being beaten by Moorish Science Temple of America members who were loyal to his rival within the group. Fard asserted himself as the rightful heir over and against the claims of at least two others who had seniority in the religion. The various claims of succession, of course, led to more violence between factions. Those who followed Fard were to become the Nation of Islam. According to Evanzz, “In November, Ford-el moved from Chicago and headed for Detroit. Using the names Wallace D. Fard and Wallace D. Fard Muhammad, the former Moor renamed the faction that he controlled the Allah Temple of Islam (ATI).”<sup>11</sup> The rest is, as they say, history.

Founded initially as Allah (or Allah’s) Temple of Islam, the Nation of Islam has its immediate genealogy in the Moorish Science Temple of America, freemasonry, a form of Shi’ite Islam (i.e. Ismai’li or even Druzism),<sup>12</sup> and a host of esoteric groups including theosophy.<sup>13</sup> To an extent, this can help to explain the esoteric make up of the organization. That the Nation of Islam was heavily influenced by these groups, especially the Moorish Science Temple of America, which bequeathed to it its masonic and theosophical likenesses – can be gleaned in Dennis Walker’s observation that implies a Moorish Science Temple of America and freemasonic etiology:

Since 1877, white Shriner freemasons in New York had claimed initiations from a Grand Sheik of Mecca, bestowed the title “Noble” on themselves, and worn fezzes on which were crescent moons and stars – all features that were to recur in the neo-Muslim sects to be headed by Noble Drew ‘Ali and Elijah Muhammad ... A succession of scholars, claim[ed] to trace white American theosophical, esoteric and freemasonic writings and motifs that Drew and his deputies plagiarized without acknowledgment ...<sup>14</sup>

What Walker indicates here is what I documented in an earlier project on the Nation of Islam, namely, that not only does the Nation of Islam (i.e. the reference to “Elijah Muhammad” above) come from the Moorish Science Temple of America, but both the Moorish Science Temple of America and the Nation of Islam incorporate themes and material culture from American freemasonry, including the fez.<sup>15</sup> What the citation also points to is that some of the “Islamic” mythology and symbolism in both religious groups has explicit reference in masonic honorific titles and practices.

### *Theosophy*

The second, largely responsible for importing occultism and esotericism from Europe to America, theosophy (“divine wisdom”) plays an important role in Western esoteric thought. In addition, Evanzz seeks to draw a more direct relationship between the Nation of Islam founder, W. D. Fard Muhammad (who was also a member of the Moorish Science Temple of America), and theosophy while Fard was a resident of San Francisco, California:

Strong circumstantial evidence suggests that Fard used yet another alias there, that of George Farr. According to ONI reports in late 1921, a man named George Farr got involved in the Theosophical Society, where he acted as an “advanced man” for Brahmin Mohini Chaterjee, the East Indian mystic. Chaterjee’s benefactor was Madame Blavatsky, the founder of the society ...<sup>16</sup>

What Evanzz argues is that “George Farr” and “Fard” were one in the same – that Farr was one of Fard’s many aliases that he used as he moved in and out of various religious groups and racial and economic ventures. Evanzz argues that intelligence reports (apparently Office of Naval Intelligence) document Fard’s activities as Farr in San Francisco in the early 1920s.<sup>17</sup> The picture of Fard that emerges, at least for Evanzz and others, is that of a hustler who uses multiple identities and borrows from many groups to construct a persona and religious philosophy that he would utilize nefariously. This was, indeed, the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s position as it attempted on multiple occasions to discredit the Nation of Islam. But a deeper exploration of these issues of the identity of W. D. Fard Muhammad will have to be taken up in another space.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of whether or not one interprets the history of Fard as convoluted, one cannot or should not miss the important implications for the origins of the Nation of Islam – which include membership in many esoteric religious movements and an experience in and with a multitude of groups, fluidity that itself may also characterize Western esotericism.

Esotericism is a term that refers to a polymorphous modern movement in Europe and the United States of numerous groups, practices, and forms of thought that can be apprehended as responses to the secularization and mechanistic worldviews in Western civilization. In the general sense, its concern is with “synthesizing religion and science,”<sup>19</sup> which makes sense as a response to secularization, given its desire, then, to re-enchant nature and to see the world as organic. Following Antoine Faivre, Wouter Hanegraaff’s massive study, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Western Thought*, observes that esotericism has four primary characteristics that are considered intrinsic to its definition and two that are relative or non-intrinsic.<sup>20</sup>

Hanegraaff outlines the four categories, which for him are inseparable from an understanding of esotericism and from each other. That is to say, all

of them must be present in order for a movement or “oeuvre” to be considered esoteric:<sup>21</sup> (1) *Correspondences*: This notion maintains that correspondences, symbolic or actual, exist between the ethereal and corporeal realms or stated differently, between the invisible and visible worlds. (2) *Living nature*: Here, he suggests that in esoteric thought *all* of nature is seen as living and traversed by some divine force. (3) *Imagination and meditations*: This idea is dependent upon the category of “correspondences,” and it implies the possibility of meditation between higher and lower worlds through rituals, symbols, divine beings, and so on. *Imaginatio*, accordingly, is the main instrument through which Gnosis is attained. But this is more than the capacity for fantasy. It is the means by which the visionary and cognitive relationship with an intermediate world is established. (4) *Experiences of transmutation*: This terminology indicates the existence of an “inner process or mystical ‘path’ of regeneration and purification,” which initiates the adepts into the secret mysteries (Gnosis) of the intermediate world.<sup>22</sup>

What should be apparent is that Gnosis is a crucial aspect of esotericism. I want to use Gnosis or “Gnosticism” as a term to describe various forms of knowledge that are understood to be secret or hidden from everyone but adepts or initiates into esoteric systems of thought and praxis, which reveal the true nature of the universe and humanity. Gnosis, then, is forbidden knowledge that is often anathema to religion and science.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Gnosis permeates, in one form or another, all of the intrinsic features of esotericism as well as the two non-intrinsic categories.<sup>24</sup> Of course, the two other traits are not essential for a religious group to be designated esoteric, but they are significant variants.

Yet, I would argue that these two principles of esotericism are just as important for understanding the Nation of Islam as esoteric as the four above, for in and around these relative categories, the intrinsic characteristics revolve, and they are the two that are most explicitly indicated by and within the Nation of Islam. The first of these is *the praxis of concordance*. This quality denotes the tendency of esoteric organizations to seek to establish commonalities among two or more different traditions or a type of perennialism that infuses all religions, with the sense that the esoteric group has a superior secret doctrine that is central to interpreting all the other religions. This can be seen, as we shall soon see, in the mythology of the Nation of Islam and what Elijah Muhammad referred to as the “supreme wisdom.”<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, this praxis of concordance is also illustrated in the ways in which the Nation of Islam borrowed from multiple religious traditions – a syncretism of sorts that demonstrates tacitly (though the need to maintain the exclusivity regarding the truth intentionally obfuscates) that many traditions contain doctrines that contribute to the secret knowledge that the Nation of Islam conveys only to its members. This is what I had in mind in my dissertation when attempting to illustrate this aspect of religion in the Nation of Islam. Concerned with the synthesis of religion and science,

esotericism is often syncretistic in nature,<sup>26</sup> which may help to explain the fluidity in the Nation of Islam with respect to the strong influences and elements of Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, black nationalism, African American Christianity, freemasonry, Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temple (which itself originated in freemasonry), the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (i.e. the Jehovah's Witnesses), scientific cosmology and mathematics and so on, that many scholars document in the thought of the Nation of Islam.<sup>27</sup>

It is interesting to note that, after the death of Noble Drew Ali, the founder of the Moorish Science Temple of America in 1929, Master Fard Muhammad, claimed to be his reincarnation. As Dennis Walker, author of *Islam and the Search for African-American Nationhood: Elijah Muhammad, Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam*, contends: the Nation of Islam is constructed "by many hands";<sup>28</sup> or using the term of Claude Levi-Strauss, the Nation of Islam is a *bricolage*.<sup>29</sup>

Again, I am arguing for the dissonance between the Nation of Islam's public rhetoric, which often denies that their doctrines have earthly sources that antedate a "divine revelation" from their God, and their tacit approval of the truths of these numerous traditions and practices by their intentional inclusion in the Nation of Islam's own theology, mythology, and rituals.<sup>30</sup> Which is to say, the Nation of Islam evidences a form of praxis of concordance with groups like the Moorish Science Temple of America, freemasonry, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and others by borrowing heavily from them even though their claim to exclusivity and their rituals conceal the origins of their doctrines and practices.

### *Jehovah's Witnesses*

An interesting example of how this functioned in the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad was in their eschatology and its relation to a third group of note – the Jehovah's Witnesses. Elijah Muhammad claimed on many occasions that the end of the six thousand year reign of white of domination ended in 1914. At the time Elijah Muhammad was preaching, then, white people were on borrowed time, since Allah was delaying his apocalyptic wrath on this evil age. In Elijah Muhammad's own words:

When was this time [the 6,000 years of the "devil"] up according to the word of God to me? It was up in 1914. Then why was not the judgment at that time? Why did not God destroy wicked in 1914 if that was the end of the world? ... He had always been a merciful God, and He was merciful to those people in those days. He granted them an extension of time so that the world historians, writers, scientist, scholars would not charge him with not giving them a chance to repent if they wanted to.<sup>31</sup>

Elijah Muhammad claims that the revelation of God’s “extension of time” to the evil age was a direct transmission to him from God. While this poses a theological problem, since whites were “created” to be evil toward black people and it was their nature, Muhammad wants to present God in the Nation of Islam as merciful and – as contradictory as it may seem – the white condition as temporary and changeable. We will return to this when we explore the content of the Nation of Islam’s secret knowledge in their mythology.

What seems obvious is that Elijah Muhammad appropriated from the Jehovah’s Witnesses “1914” as the year when the dispensation of white rule ended, in particular the leader of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Judge Rutherford, of whose preaching he was a secret fan. In an early essay on the subject, “Watchtower Influences on Black Muslim Eschatology,” William A. Maesen’s claims:

The Watchtower held that the end of the “Gentile times” must come in 1914, when the righteous rule was to begin (Rutherford 1927: 303–4). Jehovah’s Witnesses thoroughly believed they were to be taken to heaven in 1914, but discovered that ‘expansion work’ must take place first (Macmillan 1957: 47, 52).<sup>32</sup>

The Nation of Islam simply exchanged the age of white rule for “Gentile times” and suggested that Allah (i.e. Master Fard Muhammad) was delaying his return and judgment on the white world for at least fifty years in one case,<sup>33</sup> sixty years,<sup>34</sup> and seventy on another occasion so that white people will have a chance to repent.<sup>35</sup> Not only did Elijah Muhammad borrow, in this way, from Rutherford (and his predecessor Charles “Taze” Russell), Fard, the Nation of Islam’s founder, also “endorsed” his teachings.<sup>36</sup> Evanzz argues:

Muhammad always listened carefully to Rutherford’s broadcast sermons. In fact, without Fard as his guide, Muhammad became increasingly dependent upon Rutherford’s broadcasts and writings for his own interpretations of scripture and for ways to lure under-class African Americans to his temples. (Evanzz 1999: 118)

Fard’s tutelage of Elijah Muhammad was from 1931 to 1933, after which Elijah Muhammad assumed the leadership of the Nation of Islam. Evanzz implies, here, that Elijah Muhammad lacked the creativity and ability to lure African Americans to the nascent movement; thus, he depended on the Jehovah’s Witnesses and others for doctrinal material. The extent to which he incorporated Watchtower ideas beyond “1914” was vast and included dispensationalism generally, millennialism and many others such as the idea that 144,000 *elect* would be saved at the end of the age.<sup>37</sup>

But why were Jehovah's Witness ideas so attractive, and what did they contribute to esotericism in the Nation of Islam? Maesen argues that it was exactly their cryptic nature, their potential for various interpretations and applications, that made them appealing to the Nation of Islam:

One possible explanation would emphasize the *cryptic ambiguity* of the Watchtower doctrines because they permit multiple interpretations ... Suggesting several dimensions or levels of interpretation, cryptically ambiguous statements may make it more difficult to fathom the author's intention and may make it more easily adapted than those that are merely vaguely ambiguous ... It is possible that cryptic ambiguity also enhances the prestige and hence the influenceability of the source. Further, it is well established that a prestigious source has greater influenceability whe[n] stimuli are ambiguous.<sup>38</sup>

Because of this cryptic ambiguity Fard and Muhammad were able to appropriate the teachings, and for his part, Muhammad was able to make the claim that Fard transmitted the ideas directly to him, that is, that God gave him esoteric knowledge that he was to teach to the elect. Maesen also suggested that Fard facilitated this usage of Watchtower material by declaring to Muhammad that they were "symbolic" teachings.<sup>39</sup> Hence, they were subject to the *real* meaning that the Nation of Islam could and would ascribe to them in their own crypto-theological and mythological system.

What I have endeavored to demonstrate is a modified *praxis of concordance* that functioned within the Nation of Islam, that through the Watchtower and other groups, the Nation of Islam practiced a form of perennialism that was obfuscated by a denial of the copious origins of the "truths" that Elijah Muhammad co-opted. The modification was in the creative concealment through denial and criticism. Elijah Muhammad's strategic dissemblance can be seen, for instance, in his denunciation of the Witnesses, proclaiming, "We are the true witness of God. You have a gang of devils around here calling themselves Jehovah's Witnesses. Talking about they are the witness of Jehovah, when did a devil become a witness of Jehovah[?]"<sup>40</sup> He reads Witnesses here as primarily white, despite the fact that the group has always had a large contingency of African Americans and that people of color may have represented half of their numbers in the United States.<sup>41</sup> Notwithstanding this fact, the calculated maneuver obscures a praxis of concordance.

Hanegraaff refers to the final non-intrinsic feature of esotericism as *transmission*, and what this category indicates is the master-disciple relationship in which and through which secret knowledge is conveyed.<sup>42</sup> It is found strongly in the Nation of Islam. Although Hanegraaff gives the least attention to this aspect of esotericism, it is important in the Nation of Islam because it authenticates Elijah Muhammad's leadership and Gnosis precisely because he

received them directly from the “master” – literally Master Fard Muhammad – God himself. The beginnings of these direct revelations took place from their very first interaction. Elijah Muhammad relates the encounter:

I heard that there was a man teaching Islam by the name of Mr. Wallace Fard. At that time He used the initials W. D. Fard, that was in Detroit, Michigan. When I heard what was said, I wanted to meet him and I finally did. When I met Him, I looked at Him and it just came to me, that this is the Son of Man that the Bible prophesied would come in the last days of the world, and I couldn't get that out of me. I shook hands with Him and I said to him, “You are the One that the Bible prophesied would come at the end of the world under the name of Son of Man and under the name The Second Coming of Jesus.” And so, He looked at me a little stern, and then He smiled, put His head down beside my head then whispered in my ear and said these words, “Yes I am the One, but who knows that but yourself,” and to “be quiet.”<sup>43</sup>

Muhammad recounts another version of their meeting that varies slightly. Muhammad said that he asked Fard, “Who are you?” Fard replied, “I am the one the world had been expecting for the past 2,000 years ... My name is Mahdi; I am God.”<sup>44</sup> The narrative indicates that the master–discipleship relationship in which secret knowledge was transmitted was initiated in Fard's and Muhammad's first meeting. The scenario also suggests that Muhammad was the first and only person to recognize Fard as the literal and bodily fulfillment of the “One” spoken of in biblical prophecy who was to come at the end of the age. This privileged master–disciple relationship would very quickly become much more intense, Muhammad maintains:

He used to teach me night and day. We used to sit sometime from the early part of the night until sunrise and after sunrise. All night long for about two years or more. He was with us three years or a little better, and I was constantly around Him and He was constantly teaching me things of Islam: what is to come and what was before. This is the way we began.<sup>45</sup>

For two or three years, Muhammad's reports being Fard's pupil in the secret teachings – in direct *transmission* from the “Son of Man” to his student. The content of this *Gnosis* will be explored in the next section.

Again, the point here – an argument with Fairve and Hanegraaff really – is that in the case of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, *praxis of concordance* and *transmission* are not merely extraneous tenets of esotericism that may or may not be present in any esoteric complex that evidences the four fundamental categories. What this essay emphasizes is that with regard to

the Nation of Islam the two non-intrinsic features are, in fact, indispensable because the features that Hanegraaff recognizes as intrinsic revolve around and indeed appear in the relative two – they are elemental.

Note that the episode above tenuously illustrates the relationship between *correspondences*: between the ethereal world of biblical prophecy and the corporeal world, literally in this case, prophecy is apprehended as being fulfilled in the natural realm through Elijah Muhammad's discernment of the signs; and *imagination and mediations* via Elijah Muhammad's encounter with God-Allah himself, who in the cosmology of the Nation of Islam is the embodiment of an "intermediate" being in the sense that God is not so much transcendent as an immanent intermediary between the cosmos and the earth.<sup>46</sup> One could also argue that this process of the *experience of transmutation* began here, given that Elijah Muhammad's Gnostic path toward the "hidden mysteries of the cosmos"<sup>47</sup> was inaugurated instantaneously. That nature is *enlivened* can be gleaned most poignantly in the Nation of Islam mythology with some qualifications. I will attend to this matter shortly. Nonetheless, it is implied above in that prior to his appearance Fard was hidden in the cosmos and the earth which bares his imprint and essence as creator of them. After his departure from earth, Fard was said to be in occultation in the Mother Plane or Mother Ship, a technological spaceship and vehicle of destruction that is simultaneously a living human-built planet.<sup>48</sup>

In the mythology – the superior truth that discloses a *praxis of concordance* in the multiple sources drawn upon in its construction and its *transmission* which accounts, at least partially, for the narrative's existence – the other "indispensable" markers appear.

That is to say, it is in the mythology – the secret knowledge of the hidden God – that the ways in which the non-intrinsic reveal and hold together the intrinsic can be seen most cogently. Part of the difficulty with interpretation, here, is the inability and inflexibility of Fairve's and Hanegraaff's categories to account for material religions such as the Nation of Islam that eschew particular forms of supernaturalism that privilege outer transcendence and inner spiritualism. Therefore, a definition and perspective like theirs is unable to locate groups that take esoteric sources and Gnostic traditions and transform them into material signifiers with meaning that points earthbound rather than "heavenly" – religions that are, in fact, esoteric. Rather, if one – following Stephen J. Hunt, who is appropriating Luckmann – views transcendence as earthly as well, as I do here and have elsewhere,<sup>49</sup> then one can make a qualified interpretive shift to account for such movements and practices. Hunt calls these "little transcendences of earthly life, especially those which are concerned with self-realization, self-expression, and this-worldly interests" as opposed to "great transcendences" that are other-worldly concerned.<sup>50</sup> The mythology of the Nation of Islam illustrates such transcendence, whose esotericism can easily be discovered.

## SECRET KNOWLEDGE OF A HIDDEN GOD: THE MYTH OF YAKUB, FREEMASONRY, AND UFOS

God, Master Fard Muhammad, disappeared in 1933 but left secret knowledge in the form of mythology that was *transmitted* directly from *master to disciple*, Elijah Muhammad. I should qualify my use of mythology here in fairness to Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. What I am calling “mythology” – their sacred symbols in narrative form that has deep existential meaning but is ahistorical and not necessarily scientific – he understood literally to be sound technically and historic. The fantastic account that Master Fard Muhammad would pass on to Elijah Muhammad for the “three years” in which he learned from Master Fard – part history, astronomy, evolutionary biology and genetics, numerology, metaphysics, theological anthropology, and science fiction – would transform his reality and give it a coherence and consciousness that the unlettered man had never before experienced. The world was no longer absurd, and the racial violence and oppression that he and many countless other black people experienced now made perfect sense. We will return to the idea of violence in the next section and the mythical figure Yakub shortly.

No one account of the epic exists in any particular literary form that Elijah Muhammad composed. Rather, the mythology was disseminated to members of his Nation of Islam through various sermons and addresses that were later published in fragments by him and his followers.<sup>51</sup> Elijah Muhammad claimed to have access to this esoteric knowledge regarding the nature of reality, God, and race, as did African Americans through him. He does not claim how he accesses this Gnosis – only that it comes from his relationship with Master Fard, the Great Mahdi, who taught him. He says, for instance:

The secret of who God is and who is the devil has been a mystery to the average one of mankind, to be revealed in all of its clearness to one who was so ignorant that he know [*sic*] not even himself – born blind, deaf and dumb. All praise is due to the Great Mahdi, who was to come and has come, the sole master of the worlds. I ask myself at times, ‘What can I do to repay Allah (the Great Mahdi, Fard Muhammad) for his coming, wisdom, and knowledge and understanding?’<sup>52</sup>

Elijah Muhammad refers to this knowledge as secret and mysterious, and he intimates that such knowledge is hidden primarily from white people, since he uses the term “mankind.” “Black”<sup>53</sup> people, the mythology argues are not a “kind.” They are the “Originals,” since only “kinds” were *made* through artificial genetic processes. Black people, on the other hand were *created*.

Furthermore, he seems tacitly self-conscious about his own lack of formal education or ignorance, and given this, he expresses gratitude for the gift of secret knowledge that Fard conveyed to him. Note that Elijah Muhammad

used the term “Great Mahdi” for Fard, which indicates that the master is hidden in occultation until such time that he again appears. Implied is that Fard remains alive – very alive. Muhammad too. While outside the purview of this essay, elsewhere I do investigate the encounter in Tepoztlán, Mexico that Louis Farrakhan claims to have had with Muhammad after his “death” (and apparently with Fard) on September 17, 1985 on a “UFO” that Muhammad called the Mother Plane or Mother Ship.<sup>54</sup> Farrakhan views such an event as the literal fulfillment of the Nation of Islam mythology.

While the myth claims to be a history and science of the entire universe, it is roughly organized around five periods. The first explains the self-creation of God and the origin of the cosmos more than seventy-six trillion years ago and the creation of the Original People on Earth, Mars, and Venus. The second stage describes events that happened sixty-six trillion years ago, involving a plot to destroy the Original people of the earth. The third represents fifty thousand years ago when the remnant of the Original people lived in the Nile Valley or “East Asia,” and the fourth, with the six hundred year process of making the white race six thousand years ago by a black renegade scientist named Yakub. The fifth and final period describes the coming of the Mother Plane that destroys this present age and ushers in the new millennium.<sup>55</sup> That said, Elijah Muhammad locates the genesis of the epic in the appearance of Master Fard Muhammad, Allah-in-person, the Great Mahdi and founder of the Nation of Islam:

Allah came to us from the Holy City Mecca, Arabia in 1930. He used the name Wallace D. Fard, often signing it W. D. Fard. In the third year (1933), He signed his name W. F. Muhammad which stands for Wallace Fard Muhammad. He came alone. He began teaching us the knowledge of ourselves, of God and the devil, of the measurement of the earth, of other planets, and of the civilizations of some of the planets other than the earth.<sup>56</sup>

The parameters of the narrative, then, are vast. From the self-creation of God, to the earth and the cosmos, including the inhabitants of other planets, to the culmination of the age in its destruction and regeneration by the Mother Plane, the metanarrative accounts for it at least in the general sense Elijah Muhammad would most likely conclude. It is the grand story of the world. “He gave the exact birth of the white race, the name of their God who made them (i.e. Yakub) and how; and the end of their time; the judgment, how it will begin and end,”<sup>57</sup> says Muhammad.

### *The creation of God and the cosmos*

According to the narrative, the literal and scientific history of the “so-called American Negro” goes back roughly seventy-six trillion years, when the universe

was filled with darkness and lacked materiality and temporality, because nothing moved.<sup>58</sup> This was prior to the invention of writing, so not much is known about it, except that the only existence other than the void of the darkness was an atom, Elijah Muhammad insists. He tenuously addresses matters (pun intended) of scientific cosmology, such as the origin of the initial atom, which are troublesome, given that for him, Allah (God) created everything:

Take your magnifying glass and start looking at these little atoms out here in front of you. You see that they are egg-shaped and they are oblong. You can crack them open and you will find everything in them that you find out here. Then were there some of them (atoms) out here? Well who created them? I want you to accept the Black God. You say, 'There is no beginning or ending.' I admit that. But we do know that they had to have some kind of beginning. But how it happened, we don't know. That's why we say that His Beginning, we don't know anything about.<sup>59</sup>

Time began when this atom began to move,<sup>60</sup> and the atom developed flesh, blood, brains, and power.<sup>61</sup> This was the "beginning" of God, Allah, who was self-created and then set his attention on creating other gods. These other "gods," Muhammad suggests, were the Original black people,<sup>62</sup> but he fails to explain why they were called such.

After completing those tasks, God created the cosmos which included seven planets that sustained animate life forms such as gods (i.e. black people). The original gods lived on planet earth, which consisted of what is now the earth and the moon. Ruled from "Asia," earth was the homeland of the thirteen tribes into which Allah organized them, "united by skin color (black), religion (Islam) and disposition (righteous)."<sup>63</sup> Of the other planets, Mars was by far the most significant, and the gods who lived there, while less intelligent than the beings of earth, were believed to live as long as twelve hundred years, though most lived two hundred years. About this planet and its inhabitants, Muhammad had much to say:

God taught me that He has pictures of the Martian people, and the devil believes it, because they have come so near to looking at the surface of Mars to look for creatures on it. They believe that they are there. They [i.e. the beings on Mars] are very wise, very skillful, so Allah taught me. They hear his planes coming. They could hide away. They live on that planet 1000 [sic] of our Earth years, so he may have seen a plane from the Earth yesterday. If they don't want to be seen by you, they don't have to let you see them. That's the truth. You have people on Mars! Think how great you are. Ask the white man if he has any out there. We have life on other planets, but he don't.<sup>64</sup>

The narrative continues in its cosmic theme while returning to the notion of “writing.” As such, written script was invented several trillion years later, after the beginnings of the universe, due to the need to chronicle the future. The saga contends that 30 per cent of the population was always discontent, and everyone was mortal, even though they were righteous and peaceful.<sup>65</sup> As a result, twenty-three god-scientists wrote the future history, and the twenty-fourth analyzed what was written, perhaps made necessary by their mortality.<sup>66</sup> Subsequently, the texts that they developed became the Qur’an and the Bible in their modern and organized forms. Furthermore, these gods of earth were not eternal – they lived only two hundred to three hundred years then died. Moreover, time progressed in dispensations of twenty-five thousand year cycles, wherein a god was chosen in each of period to reveal the will of Allah.<sup>67</sup> The twenty-five thousand year dispensations that are written by twenty-four scientists correspond to the circumference of the Earth, roughly twenty-four thousand miles, and the twenty-four hours in a day.<sup>68</sup>

### *Renegade black scientists and the destruction of the Original People*

What seems to follow at this point is that another god-scientist enters the narrative. This scientist is a predecessor of Yakub – and like Yakub is a renegade black scientist who appears on the scene sixty-six trillion years ago. Apparently angered over the linguistic and philosophical heterogeneity of the Original People and his desire to rule,<sup>69</sup> he devised a plan in which he drilled a deep hole in the Earth, filled it with an explosive that was 30 per cent more powerful than dynamite,<sup>70</sup> and detonated the bomb, which then separated the planet into the Earth and the moon. More specifically, the moon was split off or “deported.” This deportation of the moon explains the existence of the Earth and the moon, which prior to the explosion was one planet. One of the original thirteen tribes was killed in this explosion because the tribe ended up on the moon, which did not have enough water to sustain life and died as a consequence. Notwithstanding, the twelve remaining tribes survived on Earth. The most resilient of them, the Tribe of Shabazz – the Nation of Islam – went on a quest to find and settle the richest land on earth. This search led them to the Nile Valley (East Asia), from where they also founded a sister civilization in Mecca.<sup>71</sup>

### *East Asia and the Original People of Earth*

The saga intimates that fifty thousand years ago a dissatisfied scientist from the Tribe of Shabazz encouraged members of the clan to move their families to the “jungle” of East Asia (Africa), a signifier of uncivilized living, in order make the Original People “tough and hard ... to prove to us that we could live

there and conquer the wild beasts”<sup>72</sup> and that this jungle experience adversely affected black features, which is the “origin of our kinky hair,”<sup>73</sup> and other distinctions, generally described in negative terms. Unwittingly, the Nation of Islam has incorporated negative terms and stereotypes about black physical features and about Africa as a “jungle.” Their mythology fails to resolve this issue and many others that they reproduce from the racist, sexist, and classist culture in which they lived. The mythology actually privileges European physical features and regards “traditional” black features to be derivative of a white “norm.”<sup>74</sup> The fact that the narrative uses “East Asia” instead of Africa may also indicate a desire to distance themselves from the negative meaning that was often attached to the continent vis-à-vis Western discourses and media, but in so doing, reproduced it.

### *Yakub, the making of the white race, and genocide*

As the story goes, Yakub, the latest and the most significant of the god-scientists, was born near Mecca about 6600 years ago in the current twenty-five thousand year cycle,<sup>75</sup> an event that was prophesied by the twenty-four scientists 8400 years prior to his birth.<sup>76</sup> Known as the “Big Head” for his superior intellectual abilities and his arrogance or wisdom,<sup>77</sup> Yakub was one of the 30 per cent of those who were discontented.<sup>78</sup> Gifted with superior genius, he studied genetics (i.e. “the germ of man”) as the collective of god-scientists had prophesied. To be sure, he was intent on destruction of the Original People from the time of his youth, and his studies and unusual creativity would ultimately serve his goal. He devised his plan from unusual sources, given his keen insight. For instance, he was able to discern the relationship between magnets and human attraction that would be the basis of his diabolical scheme. One day Yakub, who apparently understood formal genetics and the notion of dominant and recessive traits, was playing with magnets. He learned from this the law of attraction. Apparently, the magnets symbolized the power of attraction – how an “unlike”<sup>79</sup> people could attract, manipulate, and rule the Original People with lies and tricks. At the age of eighteen, he had finished his formal education at the colleges and universities of his land, and he was esteemed as a brilliant scientist. Subsequently, he engaged in the study of eugenics in order to make such an “unlike” people who could dominate the Original People.

By studying the Original Man’s “germ” (read: chromosomes) under a microscope, Yakub discovered that there were two “people” (read: genes) in him, one black and one brown (read: dominant and recessive traits). Through a type of eugenics or genetic engineering called grafting in which he separated the brown germ, he determined that he could “make” a (white) race of people who could rule and ultimately destroy the black nation.<sup>80</sup> To make a long story short, the engineering of the white race would take six hundred

years and though Yakub died at the age of one hundred fifty, by then he had passed on all of his secret knowledge to his followers.

Through the process of grafting, he would separate the black germ from the brown germ, and from the brown germ would come the red, and from the red, the yellow – a six hundred year procedure until finally the white race was *made*. To guarantee the method, Yakub’s people would forbid black people to marry one another and kill all the black babies that were born (and save the brown). The nurses would tell the new parents that the black babies had died and gone on to a better place, that is, heaven, hence the importance of the doctors, nurses, ministers, cremators, and notions like heaven in the conspiracy.<sup>81</sup> Finally, the conspiracy was carried out through the religion that Yakub developed – Christianity – which made African Americans ideologically white and obfuscated from their consciousness the devil’s genocidal plan. Allah tried to save white people by sending the prophets to them – first Moses, then Jesus, then the Prophet Muhammad.

### *The hidden God, freemasonry, and UFOs*

Still, Elijah Muhammad argued, Fard himself is hidden and will reappear at the time of his unveiling and judgment on the world. He comments: “Since His work is to destroy the wicked, He must remain hidden from the eyes of the world until the time is ripe (the end), for the two (God and devil) cannot rule together.”<sup>82</sup> Simultaneously, the secret knowledge of Master Fard Muhammad is cloaked in the symbols of freemasonry. Along this line of reasoning, he proclaims that the symbols on the masons’ attire point to the so-called Negro, and some of the secret truths of the mythology of Yakub can be seen in their symbols. “The fez represents the universe,”<sup>83</sup> he retorts: “The Blackman made this fez. What I mean, the Sun, Moon and Star.”<sup>84</sup> Moreover, “We are the Square, and we are the Star, and we are the Moon ... The white man knows nothing about the creation of such planets. This is why I teach you the theology of it.”<sup>85</sup>

Hidden in the symbols and language of masonry, then, is the nature and origin of the cosmos, the “supreme wisdom” of which is the identity of Allah and the divine genesis of the black race. To that end, Elijah Muhammad proclaims, “The Original Man, Allah has declared, is none other than the black man. He is the first and last, and maker and owner of the universe; from him come all – brown, yellow, red and white.”<sup>86</sup> These myths and symbols also disclose the cosmic origins of the black race, which is connected to great beings on other planets. Indeed, Muhammad relished the idea of being related to “black” people on other planets, especially Mars. This is one of the important distinctions between the origins of black people and the “white man.” White people are a small, limited group, while the black race is cosmic. Therefore, black identity cannot be solely or properly constructed out of the experiences

and racist discourses of the West. The true identity and meaning of black bodies lies in trillions of years of history prior to the existence of Europeans and Americans.

Yakub's story culminates in the arrival of the Mother Plane, which will destroy this present world order and establish the new millennium in which black people will exist in their intended state in peace. He suggests that black bodies will take new meaning when the New World comes into being and that whites will learn the truth of the religion of Allah. Muhammad announces that blacks will be changed and unveiled as the greatest and most beautiful, powerful and intelligent bodies ever to exist, and he stipulates that whites will behold the revelation that these are Muslim bodies – much to their chagrin. They, he argues, are expecting that Christianity will be the religion of the new millennium.<sup>87</sup>

Michael Lieb, author of *Children of Ezekiel: Aliens, UFOs, the Crisis of Race, and the Advent of the End Time*, has a similar take on the Mother Plane phenomenon as the one presented thus far. Lieb surveys fictional literature, religious ideas, and scientific technology that engages and uses Ezekiel's vision as a model or guide for those that view it as a literal ancient visitation by a divine being or space aliens. He argues that Ezekiel's vision provides an aesthetic archetype which expresses the human desire to technologize and mechanize the ineffable, the inexpressible, and the unknowable – to render it intelligible and mundane in order to master it.<sup>88</sup> One such technological machine, he contends, is the unidentified flying object (UFO). The Mother Plane can be read, then, as a divine vehicle, a chariot of work, which discloses the truth, previously Gnostic, to all the world of black bodies in all their splendor – cosmic, transcendent, ultimate, divine, and destroying the evil reign of oppression, that establishes a new order which discloses once and for all the nature of those who were once the most despised people on the planet. Fard Muhammad, for Elijah, will be on this vehicle, destroying the present age and creating a new one.

## THE MEANING AND FUNCTION OF ESOTERICISM AND GNOSTICISM IN ELIJAH MUHAMMAD'S NATION OF ISLAM

In conclusion, I argue that esotericism and Gnosticism were responses to actual and symbolic violence directed at black bodies in the United States. As a form of epistemology, for Elijah Muhammad, such a system of secret knowledge and symbols, including the existence and retribution by the Mother Plane, gave them a sense of control and meaning in a world that was otherwise characterized by lynching and abject poverty and set against a history of enslavement and centuries of discourses of black inferiority. Hence, his entire existence was characterized by an ever-present terror,<sup>89</sup> and the real possibility that black life could come to an abrupt and violent end. To compound matters, he was born and lived out his early adult life in Georgia in the decade

that historian Lerone Bennett called the worst decade in history for African Americans.<sup>90</sup> Fully one-third of all lynchings – disarticulations, burnings, dismemberments – of black bodies occurred between 1890 to 1900.<sup>91</sup> In 1897, the year in which Elijah Poole (Muhammad) was born, for instance, at least 123 lynchings took place, the third highest number for a single year on record.<sup>92</sup> “Three weeks after Muhammad was born, Georgia Governor, W. Y. Atkinson, spoke of such lynching as necessary due to the rise in the African American population in the state – a necessary occurrence to protect the virtue of white women.”<sup>93</sup> Muhammad witnessed too many of these events to mention in this space. Suffice it to say, as Lieb does, that lynchings were a “commonplace occurrence” for Muhammad.

Yet, one event was especially traumatizing – even more than when, at the age of eleven, he ventured by himself to downtown Cordele, Georgia, where he was born, and a white man pulled an ear of a black man out of his pocket, and gloated over one of several lynching trophies that he possessed.<sup>94</sup> His friend, Albert Hamilton, was accused of attacking a white girl in 1912.<sup>95</sup> Having been arrested and placed in Crisp County Jail, where three African Americans had been lynched a week earlier, a white mob broke into the facility, took Hamilton and lynched him – parading his body throughout the black section of Cordele as a form of public administration that was meant to teach and keep black people in their “place.” The white community even made postcards of the event in order to celebrate and relive it.<sup>96</sup> Poor Elijah was dejected, reportedly saying, “I cried all the way home,” and remarked, “If I ever got to be a man, I told myself, I would find a way to avenge him and my people.”<sup>97</sup> Clegg concludes, “This traumatic experience stayed with Elijah for the rest of his life and certainly made him more susceptible to black separatist doctrines.”<sup>98</sup> And more open to Gnostic mythologies such as the Yakub story. This is the crux of my contention.

He was never able to shake the trauma, either. Decades later (c. 1966), as leader of the Nation of Islam, he would express:

This is the American so-called Negro: Robbed so complete today that even after reading the history of how their fathers were brought here, put on the block and sailed [*sic*] off as animals, and have been lynched and burned to the stake for every century since he has been here. And today he is being beaten and killed, shot down on the streets and on the highways throughout the government of America without hinderance [*sic*] by his slave masters children.<sup>99</sup>

These sentiments can be traced to concrete events that occurred in his life, so that the story of Yakub, as presented by Fard, made perfect sense to him. He could comprehend the violence against black bodies that otherwise made no sense. But this was not enough. The universe was not fully comprehensible

unless there was some sense of justice, some ultimate meaning to the experience. The Mother Plane completed the narrative and the longing for meaning, purpose, and recompense.

More than simply a UFO, the Mother Plane was derived from a literal reading of Ezekiel 1 in which the prophet experienced a *visio Dei* in the form of a “space” vehicle, described as a wheel within a wheel.<sup>100</sup> According to Elijah Muhammad, the Mother Plane was a military weapon that Allah (Master Fard Muhammad) would use to judge America and the world for its horrific treatment, lynchings and enslavement of black people:

But America brought this woe upon herself, by not doing Justice to her Black slaves ... Allah (God) wants to pay America for her injustice to we, the poor Black man in America, the Black slave! ... America has not received much woe yet, for how she killed outright, the poor Black man in the south (GA). America has hated her Black slave worse than she hates rattlesnakes.<sup>101</sup>

The Mother Plane would eventually bring peace on earth as well as retribution. The esoteric system, with its concomitant Gnosis, promised this to those who are willing to embrace the religion of Islam. In addition, not only does the story attempt to give coherence to black suffering, it also gave new meaning, in its secrets, to black bodies that were considered the most inferior on the planet. As such, new sources of knowledge and symbols were needed that could affirm black bodies. For lack of more appropriate terms, aliens, UFOs, and highly symbolic language that apprehends racial meaning even in the symbols of freemasonry were viewed as one of few viable sources that could not be contested through verifiable earthly means.

What this demonstrates is a need for greater attention to esotericism and Gnosticism in African American religion and the manner in which marginalized epistemologies function to give meaning to people and religious groups that perceive themselves to be in jeopardy and vulnerable to forces that otherwise would seem out of control. Moreover, it demands a reexamination of the categories and definitions of the discipline of Western esotericism in the study of religion. While their Gnostic system of knowledge had serious problems and conflicts, it was through esoteric means that the Nation of Islam sought to make intelligible a reality that would otherwise be absurd, out of control, and terrorizing.

## NOTES

1. Essien-Udom (1962); Curtis (2006); R. B. Turner (2003). Although these have only tenuous contact with the subject and lack definitions and detailed engagement, these three may be considered exceptions.

2. This essay is an extension of the research for my 2009 dissertation entitled, “Re-imagining Race and Representation: The Black Body in the Nation of Islam,” which has been revised and is now under review for publication. I use the term “Elijah Muhammad’s” Nation of Islam in the present essay, which includes the years 1930 through 1975 – the year of the Nation of Islam’s founding and the year of Muhammad’s death respectively. The term also functions to delineate clearly the Nation of Islam in question and to distinguish it from the multiple groups that have been called “Nation of Islam.”
3. Finley and Alexander (2006: 214). Regarding magic tricks, for instance, Fard would take one of his hairs and with it appear to lift an entire pile of hair of those who were observing him.
4. R. B. Turner (2003: 93). The Moorish Science Temple of America also had secret knowledge in the form of a sacred Gnostic text known as the Holy Koran or the Circle Seven Koran – composed by Drew Ali from multiple sources including the Bible, the Qur’an, Levi Dowling’s *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ*, and the Rosicrucian *Unto Thee I Grant*.
5. While I refer to the Moorish Science Temple of America as “African American” religion, the founder, Drew Ali, taught its members that they were neither black nor negro, but rather their true identity was literally as Moors.
6. Evanzz (1999: 67–70).
7. Marsh (2000: 37).
8. Marsh (2000: 29).
9. Essien-Udom (1962: 35–6). “However, Minister Malcolm X and other leaders of the Nation of Islam have emphatically denied any past connection whatsoever of Elijah Muhammad, Master Wallace Fard Muhammad, or their movement with Noble Drew Ali’s Moorish American Science Temple.” Cf. Muhammad (1993a: 44), where Muhammad denies past membership in the Moorish Science Temple of America. Evanzz (1999: 65–9), says that Muhammad’s membership in the Moorish Science Temple of America was definitively established.
10. Evanzz (1999: 69–70).
11. Evanzz (1999: 68).
12. Walker (2005: 258–63).
13. R. B. Turner (2003: 93–4).
14. Walker (2005: 207).
15. Finley (2009: 177–80).
16. Evanzz (1999: 402). Cf. Clegg (1997: 73), where Clegg refers to “the theosophy of Fard Muhammad.”
17. Evanzz (1999: 402–6).
18. See, Evanzz (1999: 395, 414); Finley (2009: 184, n. 117).
19. Hanegraaff (1998: 397).
20. Hanegraaff (1998: 397–8).
21. Hanegraaff (1998: 398).
22. Hanegraaff (1998: 397–400).
23. Kripal (2010: 144–5).
24. Hanegraaff (1998: 397–400).
25. Cf. Muhammad (2006; n.d.).
26. Hanegraaff (1998: 397).
27. See, for example, Benyon (1938: 894–907); Essien-Udom (1962: 17–62, esp. 63); Maesen (1970: 321–5); Clegg (1997: 72–3); Evanzz (1999: 96, 118, 538 14n and 15n); Lieb (1998, esp. 178–229); Muhammad (1994); Walker (2005: 318, 405–6, 568).
28. Walker (2005: 319). Clegg (1997: 36) draws the same conclusion.
29. See Levi-Strauss (1966: 1–34).

30. Muhammad (2002a: 8). I am extremely careful to over-document my claims that Fard Muhammad and Elijah Muhammad borrowed heavily from many sources including the Moorish Science Temple of America, theosophy, freemasonry, the Jehovah's Witnesses, African American Christianity, Marcus Garvey's Black Nationalism, and so on, because as Nasir Makr Hakim, the editor/compiler of the reference above demonstrates, many in the Nation of Islam vehemently opposed the idea that much of the doctrines and mythology of Master Fard Muhammad and Elijah Muhammad were not their creative and original product. In fact, Hakim claims that his work is "challenging, dispelling and completely refuting the notion that Master Fard Muhammad and Elijah Muhammad somehow borrowed or was taught by Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey" (Muhammad 2002a: 8). Obviously, I disagree strongly and maintain that Hakim is grossly overstating the impact of his work on "refuting" such claims.
31. Muhammad (1993c: 20–21).
32. Maesen (1970: 322). In-text references are Maesen's and will be listed in the bibliography. Cf. Anonymous (2005), from the official website of the Jehovah's Witnesses. See also Hunt (2003: 49–50).
33. Muhammad (1993c: 20–21).
34. Muhammad (1993c: 34).
35. Muhammad (1993b: 53).
36. Maesen (1970: 323). Cf. Clegg (1997: 72).
37. Maesen (1970: 322–3).
38. Maesen (1970: 324).
39. Maesen (1970: 324).
40. Muhammad (1993d: 38).
41. See Carr (2001).
42. Hanegraaff (1998: 400).
43. Muhammad (1993a: 1).
44. Muhammad (1965: 17); Finley (2009: 92).
45. Muhammad (1993a: 2–3).
46. The Nation of Islam is a very material religion, and as such, gods, devils, "angels" and divine beings are human and embodied.
47. Hanegraaff (1998: 399).
48. Muhammad (1965: 291; 1992: 40).
49. See Finley (2009: 142–202).
50. Hunt (2003: 223). Cf. Luckmann (1990: 127–38).
51. See Finley (2009: 90, n. 37). A good collection of addresses on the subject, however, can be found in Muhammad (2002a).
52. Muhammad (1965: 52). Cf. Muhammad (2006: 14), for a similar discourse that is verbatim in places to the one cited here.
53. Finley (2009: 110). The term "black" in the Nation of Islam referred to people who were understood as "black, brown, red, and yellow."
54. Finley (2009: 333–88).
55. Finley (2009: 91).
56. Muhammad (1965: 16–17).
57. Muhammad (1965: 17).
58. Muhammad (2002a: 48); Clegg (1997: 41).
59. Muhammad (1997a: 39). See also, Muhammad (1993d: 51), in which he wrestles with creation *ex nihilo*. Some of the versions are contradictory in that Muhammad suggests that no matter existed, while others suggest that one atom existed.
60. Muhammad (1993d: 51, 56; 2002a: 48). Time equals motion.
61. Clegg (1997: 42).
62. See, for example, Muhammad (1965: 42).

63. Clegg (1997: 42).
64. Muhammad (2002b: 167–8). Cf. Muhammad (1993a: 8; 2002a: 59).
65. Muhammad (1965: 111).
66. Clegg (1997: 45).
67. Clegg (1997: 44–5).
68. Muhammad (1965: 108).
69. Muhammad (1983: 10).
70. Muhammad (1983: 10).
71. Clegg (1997: 44–5).
72. Muhammad (1965: 31). The saga also makes an unexplained temporal leap from trillions of years ago to tens of thousands of years ago.
73. Muhammad (1965: 31; n.d.: 33–4). Cf. Clegg (1997: 48–9).
74. Finley (2009: 103–4); West (2002: 53–4).
75. Clegg (1997: 49); Muhammad (1965: 110; 2002a: 61). Recall that the world functions in twenty-five thousand year cycles in which new gods reign and new scriptural histories are written.
76. Muhammad (1965: 110).
77. Muhammad (1965: 110–11; 1983: 30–31).
78. Muhammad (2006: 15). The contradiction that seems unexplained is how the Original people are “good by nature” and yet have the capacity to sin which Muhammad tries to indicate when he says that 30 per cent are always dissatisfied.
79. Muhammad (1965: 112).
80. Muhammad (1993a: 6–9; 2006: 38). Cf. Evanzz (1999: 75).
81. At the same time, the black race, the Tribe of Shabazz, included the black, brown, red, and yellow peoples. Cf. Muhammad (1965: 121): “The black nation, including its other three colors, brown, red and yellow, outnumber the Caucasian race, eleven to one.” See also Muhammad (1993a: 12–13).
82. Muhammad (1965: 14).
83. Muhammad (1994: 24).
84. Muhammad (1994: 24).
85. Muhammad (1994: 24).
86. Muhammad (1965: 53).
87. Muhammad (2006: 32).
88. Lieb (1998: 3).
89. Pinn (2003: 77).
90. Evanzz (1999: 20–21).
91. Evanzz (1999: 20).
92. Evanzz (1999: 21).
93. Finley (2009: 83). Cf. Evanzz (1999: 20).
94. Evanzz (1999: 23–4); Clegg (1997: 10).
95. Evanzz (1999: 39).
96. Evanzz (1999: 39–40). Cf. Pinn (2003: 75).
97. Evanzz (1999: 40).
98. Clegg (1997: 10).
99. Muhammad (1993c: 26–7).
100. Muhammad (1965: 290). See also, Muhammad (1992).
101. Muhammad (1992: 16–17).

## CHAPTER 15

# CONSCIOUS CONCEALMENT

## THE REPRESSION AND EXPRESSION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SPIRITUALISTS

*Margarita Simon Guillory*

In 1933, the same year she became a Spiritualist, Nellye Mae Taylor joined the National Colored Spiritualist Association of the United States of America. Experiences with racial discrimination in the churches of the National Spiritualist Association of the United States, both in Oklahoma and Kansas, led her to join the organization ... African Americans were not permitted to conduct service or give readings.<sup>1</sup>

These highly emotional services seem to produce an unbalanced state which robs the individual of inhibitions which make him a reasonable being and capable of self control ... The Negro who could “get happy” most often at these hysterical religious meetings was usually the weakest morally in the community. He, or she, would steal, indulge in crimes of violence and not infrequently in sexual crime.<sup>2</sup>

The opening excerpts, the former a biographical snapshot of an African American Spiritualist<sup>3</sup> and the latter a statement made by an African American sociologist, capture the historical predicament confronting Spiritualists of African descent. Taken together, these two citations show the sandwiching of African American Spiritualists between two compounding forces. On the one hand, these Spiritualists faced opposition in modern American Spiritualism because of their race. Their blackness, especially during the rise of institutional forms of segregation in the late nineteenth century, served as the primary reason for their ejection from the National Spiritualist Association in particular and the modern Spiritualist movement in general. On the other hand, Spiritualists of African descent, because their religious expression did not fit neatly in a traditional mold of African American Christianity, were rejected by many members in their own community. Trapped between these

two compounding forces, African American Spiritualist activities, including their doctrinal systems and ritualistic activities, within modern American Spiritualism were repressed, undergoing a forceful movement into Spiritualism's historical unconsciousness.

African American Spiritualists, along with their accompanying doctrines/rituals have been concealed in the historical annals of modern American Spiritualism due to their subjection to *historical compounded repression* – a multi-variable process containing two or more forms of resistance that seeks to eliminate the expression of an undesirable content(s) from historical records. What are the inner workings of this historical compounding as it operates in the lives of African American Spiritualists? What specific type of material concerning African American Spiritualists' beliefs has undergone historical repression? Why and how did this concealment take place?

#### ATTEMPTING TO REVEAL: ACADEMIC RECOVERY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SPIRITUALISTS

There have been scholarly efforts to highlight African American involvement in modern American Spiritualism. However, only two of these works offer an explicit account of African American contributions to the early years of modern American Spiritualism. John Patrick Deveney, for example, captures activities of African Americans in the initiating stages of this movement through a biographical excavation of Paschal Beverly Randolph – an African American Spiritualist turned Rosicrucian that Deveney considers to be a primary progenitor of occultism in America. He illustrates how Randolph, by 1852, only four years after Spiritualism's conception, is not only fully committed to the movement as a trance speaker, one who possesses the ability to embody a spirit through an elevated state of consciousness, and a “clairvoyant physician,” but also how by 1855 he becomes one of the first *American* Spiritualists to take Spiritualism into the public arena abroad, mainly in England.<sup>4</sup>

Robert Cox in his work *Body and Soul* utilizes a “sympathetic” or culturally diverse view of Spiritualism in antebellum America as a platform to discuss contributions made by Spiritualists of color.<sup>5</sup> Particularly, he highlights activities of Creole Spiritualist circles operating in New Orleans as early as 1857. He argues that these circles, although they are greatly influenced by Spiritualism as expressed in the North, adopt a unique brand of “Creole Spiritualism” – a mode of Spiritualism that incorporates social and political factors into a religious framework – after the Civil War. In the end, Cox uncovers the existence of full-fledged Spiritualist circles operating among people of mixed ancestry – mainly African/French admixture – in New Orleans only nine years after the birth of modern American Spiritualism in Hydesville, New York.

Other texts either mention African American Spiritualists in passing or reduce their involvement to one premised merely upon the discussion of

social inequalities, especially regarding matters of race. Ann Braude, for instance, sums up the participation of African Americans in nineteenth-century Spiritualism in three sentences, which include the mention of three figures: Mr Anderson, “a colored gentleman of Battle Creek,” William Cooper Nell and Sojourner Truth.<sup>6</sup> Catherine Albanese in her work entitled, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit* seeks to provide a culturally sensitive historical discourse on America’s metaphysical religions. While this historical unraveling of Spiritualism illustrates how strands of racist ideologies were stitched into certain cosmologies like Andrew Jackson Davis’s “cartography of the afterworld,” Albanese’s recognition of African American participation in the movement itself, not including references to African American Spiritualist churches, does not move beyond the mentioning of Paschal Beverly Randolph and the formation of the National Colored Spiritualist Association.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, in *Ghostly Communion*, John Kucich defines modern Spiritualism as “a particular social discourse reappearing in a variety of contexts and forms.”<sup>8</sup> With this notion of Spiritualism Kucich establishes a connection between the literary work of Harriet Jacobs and her implicit involvement in this religious movement. He asserts that while Jacobs does not openly embrace American Spiritualism, she carefully weaves its symbols and figures into both her publications and personal correspondence with people like Amy Post, an instrumental figure in the early stages of the movement in upstate New York. Although Kucich acknowledges how Jacobs implicitly employs a spiritualist framework to articulate her voice, which had been silenced by the atrocities of slavery, he restricts her usage of Spiritualism to one of political resistance. Thus, this text’s acknowledgment of Jacobs’ interaction with modern Spiritualism does not move beyond racial politics.

Each of these works is vital in their recovery of the African American presence in modern American Spiritualism. However, retrieval alone, while important, only denotes a reclamation of that which is lost but forgoes attention to the reasons *why* certain material undergoes historical concealment in the first place. Particularly, why were the activities of African Americans concealed in modern Spiritualism? The answer lies in the operation of multiple forms of resistance known collectively as *historical compounded repression*, which consciously seeks to eliminate certain experiences from historical records. Specifically, the race and class of African American Spiritualists were identified as “undesirable elements” that must undergo a compounded form of repression as offered by both Spiritualist and African American communities, respectively. Such a dual form of repression altered the ways in which the contributions of African American Spiritualists would be counted within the historical accounts of modern American Spiritualism.

The placement of African American Spiritualists between two compounding repressive forces – racialized resistance in predominately white Spiritualists circles and intra-communal resistance in African American urban communities like Detroit – caused a historical repression of their ecclesiastical

activities within the annals of American Spiritualism. Despite this suppression, African American Spiritualist activity did not cease. Deep in the recesses of Spiritualism's historical unconsciousness this marginalized activity, still driven by foundational Spiritualist principles, takes on other forms of expression. These African American expressions of Spiritualism quite often evaded historical capturing because they appeared to be "other" religious forms with no explicit connections to "original" Spiritualism. However, these alternate Spiritualist expressions are representative of an expansion of modern American Spiritualism. The Holy Science groups of Detroit serve as an example of how African American Spiritualists employed a uniquely adapted Spiritualist doctrinal framework to push past forces of resistance in order to claim a space of visibility in that their conceptions of God would no longer be hidden but manifested in the historical consciousness of modern American Spiritualism.

#### REVEALING A SPIRITUALIST GOD: GOD "AS" ... IN DETROIT'S HOLY SCIENCE MOVEMENT

Detroit, in addition to cities like New York, Chicago, and Cleveland, served as a major destination point for the massive migration of African Americans moving northward from southern regions. By 1930, there were approximately 120,000 African Americans living in Detroit, and this increase played out in various cultural and institutional spaces within the city.<sup>9</sup> Religion represented one such institutional space. Although some migrants found a place in established churches like Second Baptist Church and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, many migrants were turned off by the formalized structure of these ecclesiastical spaces. Instead, they gravitated towards smaller, less formalized churches. This trend finds voice in an interview captured in a social report compiled by African American sociologist Henry Allen Bullock. As one interviewee states, "When I first came here [to Detroit], I went to a big Baptist church, and all I heard there was about Heaven ... I was not satisfied in that church. I never felt at home. I came down here [to a Spiritualist church] and they were talking about earthly things"<sup>10</sup> This dissatisfaction with some of the traditional Protestant churches in Detroit served as a primary catalyst in the increase of religious diversity in Detroit, especially as seen in the growth of Spiritualist churches during the 1930s:

Their [Spiritualist churches in Detroit] growth has been so rapid that at present a conservative estimate would place their number at from 200 to 300 in the entire city. The best known of these churches are "Spiritual Church of Christ in Man," "The Alpha and Omega Spiritual Church," "St. Ruth's Spiritualist Church," "First True Vine Spiritualist Church," "Universal Spiritualist Church of Christ," and "St. Isaac's Sunlight Spiritualist Church."<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Spiritualist churches saturated the city of Detroit, and their numbers continued to grow because they offered doctrinal systems and ritualistic activities, as exhibited in public medium services and private readings, which tapped into the life experiences of those living in Detroit. One such space was St Ruth's.

St Ruth's Spiritualist Church, one of the six most well known Spiritualist churches listed in the above excerpt, becomes the cornerstone for Detroit's Holy Science movement, an ecclesiastical campaign driven by the activities of one woman, Dr Hattie Lewis Johnson. A native of Red Bank, Georgia, she studied Spiritualism under the tutelage of Father Hurley at the Spiritual Church of Christ in Man before he split with the National Colored Spiritualist Association (NCSA) to form the Universal Hagar's Spiritual Church, one of the largest independent African American Spiritual associations from 1930 to 1950.<sup>12</sup> Dr Johnson discusses her eventual separation from Hurley's church in an interview:

Well, before I opened this church [St Ruth's Church of Holy Science] I studied Spiritualism under Rev. Hurley. He tried to keep me with him by telling me I wasn't ready to hit out for myself, but I tried it. Many people from his church came over with me. That was in 1931. I been here ever since.<sup>13</sup>

Guided by her commitment to Spiritualism and despite her recollected objections of such an initiative from her mentor, Dr Johnson established the city's first Holy Science church, St Ruth's Church of Holy Science,<sup>14</sup> at the intersection of Orleans and Monroe Avenues in an area known as the Black Bottom in 1931.<sup>15</sup> The following year she organized the Antioch Association of Holy Science, whose membership by the early 1940s included Holy Science churches in Detroit, Flint, and Saginaw. Detroit churches in addition to St Ruth's included: Divine Temple of Metaphysics (Dr Ann Ryan), First Church of Deliverance of Divine Science (Dr Maxine Keith), St Teresa Church of Holy Science (Dr Lily May Ellis) and Lily of the Valley House of Prayer (Mother Viola Reed).<sup>16</sup> Each of these female leaders ascribed Spiritualism to their groups. Like Dr Johnson they employed Holy Science as a means to express their Spiritualist leanings through the employment of a unique blending of doctrinal principles that afforded them participation in modern American Spiritualism with little contestation from either white Spiritualist circles or "respectable" African American social reformers, representative of two repressive forces that will be discussed in greater detail later.<sup>17</sup>

Dr Johnson's Antioch School of Metaphysics became the primary conduit through which this distinctive Spiritualist doctrinal form called Holy Science would flow. The primary building material for the doctrinal framework of Holy Science was supplied by initiatives taken by the NCSA, specifically the interjection of Christianity as a divine source into American Spiritualism.

While the NCSA adopted most of the principles outlined in the philosophy of Spiritualism, these African American Spiritualists made two important changes that would serve as a cornerstone for the Holy Science doctrinal system.<sup>18</sup> First, the NCSA amended principle nine in Spiritualism's "declaration of principles." The amended principle states, "We [NCSA members] affirm that the precept of Prophecy contained in the Bible is a Divine attribute proven through mediumship."<sup>19</sup> The bible, then, is recognized as a divine source that attests to the validity of mediumship. The addition of a tenth principle affirming the human's ability to possess spiritual gifts as attested to in the recorded activities of Scripture represented the NCSA's second move. Specifically, this principle declares, "We affirm man's spiritual gifts, and that they are confirmed by the works of Jesus Christ, the prophets and apostles as recorded in the Holy Bible."<sup>20</sup> These changes are important because they illustrate how the NCSA extended the overall framework of Spiritualism. This organized group of African American Spiritualists constructed a philosophy of Spiritualism that accepted Infinite Intelligence without the negation of Christianity's ability to symbolize and articulate such divine intelligence. This revised Spiritualist framework of "acceptance without negation" provides Dr Johnson with primary materials needed to build a doctrinal system of Holy Science, one capable of providing an outlet for the manifestation of African American Spiritualist activities in modern Spiritualism.

Dr Johnson's primary conceptualization of Holy Science, as presented in both St Ruth's Church of Holy Science and Antioch School of Metaphysics, involved the use of a Spiritualist framework that views God "as" Vibratory Source. This notion of God finds manifestation in the doctrinal framework of Holy Science that recognizes intersectionality between God, humanity, and science. Utilizing some of the principles contained within the "Law of Vibration,"<sup>21</sup> a primary law contained within American Spiritualism concerning the creation/maintenance of positive energy, Holy Science establishes and explores this interconnectedness between matters of spirituality and temporality. Specifically, God as the source of vibrations, oscillating energy pervading the entire universe, is the heart of this law. As oscillating energy, vibrations radiate from the divine source interjecting into spaces of temporality. Holy Science's commitment to this diffusion of divinely originated vibrations finds attestation during the giving of "messages" – usually the terminating portion of night services where mediums give congregants and/or visitors one on one messages sent from the spiritual realm. For instance, in a message given in St Ruth's Church of Holy Science in 1935, the medium tells the adherent, "There is a green *vibration* around you, my friend, and through the beautiful spirit, I see you will be very successful in receiving your desire. [emphasis added]"<sup>22</sup> As presented here divinely vibrations are not solely relegated to the spiritual realm but possess the ability to move and invade temporal realms appearing in a manifested form, "a green vibration." This medium's ability to see a "green vibration" surrounding the individual highlights two

additional beliefs concerning vibrations: (1) they possess reflective abilities via objectification – materialization of divine energy which gives the ability to reflect light and produce color; and (2) they possess projective abilities in that these vibrations are capable of displacing energy on to another object/subject. Thus, the divinely originated vibration shows itself as the color green, and because this color within Spiritualist spaces symbolizes money and success, the Holy Science medium states confidently that the individual will be “successful” in receiving what is desired.

Additionally, these spiritual vibrations, as understood in the Holy Science doctrinal framework, were not without identity and/or purpose. This notion finds expression in a late night service at St Ruth’s during the concluding séance period. A pupil of Dr Johnson shares a message with a receiver:

When I contact your spirit, I am contacting a personal condition, you understand me, bless your heart. The spirit says, pray and pray much and you will be able to bring yourself out alright. There is a *vibration* of a *sister* which comes so beautifully to you and leads you. *She is walking with you and will carry you to prosperity and success.* She can bring you out alright. You will come out alright. Before this time tomorrow night, you will be blessed.<sup>23</sup> [emphasis added]

The vibration is not just some abstract depersonalized scientific property. Instead, this vibration is feminized for it is a “vibration of a sister.” In short, the vibration possesses identity. The survival of identity beyond death is affirmed in both the National Spiritualist Association (NSA) and NCSA’s fourth philosophical declaration, which states, “We [Spiritualists] affirm that the existence and personal identity of the individual continues after the change called death.”<sup>24</sup> This notion is attested to in Dr Johnson’s various sightings of a “beautiful baby,” a forcible man called “John,” a “beautiful girl,” and a “brown skin man with hair close to his head” as revealed during her message sessions in St Ruth’s Church of Holy Science.<sup>25</sup> Beyond identity, vibrations are aim-directed. They serve a purpose in the doctrinal system of Holy Science. As suggested in the quotation above, the sisterly vibration has been commissioned to provide guidance. Therefore, her purpose is to “walk” with the individual providing “prosperity and success” every step of the way. To this end, vibrations as permeated by God, according to Holy Science belief systems, are purpose-driven pulses possessing abilities to undergo externalization via coloration and identity-retention in spaces of temporality.

In addition to God “as” Vibratory Source, Holy Science posits God “as” Infinite Intelligence and humanity as a direct manifestation of this Divine Intelligence. Humans, then, have the ability to tap into this source of intellect through various spiritual processes. One of the most common ways is known as *unfolding*. This gradual process, under the direction of God, causes an internal opening to occur within a person, which places the individual in

a position to receive divine understanding or one's spiritual gifts. Specifically, Holy Science establishes a connection between spiritual unfolding and the movement of one's mind. For instance, according to Dr Palmer, a pupil of Dr Johnson, unfolding produces a mental awakening in which the mind ascends from lower consciousness ("carnal mind") to higher consciousness ("spiritual mind").<sup>26</sup> Those individuals living in the former realm of consciousness are arrested by mental sublimation in that carnality arrests the activities of the mind yielding an inactive (i.e. "sublimed") mind.<sup>27</sup> However, in the latter, or higher state, the individual's mind awakens, which is a part of the process of spiritual unfolding, and as a result of this movement of the mind one becomes capable of apprehending spiritual power or "infinite wisdom." For Holy Science adherents it is this attainment of higher consciousness that allows them to lift their minds above elements of adversity like economic hardships, intra-communal classism, and racism that they constantly faced in the urban terrain of Detroit. To this end, movement of the mind into a higher state offered those practicing Holy Science access to an "esoteric wisdom," manifested understanding given by God "as" Infinite Intelligence, which did not negate social constructions like race, but allowed for a "transcendence of race and the physical body."<sup>28</sup>

#### REJECTING "OTHER": REPRESSION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SPIRITUALISTS

The contributions of a few African American Spiritualists are recognized in the early years of modern American Spiritualism. Emma Hardinge Britten, for example, in her historical chronicling of the first two decades of Spiritualism recognizes the existence of mediumship "amongst the colored population," which includes a girl medium from Georgia, and Tom Jenkins and Dr Valmour, both residents of New Orleans.<sup>29</sup> All of these figures are categorized as physical mediums whose activities are restricted to matters of physicality, mainly the healing of bodies. Since Spiritualism privileges spiritual abilities of the mind – trance speaking, automatic writing, and clairvoyance – over physical mediumship, Britten's recorded contributions of African Americans, while noted, are considered historically minimal in the opening two decades of modern American Spiritualism. Therefore, African American Spiritualists, like those cited by Britten, are allowed expression within the historical conscious of Spiritualism at this point because their contributions only involve the physical body. However, African American Spiritualists possessing *privileged* spiritual abilities, like P. B. Randolph, receive a different type of historical treatment.

Randolph publicly rejects Spiritualism in a speech at the Utica Philanthropic Convention of 1858. Early Spiritualist doctrines of the non-existence of evil and selective human immortality, especially as espoused by Andrew Jackson Davis, symbolize primary catalysts fueling his public recantation

of Spiritualism. Randolph's take on both of these positions is addressed in a book published two years after the Utica convention. "Spiritualism is destructive of all we hold most dear and cherish most sacredly," he writes, and "it denies immortality to untold thousands."<sup>30</sup> It is this denial of immortality that Randolph sees as Spiritualism's weapon of destruction in that it builds up the hope of immortality in a select few at the expense of relegating a large majority of humanity to the margins of finitude. His response to this doctrine of selective immortality finds voice also in the pages of *The Unveiling*; he exclaims:

If any man is an immortal being, he must have derived the quality from those who begat him. If some men and women are not immortal, how can they produce an immortal infant? No woman can give to her child that which she does not possess ...[therefore] whenever called on I shall be happy to demonstrate how and why *all men, rich, poor, black, white – all, all are immortal* [for] nature reveals it, all good spirits declare it; God proclaims, and common sense sustains it.<sup>31</sup>

Randolph as seen here not only again publicly challenges the doctrine of selective immortality, but he also offers a counterargument against the Spiritualist understanding of immortality through the utilization of rationalism. Also, as equally important, Randolph here does not reject the existence of spirits, as espoused in Spiritualism; however, he interjects God into the equation, a move that further adds insult to injury in his crusade against Spiritualism.

Although many Spiritualist circles had acknowledged Randolph as a gifted trance speaker, his public rejection of Spiritualism appearing in verbal and textual form was deemed unacceptable, which resulted in resistance. Various Spiritualist journals captured this resistance in letters submitted by white Spiritualists. In a letter printed in William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, an unknown writer voiced his opinion concerning Randolph's challenge of Spiritualists' involvement in abolitionism. The writer states, "A colored man, a Spiritualist, there was, who rejoiced in the name Randolph ... I never saw a colored man, woman or child, who so nearly proved the oft heard assertion that '*the colored race are fit only for slaves!*'"<sup>32</sup> Randolph is noted as a proof of the inseparability between "a colored man" and slavery; a toleration that may fair better in "revival enterprises"; and "the most interesting *object* of thought, a real peripatetic idea."<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Britten in a single breath of contradiction recognizes Randolph as "a Spiritualist and a trance speaker," "an unworthy subject," a spiritual "mountebank," and relegates those willing to provide him with a public platform as one stopping "short of negro minstrelsy."<sup>34</sup> Based upon these racialized responses within Spiritualist circles, it is not only the rejection of certain doctrinal principles that is problematic but it is rejection coupled with Randolph's blackness that activates a mode of repression.

In this way, race established an internal distinction within modern American Spiritualism between those who are deemed as recognizable and accepted, and those who must be subjected to some form of repression because they are “fundamentally offensive.”<sup>35</sup>

Repression premised upon racialized boundaries yields a threefold form of rejection of African Americans within Spiritualism: (1) intellectual rejection; (2) cosmological rejection; and (3) institutional rejection. First, the intellectual ability of African American Spiritualists, especially those viewed as mediums and trance speakers, is subjected to a repressive form of *intellectual detachment*, a simultaneous detaching of rationality from African American Spiritualists while attaching intellectual abilities to embodying spirits. For instance, after hearing a well-known African American trance lecturer, an English Spiritualist remarks, “[His] lecture was consecutive, systematic and logical, replete with profound thought clothed in rare rhetorical beauty, and enunciated in a style of elocution *much superior* to that of the medium in his normal state. [emphasis added]”<sup>36</sup> Thus, this Spiritualist of color’s inferiority can only be compensated through the endowment of *superior* spiritually induced intellect. Furthermore, Randolph, in a major text published in 1863, confirms this reduction of African American intellect to that of the spiritual realm, he states:

If then I said anything remarkable or good, above the average intelligence of men of my lineage, why even then spiritualists refused me credit, as a general thing, openly taunted me with my natural ethnological condition, and insulted my soul by denying me common intelligence, but said, by way of salve to the bitter wound, ‘You are now so extraordinarily developed that the dear angels of the spherical heavens can use you when wide awake!’<sup>37</sup>

Published statements such as these reveal a contradiction operating within Spiritualism, especially during its first decade. Although Spiritualist espousal of democratic individualism translated to equality among men and women, race, as Randolph suggests, was indeed a factor considered in modern Spiritualism.

Cosmological rejection premised upon race is expressed in specific cosmologies advanced in modern American Spiritualism. Despite Spiritualism’s vivacious espousal of individualized liberty and natural rights for all of mankind, their commitment to laws of evolution led to the integration of elements of social Darwinism into their cosmological cartographies, which included the matter of race.<sup>38</sup> Scholars of Spiritualism like Robert Cox and Bret Carroll propose a distinct correlation between the popularity of racialized Spiritualist cosmologies and increasing racial tensions following the Civil War. However, cosmologies based upon racial differences are also prevalent during the antebellum period, especially those offered by Andrew Jackson Davis. For example,

in a Spiritualist text published in 1852, Davis utilizes a modified version of Platonic forms to establish a relationship between nature and divinity. He meticulously traces the evolution of humans, plants, and animals, with the last category representing the space of discourse in which discussion of people of African descent would take place. Davis not only identifies the “negro anatomy” as a lower form as compared to unseen higher forms, but also he privileges this same body as being higher than monkeys and apes in the temporal realm.<sup>39</sup> Here African Americans’ are objects of physicality that are relegated to the temporal realm. The resistance of the African American presence is even more explicitly presented in Davis’ published lecture on “Summer-Land” – the second sphere in which humans ascend after death. Influenced by the scientific division of races, Davis identifies two distinctive points of polarity, the “Ultimates,” that is Caucasians, and “Primates,” that is Negroes. According to him, the latter is sense-oriented, “a simple child of nature” while the former is a person of reason and introspection.<sup>40</sup> In addition, African Americans are aligned with the left side or natural side of humanity, and the “Ultimates” commence with the Divine Intelligence located on the right pole of humanity. With this move, he represses those manifesting physical blackness to the unconscious realm of physicality. Even more, this difference with respect to color transcends temporality, moving into Summer-Land where “the Caucasian world moves all through on wing, and the African world is free to move all through the opposite wing of the *infinite* place. [emphasis added]”<sup>41</sup> In this sense, neither death nor ascension as expressed in these Spiritualist cosmologies provided any means of escape for African American Spiritualists from a profound subjection to resistance and rejection activated by race.

Repression based upon racial difference also takes an institutionalized form within modern American Spiritualism. Despite resistance from within Spiritualism, African American membership increased. The hundreds of African American delegates who attended the annual NSA convention, especially in the early 1920s, attest to this increase.<sup>42</sup> Such a critical mass of African American Spiritualists elicited discussions of segregation within the NSA. During the 1924 convention a special session was called by Dr George B. Warner, president of the NSA, to discuss an institutionalized separation based upon race. Specifically, the purpose of this session was to “cut off the colored Spiritual Church in America from the white body.”<sup>43</sup> Seven days later a resolution was made despite the protest of African American delegates like John White who stated that this issue “has now resolved itself into an acute issue affecting our future as a people.”<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, a large majority of white Spiritualists of the NSA decided that segregation among its members would be better for both races. Institutionalized segregation established sharp distinctions concerning membership, and African American Spiritualists were considered elements of undesirability which had to undergo an “after expulsion”<sup>45</sup> – initial acceptance followed by a forceful rejection. Therefore, in 1925 “colored and white Spiritualists split” with the former becoming the National

Colored Spiritualist Association (initially called the National Negro Spiritualist Convention), leaving the latter, or NSA in particular and modern American Spiritualism in general, free of a direct contestation with “blackness.”<sup>46</sup>

#### REPUDIATING “DIFFERENCE”: INTRA-COMMUNAL REPRESSION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SPIRITUALISTS

The National Colored Spiritualist Association (NCSA), by the late 1920s, had established its headquarters in Detroit and, by 1930, had developed a national network that included Spiritualist groups from several major cities like Chicago, Miami, and New York City.<sup>47</sup> The historical presence of African American Spiritualists already operating in Michigan, especially in places like Battle Creek before the turn of the century, combined with a population surge of African Americans, from 5,741 in 1910 to 120,066 by 1930, served as two primary reasons why the NCSA was particularly attracted to Detroit. This sprawling urban city offered potentiality for the expansion of Spiritualism, so much so the number of Spiritualist groups surpassed two hundred by 1940.<sup>48</sup> But this growth was not without contest. Unlike the racialized resistance African American Spiritualists received from their white counterparts, they faced an intra-communal multivariate form of repression in Detroit that was premised upon class distinctions, demographics, and religion.

Detroit’s African American population was divided into a three-tiered economic system, which included an elite class, a “middling class” and a lower class. The highest tier, also the smallest, was mainly composed of professionals and business owners. Detroit’s African American elite enjoyed socially interacting with whites, especially in education. The “middling class”<sup>49</sup> was divided into two sections, the new middle class and working masses. African American Southern entrepreneurs were the primary constituents of the former while the latter consisted of those mainly working in service occupations. Not only was the middling class the largest of the three economic classes by World War I, but also this group, especially the new middle class sector, began to promote a program of social reform that targeted the bottommost class.

The promotion of a politics of respectability by the middling class and a forceful attempt to interject this policy into the lower economic class created sharp distinctions among African Americans in Detroit. Development of a socially acceptable collective identity was dependent on infusing respectable elements like cleanliness and temperance into the lowest socioeconomic tier. Such an infusion sought to minimize “intragroup differences”.<sup>50</sup> The middling class, especially the top tier within this group, viewed the lower economic class as the source of difference. Categorizations of difference were associated with the South because many of the second tier of the middling class and the bottommost class within the city’s African American population had migrated from Southern rural areas. Thus, identity and geography were conflated yielding

a “Southern/Northern” dichotomous framework.<sup>51</sup> The former side represented “disorder, dirt, licentiousness, and a disheveled appearance” while the latter side symbolized “self-restraint, cleanliness, chastity, and respectability.”<sup>52</sup> To this end the new middle class viewed parts of the working class and lower class to a larger extent, especially between 1910 and 1940, as sources of disorder that interjected undesirable elements into Detroit’s public space. For example, from 1918 to 1922 the Detroit Urban League, composed of mostly African American middle classers, passed out brochures entitled “Helpful Hints” to incoming Southern migrants; these leaflets were also distributed in improvised areas of the Black Bottom. This pamphlet contained seventeen don’ts:

Don’t go about the streets or on the car in bungalow aprons, bou-doir caps and house slippers; don’t sit in front of your house or around Belle Isle or public places with your shoes off; don’t carry on loud conversations or use vulgar or obscene language on street cars, streets, or in public places; don’t throw refuse and tin cans in your back or front yard; don’t forget that cleanliness and fresh air are necessary to good health.<sup>53</sup>

Public untidiness, loudness, vulgarity, and uncleanness were identified by the Urban League as disordered impulses that had to undergo some form of repression in order to maintain an African American “respectable” and “healthy” communal identity free from the blemishes of negative stereotypes.

Spiritualism was also viewed as one of these elements that must be repressed in order to establish a collective identity of respectability. African American Spiritualist groups did not fit the prescribed images of self-restrained, respectable religious activities as expressed in well-established churches in Detroit like Second Baptist Church (1836), Bethel A.M.E. Church (1841), and St Matthews’ Protestant Episcopal Church (1846) whose membership included African American elites and the new middle class. For example, many Spiritualist churches were involved in the underground world of number gambling as attested to by a Spiritualist leader in Detroit:

I did deal in numbers in my church. If somebody would come up stairs and ask me for one I would give him one, but not in church. Because there are so many snitchers around they may bring the law in on me. [But beyond numbers] I teach against stealing, getting drunk, and things like that...<sup>54</sup>

This direct involvement of some Spiritualist groups in Detroit’s gambling economy was considered sacrilegious among social reformers because this juxtaposition of the sacred and secular represented a deviation from “respectable” religious practices. Therefore, Spiritualists were viewed as social deviants,

undesired products of the Great Migration, and manifested “symbols of Southern primitivism.”<sup>55</sup> Social reformers, mainly members of the Detroit Urban League and various local Christian associations, offered resistance to the rising numbers of Spiritualist churches in the Black Bottom area of Detroit.

Intra-communal resistances against unorthodox forms of religious expression, especially against groups like the Church of God pre-1920 and organized Spiritualist groups post-1920, most often appeared in print.<sup>56</sup> Prior to the establishment of the NCSA’s headquarters in Detroit, the religiosity of African Americans in the city caught the attention of sociologists, African American sociologists in particular. Painstaking investigations were published in the form of social surveys. For instance, in a 1920 survey by Forrester B. Washington, first executive director of the Detroit Urban League, the religions of African Americans in Detroit were represented by two major divisions: reputable churches, and groups promoting religious hysteria.<sup>57</sup> The former were composed of orthodox, Christian churches that were considered positive social organizing centers for elite and middle class members of the African American population. They were *reputable* ecclesiastical spaces. However, the latter’s description was subject to a more negative tone. In a sub-section of this survey entitled, “Religious Hysteria: An Increase in Hysterical Forms of Religion Since the Migration,” Washington identifies a singular strand of connectivity existing among groups of this hysterical category:

All these sects have one characteristic in common. Their services are given over to hysteria in all forms. These services are noisy and emotional. They are characterized by protracted singing, moaning and shouting. Long drawn out prayers which only end in exhaustion or fainting are typical of their regular services.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, although Washington recognizes that there are many sects in this category, he compresses their heterogeneity with a homologous predicate: hysteria. Specifically, Spiritualist groups, Churches of God, and Fire-Baptized Holiness churches are explicitly listed in his social survey as being saturated with these “barbaric practices” that are unjustifiable under the Christian banner.<sup>59</sup> Such hysteria Washington deems as “harmful” because it primarily fostered the production of an abnormal individual that was mentally disjoined. In short, disorder is an immediate product of these spaces of hysteria. Additionally, these so-called church groups that permit mass hysteria restrict the individual to the realm of emotionalism with no opportunity to act as a “reasonable being.” Much like Davis’s Spiritualist cartography that places African Americans on a cosmologic sensory pole, Washington develops a relationship between religiosity and rationality. The difference lies in that his polarity is intra-communal in that particular African Americans are aligned with rationality and sentimentality while others are reduced to emotionalism. Washington’s survey reveals an attitude existing in Detroit about religious

expression outside of those of Christian respectability, including Spiritualism but not restricted to just this form of religious identity. He adamantly proposes in the text's concluding thought that "there should be an elimination of all the questionable Negro Churches in the city ... No Negro citizen should hesitate to take any steps which would impede the growth of unnecessary and harmful excrescences on the race."<sup>60</sup> Therefore, sharp distinctions are already in place in Detroit regarding acceptable religiosity verses that of non-acceptability when the NCSA establishes its headquarters in the city. Such an ethos maintains a posture of resistance because incoming African American Spiritualists are viewed as abnormal religious outgrowths seeking to disrupt the continuity of a respectable collective identity. Thus, intra-communal forms of repression *must* be administered to these threatening religious impulses, resulting in the marginalization of African American Spiritualists' doctrinal systems and ritualistic activities.

#### NO LONGER TO BE CONCEALED

African American Spiritualists along with their specific belief systems were constantly subjected to a compounded type of historical repression, resulting in historical obscurity. This repression translated into specified modes of resistance against Spiritualists of color. Not only did African American Spiritualists encounter resistance from within Spiritualism because of their race, but also they were subjected to an intra-communal form of resistance based upon class and geographical distinctions in African American urban communities like Detroit. These Spiritualists faced two oppositional forces that intentionally sought to eradicate their contributions, which included their cosmology regarding God. However, despite these sources of rejection, African American Spiritualists' doctrinal systems and ritualistic activities acquired visibility through the formation of organizational centers like the National Colored Spiritualist Association and the expansion of Spiritualist foundational principles, and the creation of spaces like that of Holy Science in Detroit, which espoused a juxtapositional doctrine of God, spirituality and science. To this end, historical repression may have inhibited the recording of Spiritualist activities of African Americans, but it did not stop such activities from occurring. Thus, African American Spiritualists realigned themselves in such a way as to break back into the annals of modern American Spiritualism. In this way, the repressed returned back into Spiritualism's historical consciousness, no longer to be concealed.

#### NOTES

1. Noll (1991: 41).
2. Washington (1920: 196).

3. African American Spiritualist, as used here, refers to those African Americans involved in modern American Spiritualism. This usage is not to be confused with those constituents of African American Spiritual Churches, ecclesiastical bodies that include elements of Spiritualism in their doctrinal structure but have been defined as a separate body. A comprehensive treatment of Spiritual Churches can be found in Baer (2001: 1–219); Jacobs and Kaslow (1991: 1–272).
4. Deveney (1997: 25).
5. Cox (2003: 162–88).
6. Braude (2001: 29).
7. Albanese (2008: 242).
8. Kucich (2004: xxv).
9. Boyle and Getis (1997: 15–16).
10. Bullock (1935a: 40, 49).
11. Carlson (1940: 102).
12. Carlson (1940: 102–4).
13. Bullock (1935a: 46).
14. Other names given to Dr Johnson’s group were St Ruth’s Spiritualist Church and St Ruth’s Science Temple.
15. Carlson (1940: 102).
16. Archbishop William E. Stokes, interview by Margarita Simon Guillory, February 2, 2010, Rice University Department of Religious Studies in Houston, TX. Archbishop Stokes is a native of Detroit and has been an active member with the Israelite Divine Spiritual Churches for over four decades.
17. Archbishop William E. Stokes, interview by Margarita Simon Guillory, February 3, 2010, Rice University Department of Religious Studies in Houston, TX. In this interview, he discussed the stigma associated with Spiritualism and that Dr Johnson utilized Holy Science as a way to practice, as he stated, “a mind’s way to God.”
18. For the complete list of the NCSA’s principles, see Noll (1991: 35–6).
19. Noll (1991: 36).
20. Noll (1991: 36).
21. Leonard (2005: 243).
22. Carlson (1940: 13).
23. Carlson (1940: 17, Appendix C).
24. Noll (1991: 35).
25. Carlson (1940: 15–20, Appendix C).
26. Carlson (1940: 2–3, Appendix C).
27. Carlson (1940: 4).
28. Nance (2002: 132–3).
29. Britten (1970: 207, 425).
30. Randolph (1860: 33).
31. Randolph (1860: 52–3).
32. Deveney (1997: 90).
33. Deveney (1997: 90–97).
34. Britten (1970: 242–3).
35. Freud (1952, 424; 1961: 20–27).
36. Deveney (1997: 61).
37. Randolph (1863: 100–101).
38. For antebellum Spiritualist racialized cosmologies refer to Davis (1852, 2005). For post-Civil War Spiritualist cosmologies premised upon race, see Crowell (1879: 55–8); see explicit statement made by Carrie E. S. Twing, a female Spiritualist who constructed detailed cosmologies concerning race and Spiritualism, in Cox (2003: 196).
39. Davis (1852: 304).

40. Davis (2005: 429).
41. Davis (2005: 433).
42. Anonymous (1924a).
43. Anonymous (1924a).
44. Anonymous (1924b).
45. Freud (1952: 424).
46. Anonymous (1925).
47. Baer (2001: 114–15).
48. Carlson (1940: 102).
49. Katzman (1973: 135). Katzman employs “middling” to signify the two divisions of this class, middle class and working class. Although his focus ends in 1910, this class with different percentage dynamics still existed in the African American community of Detroit during post-WWI years. A parallelism between Detroit’s class systems and religious orientations within this same space can be found in Wolcott (1996: 273–306).
50. J. C. Turner *et al.* (1994: 455).
51. Wolcott (1996: 274).
52. Wolcott (1996: 275).
53. Wolcott (1996: 276–7).
54. Bullock (1935a: 48).
55. Wolcott (2001: 114).
56. For ethnographic work that highlights the presence of illicit forms of intra-communal resistance against Spiritualist groups, see Bullock (1935b).
57. Washington (1920: 196).
58. Washington (1920: 195).
59. Washington (1920: 196).
60. Washington (1920: 200).

## CHAPTER 16

# OCCULTURE IN THE ACADEMY?

## THE CASE OF JOSEPH P. FARRELL

*John Stroup*

Before us is a case study of Joseph P. Farrell who, as his many-sided persona appears on the Web and in books, interests us on account of his effective and transgressively unusual popular culture use of our categories of Hidden History, Transtheism and Gnosticism.<sup>1</sup> To understand the significance here of Farrell and his audience, it is necessary to recall the competing senses of marginalization and victimhood in contemporary American society and politics as one moves back and forth from elite or official culture and the populist culture. In this connection, the theme of political and economic struggle and struggle for control of the broader culture comes to the fore. Likewise, that theme is written between the lines of Farrell's conspiracist and transgressively alternative nonfiction books even as it is explicitly brought out in Farrell's learned, theological direct attacks on the developments leading to what Farrell reconstructs as the theological deep causes for Western secularity.<sup>2</sup>

As our intent is to furnish a preliminary map of a multifaceted phenomenon, our study simply connects the dots found in publicly available material, without verifying the accuracy of the factual claims in Web and published material. Such material is here taken at face value rather than investigated in skeptical depth. The Farrell phenomenon has made heavy use of arguments concerning the Western obsession with a principle of "simplicity" in thinking about matters divine. For Farrell this is a false divinity, a dubious kind of thinking which has led to growing distraction from the God of Abraham and early Christianity. Likewise this has led to the appearance in antiquity and subsequent history of items that the Farrell phenomenon characterizes as "Gnostic." This is a process which, over the course of Western history since the Franks and Charlemagne, has purportedly been hidden from critical view in Western literature.<sup>3</sup>

## THE BASICS

Joseph P. Farrell has become a Web, radio, YouTube and Amazon.com phenomenon despite or because of obtaining 1987 doctoral credentials from Oxford in patristics. An American convert from Protestantism with a background in mathematics and sciences, Farrell studied patristics at Oxford under the Greek Orthodox convert Kallistos Ware. After a short career in the academy with learned publications, including some in patristics and in anti-modern cultural criticism, Farrell returned to his American roots and began establishing a new self, that is, a popular and populist identity for himself on Amazon.com and on the Web and on talk radio.<sup>4</sup> He has operated out of South Dakota,<sup>5</sup> attracting attention in alternative culture circles, including the right-populist or conspiracist and religious and spiritual segments studied by social scientists like Michael Barkun, Colin Campbell, and Christopher Partridge, areas of concern for those who follow scholarship on the sociology of alternative spiritual and religious culture, the “cultic milieu” or “occulture.”<sup>6</sup> In Campbell’s words, “it can be seen, more generally, to be the point at which deviant science meets deviant religion. What unifies these diverse elements, apart from a consciousness of their deviant status and an ensuing sense of common cause, is an overlapping communication structure of magazines, pamphlets, lectures and informal meetings, together with the common ideology of seekership.”<sup>7</sup>

Farrell’s positioning as a public figure can be tracked with coordinates from social scientist Christopher Partridge, with his notion of a loose community of the alternative-minded, the so-called “occulture.” Partridge has contended, with reference to George Lindbeck, that “occulture is leading to the establishment of ... an *occultural*-linguistic community” characterized by “a gradual *occultural* ecumenism.” There is “less opposition to certain forms of Christianity.” Thus, “traditional, ‘hard’ Christian belief ... is losing out” in favor of “‘soft’ *occulture*-friendly Christian belief” in view of the underlying fact that “Western spiritual seekers are starting to speak the same language” with “occulture ... providing a *lingua franca*.”<sup>8</sup> The public presence of Joseph P. Farrell can well be considered as an example of this *occulture*. He maintains an authority status on the Web, even as his public position emerges as hovering between two points: Partridge’s “traditional, ‘hard’ Christian belief” at war with New Age spirituality when he writes the Christian parts of his publications and Web presence; and another, ironical location within Partridge’s “‘soft’ *occulture*-friendly Christian belief” when he addresses non-believers as an author of books of alternative nonfiction.<sup>9</sup>

Considering the entire phenomenon in broad context, even though his popular works of alternative nonfiction avoid proselytizing, we may well suppose that Farrell’s foundational identity as an Eastern Orthodox historical theologian should alert us to how he may quietly seek to move readers toward a mode of holding religious and factual options congruent with what, for him,

is the preferred option: Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Farrell's sophisticated tactics, his passing familiarity with fringe physics, and his skill in orienting his positions within the loose norms of alternative culture make tracking him difficult. He, among other things, constructs in his popular works of alternative nonfiction a universe in which ancient biblical and mythic events possess real-world referentiality. This referentiality is congruent with advanced science, Christian theism, and supernatural transcendence.<sup>10</sup>

It would be simple to document how the academic and patristic Farrell develops a strong criticism of Western Christianity and modernity as ongoing abandonments of original Christianity. This abandonment allegedly took place by converting Christianity into a kind of incipient philosophical monism addicted to increasingly bold and reductionistic redefinitions of Trinitarian theology. This theology was borrowed from Neoplatonism and Middle Platonism and increasingly obsessed with divine simplicity. It culminated first in Joachim of Fiore and Left Hegelian Marxist revolution, then theologically in Tillich's "God beyond" or "above God." It entailed a post-Christian obsession with the divine process, which was reinterpreted as a pursuit of power through physics and technology, and an amoral outlook instantiated in the Bolsheviks and Nazis. It is a process of steady decline which Western observers cannot properly diagnose nor understand due to their own addiction to the results of Neoplatonism as it entered the Western bloodstream in the early Middle Ages. Augustine of Hippo's theology of the Trinity which took over Western religion is the basis for Farrell's account of subsequent decline and perversion in the West. His account is a history of declension that Western academics purportedly hide from themselves as the West continues its slide into the amoral destruction of its historic identity, while sinning against moral, political, cultural, and economic common sense.<sup>11</sup>

Thus Farrell in his theological attack on Western developments puts Charlemagne, Rudolf Bultmann, Elaine Pagels, Hitler, and Soviet Communism all into the same trajectory of Western decline – though they do not show up in a single list, being instead indicted by their common Latin or Frankish outlook-ancestry. Indeed, he relates them genetically to early Gnosticism and its Voegelinian recurrence, with all sharing in the misunderstanding and misappropriation of Neoplatonic obsession with divine simplicity at the expense of the personal God of Abraham and original Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Eastern Orthodoxy, however, like ancient catholicism, purportedly threw off all the successive waves of attacks from the Neoplatonizers. Thus Farrell explicitly invokes and intensifies Adolf von Harnack's famous reading of Gnosticism as "acute Hellenization", taking Hellenization as Neoplatonizing. Yet Farrell tacitly weakens or rejects Harnack's reading of catholicizing as "chronic Hellenization." Provisionally speaking, it could appear Farrell's construction of an Eastern Orthodoxy immune to Hellenization-as-Neoplatonism depends on his accepting a reading of the Cappadocian Fathers according to which Gregory of Nyssa in particular was not at the most important level a follower

of Neoplatonism or Stoicism, limiting the use of philosophy chiefly to matters of ethics.<sup>13</sup>

Farrell's use of the Harnackian Hellenization thesis may distract our attention from another point. Though Farrell's upholding of an origin for Gnosticism in Hellenization may strike readers as a fossil from earlier days, still, Farrell's underlying theological interest approaches a motif of interest. Recall that the first essay in this volume was Professor DeConick's fascinating study of John 8. Her essay makes an important argument for her view of the location of and stages in an origin of Gnostic material. Her essay brings to our attention reasons to look at a version of Christianity onto which there had not yet been, as she puts it, any "grafting of the supramundane Platonic god into the system."<sup>14</sup> Now Farrell, though he would not endorse an adoptionistic Christology nor admit any proto-Gnostic reading of the Fourth Gospel's Jesus-message, nonetheless would probably show a lively interest in Professor DeConick's argument as in some sense helping strengthen his own broader claim that not only is salvation of the Jews,<sup>15</sup> but that salvation originates, not with some first principle but instead with the personal God of Abraham and with the humanity involved in Jesus Christ. In other words, one is advised to make a strong repudiation of any contamination of Christianity by either Middle Platonism or Neoplatonism. For both the academic and the popular Farrell prefers instead his original Christianity not-yet-Hellenized in its conception of God. This preference comes through in Web appearances as an advocate for Eastern Orthodoxy and its antique roots, a tradition which Farrell understands maintains a strong continuity with ancient Israelite cultic practice. There is also an implicit advocacy for the reasonable possibility of an ancient catholic orthodoxy written between the lines in his popular works of alternative nonfiction.<sup>16</sup> In this sense Farrell would be intrigued by the emphases in April DeConick's reading of John.

With regard to alternative nonfiction, Farrell has ten books out, three translated into German, along with a new DVD.<sup>17</sup> These publications appeal to an audience interested in alternative history and archeology: the Great Pyramid as an ancient weapon constructed on Tesla-like principles for use against ancient astronauts from Mars and elsewhere; current fringe physics retrieving ancient antigravity technology; Nazi plots involving weaponized anti-gravity research; Nazi flying saucers in the southern hemisphere today; the Nazi experimental saucer crash disaster at Roswell in 1947; bankers' plots to suppress general knowledge of advanced technology; "paleoancient" atomic war on earth; alchemy and Hermetic writings and Neoplatonic doctrines of emanation as ancient metaphorical encoding of half-understood advanced physics from our remote extraterrestrial ancestors who fought interplanetary wars three million plus years ago before disappearing and leaving our remotest civilized ancestors (left behind to struggle as novices on earth) half-comprehending what they were unable to explicate in rigorous mathematical terms – that is, a hyper- or multi-dimensional physics that can potentially

account for ancient tales of miracles and strange occurrences, including angels and demons that exist in multiple dimensions as plasma or electron clouds.<sup>18</sup> Though his work is shot through with conspiracism, Farrell is anti-Nazi and pro-Jewish, putting the evil Nazis past and present in the place where conventional conspiracists used to put the Jewish population, that is, as the bad guys. In his publications to date, Farrell's conspiracism falls into that rare category defined by Michael Barkun: "Conspiracy theories that reject anti-Semitism and portray Jews entirely as victims are a relatively minor area of the literature." Farrell is striving valiantly to increase the number of pages so denominated.<sup>19</sup>

## THE RESULTS

In our first approach to the Farrell phenomenon, the method has not been to look for "facts" behind Farrell's Web presence. Instead, it has been to map the public features and functioning of the whole, taking claims at face value. In so doing, the obvious matter requiring attention was the overtones and evaluation of Farrell's double track, that is, his Eastern patristics identity connected with a negative reading of Western modernity and Western theology on the one hand; and, on the other hand, Farrell's increasingly unusual series of scenarios in his popular writings, ranging as they do from ancient astronauts to contemporary Nazi conspiracies involving weaponized antigravity technology and flying saucers.

Our results include the following findings:

1. Farrell works with categories such as Transtheism, Hidden History and Gnosticism, but in a way politically and culturally *in polar opposition* to the categories of the postmodern academy and mainstream or official culture. The postmodern academy and mainstream culture fuse leftist rhetoric with the realities of a corporate financial basis composed of transnational military and economic enterprise under strong government direction. This requires the destruction of historic personal and communal identity through indoctrination and, if necessary, re-education or marginalization of troublemakers and dissenters objecting to globalist reductionism. Farrell emerges as a voice of populist protest in the face of this process, as his interest in the banking and corporate aspect of conspiracism shows.<sup>20</sup> This backward-looking personal and communal identity, encompassing an attachment to the most archaic version of ecclesiastical institutionalism, grounds and shapes Farrell's learned and popular stance as a populist and American traditionalist alternative critic of contemporary trends. He even claims additional weight and perspective because his perspective is pre-American and indeed in a sense pre-European antique.

Notably, in Farrell's popular works, Nazis come on stage and pursue a Neoplatonized, philosophical kind of Transtheism derived from medieval

misunderstandings of true Christian theology that long ago had been theologically diverted. This results in the perception that the entire West *before the Nazis* had been distracted into the peripheral and tragic pursuit of what Neoplatonism really was, mistaking Neoplatonism for the true theology leading to the living God. In Farrellian context, this implies a devastating critique of current theory and “praxis” in America.<sup>21</sup> For Farrell, Western history is the Hidden History of the replacement of original Christianity with Hellenization through Neoplatonizing. This leads to increasingly alarming pursuits of the real content of Neoplatonism by the theologically derailed and deranged in the West. But what exactly does Farrell take Neoplatonism to be or to have been?

2. What Neoplatonism really was, according to Farrell, and also what the Hermetic corpus and much of ancient Egyptian lore really were, and what alchemy really was, is the half-understood, metaphorical encoding of a “legacy” preserved semi-intact from a “paleoancient” and in part extraterrestrial “donor” civilization. This donor civilization was incredibly advanced in physics and technology and it knew the transcendent God of Abraham in some sense. More than three million years ago the donor civilization fought wars on earth and elsewhere in the solar system. Later alchemical and Hermetic pursuits constituted a desperate encoding of this once rigorous science in a form that primitive human cultures could preserve, hand on, and do things with.<sup>22</sup>

As for Nazis past and current, whether in Germany or from their bases in Argentina, they have been pursuing attempts to retrieve this ancient technology of antigravity and alchemical transmutation of elements for evil purposes. They have been misled like all of Latin Europe by the confusion of Neoplatonism as a metaphor for advanced physics with the totally distinct theology of the true God.<sup>23</sup> While this content of Neoplatonism and other ancient works like the Hermetic corpus constitutes a physics in itself neutral, for the Nazis and their European predecessors, it is dangerous. The pursuit of power in technology intoxicates if one lacks proper religio-moral safeguards.

Thus, in Farrell’s version of the medieval West, the true God was replaced with a philosophical principle of divine simplicity borrowed from Neoplatonism. Neoplatonism itself was a series of metaphors for a rigorous physics based on the notion of a “manipulable” “aetheric” “substrate” “underlying” all phenomenal reality in all possible universes or dimensions.<sup>24</sup> Thus it is for Farrell not all that startling that the Western world has gotten into a series of predicaments.

3. Examination of Farrell’s alternative nonfiction shows that it does not contradict the possibility of a rationally upheld supernaturalist version of ancient catholic orthodoxy. In fact, one can argue that subtle apologetic for the rational possibility of classic Christianity within the framework of advanced and fringe physics is part of the Farrell phenomenon. Cutting-edge and fringe versions of physics, introduced in equation-ridden detail, support for Farrell

the implicit suggestion that Christian supernaturalist claims will eventually prove consistent with advanced consensus science. No preaching intrudes into the popular books, merely hints of this, such as the claim that ancient astronauts knew of the God later revealed in the Bible, or the suggestion that angels and demons can be rationally understood as existing in a plasma or electron cloud state having a temporal start but no terminus.<sup>25</sup> More important is the fact that despite his own fascination with advanced technological and physics hypotheses, or perhaps because of it, Farrell puts his narratives and hypotheses concerning technology into a conventional moralizing framework of evaluation and distancing. This framework is one in which, in typical postwar fashion, the unspeakable evil of the Nazis constitutes the tent pole of a decidedly non-Eliadean moral universe. Farrellian Nazis are evil misusers of intelligence and diligence and ancient lore once donated to “legacy” civilizations.<sup>26</sup> However extreme the fascination with the power of a morally neutral technology, however unknown the other Forces that may lurk at the edge of the universe for Farrell’s as yet unwritten scenarios, nonetheless the reader comes up against reminders that the Farrellian universe is a morally familiar one. His villains are familiar figures of evil, stock items constituting the moral coordinates of a contemporary America that is perhaps multicultural but forever post-Judaeo-Christian, forever marked by cultural assumptions of good versus evil and of the polarity of the Nazi versus the Judaeo-Christian heritage.

4. In view of this – constructing a popular alternative nonfiction series in which conventional morality and obstinate insistence on openness to conventional Christian transcendence are upheld – we are thus entitled to report a not insignificant further finding on the basis of our survey. The writings and Web presence of Farrell constitute an *exception* to the claim of Andreas Grünschloß, according to which ancient astronaut narratives inevitably and by inherent nature tend toward a simple kind of “Euhemeristic” unmasking.<sup>27</sup> Grünschloß, looking at pre-Farrellian ancient astronaut material, argues for seeing there a “disenchantment” in which contemporary fascination with technology and its power *must* take the place of conventional religion even for those such as Zecharia Sitchin. They apparently began their adventures with ancient astronauts hoping that retrieval of event-referentiality for ancient extraordinary or mythic narratives would end by retrieving religiosity.<sup>28</sup> The outcome has proven disappointing and religiously limited, says Grünschloß. While Grünschloß has chronicled the emergence of forms of pallid religiosity and the growth of “post-scientific” and “post-religious” UFO religions or cults, his assessment appears to be that this enterprise is largely incompatible with conventional religiosity given its foregrounding of fascination with technology, and unfulfilling in the long run. At this stage, however, one may call for a bit of revision in this area.<sup>29</sup> While Farrell’s alternative nonfiction occasionally opens the theology portal slightly, his main move has nothing to

do with direct injecting of divine action or a cosmicized soteriology or explicit discussion of conventional theism. Instead Farrell wrenches the narrative of ancient astronauts, fringe physics, pursuit of alchemy, crystalline lattices, UFOs, anti-gravity propulsion, and Tesla-esque weaponry out of the domain of morally ambiguous science fiction and sets it within the most conventional of American moralizing frameworks. So the case of Farrell necessitates some rethinking, as Farrell self-consciously and reflectively mitigates his own fascination with technology and physics by consistently installing around these topics a strong framework of a conventional moral nature, a framework joined to a desire to uphold a place for the conventionally transcendent and theistic.

#### MATTERS FOR ADDITIONAL EXPLORATION

For the Latin West and its secularity, contends Farrell, the *real* hidden narrative is *the narrative of the forgetting of the God of Abraham and the substitution of a seductive but truncated and misleading allegorical encoding of the principles of advanced physics for true theology and true worship*. Farrell argues that already with Augustine the direction is set with a fateful concentration on “an increasingly impersonal unity” in God, which pays no attention to the “Monarchy” of the First Person of the Trinity<sup>30</sup> This direction appears as part of a Western, Gnosticizing, Hellenizing concentration on divine simplicity. “Obsession with divine simplicity” is for Farrell a theological misunderstanding that, rooted in Neoplatonism and the alleged encoding of “paleoancient” technology, leads the West to produce theological thinkers like Tillich, and Sorcerer’s Apprentice technology. It results in a slide toward philosophical monism in the West, a declension away from concentration on a personal, transcendent God known to Abraham and to the Christian Church from Jesus as its founder through the ecumenical patriarchates and creeds. So triumphed the Augustinianized, Neoplatonized, simplicity-in-God-obsessed movement sponsored by the power drive of Charlemagne and his ecclesiastical take-over of the Latin world. This triumph, according to Farrell, was over an original Christian emphasis that survives in the Eastern Churches, which have rejected philosophical Hellenization consistently.<sup>31</sup> Farrell declares, with regard to the difference separating Christendom before Charlemagne from Augustinianized Christendom and faith after Charlemagne: these amount to “two Europes” that “*worship different Gods.*” Farrell explains:

*at its core the Second Europe [imbued with Frankish, Augustinian, Neoplatonized theology] is pagan, for it worships a pagan definition of God ... From the standpoint of the First [ancient and Byzantine] Europe ... the Second is in the continual process of actualizing the unwitting, but nevertheless, great apostasy ... in the system of Augustine. Even its “bold” and “radical” modern “reinterpreters”*

of Christianity – an Elaine Pagels or a Rudolph [sic] Bultmann or a Julius Wellhausen – are less revolutionary than they think, for they are as much products of the Second Hellenization as their mediaeval forefathers.<sup>32</sup>

Farrell’s “hidden history” – his populist-alternative construction – appears transgressive in its devaluation of the Western trajectory toward modernity and its elevation of a “non-Hellenized” version of ancient catholic orthodoxy said to persist in the Byzantine and Russian traditions.<sup>33</sup> So in his theological writings Farrell can construct a transgressive implied ledger in which those on the *wrong* side include Elaine Pagels, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich and most of the Popes from the time of Charlemagne forward, not to mention the inner circle of the Nazi SS – though, to be sure, constructing such a book-keeping balance depends on the active faculties of the alert reader. Modernity, Western theological pseudo-orthodoxy or pseudo-conservatism, the feminist retrieval of Gnosticism, and the Nazis all suffer from the same degenerative pathology for Farrell. Farrell brings forward the specter of a “hidden history,” pointing to secret Nazi development of technology later coming into general use, a development connected with his claim that a post-war Nazi conspiracy lies behind the alleged Roswell UFO episode of 1947.<sup>34</sup>

All this could be studied in greater depth were resources available. What could call loudest for detailed treatment are the following points. First, one could look into the details of how Farrell’s Heinrich Himmler was allegedly captivated by purported mystic schemes for SS retrieval of “paleoancient” technology that could (if I do not misunderstand?) allow reconstituting of extraterrestrial Nordic forebears according to a Germanized worldview framework – a framework that, in some of its features emerges as looking not too distant from a Germanic-veneered version of Paul Tillich, here taking a broad but not unreasonable reading of Farrellian texts and their implications.<sup>35</sup>

Then, second, one could go into Farrell’s use of themes from René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz and Paul LaViolette to put forward a notion of “paleoancient” rigorous physics later encoded for the use of less advanced “legacy civilizations” in Egypt and elsewhere. This rigorous physics is related to an infinitely “manipulable” “aetheric” “substrate” of reality and, for Farrell, not only retrievable in practice potentially, but also capable of being modeled by adapting the mathematical language of topology.<sup>36</sup> Here, though, we are not engaged in exercises in mathematics however extended. Therefore we close on a different note.

## WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

To those making their first acquaintance with the Farrell phenomenon, it may appear so anomalous as to defy comprehension. Recalling the remarkable

details, we may wonder about the entire matter. We, however, find cause to take Farrell as *serious* when he adopts a stance in which he can combine his propounding of increasingly unusual alternative scenarios with his public role as representative of ancient catholic orthodoxy.<sup>37</sup> Thus we ask where the appeal of this Farrellian mix lies for its author and its consumers, especially as the more baroque material here joins with Eastern Orthodox theology and religious practice – which, however unusual it may appear, still constitutes only an imperfect simulacrum of the highly contemporary exotic cults that truly belong in the “cultic milieu” or the New-Age related inner sanctum of alternative spiritualities. Why, then, the Farrell saga with its particular components? On reflection there occur two possibilities, not mutually exclusive, here leaving out of consideration the limited financial reward for the author.

The first is cast in the terms of the Foucauldian academy, where struggle for power and dominance underlies all “contestation”<sup>38</sup> between myths and linguistic codes. Perhaps a sizable part of the non-university population pays limited attention to official narratives, instead taking an instinctive cue as if they had been reading Nietzsche on myth, but myth in its application with a political and socio-cultural valence opposite to that of the contemporary university. So in popular culture one encounters myths that empower a populist populace rather than university professors, theoreticians of community organizing, mainstream journalists, and government officials, implying a worldview and a politics radically at variance with those of today’s establishment power structure – instead, the worldview and politics arising from a non-mainstream, American populist culture. After all, we have been dealing with a writer of Christian profile who (at one place or another) puts Elaine Pagels and Rudolf Bultmann into the same implied ledger column as Heinrich Himmler.<sup>39</sup> That constitutes a populist rejection of quite a bit.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps the first possibility is too hard to envision or accept. If so, consider another, summed up in the words of Alphonse de Lamartine in the Chamber of Deputies: “*Messieurs, la France s’ennuie!*”<sup>41</sup> Perhaps, like France, the general public is bored. For the accepted academic view of the origins of the human species and human societies and the status of cultural rules is so boring, so banal in its implications, that it will perpetually spawn alternate accounts – simply because the official account, with its gradual processes and calculatedly unsurprising celebration of uniformitarianism and expectation of uniformity everywhere in physical processes and rules of the politically and culturally acceptable, offers little in the way of reward for non-elite, non-guild-members who accept it.<sup>42</sup> It is not simply that the political result of official narratives and codes for much of the population seems to boil down to powerlessness repackaged as democracy; further, those narratives and codes reduce the importance of the human spirit and human moral purpose to such a level of amoral triviality and such a state of insignificant loneliness in the immediate neighborhood of earth that all the Carl Sagans and Richard Dawkinses and Stephen Jay Goulds and James Randis and John Rawlses imaginable will never

be able to close out the desperate quest for exciting and satisfying alternatives, quite possibly the wilder the better.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## NOTES

1. This investigation concerns the print and online image of Joseph P. Farrell, making no claim to investigate facts supporting or altering that image. Popular culture aspects remain in view throughout. For Farrell himself, see, for example, Farrell (1987a; 1997; 2001a, 2006c; n.d.). See also Farrell (2001a: 69–78; 2003; 2005a: 13, 74, 81–2; 2005b; 2006a: 192–5, 199; 2006b; 2007a: 252, 325–6, 413, 416f; 2008d: 267, 388; 2009a: 277; 2010a: 245; 1987b; 1989; 2001b); Anonymous (2008); Farrell (2010a, 2010b); Anonymous (n.d.a); Farrell (1996); Anonymous (n.d.b); Farrell (1987b, 2008b, 2008c, 2007b, 2009b, 2009c); Rubinstein (2008: 164, 194 n. 50); Farrell (1997: 104, 318, 319) cites Tillich’s “abyss of everything specific.” For classic *beyond* and *above* passages, see Tillich (1948: 136–49; 1966; 1968: 51; 2000: 186, 188).  
Background: see for example Clayton (2000). My interest in Farrell has been intensified by the fact that Farrell, despite his hypotheses, was not completely dismissed in the one secondary work of repute that took notice of him. This was historian Professor William D. Rubinstein’s eminently skeptical work, *Shadow Pasts: History’s Mysteries*. Rubinstein disposes of all manner of legends and myths. However, with regard to Joseph Farrell’s portrayal of the Great Pyramid as, in Rubinstein’s words, “actually a weapon of some kind, employing Tesla-style scalar impulse waves,” Rubinstein appears stumped, saying simply that Farrell’s three books on the Great Pyramid are full of “innumerable scientific equations and the like, which make his work difficult to assess” (Rubinstein 2008: 164). Likewise, with regard to Farrell’s claim that, as Rubinstein writes, “both the Nazis and the Japanese set off atomic bombs in 1944–45, before the first American atomic bomb,” Rubinstein appears not to know what to conclude, simply saying that Farrell “employs a wealth of intriguing evidence, making it impossible to dismiss” (Rubinstein 2008: 194, n. 50). Perhaps Farrell could open up more than popular culture, or perhaps destroy all criteria of conventional objection altogether. But first to the issue of popular culture here. For a useful treatment of ancient astronaut notions but with no particular mention of Farrell, see also Fritze (2009, esp. 211–14) on Zecharia Sitchin and the problems with his claims. Refer as well as to Anonymous (n.d.j); Hoagland & Bara (2009); Anonymous (n.d.f); and Grünschloß (2003).
2. Anonymous (n.d.g); West *et al.* (1992); Strauss (1988); Codevilla (2010).
3. E.g. Farrell (1997: 207–311, 546, 746, 881).
4. See Noory (n.d.); Farrell (2007b, 2007c, 2010b).
5. Farrell (2006c).
6. Barkun (2003). And see this standard observation in Campbell (1998:122–3), with reference to Campbell (1972: 122): “The term cultic milieu was coined by Colin Campbell to refer to a society’s deviant belief systems and practices and their associated

- collectivities, institutions, individuals, and media of communication. He described it as including ‘the worlds of the occult and the magical, of spiritualism and psychic phenomena, of mysticism and new thought, of alien intelligences and lost civilizations, of faith healing and nature cure.’” See also Partridge (2005). As Gleig (2007: 33) notes, for Partridge, “occulture” signifies “the dynamic array of alternative spiritual ideas, practices and methodologies which is both fertilized and disseminated by popular culture and bears witness to the extraordinary confluence of secularization and sacralization occurring in modern culture. At the heart of this is the ‘subjective turn’: the rejection of duties, obligations, and external authority in favor of the privileging of the self as the locus of meaning and value. Where critics find self-indulgence, inauthenticity, and appropriation, Partridge unearths individual responsibility, sincerity, and creative ‘bricolage’ as he traverses through the increasingly populated landscapes of holistic healing, ecology, paganism, and the more exotic terrains of cyberspirituality, the sacralization of psychedelics, Ufoism, and demonology, arriving finally at the ‘eschatological re-enchantment’ of apocalypticism, millennialism, and millenarianism.”
7. Cf. Campbell (1998: 122–3), with reference to Campbell (1972: 122). For the “cultic milieu,” see Campbell (1998: 122–3), with reference to Campbell (1972: 122).
  8. Partridge (2005: 1.186–7).
  9. Partridge (2005: 1.186–7).
  10. Cf. Worthing (1996).
  11. Farrell (2007b). See also Farrell (2009c; 1997: 64, 104, 138, 207–311, 319, 412, 425–6, 448, 508, 544, 546, 549, 581, 719, 723, 746, 863 nn. 64–102, 866, 872, 881, 939f., 963, 967).
  12. Farrell (1997: 8, 64, 65, 71, 87–90, 106, 112, 117, 124, 136, 193, 201, 216, 278, 302, 309, 384, 389, 399, 418, 426, 430, 454–6, 493, 622, 863 nn. 64–102, 866, 939–46, 958, 963, 967, 975); Cf. Farrell (2007b, 2009c, 2008e).
  13. Farrell (e.g. 1997) rejects some aspects of the reading of Gregory in Johannes Quasten. However, as certain areas of Farrell the historical theologian are unavailable to me (I refuse to join Farrell’s password-protected community), and as I am not myself a scholar of patristics, I decline to give detailed answers concerning Farrell’s arguments for his evident thesis of a persistent immunity of Eastern Orthodoxy to the kind of Hellenization attack held to have deformed Western faith, thought and practice over the last twelve hundred years. Cf. Grillmeier (1975: 423–88, 454–6); Yamauchi (1994); D. H. Williams (1994); Helleman (1994); Rowe (1994); Drobner (2008); Altaner (1961: 519–23); Wilken (1981); Meijering (1985: 141–2). Kippenberg (2002: 11) notes the similarity between Harnack’s attitude and Kant’s. Without mentioning pathology, M. A. Williams (1996/1999: 80) implies the diaGnostic mode. For Hellenization and the success of the East and the failure of the West in defeating it, see Farrell (1997: 8, 71, 87–90, 112, 117, 124, 136, 193, 201, 216, 278, 309, 384, 389, 399, 418, 430, 454–6, 493, 622, 946, 958, 975).
  14. See her contribution to this volume.
  15. See Farrell (1997: 5–6) on ancient catholic orthodoxy and the continuation of it in Byzantium and beyond: “For the First Europe ... then, God is literally *seen* in a particular historical tradition ... It is no mere ‘God-in-general’ Who is the Subject of the Vision of God, it is *this* God, for Ambrose, Christ Incarnate. All of this is to say that the First Europe’s Christianity has stamped on its very essence a ‘quasi-Jewish’ character ...”
  16. Farrell (1996); Anonymous (n.d.c); Anonymous (n.d.d); Farrell (2007b). Note the convergence of Farrell’s conservative theology with the mention of his alternative interests in Farrell (2006b), an online publication of the California Graduate School of Theology, describing Farrell as Professor and D. Phil., illustrating Farrell’s movement between ancient Gnosticism and modern views approaching the characterization of them in Voegelin; note the concluding footnote, implying Farrell’s work in alternate nonfiction can be taken as something like a critical work of scholarship. Also Anonymous (2008); Farrell (1996, 2009c); Anonymous (n.d.b).

17. See Farrell (2009e).
18. Farrell (2007a: 325–7); Ankerberg and Weldon (n.d.); also the citation of John Keel and the interdimensional hypothesis to support a Christian evangelical reading of UFOs as identical with classic demons in Gleghorn (n.d.); Anonymous (n.d.m); Anonymous (n.d.k); Vallée (1991); Eyre (2009). On John Keel, see Jeff Kripal's essay in this volume. See also Cook (2001); Witkowski (2003); Cornwell (2004); Karlsch (2005, 2007).
19. Barkun (2003: 141); cf. Goodrick-Clarke (2002: 165). Readers curious about characterizing the Farrell phenomenon as “populist” and “pro-Jewish” note: prescriptions on US foreign policy are scant. Farrell's material *as of March 1, 2010* falls into the category in Barkun; see Farrell (2007a: 310, 80; 2008a: 413, 12–29). *Here no assessment is made of Farrell's book and other publications from 2010*. For conspiracism in general, see Mintz (1985: 199).
20. Farrell (2010b, 2008c); and see above. Refer also in general to Gray (1995).
21. See above. Farrell (2007b, 2009c). Popular: Farrell (2005b, 2008a, 2008c, 2008d, 2006a, 2009a).
22. Farrell (2005a: 109, 127; 2009a: 48). Farrell (2001b: 91 n. 93): “such a position more or less posits that the Biblical God was more or less the God of the putative ancient Very High Civilization. Making that case would be a complex ... undertaking far beyond the purview of this work.” Farrell (2007a: 301–23) mentions two “creations.” See Farrell (2001a: 289f.); Farrell (2007a: 411–12), where relatives of human beings should be supposed as having existed or existing on other planets. For the apparent view that creatures in the Very High Civilization of paleoantiquity in effect served the God of Abraham: Farrell (2001a: 91 n. 93). Cf. Kardashev (1985); Anonymous (n.d.n). Regarding “Legacy”: Farrell (2007a: 30 n. 11; 2003: 21; 2005a: 13); Barkun (2003: 199f.); LaViolette (1995); Farrell (2009b; 2009a: 47); Farrell (2001a: 6, 61, 66, 67, 69–70, 132, 196, 210; 2005a: 196, 209, 222–6); on dating the ancient cosmic war at three million, two hundred thousand years ago, see Farrell (2007a: 415ff.).
23. Farrell (2008d, 2009a); on Hitler's possible escape: Farrell (2008b); Argentina: Farrell (2009d; 2006a: 169–71; 2005b: 152–4; 2006a: 342; 2009a; 2005a: 226); Goodrick-Clarke (2002: 151); Flowers and Moynihan (2001).
24. LaViolette (1995); Farrell (2009b; 2009a: 47, 80; 2003: 265–9; 2001a: 6, 61, 67, 132, 210).
25. See above. Farrell (2007a: 301–23), two distinct “creations”; Farrell (2001a: 289f., 91 n. 93), possible paleoantique service of the God of Abraham; Farrell (2007a: 411–12), close relatives of human beings existed or existing on other planets. Farrell has not produced a full-scale appropriation of Jacques Vallée or John Keel for purposes of completely vindicating Christian demonology; he knows the writings of the former.
26. Farrell (2005b, 2006a, 2008a, 2009a).
27. Grünschloß (2006: 15–16, 21), citing Marco Frenschkowski.
28. See Grünschloß (2006). On Sitchin: Kilgannon (2010); Lewis (2003: 117, 127). On options in UFO worldviews: Partridge (2005: 2.165–206, 263–70); Anonymous (n.d.f).
29. See Grünschloß (2006: 20).
30. Farrell (1997: 316–17).
31. See Farrell (1997: 8, 71, 87–90, 112, 117, 124, 136, 193, 201, 216, 278, 309, 384, 389, 399, 418, 430, 454–6, 493, 622, 946, 958, 975). Farrell finds in this obsession with a simple power beyond the God in scripture a Transtheism, however without the exact word. On this, Farrell cites Paul Tillich, affirming that for Tillich “the simplicity is ‘the abyss of everything specific.’” See Farrell (1997: 104, 318–19); Tillich (1968: 51). Farrell (1997: 60) moves in a similar direction when speaking of Gnosticism and its “gods-behind-God.” For “God beyond God,” see also McGinn (1981).
32. Farrell (2007b).
33. Farrell (1997: 87, 90–96, 99, 112, 120, 124, 161–9, 193, 201, 216, 232, 309, 339, 384).
34. See Farrell (2010a: 245; cf. 2005b).

35. Farrell (2009a: 259).
36. Farrell (2005a: 209, 222–6; 2009a: 36, 80; 2001a: 6, 66f., 69f., 132, 210); LaViolette (1995); Farrell (2009b; 2009a: 47; 2003: 265–9). Significant for Farrell is twentieth-century occultist/“alternative Egyptologist” René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz (1887–1961), whose work on the Temple at Luxor, Farrell takes to show ancient Egypt possessed an important physics legacy from a preceding, “donor” civilization, wherever headquartered, summed up in a complex concept of a “topological metaphor” for the aether or primary medium that can be rendered in “the mathematical language of harmonics” such that, at the start, “the undifferentiated medium” can be represented as “an undifferentiated hyperset” susceptible of varied subsequent differentiation, with the result that – as later alchemists grasped semi-metaphorically – matter can be “back-engineered,” even as Egyptian magicians knew to apply these principles for “analogical action at a distance.” (Here closely following the language of Farrell.) See Farrell (2005a: 109, 127; 2009a: 36, 48). Rubinstein (2008, 195 n. 64) observes that Schwaller de Lubicz emerges “as the father of unorthodox Egyptology.” “Legacy”: see above.
37. Or, I do not read Farrell’s writings as stimulated by Kierkegaard’s reaction to the possibility of human demonstrations concerning God and divine existence; see Kierkegaard (1985: 34): “What an excellent subject for a comedy of the higher lunacy!”
38. Cf. Harrington (1983). See also Cornel West in Anonymous (n.d.h): “you have to fight in the life of the mind as well as fight in the streets, as well as fight in the courts, as well as fight in congress and the White House. Every site is a sight [sic] of contestation. There are various forms of weaponry ... Because we are on the battlefield, and there are bullets flying, some symbolic, some literal and the life of the mind is a crucial place where the battle goes on.”
39. Farrell (1997: 8, 64, 65, 71, 87–90, 106, 112, 117, 124, 136, 193, 201, 216, 278, 302, 309, 384, 389, 399, 418, 426, 430, 454–6, 493, 622, 863 nn. 64–102, 866, 939–46, 958, 963, 967, 975); Cf. Farrell (2007b, 2009c, 2008e).
40. It might not be far off to see Farrell’s career as reacting to the dechristianization of America. Cf. Gress (1998); Kaufmann (2004).
41. See Whitehouse (2007: 2.80, 171) for variations on this passage, with punctuation adapted.
42. On “basic threads in motivation and fascination” with regard to ancient astronaut “discourse,” refer to the description of “A lay-people’s revolt against the academic establishment,” in Grünschoß (2006: 15): “Following the ubiquitous reverence to Schliemann, the Paleo-SETI endeavors are attempts to participate in academic discourses as emancipated lay individuals, who are frustrated by the compartmentalized specialization and the arrogant self-certainty of established academic discourses and who want to be heard in their new attempt at re-evaluating ‘damned’ data.”

## AFTERWORD

### MYSTICISM, GNOSTICISM, AND ESOTERICISM AS ENTANGLED DISCOURSES

*Kocku von Stuckrad*

The quest for the hidden god in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is as old as the blending of philosophical and religious perspectives in the ancient Mediterranean. This volume on *Histories of the Hidden God* impressively shows that the dialectic of concealment and revelation of divine secrets has been an influential structural characteristic of Western religious tradition. Knowledge about the nature of the divine has always been linked to dangers and risks – but the higher the risk, the higher the prospective reward, one might say. Among the perceived dangers was the transgressive potential of this knowledge that ultimately put the human being in the position of the god. This was at the same time an important promise for the seekers themselves, along with the promise of salvation through *gnôsis*.

It would be a futile attempt to provide a response to the many chapters of this volume. With its broad spectrum of approaches, topics and contents, this volume reveals the productivity and richness of the study of Gnosticism, esotericism, and mysticism in Western culture; however, it also reveals the difficulty of finding a coherent analytical framework for scholarly interpretation. How can we differentiate Gnostic, esoteric, and mystical currents? How do these currents become “-isms”? And what is gained by constructing such “-isms” in scholarly discussion? Do these terms help us explaining cultural dynamics, and if so, what kind of dynamics are we dealing with?

Since its beginnings in the nineteenth century, the academic study of religion has been wrestling with the definition and demarcation of “mysticism.” During the twentieth century, the term “Gnosticism” was linked to that debate in a complicated way. But the discussion got even more messy when from the 1980s onward the study of “(Western) esotericism” entered the scene, addressing many phenomena that had previously been labeled as “mysticism” under the new rubric of “esotericism.” The question arises how we can distinguish the one from the other.

In what follows, I want to reflect on these systematic questions. Rather than responding to the individual chapters of this volume, my remarks are intended to provide a referential framework in which the chapters may find an analytical place. Hence, my comments should not be read as “closing remarks” but as “intermediate reflections” on where we are in our scholarly discussion and how we can open up our perspectives to include as many disciplines and approaches as possible to study these fascinating currents.

## MYSTICISM, RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, AND ESOTERICISM

Let us begin with mysticism. Etymologically, this term is related to Greek *mu/muô* (= [eyes and mouth] to be closed). Via the concepts of *mustês* and *mustêrion* it influenced the descriptions of ancient mystery cults of initiation. Thus, “mystery” is closely linked to secrecy and initiation. Interestingly enough, however, the early Christian apologetics interpreted *mustêrion* as something ineffable instead of something secret or hidden.<sup>1</sup> Middle- and Neoplatonic authors, for their part, linked the term to theurgy and mystery cults. But it was only in the high Middle Ages and the Renaissance that the central element of “mysticism” became to be regarded as experientially uniting with the divine (“*unio mystica*”) and as the dissolution of boundaries between time and space or between subject and object.

The experiential dimension of mysticism has become tantamount for most concepts, as in Annette Wilke’s definition:

Mysticism is an umbrella concept for (1) experiences in which boundaries are dissolved – those of the subject, such as in a vacuum of thought, or in ecstasy; those of the object, so that dualities are removed; those of space, to experience the infinite in the finite; those of time, when the ‘timeless, everlasting now’ replaces successive time. ‘Mysticism’ also denotes (2) the concepts, teachings, and literary genres that contemplate, recount, or describe this immanent transcendence, or transcendent immanence.<sup>2</sup>

That the category “religious experience” has closely been related to the category “mysticism” is a result of influential scholarly writings of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly William James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1901/1902). Mystical experience has repeatedly been described as an individual encounter with the divine by means of dissolution of boundaries, be they physiological, categorial, or emotional. From a scholarly point of view, the major academic problem with mysticism and experience, then, is the fact that the experiences themselves are inaccessible for unambiguous academic scrutiny, particularly if we leave the experimental frameworks of analysis and turn to historical sources. These

sources are texts, images, or material objects that *communicate* and – in the case of texts – *report* mystical experiences. Consequently, research into experience and mysticism has turned to issues of *narrativity* and social construction in order to explain the dynamics of religious experience, thus leaving behind earlier ontological or phenomenological approaches.<sup>3</sup> The power of explanation that these approaches provide by far exceeds the ultimately problematic search for “understanding religious experience.”<sup>4</sup>

The presumed experiential nature of mysticism is but one of the many problems involved with the academic study of mysticism. These problems get even more pressing when we compare concepts of mysticism and esotericism. The emergence of a scholarly field of “Jewish mysticism” – and I will restrict myself to this example – is a complex phenomenon itself, which cannot be detached from intellectual and cultural contexts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe. As a response to certain trends in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and being influenced by both political Zionism and Romantic images of Jewish mystical culture by Martin Buber and others, Gershom Scholem conceptualized “Jewish mysticism” – often even spelled with a capital “M” – as a distinct tradition in Jewish religious history. The scholarly use of terms is ambiguous, to say the least. In his English publications, Scholem often used the term “mysticism” for something that he had earlier described in Hebrew terms that are linked to esotericism, in his understanding an equivalent to “social exclusivity.” Thus, Kabbalah has been described as esoteric and mystical at the same time, without a clear distinction between the terms.

When we look at the next generation of Kabbalah scholars, we still find this ambiguity. When Moshe Idel writes that “Kabbalah is by definition an esoteric body of speculation” and that “esotericism is deeply built into this lore,”<sup>5</sup> it remains unclear how mystical Kabbalah might be differentiated from esoteric Kabbalah; in addition, Idel seems to apply an understanding of esotericism that is based on secrecy, a notion that recent scholarship has tried to overcome.<sup>6</sup> Another example is Joseph Dan who, referring to what he calls the “contingental approach” suggests that it was only in the Renaissance, when Christians absorbed Jewish Kabbalah in their own frameworks of interpretation, that Jewish “mysticism” was transformed into “esotericism” – esotericism thus would be a predominantly Christian enterprise.<sup>7</sup>

Dan’s distinction refers – only superficially, to be sure – to Antoine Faivre’s influential typological definition of esotericism. As is well known, Faivre conceptualizes esotericism as a “form of thought” that consists of four “intrinsic characteristics”: the “doctrine of correspondences,” the idea of “living nature,” the special attention to “mediation and imagination” and the “experience of transmutation.” Faivre himself contributed to the discussion about mysticism and esotericism with the suggestion that the two fields – despite their considerable overlap – should be distinguished according to the relative importance that their representatives give to “intermediary realities,” a

domain seen as a mere stage to pass through and leave behind by the mystics, whereas esotericists tend to dwell in this area.<sup>8</sup>

I cannot go into a detailed discussion of these approaches here. Suffice it to say that conceptualizing esotericism as knowledge that is restricted to an inner circle of people – which seems to be the dominant approach among scholars of “Jewish mysticism” – and thus limiting “esotericism” to some sort of “social exclusivity,” has the benefit of being a simple and easily applicable configuration. However, this approach has two problems: first, it still leaves us with the problem of conceptualizing “mysticism” vis-à-vis the exclusivity of esoteric knowledge, and second, it disregards the methodological progress that the study of Western esotericism has witnessed during the past two decades.

How can we solve these problems? As I have argued elsewhere, it is more fruitful to talk of “esoteric discourse in Western culture” than trying to construct a “tradition” with the term “esotericism.” My theoretical framework operates with the dynamic of a twofold pluralism that characterizes European history of religion – a pluralism of religious options and a pluralism of societal systems and domains that interact with religious systems in manifold ways. Within these pluralisms, discourses of perfect knowledge can be addressed as “esoteric discourse.” The notion of esoteric discourse helps us to reconstruct the genealogies of modern identities in a pluralistic competition of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> I have in the meantime refined the analytical tools of a “discursive study of religion” and developed a discourse-historical approach that is very much informed by discussions in the sociology of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, “discourses” are practices that organize knowledge in a given community; they establish, stabilize, and legitimize systems of meaning and provide collectively shared orders of knowledge in an institutionalized social ensemble. Statements, utterances, and opinions about a specific topic, systematically organized and repeatedly observable, form a discourse. “Historical discourse analysis” explores the development of discourses in changing sociopolitical and historical settings, thus providing means to reconstruct the genealogy of a discourse.

How does this approach help us to come to a distinction between mysticism, esotericism, and Gnosticism? All of these discourses organize knowledge in a significant way; they operate with concepts such as perfect knowledge, ultimate truth, concealment, revelation, or salvation. These categories form a discursive field in which we see both similarities and differences. Despite many discursive links, it is the strategic goal of gaining absolute knowledge that differentiates esotericism from mysticism. While melting with the absolute or the dissolution of boundaries can be a means both for mystics and esotericists, the latter will use this as a means to gain superior knowledge of the world. And in the case of the “Gnostics,” ultimate knowledge is typically linked to discourses of salvation.

## EXAMPLES

The differences between mystical and esoteric discourses become clearer when we discuss them with regard to historical examples. Let us consider the famous opening of the Hermetic *Poimandres*, written in the third century CE:

Once, when thought came to me of the things that are and my thinking soared high and my bodily senses were restrained, like someone heavy with sleep from too much eating or toil of the body, an enormous being completely unbounded in size seemed to appear to me and call my name and say to me: ‘What do you want to hear and see; what do you want to learn and know from your understanding?’ ... I said, ‘I wish to learn about the things that are, to understand their nature and to know god. How much I want to hear!’ I said. Then he said to me: “Keep in mind all that you wish to learn, and I will teach you.” Saying this, he changed his appearance, and in an instant everything was immediately opened to me.<sup>11</sup>

The “mystery” documented in this initiatory narrative is quite different from those narratives known from the ancient mystery cults. A member of an ancient mystery cult is initiated into close contact with his or her divinity, which may change this member’s life but will not necessarily lead to a claim of knowledge vis-à-vis other interpretations. The latter, however, is the main interest of Hermetic texts from late antiquity.

With this feature, Hermetic texts closely resemble ritual access to divine knowledge that is spelled out in theurgic texts of the same period. For instance, in his *De mysteriis*, Iamblichus leaves no doubt about the superior power of the theurgic kind of divine knowledge. A famous passage is the following argument against Aristotelian syllogism as source of perfect understanding:

So then, to the eternal companions of the gods, let there correspond also the innate cognition of them; even as they themselves possess a being of eternal identity, so too let the human soul join itself to them in knowledge on the same terms, not employing conjecture or opinion or some form of syllogistic reasoning, all of which take their start from the plane of temporal reality, to pursue that essence which is beyond all these things, but rather connecting itself to the gods with pure and blameless reasonings, which it has received from all eternity from those same gods. You, however, seem to think that knowledge of divinity is of the same nature as a knowledge of anything else, and that it is by the balancing of contrary propositions that a conclusion is reached, as in dialectical discussions. But the cases are in no way similar. The knowledge of the gods is of a quite different nature, and is far removed from all

antithetical procedure, and does not consist in the assent to some proposition now, nor yet at the moment of one's birth, but from all eternity it coexisted in the soul in complete uniformity.<sup>12</sup>

Neoplatonists regarded demonstration by Aristotelian syllogism proper for the physical realm only, whereas knowledge of the gods required a different form of cognition. Theurgy – the “divine work” – is a *process* in which the religious expert rises to an active understanding of the divine in ritual performance, thus blending his or her soul with the all-encompassing source of life.

My third example pertains to the Hebrew concept of *sôd* (i.e. the secret meaning of a biblical passage) that played a role already in rabbinic hermeneutics but was moved to the center of scrutiny in kabbalistic interpretation. Although the concept of *sôd* has often been linked to mystical dimensions of Jewish hermeneutics,<sup>13</sup> it fits the notion of the esoteric even better. It is an example of secretive discourses, in which ultimate knowledge is revealed by “total hermeneutics.” In many forms of theosophical Kabbalah, the goal of kabbalistic hermeneutics is a superior understanding of the working of the divine and not an experience of unity or the dissolution of boundaries. Rationalism can be a crucial element of esoteric discourse, while mystical discourse is often characterized by dissolution of rational and non-rational spheres. Kabbalah as an esoteric means to unlock the secrets of nature is tantamount to Christian kabbalistic applications from the sixteenth century onward. From this perspective, even the twentieth-century discourse of the “life sciences,” with its almost kabbalistic decipherment of the human genome, can be addressed as esoteric.<sup>14</sup>

The different discursive structure becomes evident, if we compare these examples with other narratives usually referred to as mystical. The experience of a *unio mystica* prominent in mystical narratives from the medieval time through the present can be a goal in itself, rather than a means to higher knowledge. Hence, while the overwhelming experience of divine love by Rûmi or a Christian mystic did not necessarily imply claims of superior knowledge, Abulafia's experiential techniques or Swedenborg's visionary reports led to claims of knowledge raised against other understandings of the divine.

A clear example of mystical discourse that does not lead to esoteric knowledge claims can be found in what Catherine L. Albanese calls “American Nature Religion.”<sup>15</sup> On the interface between Christianity, pantheism, animism, and the early conservation movement, authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold left influential testimonies of experiential ways to the powers of nature. Consider, for instance, John Muir's famous sentences:

When we try to pick out anything by itself we find that it is bound fast by a thousand invisible cords that cannot be broken to everything else in the universe. I fancy I can hear a heart beating in

every crystal, in every grain of sand and see a wise plan in the making and shaping and placing of every one of them. All seems to be dancing to divine music ... The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness.<sup>16</sup>

John Muir's mysticism is a spiritual and emotional way to uniting with the powers of nature, a pantheism that is based on what Bron Taylor calls "wilderness epiphanies."<sup>17</sup> In his *1000-Mile Walk* through the Sierra Nevada Muir points out: "You bathe in these spirit-beams, turning round and round, as if warming at a camp-fire. Presently you lose consciousness of your own separate existence: you blend with the landscape, and become part and parcel of nature."<sup>18</sup> No doubt, this is the description of a *unio mystica*, but it is not linked to claims of superior knowledge.

However, things are not always that easy. There is a large body of presumably mystical writings that involve esoteric conclusions. I already referred to Abulafia and Swedenborg. The twelfth-century mystic and theologian Hildegard of Bingen is another case in point. Consider, for instance, the famous opening passage ("declaration") of her *Scivias*. In Hildegard's report of the vision, she says that "a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and inflamed my whole heart and my whole breast, not like a burning but like a warming flame, as the sun warms anything its rays touch." A celestial voice instructs her to "say and write down what you see and hear ... as you see and hear them on high in the heavenly places in the wonders of God."<sup>19</sup> To be sure, Hildegard sees herself mainly as a visionary prophetess who serves the needs of her human fellow-people. For her, the essence of her visionary teaching is not a knowledge claim of total understanding, but the ultimate experience of divine love and presence.<sup>20</sup> However, Hildegard goes on in her report, saying that she now has the power to understand the meaning of "the psalteries ... the evangelists and the volumes of the Old and New Testament." This passage could just as well be read as an example of "total hermeneutics." Like other passages in her vast oeuvre, it involves features of secretive discourses of revelation of knowledge.

In *Histories of the Hidden God*, the reader will find many more examples that show the breaks and entanglements among mystical, esoteric, and Gnostic discourses. What I offer here is a structural differentiation, developed from the language and practice of the sources and turned into ideal types for scholarly analysis. A mystical discourse can be entangled with an esoteric one, if claims of knowledge are derived from mystical narratives. A Gnostic discourse is entangled with an esoteric one, if notions of salvation are linked to claims of perfect knowledge.

This volume provides an excellent starting-point for further research into the dialectic of concealment and revelation of divine knowledge in Western culture. This academic quest can only be achieved in an interdisciplinary conversation that continuously challenges our categories and assumptions. Our

academic quest is not about revealing the truth about our past or telling the one true and complete history of Western culture. No, it is about providing new and more interesting histories of the past, histories that give answers to the pressing questions of the present.

## NOTES

1. This is why Stroumsa (1996) argues that by doing so they suppressed esoteric dimensions in orthodox Christianity.
2. Wilke (2006: 1279).
3. As an almost classical social constructivist approach see Katz (1978).
4. Such as proposed by Smart (1978).
5. Idel (1988: 253).
6. On the role of secrecy in esoteric discourse see von Stuckrad (2010b).
7. Dan (1999).
8. Faivre (1996: 2.28).
9. The details of this discussion can be found in von Stuckrad (2010a: 3–64).
10. See von Stuckrad (2013).
11. *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.1–4 (Copenhaver 1992: 1).
12. Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 1.3 (Clarke *et al.* 2004: 15).
13. See the extensive overview in Wewers (1975).
14. See von Stuckrad (2008).
15. Albanese (1990).
16. Muir (1954: 312).
17. See Taylor (1995: 101; 2010: 61–9).
18. Muir (1915–24: 1.416).
19. Scivias, declaration (Hart & Bishop 1990: 59–61).
20. Hildegard “eschewed Christian Gnosticism and the idealist contortions of Western philosophy” (Schipperges 1997: 39).

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