

Chapter 3

Gnostic Myth 1: Fallen Wisdom

1. Hypostases

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Sophia-Wisdom in the Tanakh

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

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

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

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

3. Sophia's Choice

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

According to heresiological sources, the Sophia myth that takes such prominent place in Valentinian Gnosis equally occurs in Barbelo-Gnosis⁹ and the system of the Ophites of Irenaeus.¹⁰ In addition, an independent variant is furnished by the Book of Baruch of Justin the Gnostic.¹¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An independent version of the myth of the deadly consequences of a female character's distress is contained in the summary that Hippolytus gives of the Book of Baruch of Justin the Gnostic.²¹ Three principles, two male and one female, are here at the origin of everything: Good (*agathos*), who is omniscient; Elohim, the Father-Demiurge, invisible and unknown, yet not omniscient; and the duplicitous Eden-Israel, endowed with two reasons and two bodies, "woman to the hips and snake below."²² Elohim and Eden, drawn to each other by mutual desire, have intercourse and generate two Dodecads of angels, one belonging to the Father and one to the Mother. The angels are the Trees of Paradise: the Tree of Life is Baruch, the third angel of the Father, and the Tree of Knowledge is the third angel of the Mother, Naas the Snake (Hebr. *naḥash*). The episode of the creation of the primordial human couple, whose body is made by the paternal angels around the soul of Eden and the spirit of Elohim, precedes in Hippolytus's summary²³ the creation of the world.²⁴ Thus human beings are the image of Elohim and Eden, and their bodies are not evil.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Sophia the Holy

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

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

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

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

5. Sophia and Logos

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

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

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

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

6. The Quest for Origins

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

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

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

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

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

7. The Creative Hermeneutics of Sophia's Myth

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Why the Fall?

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

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

She is called Whore,¹⁰⁰ which in testimonies of that period (and much later) indicates an excess of eroticism, not rapid profits from quick sex.¹⁰¹ Sophia and Logos are said to be "young,"¹⁰² that is, inexperienced and, above all, curious. Two testimonies say that she has no partner.¹⁰³ Anyway, she *thinks* without a partner,¹⁰⁴ she wishes to *create* without him,¹⁰⁵ or without the Father's command;¹⁰⁶ in any case she *acts* without consulting the Pleroma.¹⁰⁷ In the Valentinian versions she *ascends* toward the Father in the grip of erotic passion and foolhardiness.¹⁰⁸ In Irenaeus's version, this is the cause of her fall; in Hippolytus's, it is her imitating the Father in so far as she wants to generate without a partner. More often she *looks down*, which she is not supposed to do,¹⁰⁹ but she does anyway because of inexperience¹¹⁰ or because of the machinations of an evil character who rapes her (deprives her of her Light).¹¹¹ Individual motivations may be combined in a sequence, as in the case of Irenaeus's Barbelo-gnostics, where Sophia has no partner, she looks down, *and* this action is illegal within the constituted order of the Pleroma. Pistis-Sophia is set up by the Triple Power Authades, the Arrogant, who makes her look down with the aid of a lure. To this point she is innocent; she becomes guilty as soon as she descends to see the lure without her partner's consent.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

1. H. S. Wiesner, introduction, "Hypostasierung," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*; the definition continues:

Each of these usages precedes the term *hypostasis* and even philosophy itself, nor do these modern meanings exactly correspond to the understanding of any ancient author. Although some usages create divinities and others seem rather to break them down, the processes are not necessarily opposite but sometimes analogous. Personified divinities once hypostasized out of abstract forces (e.g., in the earliest Roman and Sumerian religions), might later be rationalized out of their mythological settings and into another sort of hypostases (e.g., the Homeric and Hesiodic gods in the hands of Plotinus [5.1.7 28-45; 3.5.2]). And these philosophical hypostases may in turn be embodied as was, for example, the immanent Logos: Jesus Christ or the eternally pre-existent Qur'an.

2. On the Platonic origin of this opposition, see esp. the noteworthy book by Hans Joachim Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin* (Schippers: Amsterdam, 1964), 223-64. Krämer deals with Gnosis as a phenomenon belonging to the history of Platonism, in which one can trace "abgesunkenes philosophisches Lehrgut altakademischer Herkunft in charakteristischer Gestaltverfremdung" (253). His thesis is sound. Unfortunately most of the documentation on Gnosticism used by Krämer comes from the German *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*.
3. Iren. I.11.1; cf. François M.-M. Sagnard, *La Gnose valentinienne et le témoignage de Saint Irénée* (Vrin: Paris, 1947), 355-57.

4. Prov. 8:29f; trans. Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East* (Ohlsson: Lund, Sweden, 1947), 99.
5. *Hom.* 16:11f; Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, 123.
6. Prov. 3:18; Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, 104f.
7. Sir. 24:4–6; trans. Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, 108.
8. *Iren.* L30.3–4; see above, chap. 2.
9. *Iren.* L29.4.
10. *Iren.* L30.3–4.
11. *Hipp.* V.26.19–21.
12. See Søren Giversen, ed. and trans., *Apocryphon Johannis* (Prostant Apud Munksgard: Copenhagen, 1963), 284.
13. See Anne Pasquier, "Prouneikos: A Colorful Expression to Designate Wisdom in Gnostic Texts," in Karen L. King, ed., *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1988), 47–66, followed by Marvin W. Meyer's response.
14. See my *Gnosticismo e pensiero moderno: Hans Jonas* (L'Erma di Bretschneider: Rome, 1985).
15. See esp. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary* (Kegan Paul: London, 1937).
16. For example, Moshe Idel clearly demonstrated, against the theory of his predecessor Gershom Scholem, that Lurian Kabbalah is not the response to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492; it is along *systemic*, not along *circumstantial*, historical lines that Lurian Kabbalah is a transformation of precedent doctrines. See Micha Odenheimer, "Kabbalah as Experience: Moshe Idel's Critique of Gershom Scholem," *Jewish Action*, Summer 5750/1990, 27–30. Idel's objections to Scholem's theory have been recently reformulated in his article "Jewish Reactions to the Expulsion from Spain," in *The Expulsion from Spain and the Holocaust: The Jewish Community's Response* (Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture: New York, 1990), 18–25.
17. *Iren.* L30.1–2.
18. *Iren.* L30.3–9.
19. *Iren.* L30.6–7; 9–10.
20. *Iren.* L30.12–13.
21. *Hipp.* V.24.2–27.5.
22. *Hipp.* V.25.1.
23. *Hipp.* V.25.7–9.
24. *Hipp.* V.25.11–13.
25. *Hipp.* V.25.13.
26. *Hipp.* V.25.14.
27. *Hipp.* V.25.23.
28. *Hipp.* V.25.28.
29. *Iren.* L1.1–8.4 = *Epiph.* 31; *Hipp.* V.29–36; and Clement of Alexandria's *Excerpts from Theodotus*.
30. *Iren.* L2.2.
31. *Iren.* L2.3.
32. *Iren.* L2.4.
33. *Iren.* L4.1.
34. *Iren.* L4.2; see 5.4.
35. *Hipp.* VI.30.6ff.
36. *Hipp.* VI.30.8.
37. *Hipp.* VI.31.2.
38. *Hipp.* VI.31.6.
39. G. C. Stead, "The Valentinian Myth of Sophia," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 20 (1969), 75–104.

40. Stead, "The Valentinian Myth," 93.
41. AJ II.57.25-58.7.
42. AJ II.61.14.
43. PS 29, p. 25 S.-T.
44. PS 31, p. 28 S.-T.
45. NH II 94.9.5-7.
46. II 100.8.
47. VII.2; 50.28.
48. VI.2; 13.19.
49. VII.50.26.
50. VII.52.34.
51. 1 ApJc V.24.29.
52. VIII.2; 135.12f.
53. BG p. 222-23 Till.
54. BG 118.15-16 p. 176-77 Till.
55. BG p. 238 Till.
56. See my article "Feminine versus Masculine: The Sophia Myth and the Origins of Feminism," in H. G. Kippenberg, ed., *Struggles of Gods* (Mouton-De Gruyter: Berlin-New York, 1984), 65-98.
57. See Rose Horman Arthur, *Feminine Motifs in Eight Nag Hammadi Documents* (University Microfilms International: Ann Arbor, MI, 1979). For a judicious assessment of SJ and Eug. see Pheme Perkins, "Sophia as Goddess in the NH Codices," in King, ed., *Images of the Feminine*, 96-112.
58. Deirdre J. Good, *Reconstructing the Tradition of Sophia in Gnostic Literature* (Scholars Press: Atlanta, GA, 1987).
59. P XIII.45.
60. VII.21. The phallic character of the Sethian Demiurge has been documented by Giovanni Casadio, "Antropologia gnostica e antropologia orfica nella notizia di Ipolito sui sethiani," in F. Vattioni, *Sangue e antropologia nella teologia* (Rome, 1989), 1295-1350; see also my *Out of This World: A History of Otherworldly Journeys and Out-of-Body Experiences, from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Shambhala: Boston, 1991), chap. 8.
61. VII.35.
62. I.60.
63. BG 27,11-13 p. 94 Till.
64. See my "Feminine," 81-82.
65. Origen, *In Iohann.* II.14.21. See Elaine H. Pagels's *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon's Commentary on John* (Abingdon Press: Nashville and New York, 1973), intended in the first instance to reject Hans Jonas's thesis that Origen had been influenced by Gnosticism.
66. See U. Bianchi and H. Crouzel, eds., *Arché e Telos: L'Antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa* (Vita e Pensiero: Milan, 1981), 47-48.
67. L75.35.
68. See my "Feminine," 82-83.
69. L76.3-4.
70. L77.6; emphasis mine.
71. EvPh II.75.3; emphasis mine.
72. L77.18ff.
73. J. Zandee, "Die Person der Sophia in der Vierten Schrift des Codex Jung," in U. Bianchi, ed., *The Origins of Gnosticism* (Brill: Leiden, 1967), 205-14.
74. Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (FRLANT 10) (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1907), 26.
75. Bousset, *Hauptprobleme*, 43.

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

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

Chapter 4

Gnostic Myth 2: The Ignorant Demiurge

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

—HAROLD BLOOM

1. His Appearance, His Aspect, His Name

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

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

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

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

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

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

HA⁸ asserts that Samael, "God of the Blind"—from the Aramaic *samâ'*, "blind"⁹—is blind (*b'alle*), ignorant and arrogant. Elsewhere this hylic abortion created from the shadow cast by Pistis-Sophia-Incorruptibility (*t'm^antattako*) is an androgynous animal, arrogant and lion-shaped.¹⁰

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

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

The name of the world creator is, in most cases, Ialdabaoth. Certain gnostics, such as the Archontics and another anonymous group mentioned by Epiphanius,¹⁸ prefer to call him Sabaoth, who is in some Coptic texts the repenting counterpart of the Demiurge (see below). Hippolytus's Perates¹⁹ call him "assassin," according to John 8:44. In PS, the Great Archon, tyrant of all cosmic tyrants, is called Adamas.²⁰ But another heavenly Ruler, third among the Triple Powers (*tridynamoi*), bears the name Authades, the Arrogant,²¹ which is elsewhere the epithet of the Demiurge Ialdabaoth.²² Authades emanates a lion-headed force in order to catch Pistis-Sophia's spiritual energy.²³ After having swallowed her *Light-dynamis*, an ambiguous metaphor for rape, the lion-headed monster is able to duplicate himself, producing Ialdabaoth, another demon made of Fire and Darkness.²⁴

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

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

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

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

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

2. The Boastfulness of the Archon

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

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

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

3. Creation of the Heavenly Powers

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

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

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

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

A similar misunderstanding results in the identification of the archontic Hebdomad with the days of the planetary week, whereas it is beyond any doubt—as Wilhelm Bousset already knew⁴⁰—that the Archons stand for the seven planets, listed in order of their distances from the earth, according to the order called Chaldaean.⁴¹ The mad Ialdabaoth (Saklas) transfers part of his energy onto the seven heavenly Rulers but does not bestow upon them any of the pure Light he had

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. The Creation of Man

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

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

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

Here the First Man shows up, according to a duplication procedure frequently employed in this text, as well as in the related HA. Since Pistis-Sophia is a female entity, already duplicated twice in Pistis and her image Sophia⁵⁷ and then in Sophia and her daughter Zoe⁵⁸ she will intervene as a feminine character in the story of the creation of man. A drop of Light she puts on the Waters gives birth to Eve of Light, a.k.a. the Instructor and Hermaphrodite.⁵⁹

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

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

Incorruptibility herself.⁶³ Initially the man is unable to stand, but Spirit comes from the Adamantine Earth (*p^akah* *nadamantine*) and settles in him.⁶⁴

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. The Counterfeit Spirit

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

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

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

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

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

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

The *antimimon pneuma* shows up first in chapters 111–15 of the IInd Book of *Pistis Sophia*. It derives from the vices of the cosmic Archons, and

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

The myth of the fabrication of the soul together with the counterfeit spirit is reported in detail in chapters 131 and following of that same text,⁸⁶ which are an impressive parody of Plato's *Timaeus* (41d ff). The five Archons of astral Fate (*heimarmenē*) send into the world the preexistent souls or create new souls. In the first case they give the descending soul drink from the seed (*sperma*) of evil (*kakia*) and from the covetousness (*epithymiai*) contained in the Cup of Forgetfulness. From other sources (which I discuss elsewhere) it appears that in some cases the Cup of Forgetfulness could simply be identified with the constellation of the Krater or Chalice. This deadly beverage becomes a sort of body (*sōma*) in which the soul (*psychē*) is wrapped and which is akin to the soul; this is why it is called counterfeit spirit (*antimimon pneuma*) and is like a vesture⁸⁷ for the soul.

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Antiastrological Polemics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. The Anthropic Principle

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. History of Humankind

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first narrative of HA¹³³ oscillates between the AJ and the SST variants. After having installed him in Paradise, the Archons enjoin Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, but the Father on High wants him to taste it.¹³⁴ In order to deprive him of his Spirit, which had already been sent to him from the Adamantine Earth, the Archons put him to sleep, extract from him the Spirit, and fabricate a Spiritual Woman

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

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

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

The Sethians¹⁴³ worship Seth, source of all virtues, a.k.a. Christ and Jesus. The world was created by the angels, who got into a fight with one another because of their favoring either Abel or Cain as progenitor of the human race, on which they could reach no agreement. The Mother, who is superior to the angels, predetermined Seth's birth by placing in him a spark of transcendent Power with the purpose of setting humanity up against the tyranny of the heavenly Archons and making an end to it. Meanwhile the non-Sethians proliferate, increasing iniquity. To eliminate them the Mother sends a deluge, intended to spare only Seth's descendants. Unfortunately, the angels sneak their own man Ham into the ark, and Ham's posterity would perpetuate disorder on the earth. To put an end to it, Seth himself reverts to the world, through immaculate conception, as Jesus Christ. Epiphanius's note seems to be an improved version of the information given by Pseudo-Tertullian on the *Sethoites*¹⁴⁴ and is largely dependent on it.¹⁴⁵

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

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

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

9. The Repentant Demiurge

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

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

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

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

The first narrative of HA¹⁵⁵ summarily states that Pistis-Sophia chases away Ialdabaoth to the Chaos and the Abyss and installs in his place his son, who is shaped according to the structure of the transcendent aeons. The second narrative is less parsimonious:¹⁵⁶ A fiery angel derived from Zoe's breath flings Ialdabaoth into Tartaros. Sabaoth, Ialdabaoth's firstborn, acknowledges the strength of the angel and repents sincerely. He is installed by Sophia and Zoe in the seventh heaven. Sabaoth causes a magnificent chariot of four-faced cherubim to be built, surrounded by angelic servants. At his right is Zoe and at his left the Angel of Wrath (*piangelos ente torgē*), at his right is Life (*zoē*), at his left Injustice (*adikia*). As F. T. Fallon pointed out, Sabaoth is here the Old Testament god, once again a positive power and saved from the contempt that befits Ialdabaoth.¹⁵⁷

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Valentinians of Hippolytus¹⁷² show less concern with the Demiurge's dignity and define him as Sophia's "abortion" (*ektrōma*),¹⁷³ "stupid and mad,"¹⁷⁴ yet place this fiery intermediary (like the Stoic "demiurgic fire")¹⁷⁵ in the middle between the pneumatic Pleroma and the Opponent Beelzebul.¹⁷⁶ Converted by Sophia, his ignorance comes to an end.¹⁷⁷ The same happy ending takes place according to Hippolytus's Basilideans,¹⁷⁸ for whom the Demiurge is duplicated into a Great Archon of the Ogdoad, perfect in comparison with the world but ignorant of the hypercosmic region (*hyperkosmia*)¹⁷⁹ hidden beyond the firmament (*stereōma*), and into an Archon of the Hebdomad, who is the god of the Torah.¹⁸⁰ Both of them have sons who are superior to their fathers in the same way as the soul is superior to the body.¹⁸¹ The Great Archon rules over the planetary heavens, the god of the Jews over the sublunar zone.¹⁸² Neither of them is evil. Their sons will have no difficulty in convincing them of the existence of the Pleroma, after which both of them will sincerely repent and deplore their ignorance.¹⁸³ R. M. Grant thinks that this is a late evolution of the Basilidean doctrine under heavy Valentinian influence. Irenaeus's notice,¹⁸⁴ by contrast, may go back to Basilides himself.¹⁸⁵ It does not say much: The visible sky is only the 365th from above, and its angels have divided all lands and nations among themselves. Their Archon (*princeps*) is the god of the Jews, who tried to subjugate the other Archons but met with their strong opposition.

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

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

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

10. Research on the Origin of the Ignorant Demiurge

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

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

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

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

11. Epitome of the Demiurge Myth

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

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

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

12. The Principle of "Inverse Exegesis"

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

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

13. Second God, Second Goddess

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

Ideas, instead of being brought about by them. Consequently the qualification of *ontos on* (that which really is), which Plato²¹⁵ bestows on the Ideas, is used by Philo to characterize God.²¹⁶ God is Being (*on*), Intellect (*nous*), Father (*patēr*), Planter (*phytourgos*), Parent (*gennētēs*), Cause (*aitios*), Spring (*pēgē*), Light (*phōs*), Lightgiver (*phōsphoros*), Intelligible Sun, Lord of the Powers (*kyrios tōn dynamēōn*), King of Glory, among others. When God wished to create the world, he first created the *kosmos noētos*, or "Intelligible World." This expression, first coined by Philo himself, designates the Platonic world of imperishable, incorporeal, and paradigmatic Ideas, according to which the world itself was created and hence older (*presbyteros*) than the world, which is in turn younger (*neōteros*) than it. As H. A. Wolfson notes, the world is thought (*noēton*) by God, it is the product of his thinking (*noēsis*), which is possible only for someone who possesses a *nous*, or intellect, to think. Philo calls the Intellect of God Logos, in accordance with Plato²¹⁷ and in reference to the Septuagint, which speaks of Logos the Word (*ha-dabar*) of God. However, Philo is not consistent in this terminology and would end up calling Logos the Intelligible World—that is, the ideal prototype of the world, which was created outside God's own Mind.

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

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

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

The plural *logoi* is used by Philo to designate the individual Platonic Ideas, also called *ideai*, *archetypoi ideai*, *typoi*, *metra*, *sphragides*, *logoi spermatikoi*, *spermata kai rhizai dynameis*, *asōmatoī dynameis*, *doryphoroi dynameis*, *angeloi*, *charites*. All of these are sometimes identified with one another and at other times are kept apart. Even if Ideas are innumerable, in one case they are said to be subsumed under six Powers,²²⁰ corresponding to the six Cities of refuge: 1. *theios logos*; 2. *hē poiētikē dynamis*; 3. *hē basilikē*; 4. *hē hileōs*; 5. *hē nomothetikē*; 6. *ho kosmos noētos*. Powers 2 and 4 are said to depend on God's chief attribute of Goodness; Powers 3 and 5 depend on the chief attribute of Justice. These two attributes are equally hypostatized. Whereas God himself is called *ho theos*, Goodness receives the name of *theos*, as well as *hē poiētikē*, *agathotēs*, *charistikē*, *euergetis*. Justice in turn is called Lord (*kyrios*), *hē basilikē*, *archē*, *exousia*, *hē nomothetikē*, *hē kolastikē*. Goodness and Justice are the two archangels of God, identified with the two cherubim who keep the gates of Paradise²²¹ and with the two angels who entered Sodom. Being God's attributes, the two Powers do not exist aside from him.²²²

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14. Anti-Judaism or Generative Platonism?

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

cases—concerning Cain, the Snake, and others—will be analyzed below. Another example could be drawn from the *Paraphrase of Shem*,²²⁴ where the Sodomites appear to be righteous members of the “immovable race” of Seth and therefore the objects of envy and vengeance coming from the Demiurge. Applications of the rule of inverse exegesis extend beyond the Old Testament. The Cainites of Irenaeus²²⁵ make Cain and Judas into the only true representatives of the Pleroma, those who plant the seed of gnostic revolution into a world dominated by the laws of the evil Demiurge. Judas, according to an interpretation in which Jorge Luis Borges would have delighted, “was the only one among the apostles to know the truth and fulfill the mystery of treason”; no wonder that a gospel, unfortunately no longer extant, circulated in his name.²²⁶

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

15. "Creative Misprision" and the Old Testament

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

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

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

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

Cain, for example, is the representative of the good Pleroma according to the Cainites,²⁴⁰ but he is held as an evil character by the Ophites.²⁴¹ Even more instructive is the evaluation of the Snake. Paradoxically those groups whose names refer to the Snake, such as the Ophites or the Naassenes, take him to be evil: he is the Angel of Iniquity for the Naassenes,²⁴² and the Devil for the Ophites, although Sophia uses him to pass her message to the first human pair. In TT²⁴³ he is likewise the Devil, and he is Moluchtas, the evil ophidian Wind in PSem.²⁴⁴

Yet other gnostics believe that the Snake is Sophia herself,²⁴⁵ whereas Epiphanius's gnostics in their no longer extant *Gospel of Eve* believe that the Snake imparted knowledge to first woman,²⁴⁶ and HA²⁴⁷ and SST²⁴⁸ assert that the Snake is the Instructor, the Spiritual Woman, Eve of Light, a double of Sophia. For the Perates the Snake is the Savior,²⁴⁹ and for the Sethians both the Demiurge and Logos are serpentine.²⁵⁰

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

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

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

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

16. Docetistic Variations

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

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

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

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

Docetists are sometimes all imagined to be what only a few of them were actually and almost never unconditionally: *phantasiasts*—believing that Jesus Christ's body was a sheer *phantasma*, a ghost with no physical substance. The irony here is that the group called Docetists by Hippolytus²⁵³ held that the Savior had a physical body, which he abandoned on the cross. (Mainstream Christianity, as we already saw, beat back the frontier of absurdity—or at least ignored it—by asserting that the Logos took his human body with him to heaven.) That it was impossible for a body made of matter to ascend to heaven, let alone beyond the sublunar sphere, was a firm tenet of Aristotelian and Stoic science. Gnostics did not dare to contradict it, and if Christians did, this may not go to their credit. Given the philosophical or scientific impossibility of bodies meeting the Lord, and the separability of any soul from any body, it should surprise no one that gnostics would so often maintain that only the physical (*sarkinon*) part of Jesus Christ could be crucified, whereas the divine Logos was not.²⁵⁴ For anyone with some philosophical or medical knowledge, it was obvious that the Savior could only be made of fiery spirit (*pneuma noeron*), and whether he had a physical body or not, he would anyway have an "incorporeal body" (*sōma natsōma*), which someone who was endowed with a "spiritual eye," like the apostle Peter, could see smiling next to the cross.²⁵⁵ Cerinthus equally asserted that the impassible Christ withdrew from the man Jesus, who died on the cross.²⁵⁶ The "laughing Savior" is seen more than once next to the cross, mocking the persecutors of the person who took his place on the cross, who could be, for example, Simon of Cyrene.²⁵⁷ Obviously there is nothing particularly "gnostic" about these beliefs, as there is nothing "gnostic" about *phantasiasm*, already attributed to Saturninus, who held the

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

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

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

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

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

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

17. The Logic of Gnostic Narrative

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

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

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

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

Upon rigorous analysis, it appears that the sensational trademark of Gnosticism, namely, gnostic myth, is but an accessory and a figment without solidity or independence, meant to enable or convey hard philosophy and entirely determined by philosophical premises and by the necessity of making sense of the many contradictions of a precedent mythical narrative, the Book of Genesis. Again it remains a mystery why our Platonists were so keen on commenting on the Book of Genesis instead of anything else, unless they were Jewish Platonists not bound to Jewish tradition, in which case we should look for them in Jewish-Christian circles from the turn of the 1st century C.E. or perhaps among Christians from the beginning of the 11nd. The part played by Simon Magus in all this cannot be assessed. His doctrine featuring a female Thought of God might have worked as further catalyst toward the gnostic preference for Sophia instead of Logos. As to where Gnosticism might have begun, it is an unverifiable though not unlikely speculation to recall that the Christians of Alexandria, showing strong inclinations toward Platonism, could certainly benefit from the challenging presence of a massive and intellectually significant Jewish community. In such a setting, a Christian Platonist is compelled to measure himself or herself by the Jewish Scriptures and is likely to know more about them than other Christians elsewhere. Both Basilides and Valentinus were Alexandrians; and so were the Christian Gnostic Clement and the great Platonist Origen a century later, who was still calling the Logos Sophia, like Philo of Alexandria two centuries before. As for the existence of a "vulgar Gnosis," let us again leave it to vulgar scholarship to prove or disprove it. All Gnosis that meets the eye, even when seriously deformed by vulgar heresiologists or, perhaps even worse, by Egyptian translators, is highly intellectual.

18. Gnostic "Dualism"?

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

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

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

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

We have already shown that the intention of this interpretation was to avoid dualism by explaining the origin of all the inexplicable principles in Genesis 1 as results of the same breach in the divine that caused the existence of the Demiurge, whose partner is Ignorance. Gnostics took Genesis 1 to be an expression of dualism and acted against it by establishing that Matter is not a principle. Only the Ophites, to my knowledge, were not troubled by the existence of the Waters in Gen. 1:2.²⁶⁷

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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