



## The Present State of Gnostic Studies

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## THE PRESENT STATE OF GNOSTIC STUDIES

BY

R. VAN DEN BROEK

The study of Gnosticism flourishes like never before and is rapidly becoming a specialism apart on the borderland of Judaism, early Christianity, and the religions and philosophies of the Roman world. This increase of gnostic studies received its impetus from the discovery of the Coptic Gnostic Library of Nag Hammadi (1945), which presented the scholarly world with fifty-two ancient works, not all of them originally gnostic, of which fourty were previously completely unknown.

By now, all thirteen Nag Hammadi Codices have been published in a facsimile edition (Brill, Leiden 1972-1979) and their contents have been made accessible by a complete English translation of the Coptic texts (*The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. by J. M. Robinson, Brill, Leiden 1977). Most of the texts have been edited in more or less critical editions and translated into various languages. Two great international projects aim to publish critical editions of all the Nag Hammadi texts: *The Coptic Gnostic Library*, edited with English translations, introductions and notes, published under the auspices of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, Claremont, USA (in the series *Nag Hammadi Studies* [NHS], Brill, Leiden) and the *Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi* (Section "Textes"), edited with French translations, introductions and commentaries, published under the auspices of the Laboratoire d'histoire religieuse de l'Université Laval, Quebec, Canada (Les presses de l'Université Laval—Editions Peeters, Louvain, Belgium).

Apart from occasional fragments preserved in anti-gnostic ecclesiastical writers, only a few original gnostic works had been known before the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library: the Berlin Coptic papyrus 8502, containing the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Sophia Jesu Christi*, of which the last two were also found at Nag Hammadi (ed. by W. C. Till [1955], 2nd rev. ed. by H.-M. Schenke, Berlin 1972), and two long-known Coptic manuscripts, the

Codex Askewianus, containing the *Pistis Sophia* (ed. by C. Schmidt, Copenhagen 1925) and the Codex Brucianus, containing the *Books of Jeû* and an untitled gnostic treatise (ed. by C. Schmidt, Leipzig 1892, and by Charl. A. Baynes, Cambridge 1933). A German translation of these works was given by C. Schmidt, Leipzig 1905, 2nd. and 3rd. ed. by W. C. Till (Berlin 1954 and 1959), 4th. ed. (with a new Preface) by H.-M. Schenke (Berlin 1981). After the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library the scholarly interest in these obscure texts was reanimated: their Coptic text as established by C. Schmidt was recently reprinted, together with a new English translation by Violet MacDermot (NHS 9 and 13, Leiden 1978).

In the end, all these new and old texts will provide a new and, it is to be hoped, solid base for the study of the gnostic movement in the ancient world. But before we are that far much work has to be done on the texts themselves. Several important texts have only been badly edited or have not yet been edited at all. Not every editor seems to know that editing a manuscript is something quite different from editing and establishing a text. Most of these texts are extremely difficult to interpret and, therefore, all translations are bound to be provisional until more is known about the doctrinal and mythological peculiarities and presuppositions of the separate texts. A complicating factor is that these works have survived in Coptic, and even in various dialects of that language, but most probably without exception were translated from the Greek. The philological aid of Coptologists is indispensable for the study of these texts. But a good knowledge of Coptic alone does not suffice for a correct translation, as can be seen, for instance, from the German translation which accompanies the editio princeps of the *Tractatus Tripartitus* (NHC I, 5; Bern 1973 and 1975). For the elucidation of the new texts joint efforts of Coptologists, classicists, historians of the religions and philosophies of the hellenistic and Roman period, and Judaistic, patristic and New Testament scholars will be indispensable.

Under these circumstances, studies on textual problems and questions of interpretation and, not least, editions of and commentaries on separate texts are more likely to be written than comprehensive surveys of the gnostic movement in general (an outstanding exception is K. Rudolph, *Die Gnosis. Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion*, Göttingen 1978, 1980<sup>2</sup>; less convincing C. Colpe, art. 'Gnosis II (Gnostizismus)', *RAC* 11, 1981, 537-659). The enormous literature on the Nag Hammadi Codices and Gnosticism is aptly listed in D. M.

Scholer, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1948-1969* (NHS 1), Leiden 1971 (continued in *Novum Testamentum* 13 (1971)-17 (1975) and 19 (1977)-23 (1981)).

The world-wide scholarly interest in Gnosticism provoked by the Nag Hammadi Library was recently evidenced by four large collections of gnostic studies: the proceedings of the colloquia on Gnosticism at Yale and Quebec, both held in 1978 and published in 1981, and the volumes composed in honour of Hans Jonas (1978) and Gilles Quispel (1981). There appeared also two minor collections of gnostic studies, mainly consisting of papers presented at a colloquium at Halle, GDR (1976; published in 1979) and at the Eighth International Conference on Patristic Studies at Oxford (1979; published in 1981). These works give a good impression of the present state of gnostic studies. Of course, the many questions of detail raised in the 120 studies contained in these volumes cannot be dealt with in a review article. But their appearance offers a good opportunity to make some comments on the topical issues in the study of Gnosticism which may be of some interest for patristic scholars in general. First I give more particulars of these works and their contents.

YALE I: *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*. Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978, Volume One: *The School of Valentinus*, edited by Bentley Layton (Studies in the History of Religions, XLI) Leiden 1980, XXIV and 454 pp. Price: Dutch Flor. 128,—. Contents: H. Chadwick, The Domestication of Gnosis; G. Quispel, Gnosis and Psychology; C. Colpe, The Challenge of Gnostic Thought for Philosophy, Alchemy, and Literature; H. Bloom, Lying Against Time; G. C. Stead, In Search of Valentinus; U. Bianchi, Religio-Historical Observations on Valentinianism; G. Quispel, Valentinian Gnosis and the Apocryphon of John; R. McL. Wilson, Valentinianism and the Gospel of Truth; R. Greer, The Dog and the Mushrooms: Irenaeus's View of the Valentinians Assessed; J. Whittaker, Self-Generating Principles in Second-Century Gnostic Systems; M. Tardieu, La Gnose Valentinienne et les Oracles Chaldaïques; H. Koester, Gnostic Writings as Witnesses for the Development of the Sayings Tradition; E. Pagels, Gnostic and Orthodox Views of Christ's Passion: Paradigms for the Christian's Response to Persecution?; J. Fineman, Gnosis and the Piety of Metaphor: The Gospel of Truth; B. Aland, Gnosis und Christentum; J. Dillon, The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonism and Gnostic Theory; D. J. O'Meara, Gnosticism and the Making of the World in Plotinus; W. R. Schoedel, Gnostic Monism and the Gospel of Truth; J.-D. Kaestli, Valentinisme italien et valentinisme oriental: leur divergences à propos de la nature du corps de Jésus; J. F. McCue, Conflicting Versions of Valentinianism? Irenaeus and the Excerpta ex Theodoto; M. Harl, Les "mythes" valentiniens de la création et de l'eschatologie dans le langage d'Origène: le mot hypothesis; A. Méhat, "Vrai" et

“fausse” gnose d’après Clément d’Alexandrie; P. Corby Finney, Did Gnostics make Pictures?

YALE II: *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*. Proceedings etc., Volume Two: *Sethian Gnosticism*, edited by Bentley Layton (SHR, XLI), Leiden 1981, pp. XVI and 455-882. Price: Dutch Flor. 136,—. Contents: R. Kraft, Philo on Seth: Was Philo Aware of Traditions which Exalted Seth and his Progeny?; M. E. Stone, Report on Seth Traditions in the Armenian Adam Books; B. A. Pearson, The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature; G. W. E. Nickelsburg, Some Related Traditions in the Apocalypse of Adam, the Books of Adam and Eve, and I Enoch; C. Colpe, Sethian and Zoroastrian Ages of the World; F. Wisse, Stalking those Elusive Sethians; K. Rudolph, Die “Sethianische” Gnosis—Eine häresiologische Fiktion?; H.-M. Schenke, The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism; A. Böhlig, Triade und Trinität in den Schriften von Nag Hammadi; J. M. Robinson, Sethians and Johannine Thought: The Trimorphic Protēnoia and the Prologue of the Gospel of John; N. A. Dahl, The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia: Jewish Traditions in Gnostic Revolt; I. Gruenwald, Aspects of the Jewish-Gnostic Controversy; A. Henrichs, Literary Criticism of the Cologne Mani Codex; L. Koenen, From Baptism to the Gnosis of Manichaeism; K. Koschorke, Gnostic Instructions on the Organization of the Congregation: The Tractate Interpretation of Knowledge from CG XI; M. Marcovich, The Naassene Psalm in Hippolytus (Haer. 5.10.2); L. Painchaud, Le cadre scolaire des traités de l’Ame et le Deuxième Traité du Grand Seth (CG VII, 2); J. H. Sieber, The Barbelo Aeon as Sophia in Zostrianus and Related Tractates; M. Smith, The History of the Term Gnostikos; G. G. Stroumsa, Aher: A Gnostic; M. A. Williams, Stability as a Soteriological Theme in Gnosticism.

QUEBEC: *Colloque international sur les textes de Nag Hammadi (Québec, 22-25 août 1978)*, édité par Bernard Barc (Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, Section “Études”, 1), Québec-Louvain 1981, pp. XII and 462. Contents: J.-É. Ménard, La Gnose et les textes de Nag Hammadi; J. M. Robinson, From the Cliff to Cairo. The Story of the Discoverers and the Middlemen of the Nag Hammadi Codices; R. McL. Wilson, Twenty Years After; T. Säve-Söderbergh, The Pagan Elements in Early Christianity and Gnosticism; K. W. Tröger, The Attitude of the Gnostic Religion towards Judaism as Viewed in a Variety of Perspectives; F. Wisse, The “Opponents” in the New Testament in Light of the Nag Hammadi Writings; B. Barc, Samaël—Saklas—Yaldabaôth. Recherche sur la genèse d’un mythe gnostique; M. Tardieu, “Comme à travers un tuyau”. Quelques remarques sur le mythe valentinien de la chair céleste du Christ; D. Rouleau, Les paraboles du Royaume des cieux dans l’Épître apocryphe de Jacques; B. Layton, Vision and Revision: a Gnostic View of Resurrection; G. Quispel, The Gospel of Thomas Revisited; C. Trautmann, La parenté dans l’Évangile selon Philippe; R. Kuntzmann, L’identification dans le Livre de Thomas l’Athlète; F. Morard, Thématique de l’Apocalypse d’Adam du Codex V de Nag Hammadi; Y. Haas, L’exigence du renoncement au monde dans les Actes de Pierre et des Douze Apôtres, les Apophtegmes des Pères du Désert et la Pistis Sophia; J.-P. Mahé, Le fragment du Discours Parfait dans la Bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi; M. Roberge, Le rôle du Nous dans la Paraphrase de Sem; L. Painchaud, La polémique anti-ecclesiale et l’exégèse de la passion dans le Deuxième

Traité du Grand Seth; Y. Janssens, Les Leçons de Silvanos et le monachisme; P. Claude, Approche de la structure des Trois Stèles de Seth; M. Scopello, Youèl et Barbélo dans le Traité de l'*Allogène*; P.-H. Poirier, Le texte de la version copte des Sentences de Sextus; A. Pasquier, L'eschatologie dans l'Évangile selon Marie: étude des notions de nature et d'image; J.-P. Mahé, Le Discours Parfait d'après l'Asclépius latin: utilisation des sources et cohérence rédactionnelle.

JONAS: *Gnosis*. Festschrift für Hans Jonas in Verbindung mit Ugo Bianchi, Martin Krause, James M. Robinson und Geo Widengren herausgegeben von Barbara Aland, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1978, pp. 544. Contents: E. Jüngel, Die Wirksamkeit des Entzogenen. Zum Vorgang geschichtlichen Verstehens als Einführung in die Christologie; U. Bianchi, Le Gnosticisme: Concept, Terminologie, Origines, Délimitation; W. C. van Unnik, Gnosis und Judentum; A. H. Armstrong, Gnosis and Greek Philosophy; J. M. Robinson, Gnosticism and the New Testament; G. W. MacRae, Nag Hammadi and the New Testament; B. Aland, Gnosis und Kirchenväter. Ihre Auseinandersetzung um die Interpretation des Evangeliums; M. Krause, Die Texte von Nag Hammadi; K. Rudolph, Der Mandäismus in der neueren Gnosisforschung; G. Widengren, Der Manichäismus. Kurzgefasste Geschichte der Problemforschung; G. Sfameni Gasparro, Sur l'histoire des influences du Gnosticisme; H.-M. Schenke, Die Tendenz der Weisheit zur Gnosis; B. A. Pearson, The Tractate Marsanes (NHC X) and the Platonic Tradition; W. Schmithals, Zur Herkunft der gnostischen Elemente in der Sprache des Paulus; E. H. Pagels, Visions, Appearances, and Apostolic Authority: Gnostic and Orthodox Traditions; F. Wisse, Gnosticism and Early Monasticism in Egypt; R. McL. Wilson, One Text, Four Translations: Some Reflections on the Nag Hammadi Gospel of the Egyptians; J. E. Ménard, La Lettre de Pierre à Philippe; E. Segelberg, The *pihta* and *mambuha* Prayers. To the Question of the Liturgical Development among the Mandaeans; A. Böhlig, Zur Vorstellung vom Lichtkreuz in Gnostizismus und Manichäismus; G. Quispel, Herman Hesse und Gnosis; Bibliographie Hans Jonas.

QUISPÉL: *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, edited by R. van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain, 91), Leiden 1981, pp. XIV and 622. Contents: List of Professor Quispel's Publications; J. van Amersfoort, Traces of an Alexandrian Orphic Theogony in the Pseudo-Clementines; U. Bianchi, The Religio-Historical Relevance of Luke 20:34-36; R. van den Broek, The Creation of Adam's Psychic Body in the Apocryphon of John; C. Colpe, Daēnā, Lichtjungfrau, Zweite Gestalt. Verbindungen und Unterschiede zwischen zarathustrischer und manichäischer Selbst-Anschauung; I. P. Culianu, The Angels of the Nations and the Origins of Gnostic Dualism; H. Dörrie, Gnostische Spuren bei Plutarch; H. J. W. Drijvers, Odes of Solomon and Psalms of Mani. Christians and Manichaeans in third-century Syria; J. Flamant, Éléments gnostiques dans l'œuvre de Macrobe; J. Fossum, Samaritan Demiurgical Traditions and the Alleged Dove Cult of the Samaritans; R. M. Grant, Charges of "Immorality" against Various Religious Groups in Antiquity; I. Gruenwald, The Problem of Anti-Gnostic Polemic in Rabbinic Literature; A. Guillaumont, Les sémitismes dans

l'Évangile selon Thomas. Essai de classement; Marguerite Harl, *Pointes antignostiques d'Origène: le questionnement impie des Écritures*; A. F. J. Klijn, *An Analysis of the Use of the Story of the Flood in the Apocalypse of Adam*; J.-P. Mahé, *Le Livre d'Adam géorgien*; J. Mansfeld, *Bad World and Demiurge: A 'Gnostic' Motif from Parmenides and Empedocles to Lucretius and Philo*; G. Mussies, *Catalogues of Sins and Virtues Personified (NHC II, 5)*; B. A. Pearson, *Jewish Elements in Corpus Hermeticum I (Poimandres)*; A. F. Segal, *Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition*; Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, *Interpretazioni gnostiche e misteriosofiche del mito di Attis*; M. Tardieu, *Aberamenthô*; M. J. Vermaseren, *L'iconographie d'Attis mourant*; H. A. J. Wegman, *Une anaphore incomplète? Les fragments sur Papyrus Strasbourg Gr. 254*; R. McL. Wilson, *Gnosis and the Mysteries*; J. C. M. van Winden, "Terra autem stupida quadam erat admiratione". *Reflexions on a Remarkable Translation of Genesis 1: 2a*; E. M. Yamauchi, *Jewish Gnosticism? The Prologue of John, Mandaean Parallels, and the Trimorphic Protennoia*; J. Zandee, "The Teachings of Silvanus" (NHC VII, 4) and Jewish Christianity.

HALLE: *Studien zum Menschenbild in Gnosis und Manichäismus*, herausgegeben von Peter Nagel (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Wissenschaftliche Beiträge 1979/39 (K5)), Halle (Saale) 1979, 296 pp. Contents: J. Irmischer, *Erwägungen zum Menschenbildbegriff in der Altertumswissenschaft*; K. Rudolph, *Zur Soziologie, soziologischen "Verortung" und Rolle der Gnosis in der Spätantike*; C. Colpe, *Die gnostische Anthropologie zwischen Intellektualismus und Volksfrömmigkeit*; W. Ullmann, *Bild- und Menschenbildterminologie in koptisch-gnostischen Texten*; W.-P. Funk, "Blind" oder "Unsichtbar"? *Zur Bedeutungsstruktur deverbalen negativer Adjektive im Koptischen*; P. Nagel, *Anatomie des Menschen in gnostischer und manichäischer Sicht*; K.-W. Tröger, *Moral in der Gnosis*; W. Beltz, *Zur Rolle der Arbeit in den Lehrsystemen der Gnosis*; G. Bröker, *Lachen als religiöses Motiv in gnostischen Texten*; P. Pokorný, *Über die sogenannte individuelle Eschatologie der Gnosis*; D. Kirchner, *Zum Menschenbild in der Epistula Jacobi apocrypha*; H.-M. Schenke, *Der sogenannte Tractatus Tripartitus und die in den Himmel projizierte gnostische Anthropologie*; H.-G. Bethge, *Anthropologie und Soteriologie im "Zweiten Logos des Grossen Seth"* (NHC VII, 2); G. Schenke, *Anthropologische Implikationen der Erlösungsvorstellung in der Schrift "Die dreigestaltige Protennoia"* (NHC XIII); W. B. Oerter, *Manichäische Frömmigkeit und Heilserwartung am Beispiel des 16. Thomaspсалms*; O. Klíma, *Aš-Šahrastānī, Kitāb al-milal wa'n-nihal* ed. Cureton S. 193, Z. 1-3; M. Loos, *Die Frage der Willensfreiheit im Mittelalterlichen Dualismus*; K. Onasch, *Zur Frage der Hierarchie in der Bogomilenkirche*; G. Strohmaier, *Eine sabische Abrahamlegende und Sure 37, 83-93*; H. Berthold, "Makarios" und seine Hörer. *Methodische Betrachtungen an antignostischer/antimanichäischer Literatur*; J. Dummer, *Die Gnostiker im Bilde ihrer Gegner*; H. Goltz, *Antihäretische Konsequenzen: 'Monismus' und 'Materialismus' in der orthodoxen Tradition*.

OXFORD: *Gnosis and Gnosticism. Papers Read at the Eighth International Conference on Patristic Studies (Oxford, September 3rd-8th 1979)* (Nag Hammadi Studies XVII), Leiden 1981, VIII and 153 pp. Contents: S. Arai, *Zum "Simonianischen" in AuthLog und Bronté*; R. van den Broek, *Autogenes and Adamas*:

The Mythological Structure of the Apocryphon of John; J. Helderman, Isis as Plane in the Gospel of Truth?; M. Krause, Christlich-gnostische Texte als Quellen für die Auseinandersetzung von Gnosis und Christentum. A. H. B. Logan, The Epistle of Eugnostus and Valentinianism; Violet MacDermot, The Concept of Pleroma in Gnosticism; G. M. Shellrude, The Apocalypse of Adam: Evidence for a Christian Gnostic Provenance; J. Frickel, Naassener oder Valentinianer?; K. Koschorke, Patristische Materialien zur Spätgeschichte der Valentinianischen Gnosis.

### 1. *The purpose and character of the Nag Hammadi Collection*

Several hypotheses have been launched with respect to the purpose of the Nag Hammadi library in its present form and the people who used it. The books were bound in a Pachomian monastery in the middle of the fourth century, as is testified by the papyri found in the covers of the codices (see J. Barns, Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices: A Preliminary Report, in NHS VI, Leiden 1975, 9-18 and *Facsimile Edition. Cartonnage*, Leiden 1979). T. Säve-Söderbergh has suggested that the texts were collected by monks for heresiological purposes (Holy Scriptures or Apologetic Documentations?, in NHS VII, 3-14). But that would not account for the clearly non-gnostic works which are also contained in the collection, nor would it explain the occurrence of more than one copy of the same text (for instance, there are three versions of the *Apocryphon of John* and two of the *Gospel of Truth*). Therefore, there is a growing consensus that the books were collected from various quarters by Pachomian monks who read them as edifying literature (see Wisse in JONAS, 431-440, Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 14-21, Chadwick in YALE I, 14-16, and with reservations now also Säve-Söderbergh in QUEBEC, 71-83). That the collection was put into a jar and hidden in a cave shows that the owner(s) intended to preserve the books and not to destroy them. In this connexion reference has been made to Athanasius' famous Paschal Letter of A.D. 367, which presents a detailed list of the biblical canon and condemns heretics and their "apocryphal books to which they attribute antiquity and give the name of saints". The Pachomian monasteries of that time were apparently not as orthodox as modern scholars used to think on the basis of later monastic literature. As a parallel case I may draw attention to the story of the monk Annarichos, who lived in the neighbourhood of Maiome near Gaza and was said to have received instruction "in the heresy of Bion and Harpocrates (i.e. Ebion and Carpocrates) his master, of whose books he had obtained possession", and to have expounded them publicly. When he was sum-



moned by Cyril of Jerusalem to come to the episcopal palace and to account for his doctrine he told the archbishop that Sator (= Saturninus) and Ebion were his spiritual Fathers. One of the heretical works in his possession was a book called the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, from which Hennecke-Schneemelcher's first (spurious) fragment derives (for text and translation see E. A. W. Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, London 1915, 58-60, 636-638). In this connexion it does not matter whether this story is true or not. In any case it shows that even at a later time the idea that there still had existed heretical, gnostic monks in the latter half of the fourth century was quite conceivable.

Some of the codices show a deliberate composition. Thus Codex V contains after the book of *Eugnostus the Blessed*, which reveals the structure of the divine world, four apocalypses (one of Paul, two of James and one of Adam). Codex I contains predominantly or even, according to many scholars, exclusively Valentinian writings. There is reason to suppose that at least some of the Coptic codices existed already in their present form in Greek (see my remarks on Codex III in *Vig. Chr.* 31 (1977) 234).

Though the Nag Hammadi collection is still often referred to as "the Coptic Gnostic Library" (cf. the title of the Claremont editorial project) or as CG (= Cairensis Gnosticus), it has become increasingly clear that not all the tractates are gnostic. The most conspicuous case is Cod. VI, 5, a bad translation of Plato's *Republic*, 588A-589B. The same codex contains several other non-gnostic works: the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* (see A. Guillaumont, *De nouveaux Actes apocryphes: Les Actes de Pierre et des Douze Apôtres*, *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 196 (1979) 141-152), *The Thunder or Perfect Mind* (see G. Quispel, *Jewish Gnosis and Mandaean Gnosticism*, in *NHS* 7, Leiden 1975, 82-122), the *Authentikos Logos* (see my article in *Vig. Chr.* 33 (1979) 260-286), and several hermetic treatises, *int. al. Asclepius*, 21-29 (see J. P. Mahé's excellent edition in the *Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi*, Section "Textes", vol. 3: *Hermes en Haute-Égypte*, tom. 1, Quebec-Louvain 1978, and his studies in *QUEBEC*, 304-327 and 405-434; also Säve-Söderbergh, *Ibid.*, 75-76). Other non-gnostic works are, for instance, the *Teachings of Silvanus* (Cod. VII, 4; see J. Zandee, "The Teachings of Silvanus" and *Clement of Alexandria: A New Document of Alexandrian Theology*, Leiden 1977; *Idem* in *QUIPSEL*, 498-584) and a fragmentary Coptic version of the *Sentences of Sextus* (Cod. XII, 1;

P.-H. Poirier, in *QUEBEC* 383-390, shows that the Coptic version is an important witness to the original Greek text). Many of these non-gnostic texts are of great importance for the study of the beginnings of Egyptian Christianity and the earliest stage of Alexandrian theology. That they have survived in Coptic only seems to be the main reason that patristic scholars have not yet paid to them the attention they deserve. The *Gospel of Thomas* is now mostly interpreted as an originally non-gnostic work which in its present form is only slightly gnosticized. In a long article (*QUEBEC*, 218-266) Quispel reaffirms his positions with respect to the main problems of this most famous writing from Nag Hammadi. He takes it to be an essentially encratite, non-gnostic collection of Sayings, in which three sources can be distinguished: a Jewish-Christian source (which contained an independent Gospel tradition), an encratite source, and a Hermetic source (which is held to be responsible for *int. al. Log. 67*: "Whoever knows the All but fails to know himself lacks everything"). The Aramaic background of the Sayings has been pointed out by Guillaumont in *QUIPEL*, 190-204. Most of the non-gnostic writings proclaim a strong asceticism, and as such they must have been attractive to the great majority of all gnostics. Even the positive appreciation of the "mystery of intercourse" in the *Asclepius* must have been acceptable to some gnostic groups, for instance the Valentinians. Therefore, there is no need to suppose that the non-gnostic tractates were added to the collection by those who were the last to use it.

## 2. *Gnosticism and the Church Fathers*

The discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library made it possible to test the reliability of the anti-heretical ecclesiastical writers whose polemics formerly constituted our main source for the knowledge of Gnosticism. I draw attention here to three aspects: the judgement on gnostic ethics (a), the reproduction of gnostic sources (b), and the reports on gnostic schools or groups (c).

a) The traditional view, based on the Fathers, that there were ascetic and libertine, licentious gnostics is not justified by the sources which now are available. Accusations of libertinism were not only raised by ecclesiastical writers but also by Plotinus, but nevertheless the libertine gnostics must have formed a small minority within the gnostic movement. Clement of Alexandria's report of license among the Carpocra-

tians (*Strom.* III, 8-9) seems trustworthy and so is Epiphanius' testimony of the obscene behaviour of a group of Egyptian gnostics (*Pan.* 26, 4-5). However, similar excesses could also happen among non-gnostic Christians, as Chadwick has pointed out. In any case, the people behind our new gnostic sources were all strenuously ascetic (see Chadwick in *YALE* I, 4-11; Tröger in *HALLE* 95-107; Wisse in *QUEBEC*, 115-117 and his earlier work 'Die Sextus-Sprüche und das Problem der gnostischen Ethik', in F. Wisse-A. Böhlig, *Zum Hellenismus in den Schriften von Nag Hammadi*, Wiesbaden 1975). The accusations of licence in the Church Fathers and Plotinus "are mainly false deductions and hearsay" according to Wisse, who also refers to "the common assumption in the Hellenistic world that false teaching must of necessity lead to an immoral life". That charges of immorality to various opponents were indeed quite normal in Antiquity was shown by R. M. Grant in *QUIPEL*, 161-170. One may ask whether there were principal differences in the motivation of asceticism by the gnostics (pagan and Christian) and other people who supported an ascetic way of life. Recently G. G. Stroumsa, *Ascèse et gnose: Aux origines de la spiritualité monastique*, *Revue Thomiste* 89 (1981) 557-573, has argued that in the gnostic sources asceticism is not a means to obtain personal purification but only to preserve a purification already obtained. He proposed to distinguish clearly pagan and Christian *asceticism*, mainly an ethical process, and gnostic *enkratism*, the expression of the gnostic's complete rupture with the world and its creator. Characteristic of the former would be its dependence on the free choice of the individual believer and of the latter its being obligatory for all the members of the gnostic community. Personally, I prefer to reserve the term *enkratism* for that radical form of asceticism that went as far as to forbid all kinds of sexual intercourse, even within wedlock, because it was considered the propagation of death. In this sense Tatian and the author of the *Sentences of Sextus* were *enkratites*, but they were not gnostics. Moreover, there is no justification for such a clear-cut distinction between 'gnostics' and 'Christians': there were pagan and Christian gnostics, and among those who believed in Christ there were gnostic Christians and non-gnostic, mostly catholic, Christians. Gnostics like Valentinus and the author of the *Tractatus Tripartitus* saw themselves as true Christians; modern scholars have no right to say they were not. There were admittedly differences in ascetic motivations among gnostic and catholic Christians which roughly went along the lines indicated by

Stroumsa, but, in my opinion, it was more a question of different accents than of sharply opposed fundamental views on ethics and anthropology (for useful suggestions regarding further study of gnostic asceticism, see Tröger in HALLE, 103-106).

b) In their reproduction of gnostic sources the Fathers were much more reliable than in their reports on gnostic ethics. In several cases the new sources enable us not only to establish that the heresiologists quite fairly reproduced their sources but also to note successive stages in the development of these sources and the ideas they express. I give three examples. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I, 29, gives a summary of the doctrine of the Gnostikoi which closely resembles the first, metaphysical part of the *Apocryphon of John*, with its description of the development of the divine Pleroma and the origin of the demiurge. But the recension of the *Apocryphon* which had come into Irenaeus' hands demonstrably contained an older version of the myth than that given by the extant four Coptic translations. In the latter texts Christ, the third 'person' of the divine triad, is identified with Autogenes who, however, in Irenaeus is a lower aeon of the Pleroma. This identification could only be made by disturbing the original scheme of aeonic generations as preserved by Irenaeus. The Coptic text of NHC III even enables us to trace an apparent mistranslation of the original Greek in the extant Latin translation of Irenaeus' work. In I, 29, 2, it is said that Autogenes is generated "*ad repraesentationem Magni Luminis*". NHC III, 11, 5 has preserved here the Greek word παράστασις (*eouparastasis* = εἰς παράστασιν). This word can mean 'representation', indeed, but it can also indicate a 'position or post near a king' (Liddell-Scott), viz. of a high-placed servant. This was originally meant by the *Apocryphon* (and Irenaeus). The same word is used in NHC III, 11, 19 with respect to the task of the four Great Luminaries, the servants of Autogenes. In this case Irenaeus' Latin translator interpreted it in the right way: they were emitted "*ad circumstantiam Autogeni*" (see my article in OXFORD, 16-25).

In his *Refutatio*, V, 19-21, Hippolytus gives an outline of the doctrine of the Sethian gnostics apparently based upon a work entitled *Paraphrasis of Seth*, to which the reader is referred for further information (V, 22). Hippolytus must have made use of an awkwardly christianized version of a work which under the title of *Paraphrasis of Shem* is preserved in NHC VII. But the Coptic work itself already bears the traces of a long literary history, though the final redaction does not lack

all coherence (see Roberge in QUEBEC, 328-339). According to the *Paraphrasis of Shem*, NHC VII, 1, 25-28, there were from the beginning three principles of the universe: "There was Light and Darkness and there was a Spirit between them". Hippolytus, V, 19, says: αἱ δὲ τῶν ἀρχῶν οὐσίαι φῶς καὶ σκότος· τούτων δὲ ἐστὶν ἐν μέσῳ πνεῦμα ἀκέραιον. In both texts the genesis of the cosmos and of all things it contains is described as the generation from a womb (μήτρα). But the exact relationship between the Coptic text and Hippolytus' source is very difficult to determine. There are, however, no indications that Hippolytus deliberately distorted his source; he simply had at his disposal a text which represented a quite different stage of development of basically the same ideas as found in the *Paraphrasis of Shem*.

Epiphanius, *Pan.* 31, 5ff. has preserved a Valentinian doctrinal letter which in many aspects deviates from original Valentinian speculations. Though in many cases Epiphanius is admittedly an unreliable source, it has never been doubted that he reproduced here an authentic Valentinian letter. Karl Holl and others even took the letter to represent an archaic type of Valentinianism. But now it has become clear that its author was strongly influenced by the *Letter of Eugnostus the Blessed*, a non-Christian work found in NHC III and V, which led him to modify some original Valentinian views (see Logan in OXFORD, 66-75).

c) The anti-gnostic writers described the gnostic movement as one broad stream of schools and systems which had sprung from one polluted fountain-head, Simon the Magician (for a recent study of the anti-gnostic polemics of Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius, see G. Vallée, *A Study in Anti-Gnostic Polemics: Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius*, Waterloo, Ont. 1981; also Dummer in HALLE, 241-251). However, this heretical genealogy and the classification of the gnostics into a great many different and differing groups has found little support in the new sources. It has become increasingly clear that the various gnostic groups were not isolated one from another, but freely made use of each other's texts (see Logan's article mentioned above, and Wilson in QUEBEC, 63). The Yale Conference on Gnosticism had as its focal points two seminars, devoted to Valentinian and Sethian Gnosticism respectively. The participants in the Valentinian seminar concluded time and again that neither of the generally accepted Valentinian writings can be wholly fitted into one of the Valentinian schools known from the Fathers. Features which according to some scholars point to an early date are taken by others as indications of a later stage of development.

The *Gospel of Truth* (NHC I, 3; XII, 2), for instance, was once claimed by W. C. van Unnik to have been written by Valentinus himself, others denied its Valentinian character, but most scholars took it to reflect a later stage of western Valentinianism (see Wilson in YALE I, 133-145). G. W. MacRae calls it "a gnostic and perhaps a Valentinian tractate" (*The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 37). The pendulum now seems to swing back. By means of a comparative, statistical, and rhetorical analysis Van Unnik's claim was reinforced by B. Standaert, *L'Évangile de Vérité: critique et lecture*, NTS 22 (1975) 243-275 (see, with much approval, Tardieu in YALE I, 142, and Layton in QUEBEC, 209: "almost certainly by Valentinus himself"). G. C. Stead has pointed out that in many studies on Valentinus and Valentinianism there is "an overconfident assimilation of the new sources to the old, in which points of agreement have been emphasized and elaborated, while inconsistencies and omissions in the evidence have been, not indeed ignored, but under-rated" (YALE I, 76). He warned against the oversimplification of picturing the history of gnostic thought "as a one-way process of complication and accretion", so that texts in which Valentinian notions are hinted at but not elaborated are interpreted as representing a "primitive" or "original" phase of Gnosticism (YALE I, 77). Stead describes Valentinus primarily as a Christian Platonist: "the fragments of Valentinus, taken by themselves, would give no ground for supposing anything but a Platonizing biblical theologian of some originality, whose work hardly strayed beyond the still undefined limits of Christian orthodoxy" (YALE I, 75). Valentinus remains an elusive figure in the history of Christian thought. Quispel, who looks at the Valentinian problem from a quite different angle, concludes: "On the whole there can be no doubt that Valentinus and his Gnostics remained more faithful than Origen and his followers to the essence of primitive Christianity. If we remove the cosmological framework and discern the basic intuitions, Valentinus was the Novalis of early Christianity. Two knights of Christ and Sophia" (YALE I, 127).

Rowan Greer has shown that Irenaeus' refutation of the Valentinians, and the gnostics in general, which he based on the catholic doctrine of the Creator God, supplied the perspective from which he described their systems (YALE I, 146-171). That does not mean that his information is without value. The division of Valentinianism into a western or Italian school (Ptolemaeus and Heracleon) and an eastern school (Theodotus and others), pointed out by ancient heresiologists and modern scholars

as well, remains of great importance for the classification and evaluation of the new-found Valentinian writings from Nag Hammadi. There is no doubt that the system of the *Tractatus Tripartitus* (NHC I, 5), according to Schenke an excerpt from a more extensive work (HALLE, 148-149), is closely related to that of western Valentinianism and of Heracleon in particular, though there are also views which are thus far unparalleled. One of the most conspicuous differences is that the Aeon which tried to grasp the incomprehensibility of God, an act which finally entailed the creation of the material world, was not Sophia but the Logos, who, moreover, is said to have acted in accordance with the Father's will. In conclusion it may be said that the new texts primarily ask for an unbiased study of their contents without attempts to connect them right from the start with gnostic systems known from the Fathers, but also that it would be very unwise to neglect this external evidence and to think that the study of Gnosticism which preceded the discovery of such a great many gnostic manuscripts had not already led to some unshakeable results.

The combination of an unprejudiced study of the original texts and a critical use of the ecclesiastical sources is especially necessary for the study of general gnostic themes. What is urgently needed is a comprehensive study of gnostic, in particular Valentinian, christology, which is mostly too easily dismissed as simply docetic (and thus heretical and thus of no positive influence on the development of early Christian christology). The western Valentinians taught that Jesus had a psychic body, but the eastern Valentinians assigned to him a celestial, pneumatic body. The latter view, which was that of Valentinus himself, determines in the main points the christology of the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II, 3), which, therefore, has to be reckoned to the eastern branch of Valentinianism (see Kaestli in YALE I, 391-403). Michel Tardieu has pointed out that to explain the celestial nature of Christ's body the Valentinians made use of a formula which, with respect to the incarnation of the soul, was current among the Platonists of their time: *καθάπερ ὕδωρ διὰ σωλήνης* (QUEBEC, 151-177). Berthold has drawn attention to the fact that this Valentinian christological image was used by the Syrian 'Macarius' in an anthropological argument (in HALLE, 233-236, mentioning several texts which are not included in Tardieu's list of relevant passages).

There has been much debate on the question of whether or not the Nag Hammadi writings provide us with the system of the Sethians who

are mentioned as a separate gnostic sect by some of the anti-gnostic authors. The Yale seminar on Sethianism discussed the problem in six sessions. After reading all the papers and the discussions following their presentation I can only conclude that the attempts to reconstruct from the new sources a specific Sethian system have failed. The great advocate of the alleged Sethian system, Hans-Martin Schenke, has taken some mythologumena of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, in which Seth plays a predominant part, as characteristic Sethian doctrines. If these mythologumena also occur in other gnostic texts he declares these writings also Sethian. The next step is to consider other features of the texts which have thus been connected as typically Sethian too. In this way, "it is possible to identify a given writing as Sethian, even if Seth (for whatever reason) does not appear in it at all, whether under his own name or as one of its equivalents" (YALE II, 593). As typical features which connect several members of his group of Sethian writings he mentions, *int. al.*, "a specific deployment of negative theology: *Apocryphon of John* and *Allogenes*" and "a specific philosophical terminology: *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianus*, *Marsanes*, *Allogenes*" (*Ibid.*). However, neither the negative theology nor the philosophical terminology of the texts mentioned have anything specifically Sethian; they only show the influence of Greek philosophy on gnostic theology (see also below, sub 4). Schenke's most fervent opponent is Frederik Wisse (YALE II, 562-576). The heresiologists transmit two sets of traditions concerning the Sethians, which both derive from Hippolytus (see Wisse in YALE II, 568-571, and Pearson, *Ibid.* 473-475). Unfortunately, the Sethians of Hippolytus' *Paraphrasis of Seth* cannot be fitted into the Sethian sect as described by Schenke! There is no doubt that there were gnostics who assigned to Seth an important role in the history of salvation. He was not only seen as the son of Adam and Eve but also as a heavenly figure and interpreted as a) a recipient and transmitter of divine revelation, b) the progenitor of a pure race which lived before the Flood and then also the spiritual father of the gnostics, and c) the Saviour, identified with Christ (see the gnostic evidence in Pearson, YALE II, 475-500; Wisse, *Ibid.*, 571-572; Rudolph, *Ibid.*, 577). Seth as Saviour, apart from his function as revealer of divine knowledge, is only found in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, Pseudo-Tertullian (*Haer.* 8), and Epiphanius (*Pan.* 39, 1, 3; 39, 3, 5). The evidence is scanty but enough to show that there must have been gnostics who interpreted Seth as a saving figure who in some way or another was to be identified with



Christ. Seth as transmitter of divine revelation and as the father of a pure indestructible race are already found in Jewish apocryphal traditions on Adam and Seth (on these traditions in Armenian and Georgian Adam Books, see Stone in YALE II, 459-471, and Mahé in QUISPÉL, 227-260). In a study of some related traditions in the gnostic *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Books of Adam and Eve*, and *I Enoch*, George W. E. Nickelsburg has shown that the first-mentioned writing derives from a Jewish Testament of Adam that was influenced by traditions also found in *I Enoch* (YALE II, 515-549). Nearly all the features of Seth in gnostic literature can be traced back to Jewish, non-gnostic traditions. Wisse concludes: "The heresiological references to the Sethians appear to be due to a wrongheaded approach and false assumptions. We are forced to the conclusion that there never was a sect properly or improperly called Sethian. The name should be eliminated from the lists of gnostic schools and sects. The views and books which until now have been called Sethian will need another and better-founded explanation" (YALE II, 573). I would have preferred a less apodictically expressed conclusion, but I agree that we should stop speaking about a Sethian gnostic system as constructed by Schenke. Kurt Rudolph has given a balanced assessment of the gnostic evidence for the alleged Sethian sect with which I may conclude this section: "Zieht man die Originalquellen heran, so gibt es kein eindeutiges Indiz für die Existenz einer geschlossenen gnostischen Gemeinschaft, die sich als "Sethianer" titulierten und ein eigenes "System" besaßen" (YALE II, 577).

### 3. *Gnosticism and Judaism*

The presence of Jewish traditions in a great number of gnostic texts is acknowledged by every student of Gnosticism. This observation had led to a heated discussion, started by Quispel in 1951 (see his bibliography in QUISPÉL, 1-12, and Van Unnik in JONAS, 65-66), on the question of whether or not the origin of Gnosticism itself has to be sought in Judaism. The discussion sometimes takes the form of a perfect babel of tongues because the participants obviously have quite different ideas in mind when they use the words 'Jewish', 'Judaism', 'Gnostic', 'Gnosis', and 'Gnosticism'. It may be useful to make some remarks on this question of definition. Both sets of words can be used in a narrow, limited sense and in a broad, more general sense. Van Unnik, who was very sceptical about the alleged Jewish origin of Gnosticism and minimized

the Jewish influence on gnostic texts, has pointed out that from Old Testament times two major points were constitutive for the Jewish religion: the belief in one God (Deut. 6, 4) and life according to the Law. According to him 'heretical' or 'heterodox' Judaism did not exist. One could only accept or reject its two basic principles; everyone who rejected one of them placed himself outside the Jewish community. The Samaritans cannot be seen as a Jewish *hairesis* in the original sense of the word: Jews and Samaritans had already been divided for centuries when Gnosticism emerged (JONAS, 74-79). However, the rabbinic polemics against *minim*, 'heretics', who threatened the belief in one God (see below) show that there were Jews who were considered heretics by their co-religionists. But Van Unnik's emphasis on the two major points of the Jewish religion is right. If there were Jews whose religious outlook was dominated by an anti-cosmic attitude which expressed itself as hatred of the Creator, who was exposed as an ignorant fool, unaware of the existence of the true, inaccessible God, then they certainly were no longer adherents of the Jewish religion. Nevertheless, ethnically they remained Jews, able to draw on the religious traditions and speculations that were current in the Jewish community. But not all the gnostics adhered to such a radical kind of Gnosticism. Since the colloquium on Gnosticism at Messina (1966) it has become usual to distinguish between Gnosticism and Gnosis. Gnosticism was defined there as involving "a coherent series of characteristics that can be summarized in the idea of a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into this world of fate, birth and death, and needing to be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally reintegrated (...) This idea is based ontologically on the conception of a downward movement of the divine." Gnosis was regarded as "knowledge of the divine mysteries reserved for an élite" (*Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, ed. by U. Bianchi, Leiden 1967, XXVI-XXVII). This distinction leaves little room for the many variations and gradations within the gnostic movement. As can be shown from recent studies, it tends to make scholars believe that it is based on the gnostic sources themselves—*quod non!*—and that the first term indicates a set of 'heretical' ideas, whereas the second was used for more generally accepted, though elitist, mystic views. It has been pointed out that the Messina series of characteristics is not as coherent as it was then thought to be, that the only author who styled himself a true gnostic was Clement of Alexandria, who, however, according to the Messina definition was not a gnostic at all, and that Clement

and others reserved the term 'gnostics' for the followers of Prodicus and Carpocrates (see N. Brox, *Gnostikoi als häresiologischer Terminus*, *ZNW* 57 (1966) 105-114; Quispel in *YALE* I, 119, 128; Méhat, *Ibid.*, 426-433; Smith in *YALE* II, 796-807).

There can be no doubt that the gnostic cosmogonical and anthropogonical myths originated and first developed within a Jewish milieu. Two examples may suffice. In a recent article on 'Jewish Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism' (in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*. Proceedings of the Regional Conferences held at the University of California, Los Angeles, and McGill University in April, 1978, ed. by J. Dan and F. Talmage, Cambridge, Mass., 1982, 41-55), Ithamar Gruenwald has drawn attention to the close agreement between the descriptions of the divine chariot in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II, 4) and *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II, 5) and in Jewish Merkavah (= Divine Chariot) mysticism; for instance, the 68 "forms" at the four corners of the chariot (*OW* 105, 9) are also mentioned in the Targum to Ezekiel 1, 6 (p. 48). That points to an intimate knowledge of the speculations of Merkavah mysticism on the side of those who developed the gnostic myth. This observation is more important than the question of whether or not Merkavah mysticism should be termed "Jewish and rabbinic Gnosticism", as was done by Gershom Scholem, who did not distinguish between Gnosis and Gnosticism. Gruenwald vehemently opposes Scholem's characterization because he erroneously takes Gnosticism "to designate the *heretical* (italics mine) movements that crystallized within and alongside the early Christian Church". For him "Gnosis" seems harmless and acceptable, "Gnosticism" dangerous and heretical: "Admittedly, Merkavah mysticism contains several items of a secret 'Gnosis', knowledge, but this is not to suggest that it is a Jewish type of Gnosticism" (p. 42). Since we have for both words only one adjective form, 'gnostic', it seems justifiable to call the Merkavah mystics Jewish gnostics, albeit that this term needs some qualification: they certainly were not gnostics in the radical sense described above.

In his excellent edition of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (in the Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, Section "Textes", 5 Quebec-Louvain 1980), Bernard Barc has shown that there is a close agreement between the description of the birth of the demiurge, Samael, and that of the giants of Gen. 6, 1-4, as told in I *Enoch* 6-7. There the angels come down from heaven and unite with the daughters of men, who then

give birth to the giants (in the Bible called *Nephilim*) who finally devour the human beings. In the *Hypostasis* a shadow from heaven appears in the inferior world and unites with matter, which then gives birth to an abortion which resembles a lion. The Hebrew word *nephilim* literally means "abortions"; the idea of a creature which devours man immediately suggest the lion (Barc, *o.c.*, 28-32). Similar ideas are found in Philo with respect to the embodied soul (Barc in QUEBEC, 131-134). Barc's analysis of the myth underlying those of *On the Origin of the World* and the *Hypostasis of the Archons* leads to the conclusion that the first redaction of the latter work was written in the Jewish community of Alexandria in the first half of the second century A.D. "par un juif gnostique dans le but d'attirer à sa foi ses frères de race fidèles aux dogmes du judaïsme officiel" (edition, 4). The view that these works were written for Jews is shared by Gruenwald: "Only Jews could see the full relevance of the Gnostic argument made through the Jewish Scriptures. In other words, it stands to reason to say that the Gnostic writings which contain the Jewish material were written for Jews, or ex-Jews, who had to be convinced of both the falsity of their understanding of Scripture and of the truth latently maintained in their Scriptures; non-Jews, that is heathen believers, could not see the point made by such a shrewd procedure. Thus, it is conceivable that the Jewish writings under discussion were mainly addressed to Jews, or to people who had previously been Jewish believers, apparently Christians" (YALE II, 717-718). Though Gruenwald is somewhat reluctant to admit the existence of Jewish gnostics, he assumes "that some Jews or ex-Jews had an important role in transmitting the Jewish material into Gnostic hands". The Jews "who shared in and were addressed by the Gnostic heresy were familiar with Palestinian, sometimes Alexandrian, traditions" (YALE II, 722-723).

The main question is whether the emergence of the gnostic demiurge, as the low, negative counterpart of the transcendent God, can be explained from Jewish ideas. The rabbinic polemics show that there were *minim*, the best-known being Elisha ben Avuyah, nicknamed Aḥer, "Apostate", who taught that there were Two Powers in heaven. The rabbinic evidence was discussed by Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven. Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*, Leiden 1977. He argued that at its earliest stage this polemic was directed against speculations about a secondary divine being, the agent or vice-regent of God, known under various names (Angel of the Lord,

Lesser JHWH, the Name, Shekina, Logos, Man, etc.), who shared in or was wholly responsible for the creation of world and man. On the basis of Samaritan sources Jarl E. Fossum has recently shown that the same ideas and the same polemics are to be found in Samaritanism: *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord. The Origins of the Idea of Intermediation in Gnosticism*, Utrecht 1982. The agreement between the views of the Jewish and the Samaritan heretics and those of the defenders of the unity of God on both sides shows that the border-line between Jews and Samaritans was not as closed as Van Unnik would lead us to believe. Gruenwald, who admits that "the belief in Two Powers was considered heretical in Talmudic times" tries to avoid a conclusion which in his view must seem nearly inevitable, viz. that there were Jewish gnostics in the very heart of Judaism, by suggesting that "it seems more likely to think that the Jewish polemic against Two Powers in heaven was directed towards a non-Jewish heresy" (YALE II, 721). In another article he argued that it is impossible to prove that the rabbinical polemics against the rather unspecified *minim* were in fact directed against Jewish gnostics (QUISPEL, 171-189). I think he is right, but the opposite, that the *minim* were not, or did not include, Jewish gnostics cannot be proved either. What is more important is that in the Jewish or Samaritan sources the agent or intermediary of God is never said to be in opposition to God. If these heretics should be called gnostics they certainly were not gnostics of the radical type described above. But their views could have been developed into those of the radical gnostics. Fossum, 231-238, has drawn attention to the fact that also in the reports on the earliest gnostics the demiurgic angel(s) is (are) not opposed to God from the beginning (Simon Magus, Menander, Justin the Gnostic). Saturninus was the first to put the creating angels into direct opposition to God; the last stage of this development is found in the *Apocryphon of John*, which describes the demiurge as "a clear travesty of the God of the Jews".

Thus, the conclusion seems justified that the gnostic myths developed within Jewish circles on the basis of Jewish cosmogonical and anthropogonical speculations. However, that does not explain the radicalization: what led some Jews to construct a sharp opposition between the good, highest God and the bad demiurge and to identify the latter with the one God of Judaism? It has recently been described as resulting from a hardening of the opposite positions taken in the debate on the Two Powers in heaven. Nils A. Dahl, further developing a sug-

gestion by Alan Segal, puts it in this way: "The close correspondence between rabbinic and gnostic texts is best explained on the assumption that some "two powers heretics" responded to the rabbinic polemic by portraying the god of their intransigent monotheistic opponents as an inferior deity, an ignorant and arrogant Archon. In the situation of conflict, the doctrine of two powers was radicalized. The secondary element in the deity was degraded and no longer simply seen as manifestation and agent of the supreme God. (...) This explanation of the gnostic split in the deity accounts for the presence of Jewish traditions in the gnostic revolt, while at the same time providing reasons for the great ambivalence with which these traditions are used" (YALE II, 690-691). Where exactly this radicalization took place cannot be established with certainty. Though there are reports on early gnostics in Samaria and Antioch (Simon, Menander, Saturninus), it is virtually certain that at least the great gnostic myths were developed at Alexandria, which had a large Jewish community. We know that already before the Christian era there was in Alexandria much speculation on the two basic divine hypostases of Judaism, Wisdom (Sophia) and Man (Anthropos), which later on formed the centres of the two principal gnostic myths (see G. Quispel, Gnosis, in *Die orientalischen Religionen im Römerreich*, edited by M. J. Vermaseren (EPRO 91), Leiden 1981, 413-435). There is also a strong Alexandrian-Jewish influence on the early Hermetic writings, especially the *Poimandres* (See Pearson in QUISPTEL, 336-348).

It would be a mistake to take the gnostic religion for a degraded form of Judaism. In its radicalization the gnostic movement became a new, anti-cosmic religion, with, as K. W. Tröger put it, "a new mental focus" (QUEBEC, 86-98). In this it may be compared with Christianity which first was also merely a Jewish sect, but very soon, in its gentile form, with Paul's emphasis on salvation by grace and the Spirit and not by the works of the law, became a religion in its own right. The debate on the Jewish origin of Gnosticism will certainly go on, hampered by its inevitable lack of terminological clarity. In my view, it is not the all-important question of gnostic studies which it is sometimes held to be. The Jewish influence is especially clear in the gnostic myths. But there are also many gnostic writings which do not show any Jewish influence at all; and the gnostic religion also won its adherents among people who did not have any relationship with Judaism whatsoever. The persistence of a religious phenomenon in varying cultural and religious contexts is not explained if one is able to locate exactly the place of its cradle. The spirit of Gnosticism cannot be explained from Judaism.

#### 4. *Gnosticism and Philosophy*

The problem dealt with in this section has a long history. Hippolytus already argued that the gnostics, like all other heretics, had derived their ideas and systems from Greek philosophy and astrology (see K. Koschorke, *Hippolyt's Ketzerbekämpfung und Polemik gegen die Gnostiker*, Wiesbaden 1975). Recently, several experts in classical philosophy have studied the problem with less animosity and more factual knowledge than Hippolytus. The question can be approached from different sides: Were there developments in earlier philosophy which could explain the emergence of Gnosticism or which could have lent themselves for an *interpretatio gnostica*? Are there indications of direct gnostic influence on Greek philosophers or of Greek philosophy on the development of Gnosticism?

The study of possible Greek antecedents of Gnosticism has concentrated on the gnostic idea of the bad world and the evil demiurge, which indeed is much more decisive than the doctrine of the soul or the gnostic's experience of alienation from the world. Though there are in pre-Socratic philosophy ideas on the origin of the universe (connected with the figure of Ananke in Parmenides and Hate in Empedocles) which have a gnostic ring, the world is never held to be essentially bad (see Mansfeld in *QUISEPEL*, 263-290). It is, however, quite understandable that later gnostics interpreted Empedocles in their own way, making Hate the evil demiurge (see J. Frickel, *Unerkannte gnostische Schriften in Hippolyts Refutatio*, in *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, NHS 8, Leiden 1977, 126-130, and Mansfeld, 288-290). In early Orphism and early Pythagoreanism there is an anthropological pessimism (incarnation as punishment, the body as a tomb) which every gnostic would approve, but it is not based on nor does it correspond to an equally pessimistic cosmology (Mansfeld, 290-293; the latter aspect is neglected by Colpe, in *YALE I*, 36, who finds in 'Orphic' texts of the 4th and the 5th century B.C. "a veritable gnostic scenario"). Plato and Aristotle were convinced of the goodness and indestructibility of the cosmos; both conceived the idea of a bad world created by a bad demiurge, only to reject it immediately—Plato by concluding that the demiurge is good, Aristotle by arguing that there can be no demiurge at all (Mansfeld, 293-304). Only the Epicureans held that the world is not good, because it is a "random, meaningless, transitory and very badly arranged cosmos" (thus Armstrong in *JONAS*, 90-92; see also Mansfeld in *QUISEPEL*,

309-312). The thesis that the world is good made two options possible: 1a. there is a good demiurge (Plato and the Stoics), 1b. there is no demiurge (Aristotle). The thesis that the world is not good also allows of two possibilities: 2a. there is no demiurge (Epicureans), 2b. there is an evil demiurge (the gnostics). The last position was not defended by any Greek school of thought but the gnostics could claim that they offered an original cosmological explanation of the misery of human existence (see Mansfeld's conclusions in *QUISPEL*, 312-314).

Though Plato and the Platonists described the cosmos as essentially good, they did acknowledge the existence of imperfection and evil in the material world, into which the soul has descended or fallen. Especially on this point there are close correspondences between Gnosticism and contemporary Platonism. The descent of the soul could be interpreted by the Platonists as willed by the gods (Calvisius Taurus and his school), but also, in a more gnostic mood, as caused by wantonness or love of the body (*int. al.* mentioned by Albinus, who himself accepted the last-mentioned explanation; see J. Dillon in *YALE I*, 357-364). The doctrine of the descent and the ascent of the soul is not the core and kernel of Gnosticism which it is often thought to be; the gnostics shared it with the Platonists, though sometimes enriching it with mythological peculiarities of their own. Especially in the second century there were Platonists who came very close to the position of radical Gnosticism. When Plutarch and Atticus assumed a maleficent world soul as the principle of evil in the material universe, based on Plato's *Laws*, 896E-897D connected with *Timaeus* 52-53, they nevertheless did not introduce a gnostic kind of cosmic dualism (see Armstrong in *JONAS*, 103-106, and J. M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, London 1978, 202-208, 254). According to Dillon, 204-205, the Valentinian Sophia and her offspring the demiurge are the gnostic equivalents of Isis and her offspring Horus in Plutarch's interpretation. That may be possible, though it deserves a more thorough investigation. That the figure of *Plane* in the Valentinian *Gospel of Truth* in fact is a devaluated Isis, because the goddess's wandering (*πλάνη*) was considered not to "lead to the truth in gnostic opinion", is a very unlikely suggestion (Helderman in *OXFORD*, 26-46). Heinrich Dörrie has shown that there are indeed aspects of Plutarch's thought which can be characterized as "gnostic traces", but that his piety does not depend on the gnostic religious world view but only shows a close affinity to it. Dörrie concludes: "Plutarch steht in manchen seiner Äusserungen der Gnosis nahe; in



seiner philosophisch-religiösen Entscheidung steht er in radikalem Gegensatz zu ihr" (in QUISPÉL, 116). More difficult to assess is the position of the Pythagorean Platonist Numenius of Apamea, who taught the existence of two souls, a good and a bad one, in the universe and in man. His demiurge, the second Nous, though being good because of his Father, has a certain ambiguity and imperfection about him: he forgets himself in his concern for matter. Nevertheless, his world remains a Platonic world; it is "a beautiful cosmos, beautified by participation in the Beautiful" (Frg. 16 Des Places; 25 Leemans). Armstrong concludes his discussion of Numenius (in JONAS, 106-109) with this judgement: "Numenius, for all his "Orientalism", remains a Platonic-Pythagorean philosopher who looks at Gnosticism, as he looks at other Oriental, non-Greek ways of thinking, from the outside, adopting and adapting any ideas from the Gnostics which he thinks will be helpful for his Platonic philosophical purposes" (see also Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 366-379). This seems a more balanced assessment of Numenius' position than that expressed by Chadwick (in YALE I, 13): "Numenius of Apamea (...) is simply to be reckoned among pagan gnostics". It is interesting to see that Macrobius, though adopting Numenius' 'gnostic' view that the planetary spheres are part of the inferior, 'infernal' world, firmly rejects the idea of a demonization of the cosmos (see Flamant in QUISPÉL, 130-142). An important question is that of the relationship between Gnosticism and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which have so much in common with Numenius. In a long and very learned article Michel Tardieu has dealt with this problem, concentrating on the correspondences between the *Oracles* and Valentinianism. His conclusion is that there was no direct influence of gnostic mythology on that of the *Oracles* but that "la réactualisation gnostique des mythes platoniciens par les mythes venus de l'Orient allait servir de modèle à la chaldaïsation du platonisme scolaire" (YALE I, 230). Or, in the words of his own summary (*Ibid.*, 233): "I conclude that the system of the *Oracles* is incomprehensible unless we see at its foundation the development of the Gnostic systems around Valentinus. Thus, I have affirmed Kroll's position, but I refuse to use the word "Gnosis"."

Especially in the second century there were Platonists and Platonic-influenced religious thinkers (also among the Christians) who came very close to radical Gnosticism in their valuation of the material world and man's position in it. From the third century onwards, starting with Plotinus, the Platonists resumed a more positive and world-accepting

attitude (only Porphyry shows a tendency to return to Numenius' position). Plotinus strongly opposed the gnostic view of the universe and its maker. Armstrong discovers in Plotinus "an intense enjoyment of this world in all its horizontal richness and diverse beauty and variety" (in JONAS, 113). "Of all ancient thinkers, pagan or Christian, he is the least interested in life after death and escape from the body" (*Ibid.*, 115). That he speaks of the "audacity" (τόλμα) of his second and third hypostases has its background in the Neopythagoreanism of the first century B.C., where the term served to indicate the Dyad, the principle of indefinite multiplicity. In Plotinus the τόλμα does not introduce, as it does in Gnosticism, a cosmic disaster (Armstrong, 116-121). That there were gnostics in the school of Plotinus is clearly shown by his polemics, especially in *Enn.* II, 9 (see C. Elsas, *Neuplatonische und gnostische Weltablehnung in der Schule Plotins*, Berlin 1975; also O'Meara in YALE I, 365-378). In Porphyry's *Vita Plotini*, 16, it is told that there were Christians who declared that Plato had failed to penetrate into the depth of intellectual being. In his lectures Plotinus frequently attacked these people, who based themselves on, *int. al.*, "apocalypses bearing the names of Zoroaster, Zostrianus, Nicotheus, Allogenes, Mesus, and others of that order". The Nag Hammadi Library contains two works which most probably are identical with two of the apocalypses mentioned by Porphyry. The long treatise of Cod. VIII, 1 is called *Zostrianus*, a name which may be identical with Zoroaster. At the end of the work we read, 132, 6-9: "Zostrianus. Words of Truth of Zostrianus. God of Truth. Words of Zoroast[er]". In Cod. XI, 3 there is a tractate, called *Allogenes*, in which a person of that name gives a revelation discourse to his son Messus (cf. Mesus in Porphyry). In *Zostrianus* and *Allogenes*, and also in another gnostic work, the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII, 5), there are speculations about the Neoplatonic triad Being, Life, and Intelligence (on this triad see P. Hadot, *Etre, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin*, in *Les sources de Plotin* (Fondation Hardt, Entretiens 5), Geneva 1960, 105-141; E. R. Dodds, *Proclus. The Elements of Theology*, 2nd ed., Oxford 1963, 252-254). These texts show a gnosticization of Neoplatonic conceptions, not the influence of gnostic ideas on Neoplatonism (see Claude in QUEBEC, 373; Siever in YALE II, 788-795, Williams, *Ibid.*, 819-821). It seems likely that the *Three Steles of Seth* and also the tractate *Marsanes* (NHC X, 1; see Pearson in JONAS, 373-384) were among the "other works" in the hands of Plotinus' opponents which Porphyry left

unmentioned. The conceptions of these texts need to be studied by an expert in Neoplatonism who is not a complete 'Allogenes' in gnostic studies (a good example is Whittaker's study of the idea of self-generation in Porphyry and earlier philosophers, in *YALE I*, 176-189).

In conclusion we may say that the influence of Gnosticism on Greek philosophy was extremely slight. The only one who seems influenced by gnostic ideas, Numenius, still remains far from becoming a gnostic in the radical sense. But his work and the *Oracula Chaldaica* show that in certain quarters of second-century society a spiritual climate prevailed in which gnostic systems could easily develop. It explains why the influence of Greek philosophical ideas can be detected in most of the new-found gnostic works. It would have been strange if the situation had been otherwise and the gnostics had not made use of the cosmological and anthropological speculations of their environment. It is becoming increasingly clear that also in formulating the typically gnostic myths which were based on Jewish traditions the gnostic authors drew heavily on contemporary Greek philosophical works. When in *On the Origin of the World* the author seems to use Hesiod's *Theogony* and to quote literally Parmenides, he is actually basing himself on a late Hellenistic cosmological source which was also known to Plutarch (see Mansfeld, Hesiod and Parmenides in Nag Hammadi, *Vig. Chr.* 35 (1981) 174-182). And when in the *Apocryphon of John* the creation of Adam's psychic body corresponds to that of the body of man in the *Timaeus*, the author did not consult Plato's work directly but made use of a contemporary writing in which each of the seven components of the human body was combined with a particular planet (see my contribution to *QUISPEL*, 38-57). From the Greek papyri of Plato found in Egypt we should not too easily infer that the gnostic authors had a direct access to the original works of Plato and that, therefore, the interpreter of Nag Hammadi texts "is free, within the limits imposed by ancient education itself, to treat certain parts of the Platonic corpus, read by second-century eyes, as one of the direct sources of gnosticism" (Layton in *QUEBEC*, 196, who overestimates the Middle Platonic element in the *Treatise on Resurrection*, without knowing that the names Albinus and Alcinous refer to the same man). Gnosticism is more than "a Platonism run wild" (thus A. D. Nock in *Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background*, 2nd ed., New York 1964, XVI), nor does it wholly belong to the "Platonic Underworld" (Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 384ff.). The spirit of Gnosticism cannot be explained from Platonism nor from any other Greek school of thought.

## 5. *Gnosticism and Christianity*

There are no gnostic works which in their present form are demonstrably pre-Christian. But the Nag Hammadi Library contains several gnostic tractates which are certainly non-Christian. These writings show that Gnosticism did not arise as a Christian heresy. Therefore, at least “the *possibility* of interaction between Gnostics and Christians during the formative period of the New Testament writings themselves” cannot be ruled out (thus George W. MacRae in JONAS, 150). The discussion on the impact of the Nag Hammadi writings on New Testament studies has concentrated on the Sayings of Jesus in the synoptic Gospels, the Prologue of the Gospel of John, and Pauline theology.

The discovery of the *Gospel of Thomas* has been of extreme importance for the study of the Sayings tradition in the Synoptics. But we need not enter here into the problems involved because in this case it is not the influence of Gnosticism which is at stake (on ‘Thomas’ see Quispel’s and Guillaumont’s articles mentioned above in section 1; Koester in YALE I, 238-261; Robinson in JONAS, 135-143; MacRae, *Ibid.*, 152-153, who thinks the Gospel of Thomas is “a thoroughly gnostic work”). It has been claimed that *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII, 1) depends on a source which was also used, but less accurately, in the Prologue of the Gospel of John. The Berlin group of scholars around H.-M. Schenke designated the gnostic tractate as a non-Christian, “Sethian”, secondarily christianized work, and especially Gesine Schenke and Carsten Colpe drew attention to what they saw as striking parallels with the Johannine Prologue. R. MacL. Wilson and Yvonne Janssens have challenged the view that *Trimorphic Protennoia* is an originally non-Christian work (see Robinson’s report of the relevant studies in YALE II, 644-662 and in JONAS, 128-131; Yamauchi in QUISPTEL, 480-484; on the anthropology of *Protennoia* see Gesine Schenke in HALLE, 173-179). In reading the gnostic treatise I absolutely do not get the impression of the Berlin group that “the relevant statements of *Protennoia* stand in their natural context, whereas their parallels in the Johannine Prologue (...) seem to have been artificially made serviceable to a purpose really alien to them” (G. Schenke in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 99 (1974) 733; Robinson in YALE II, 651). I agree with Colpe and Wilson (see YALE II, 644), that there are sapiential traditions behind both writings, but in my view *Trimorphic Protennoia* as a whole

deserves a fresh and unbiased study before anything should be said about its possible relationship with the Johannine Prologue. Of course, there is much Gnosis in the Gospel of John, and there is much in the Nag Hammadi Library to elucidate it. This was pointed out by MacRae, whose conclusion I would like to subscribe: "In my view the Fourth Gospel is neither a genuinely Gnostic work nor an anti-Gnostic one. It is rather an independent reinterpretation of the Jesus story on the part of a gifted Evangelist who was strongly influenced by the multiple currents of his syncretistic world including Gnosticism. His Gospel represents in part a gnosticizing of the tradition which, however, stops short of absolute dualism and its corollary, docetism. Thus, despite the attempt of the Valentinians to appropriate John as their Gospel because they rightly recognized its tendencies, the Fourth Gospel is not a Gnostic work" (JONAS, 156-157).

That Paul not only attacked gnostic ideas in his letters but was also strongly influenced by them was argued by many New Testament scholars long before the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library. It was claimed, for instance, that the view opposed by Paul in 1 Cor. 15, 2, that there is no resurrection of the dead, should be interpreted by the gnostic idea expressed by the heretics of 2 Tim. 2, 18, that the resurrection has already taken place. The latter view is indeed found in several gnostic tractates, e.g. the *Treatise on Resurrection*, NHC I, 49, 9-24 (see Robinson in JONAS, 131, but also Wisse's critical remarks in QUEBEC, 108-114). An important question is how far Paul's christology was influenced by gnostic conceptions. When Paul in 1 Cor. 2, 8 says that the rulers of this age were ignorant of Jesus' true identity and therefore crucified him, he seems to make use of a wide-spread gnostic mythologumenon which is also found in such non-Christian, gnostic works as the *Paraphrasis of Shem* (NHC VII, 36, 2-24) and the *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V, 77, 4-20; see MacRae in JONAS, 153-155; Shellrude, however, sees in the *Apocalypse* a document of Christian Gnosticism, in OXFORD, 82-91). According to Walter Schmithals there are in Paul's theology clear traces of a pre-Christian, Jewish Gnosticism which already used the name 'Christ' for its Saviour and later on, in a christianized form, identified this figure with Jesus. It was, still according to Schmithals, to this type of gnostic Christianity or christianized Gnosticism that Paul was converted at Damascus. This would explain Paul's anthropological dualism and his pneumatic view of salvation and life in the Church as being "in Christ", whereas the apocalyp-

tic and christological-soteriological elements of his theology would reflect the views of the Christian communities of Jerusalem and Antioch (JONAS, 385-414). Schmithals's article is fascinating but, in my view, too speculative and sometimes rather fantastic. He works with a Bultmanian concept of Gnosis without any attempt to check its elements on the new sources. It is no longer possible, nor acceptable, to speak about the gnostic aspects of Paul's theology without any reference to the original gnostic writings. There is no doubt in Paul's language and thought much that reminds us of gnostic ideas. These elements should be studied very carefully in the light of our present knowledge of Gnosticism, without building hypothesis on hypothesis. In this area of New Testament studies there is still much work to be done.

The gnostics and Christians of the first centuries of our era are often viewed as two separate groups who were sharply opposed to one another. In that view a Christian gnostic, or gnostic Christian, really is not a Christian at all but at best a syncretist who has adapted his views to those of the Church. According to Martin Krause the gnostics sought to win ordinary Christians over to their side "by adaptation, by a gnostic allegorical exegesis of biblical texts (...), by the composition of Christian-gnostic writings (...), and by the adoption, reinterpretation and expansion of the Christian sacraments" (OXFORD, 48). This picture of the Christian gnostics as people who pretended to be Christians for propagandist reasons only cannot be true. Of course, there were gnostics who had picked up some Christian notions without having any real affinity to Christianity; the sources show this abundantly. But the Valentinians were sincere Christians, who participated in the local Christian communities as long as they were allowed to do so. Koschorke has shown that the Christian gnostics did not reject the ecclesiastical offices—they often held them themselves—but were indifferent to them. They ascribed to these offices of the Church only a limited importance. The bishop, presbyters, etc., could mediate salvation by instruction and through the sacraments to those members of the congregation who had not yet reached the level of the true gnostics. The gnostics themselves did not need these forms of outward mediation, even if they did not abstain from them (a similar position was held by Clement of Alexandria). The situation changed when the bishops began to make exclusive claims in behalf of the mediation of salvation by the ecclesiastical offices. It was against this exclusiveness that the gnostics raised their polemics, not against the offices themselves. In a study of

the gnostics' valuation of the apostolic tradition and authority Elaine H. Pagels has come to the same conclusion (in JONAS, 415-430). There were gnostic communities which continued the Pauline tradition of Church organization, solely based on the Spirit and its gifts, long after the rise of monarchical episcopacy. The *Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI, 1) is directed to such a congregation, which seems more in accordance with the gnostics' pneumatic interpretation of Christianity than a community ruled by a bishop and presbyters. But in that congregation pneumatics and ordinary, less enlightened members of the church lived together, though there were difficulties between them which the author of the treatise tries to counter (see on all this Koschorke in YALE II, 757-769).

It is a serious mistake to see the gnostics simply as a separate group outside and in opposition to the Church. The Valentinian Florinus, who was active as a missionary in Gaul, was a presbyter of the Roman church and only deposed at the urging of Irenaeus (frg. syr. 28). The gnostics who are opposed, and sometimes quoted with approval, by Clement of Alexandria apparently still lived within the Church. Especially in Egyptian Christianity it took a long time before the border-line between orthodoxy and heresy became clearly discernible.

In the second century there was a theological debate between early-catholic and gnostic Christians within the Church itself. This insight opens the way to a theological appreciation of the gnostic issues. Much attention has been paid to the question of the origin of Gnosticism and the syncretism of its mythology and doctrines, but very little to its contribution to the development of Christian theology. Its influence seems to have been more considerable than was surmised by an earlier generation of scholars. On this point our classic text-books of the history of Christian doctrine are so completely insufficient that new studies are urgently needed. A first and important step in this direction was made by Barbara Aland in her contribution to the Jonas Festschrift (158-215). She describes the debate between gnostic and catholic Christians as focussed on the right interpretation of the Gospel. One might object that she puts this debate too much into the perspective of protestant, in particular Barthian theology (she even participates in the debate herself). But in my view that does not diminish the value of her analyses. The gnostics experienced their salvation as a gift of grace which made them free of the world and put them right away into the new life. They understood Paul better than most of their fellow-Christians, who

tended to express salvation into the ethical categories of merit and reward. The Christian gnostics emphasized the unexpected novelty of Christ's revelation; they rejected the ideas of a history of salvation and a *praeparatio evangelica* by the Logos, which in their view debased the unique significance of the Christ event. Mrs. Aland convincingly argues that the well-known gnostic expression "saved by nature" does not refer to an innate faculty of the elect but to the divine nature which as a gift of grace is bestowed on man (210-212). It is to be hoped that more scholars will devote their studies to this area of research.

In conclusion we may say that Gnosticism is one of the most complex and variegated religious phenomena of Antiquity. In its mythology and doctrines there are distinct Jewish and Platonic elements, which seem to reach back to its first developments. But it cannot be explained exclusively from Judaism or Platonism, and certainly not from Christianity (Mrs. Aland's suggestions to that effect, in *YALE I*, 339-342, lead into a blind alley). Not any of the exclusive explanations of its origin is satisfactory. But there is no doubt that it was only in its Christian form that Gnosticism became really important and was able to exert a lasting influence, not only on the development of Christian theology, but also on western thought in general. In this respect, the study of Gnosticism is still in its infancy.

4112 JR *Beusichem* (The Netherlands), Markt 17-19