

Chapter 9

The Two Religions of the Cathars

1. Two Forms of Catharism

The western expansion of Bogomilism raises a number of questions. It appears that at the beginning of the XIIth century it was already rooted in northern Italy, Provence (which then did not belong to the crown of France), and central France. By 1167 there had been a major split in Byzantine Bogomilism. One church, that of "Sclavonia," remained faithful to the ancient, mitigated, or pseudodualistic, doctrine; but another one arose, powerful enough to impose its dogma on Provençal and part of Lombard Catharism, which professed radical dualism. The center of the new church was a place probably called Dragovitsa, not located on the map of the Balkans.¹ By 1190 the mitigated Bogomils had resumed their offensive in Lombardy, but Provence remained lost to them altogether until the Crusade and the war that led to the fall of Montségur (1244) created complete confusion among the extant Albigenses. It seems fairly certain that radical dualism was exported to Provence from the Byzantine Empire, where its origin was purely intellectual (it was probably concocted in a monastic setting by monks with an intense nostalgia for Origenism). Yet it is by no means sure whether the radical heresy existed in Bosnia before the XIVth–XVth century.

About 1190 Nazarius, Cathar bishop of Concorezzo in Lombardy, had received from Bulgaria, as confirmation of temperate faith, the text of the *Interrogatio Iohannis*, to which he was to remain faithful all his life long. In 1250, although supplanted by his *filius maior* Desiderius, who was now setting the tone, Nazarius still professed phantasiasm according to the "orthodox" Bogomil doctrine.² Reformed by Desiderius, the Concorezzo school would come even closer to Catholic doctrine than Bogomilism did, thereby widening the gap between it and the other

school, of the radical "Albanenses" (probably for Albigenses) of Desenzano on Lake Garda.

Some distinction between "moderates" and "radicals" was already mentioned in the earliest anti-Cathar writing, the *Manifestatio haeresis catharorum* (1176-90) of Bonacursus: "Some say that God created all the elements, others that the Devil created the elements; but their common opinion is that the Devil divided the elements."³ Yet this seems to refer to two interpretive trends within Bogomilism, one close to Catholicism and the other dualistic.

More data are contained in *De heresi catharorum in Lombardia*, redacted between 1190 and 1200, for it mentions Nazarius as *filius maior* of Bishop Garattus of Concorezzo, and the same Nazarius, still alive in 1250, could not have been born before 1165-70. The *De heresi* mentions three Cathar churches in Italy; one in Desenzano on Lake Garda (near Verona), professing the radical dualism of the church of Drugunthia; a second one of Bishop Caloiannes of Mantua, deriving from the church of Sclavonia (Dalmatia); and a third one of Bishop Garattus of Concorezzo, deriving from the church of Bulgaria. Under Nazarius, Garattus's successor, the Concorezzo church professed Bogomil pseudodualism in agreement with the *Interrogatio Iohannis*.

Salvo Burci of Piacenza, whose writing *Supra stella* (*sic*) was begun on May 6, 1235,⁴ differentiates the Albanenses (radical) from the Concorricii (moderate) and from a third order, *qui Calojani et etiam rancigenae nuncupatur* (those called of [Bishop] Caloiannes or French), who are a mixture of the former two ("ex toto non sunt ex fide Albanensium, nec ex fide Concorricium").⁵ Later on (ca. 1250-60), the *Brevis summula contra hereses notatos hereticorum* furnishes a detailed, comparative list of the dogmas professed by the three Cathar groups in northern Italy, marked as A ("Albanian"), B (from Bagnolo), and C (Concorezzo).⁶ The list, which contradicts earlier authorities on more than one point, should be consulted with caution.

The unsystematic description by James de Capellis (ca. 1240)⁷ does not add anything to these data. Moneta of Cremona, a Dominican who composed, between 1241 and 1244, a vast treatise against the Cathars and the Waldensians, deals separately with the "radical" and the "mitigated." Firsthand information is furnished by Raniero Sacconi of Piacenza in his 1250 *Summa de catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno*. A Cathar of a certain standing, Sacconi converted in 1245 to Catholicism, joined the Dominicans, assisted in the inquisitorial activities of Peter of Verona, escaped the assassination attempt that took the latter's life on April 6, 1252, and became chief inquisitor for Lombardy between 1254 and 1259.⁸

Sacconi likewise distinguishes between the radical "Albanians" of Desenzano and the mitigated of Concorezzo and Bagnolo.⁹ The church of Concorezzo was by far the strongest, with 1,500 or more *perfecti* (Perfects, that is, confirmed Cathars) from a total that, for the whole of southern and southeastern Europe, must not have exceeded 4,000. (The whole of Provence was left by then with no more than 200.) The "Albanians" of Verona followed with 500, the Bagnolenses concentrated in the area of Mantua, Brescia, and Bergamo, reaching perhaps 200. Furthermore, there was a church "of the French" in Verona and in Lombardy with about 150 Perfects, and communities in Tuscany (Florence, Spoleto) with 100 Perfects.¹⁰

The Albanenses, not actual "Albanians" (who migrated in waves to eastern and southeastern Italy from the mid-XVth century) but Albigenes—that is, adhering to the tenets of the radical Provençal Cathars from Albi (northeast of Toulouse) and the surroundings—had two factions: one of Balasinanza, bishop of Verona, and one of John de Lugio (perhaps Lugano?) from Bergamo, *filius maior* and, according to Sacconi, "ordained bishop."¹¹ According to the same Sacconi, the Bagnolenses agreed in principle with the moderates of Concorezzo, except for the fact that, like Nazarius, they remained phantasiasts, and like the radical Cathars they believed in the preexistence of the soul, whereas the church of Concorezzo under Desiderius had given up Bogomil phantasiasm and stuck to Bogomil Traducianism instead of a preexistent soul. Finally, Sacconi gives us precious information about the churches of Toulouse, Albi, and Carcassonne, which were still radical like the "Albanenses," whereas the "French" (in Lombardy) held the Bagnolo faith, and the Cathars of La Marche, Florence, and Spoleto varied between the faith of Bagnolo and the "Albanians," inclining rather toward the latter.

The *Tractatus de hereticis* (1266–67) of the Lombard inquisitor Anselm of Alexandria in Piedmont (near Turin), who had been one of Sacconi's deputies, confirms the tripartition of the Italian Cathars into Garattenses (from Garattus, bishop around 1190) in Concorezzo, Albanenses in Verona, and Bagnolenses in Bagnolo, Lombardy. The Concorezzians were divided into two factions, one of their former bishop Nazarius, who remained faithful to the doctrine of the *Interrogatio* received about 1190 from a Bulgarian bishop, and the other one of Desiderius, former *filius maior* to Nazarius and then bishop, who had given up phantasiasm. Anselm further differentiated three schools of Bagnolenses but failed to explain the differences.

The Cathars themselves were fully aware of their diversity. The doctrines of the three main churches of northern Italy are fairly well known

through heresiological sources. Two of them professed a pseudodualism directly derived from Bogomilism; and the third one, deriving from a mysterious church of Dragovitsa, professed a radical dualism of which most elements, as we will see shortly, are Origenist.

2. The Pseudodualists

The doctrine summarized by Bonacursus in his *Manifestatio* is that of the monarchian or moderate Cathars, who believe the Devil to be the author of the human body, in which he imprisoned by force an angel of light. He made Eve, seduced her, and begat Cain. Abel in turn is the son of Adam and Eve and was killed by Cain. From his blood the dog was born; this is why dogs are faithful to humans (popular etiological legend). All things in the world, animated or not, have been created by the Devil, yet Bonacursus does not make any distinction between *creator* and *factor*, Creator and Craftsman. The daughters of Eve were made pregnant by the demons and gave birth to the race of Giants, who learned that the world had been created by an evil principle. This is why the Devil in his anger destroyed them with the deluge. Enoch belongs to the Devil, and the Patriarchs likewise. Moses followed the Devil's will and received his Law. David was an assassin, and Elias was abducted to heaven by the Devil himself. Yet the Holy Spirit spoke often through the mouths of the Prophets. John the Baptist belongs to the Devil. Mary's conception was immaculate, with no help from a man. Jesus had no physical body. He is not equal to God (subordinationism). The cross is the sign of the Beast of the Revelation of John. Furthermore, the Cathars are said to be vegetarian, to reject the sacraments and the Church Fathers, and to swear no oath.

Except for the popular story that explains the origin of the dog, the only information in Bonacursus that does not stem from the *Interrogatio* concerns the fornication of the two major heavenly bodies: "They believe that the Devil himself is the Sun, Eve being the Moon, and the two of them commit adultery each month, like a man with a whore. All stars are demons" (*Diabolum esse Solem, Lunam esse Evam, et per singulos menses dicunt eos fornicari*).¹²

The *De heresi catharorum* does not ascribe to the moderate Cathars a dualistic doctrine. In fact, the disciples of Caloiannes and Garattus believe in one omnipotent God, creator of the angels and of the *four elements*. Moreover, the elements have been divided not by the Devil but by a good angel of the Lord. Lucifer sinned while in heaven, but some

Cathars speak of an Evil Spirit with four faces, which superficially recalls the symbols of the Evangelists (man, bird, *fish*, and beast). This Spirit dwells at the very bottom of the universe. It was he who seduced Lucifer when the steward paid him a visit (according to the *Interrogatio*, Satan indeed visited Hell), and Lucifer in turn seduced the heavenly angels. It is not impossible that the description of this Evil Spirit was a vague and bookish recollection of the description of the five-faced Manichaean King of Darkness in Augustine, somehow contaminated with the far better known symbols of the Evangelists.

Lucifer is the Old Testament god. He fabricated the bodies of Adam and Eve from mud and introduced angels into them by force. Eve is the instrument of sin; the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is fornication. The *De heresi* discerns among the monarchian Cathars two sorts of theories on the origin of each human soul: Some of them are Traducianist like the Bogomils, some believe in the preexistence of the soul (like Origen). God supposedly created some new souls to compensate for the loss of those that will not share in eternal salvation.

"Sclavini" and Bulgarians have in common, according to *De heresi*, a number of beliefs: It was the Devil who sent the deluge and spared Noah, it was he who spoke to Abraham, destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, drew the Israelites out of Egypt, gave them the Law, and sent them the Prophets. The Holy Spirit sometimes used the latter to announce the coming of Christ. Yet the Devil is nothing but the minister of God and acts with his permission.

The "Sclavini" believed that Jesus, John the Baptist, and Mary were three angels of the Lord, but James de Capellis, reporting the same thesis, says that God "tres angelos misit in mundum, unus ex eis formam mulieris accepit, et hic fuit b. Virgo Maria. Alii duo angeli viriles formas sumpserunt. Unus fuit Christum, alius Johannes *Evangelista* (sent three angels into the world, one of which took on a woman's shape, and that was the Holy Virgin Mary. The other two angels took the form of men. One was Christ, the other John *the Evangelist*).¹³ This makes more sense, for the Bogomils marked John the Baptist as one of the Devil's followers. Furthermore, the "Sclavini" were phantasiasts.

Some among the "Bulgarians" of Concorezzo, by contrast, believed that Mary had been a real woman and Jesus a real man and that he *actually* died but discarded his body during his Ascent. (How this body could go to heaven is an unfathomable problem for the orthodox, which can be solved only by suspension of reason.) To them John the Baptist is the envoy of the Devil. This is the reformed faith of Desiderius, which wins over Nazarius's phantasiasm and comes very close to orthodox doctrine.

There is nothing fundamentally new in Salvo Burci's summary of the beliefs of the Concorricii.¹⁴ He also knows the story of the four-faced Spirit and adds that Lucifer, the Spirit, and a third partner—the Evil Trinity—have divided the elements. This innovation probably derives from an attempt to explain the plural in Gen. 1:26 (in Latin: "*Faciamus hominem*") as referring to Lucifer and his associates ("*Lucifer fuit locutum in persona sociorum*"; Burci's language is something between Latin and Italian). The episode must be a local variant, for it does not occur in other sources. Otherwise the Concorricii are rigorously Bogomil, faithful to the *Interrogatio*.

Moneta of Cremona emphasizes several times that among the monarchian Cathars God is the Creator of primordial matter, whereas the Devil is no more than its organizer, he is only the Craftsman (*factor*) of the visible world: "He is exclusively designated as the maker [*factor*] of the visible things, for he worked with a preexistent material; this is why, they say, Christ called him Prince of this World. They do not concede that he is the world Creator, for they assert that to create means to make something from nothing."¹⁵

The distinction *creator* versus *factor* played a very important part in the debate between the "Albanenses" and the Garattenses, the radical and the pseudodualist, as the *Book of Two Principles* of the school of John of Lugio shows (see below). James de Capellis also states that the moderates "say that the devil is not the Creator, but the Craftsman, for he modeled the preexistent matter of the four elements as a potter models clay into a vase" (*diabolum vero non creatorem, sed factorem dicunt, quia ex praejacente materia quatuor elementorum operatus est, sicut figulus ex luto vas operatur; emphases mine*).¹⁶

Lucifer is not a rootless principle; he was created by God, and he sinned out of free will (being jealous of God's creation). Upon his return to heaven he seduced the star-angels. The Sun, the Moon, and the stars are demons; and the major heavenly bodies fornicate every month, and the product of their intercourse is the morning dew: "Dicunt enim quod Sol et Luna et aliae Stellae Daemones sunt, adiacentes quod Sol et Luna semel in mense adulterium committunt, quod in Astronomia legitur de coitu olis et Lunae. Dicunt enim quod ros ex illo coitu spargitur super aërem et super terram, quod istam claritatem amittent et habebunt eam salvandi qui ex semine angelico, scilicet qui ex Adam generati fuerunt."¹⁷

Besides this myth, which we already encountered in Bonacursus, Moneta's monarchian Cathars are said to be Traducianist, antisacramentarian, allegorizing, and subordinationists, which shows that they conscientiously follow the *Interrogatio*. Their christology is not reported in

full. Some believe that Christ crossed Mary as if through a pipe, others that he received something from her.

Raniero Sacconi repeats the same things about the Concorezzo monarchians: They profess a single principle, God the Creator of the angels and of the four elements *ex nihilo*. The Devil fashions the visible world with God's permission; he then makes human bodies and imprisons fallen angels in them. The Cathars of Concorezzo are Traducianist. They reject the Old Testament yet have doubts concerning the Patriarchs "and especially the Prophets"; once they held John the Baptist to be evil, but during Sacconi's time (1250) they changed their mind. Desiderius's realistic christology prevailed over Nazarius's Bogomil phantasiasm, but one detail is missing from a perfectly Catholic picture, for the reformed Concorezzans assert that Christ relinquished his body during his Ascent in a heavenly place where the Virgin and the apostles dwell, and he will recover it for the last time at the last judgment. Obviously Desiderius has some problem understanding Cyril of Alexandria's emphasis on the heavenly ascent of Christ's body, not to mention Mary's, and thought to solve the problem by somehow lowering its status. The body clearly cannot abide in God's presence yet has a place in heaven. That much Desiderius could concede, and he was closer to orthodoxy than some of the Antiochene Fathers (see Introduction above).

According to Sacconi, the monarchians of Bagnolo were phantasiasts like Nazarius but had replaced Bogomil Traducianism with Origenist preexistence of the soul.

Anselm of Alexandria further specifies that Nazarius shared the ancient theory of the conception and birth of Jesus Christ through Mary's ear and that he was so subordinationist as not to accept Christ's divinity at all. Desiderius's christology, by contrast, was realistic (the Virgin's and Christ's bodies were made of flesh, Christ's Passion and death were real). The Virgin and John the Baptist are awaiting the last judgment in Paradise. During his Ascent Christ left his body in Paradise and will recover it for the last time to judge the living and the dead. The Prophets were not evil, although the Devil often spoke through their mouths, whereas at other times they were speaking as human beings. They are already saved, for they resuscitated upon Christ's death.

Old Nazarius would also have preached the story of the fornication of the Sun and the Moon, whose products are morning dew and *honey*. Nazarists abstained from honey.

Anselm mentions three schools of Bagnolo but reports only one doctrine, deriving from the interpretation of the *Interrogatio*. The *Interrogatio* indeed seemed to make a distinction between the angels *seduced* by

Sathanas and those who were simply *dragged* down by his tail(s). The innocence of the angels planted in the clay bodies points toward their belonging to the second class. The Cathars of Bagnolo thus differentiate the angels who willingly followed Sathanas from those who were *unwillingly* drawn with him in his fall, and they assert that human souls are angels of the second category. The Bagnolenses are furthermore Traducianist, subordinationist, and believe—according to the *Interrogatio*—that the Devil is the author of unpleasant meteorological phenomena.

In conclusion, it appears that the monarchian Cathars of Lombardy are pseudodualists whose ethics are Bogomil and whose doctrine is directly derived from the *Interrogatio*. In comparison with this text, the heresiologists signal a few innovations:

- The myth of the Evil Spirit at the bottom of the universe, which replaces Bogomil pseudodualism with radical dualism;
- The myth of the fornication of the Sun and the Moon, which has no doctrinal consequence;
- Desiderius's christological realism and the doctrine of an intermediate Paradise, which replace the "orthodox" Bogomil phantasiasm of old Nazarius;
- The Origenist doctrine of the preexistence of the soul, which competes with Bogomil Traducianism.

Despite all of these transformations, which only affect some sectors of the monarchian communities and have not altogether decisive doctrinal weight, moderate Catharism is Bogomilism in a pure state, drawn into a process of blending with the radical doctrine, whose origin is completely different.

3. The Radical Cathars

De heresi catharorum ascribes radical dualism to the Desenzano Cathars: They believe in two gods, one entirely good, the other entirely evil, each of them creator of angels. Lucifer is the Son of the Lord of Darkness. He transfigures himself into an angel of Light to ascend to the heaven of the good God, where the angels intercede for him and God adopts the stranger and makes him into the steward of his Kingdom, the dishonest steward of Luke 16:5–7. God would live to regret it, for Lucifer seduces his angels and provokes civil war in heaven. God is compelled to evict him, together with one third of the angels, those who took part in his

rebellion. Angels are made of *body*, soul, and spirit. Their bodies and spirits remain in heaven; only their souls fall and are imprisoned by Lucifer in human bodies. Consequently humans have angelic souls but spirits from the Devil. Christ comes down to save the angelic souls. The garments, crowns, and thrones of glory are awaiting their ancient owners in heaven. At the conclusion of numerous transmigrations from body to body, a sincerely repenting soul may recover its heavenly body and spirit.

Salvo Burci is more specific and is acquainted with a slightly different tradition: The two coeternal creators each have a Trinity and a world of their own (*habent ambo trinitatem et unusquisque habet suam creationem*).¹⁸ The Son of the Lord of Darkness ascended to heaven with his angels, beginning a merciless war against the angels of the good God. He seduced many of God's angels and drew their souls down into his own world, where "they transmigrate from body to body until they reach the knowledge of truth" (*vadunt incorporando se de corpore in corpore, dum veniunt ad cognoscendum veritatem*). Angels have body, soul, and spirit. The spirits of the fallen souls remained in heaven, but their spirits came down in quest of their souls, and, as soon as a spirit finds its soul, it speaks to her, and the soul answers: "And as soon as the soul acknowledges the spirit, she remembers having been in heaven and having sinned and afterwards she starts doing good and [draws back] from the sin she had done."

Christ, Son of God, is an angel born from the angel Mary. His body was a phantasm, he did not suffer, did not die, did not resuscitate. This world is Hell, and there is no other. When all angelic souls have returned to God's world and recovered their heavenly bodies and spirits, the angels of Evil will again declare war against them. This seems to be one of the rare examples of dialectical dualism, which ends in a loop where it began.

Moneta of Cremona knows further details. The Devil, coeternal with God, created all things visible, including all the stars. He is the god of the Old Testament, which is rejected by the "Albanenses" with the exception of the sixteen Prophets, the Psalms, and the five books of Solomon. Some also accept Job and Esdras.

God is the author of an incorruptible Kingdom, with its heavens, its Sun, its Moon, its stars, its four elements. Heavenly human beings have, like us, body, soul, and spirit, but their spirit does not dwell within the body.

Satan, the dishonest steward, ascended to heaven, seduced the angels, was defeated by the archangel Michael, was expelled, and

returned to his own Kingdom, taking with him one third of God's angels (an allusion to Rev. 12:4), whom he imprisoned in human bodies. Jesus came to the world to save the angelic souls, who, since his coming, repent after receiving the laying on of hands or spiritual baptism (that is, *consolamentum*, or consecration to Perfect Cathar). During *consolamentum* each soul receives a heavenly protective spirit called *Spiritus Paraclitum*, or consoling spirit, and different from both the *Spiritus Sanctum*, which designates the personal spirit of each soul-angel, and the *Spiritus Principale*, who is the Holy Spirit, third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit and Jesus are divine creatures and are not equal to God (subordinationism). Mary is a heavenly being, endowed—as all of her species—with a heavenly body, soul, and spirit. Jesus is another heavenly being, *actually* conceived and born as if through a pipe by the other heavenly being, who is Mary. Jesus suffers and dies *in his heavenly body*, and his resurrection is therefore true. For his having defeated the Devil, his Father gives him a place at his right side in heaven. Some radical Cathars believe that judgment has already occurred. Christ's miracles are not physical but spiritual. There is no resurrection of the body, only of the *angelic or heavenly body*. The Albanenses deny free will, for God himself has none, the less so could he concede it to his creatures. They profess the preexistence of souls, saying that God's psychic nation is *antiquus*, "primordial," for God does not create new souls. They are antisacramentarian, vegetarian, do not swear oaths, do not kill. They believe that the Prophets, who were not evil, have prophesied in a different world.

The most complete file on the radical Cathars is collected once again by Raniero Sacconi, who acknowledges the existence of two schools: one of the Bishop of Verona Balasinanza and one of John of Lugio of Bergamo, once *filius maior* of the first.

The followers of Balasinanza believe in two coeternal principles, each with his own Trinity (God's Trinity being subordinationist), his own angels, and his own world. The Devil goes to heaven to fight Michael and God's angels and returns to his world with one third of them, whom he imprisons in bodies of humans *and animals*. The angels transmigrate from body to body pending their final return to the divine world. Here for the first time the doctrine of the preexistence of the soul is combined with the idea, current in Provençal Catharism, that reincarnation is possible not only in the human but also in the animal realm.

Mary is an angel; the Savior's body is immaterial, apparent, he has not suffered, he has not died (Bogomil phantasiasm). His miracles are fake. All of the Patriarchs and John the Baptist were servants of the

Devil, who is the author of the Old Testament, with the exception of Job, the Psalms, Solomon, Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, and the sixteen Prophets. "They teach that this world will have no end, that the final judgment has already taken place and will not be repeated, that Hell, fire, and eternal punishment are in this world and nowhere else."¹⁹

Saconi is likewise our major source concerning the most original Cathar thinker, John of Lugio, who, born about 1180, was first a Cistercian monk and later became *filius maior*, perhaps even bishop of the Cathar church of Desenzano.²⁰ In 1939 Antoine Dondaine published the *Book of the Two Principles*, a collection of seven writings from the school of John of Lugio. Arno Borst extensively commented on the authorship of the text, Christine Thouzellier gave a critical edition, and René Nelli devoted to it a beautiful study in which he tried to show that its basic doctrine was Augustinian.²¹ Unfortunately, the quality of these tracts is extremely questionable, and although the *Book of the Two Principles* sheds much light on the debate between the moderate Cathars of Concorezzo and the radical ones from Desenzano, it is of little help in pinning down John of Lugio's doctrine with certainty. For this we should revert once again to Sacconi.

John of Lugio adopts and adapts the dualism of the two Principles, and his arguments must have been of the same kind as those developed in the best tract of the *Book of the Two Principles*, *De libero arbitrio*, which begins with a merciless attack on monistic theodicy. There must be two Principles—the *Book* resumes an argument also embraced by Marcion and the Manichaeans—because "the good tree bears good fruit but the bad tree bears evil fruit" (Matt. 7:17). What is more, the *Book* prefigures Kant in that it emphasizes the logical impossibility of a coherent theodicy: If God is endowed with all the positive attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, holiness, goodness, and justice, then he must have known that his angels would have fallen and *must have wanted to make them imperfect*. The conclusion is inescapable that "God then . . . would be the supreme cause and principle of all evil." The Desenzano school intends to demonstrate that the only coherent theology must be dualistic, for either God is omniscient but not good or he is good but not omniscient.

For John of Lugio the two separate creations are spiritual processes. The Evil One has many names, which are as many hypostases of Evil. In debate with the moderates, he repeats as often as his follower who wrote the *Book* that *creator* and *factor*, Creator and Craftsman, are exactly the same thing, and not that the first creates the elements and the second fashions the world from preexisting material. This world was made—

created—by the Father of the Devil (the Devil is Lucifer himself). The good God runs a parallel universe, invisible and incorruptible. In God's parallel world there is marriage, fornication, and adultery; the men of that earth have married the daughters of the Devil and have thus generated the race of Giants. All this is the work of the Devil, who is stronger than God's creatures, and *occurs without God's will or permission*.

The *Compendium ad instructionem rudium* that is part of the *Book of the Two Principles* adds that God created a heaven and an earth out of matter different from the changing and irrational elements of our world, inhabited by intelligent and sentient creatures. God is thus by no means the creator of the elements of *this world*, "weak and barren" (Gal. 4:9). "There is another *creator* or *factor* who is the Principle and cause of death, perdition and all evil." God is not omnipotent, for he has neither the power of doing evil nor *the power of self-destruction* nor the power of duplicating himself. He is metaphorically called omnipotent because he is capable of doing all good. Evil derives from an Evil Principle other than God: this Principle, Sathanas, the "Power of Darkness" (Col. 1:12-13; Luke 22:53), is *powerful* in iniquity. The Evil, divided up into Lords and Princes, is coeternal with God and will have no end. In fact, according to Sacconi, John of Lugio held that nothing that exists has free will, not even God, for if he had, his will would prevail over that of his Opponent. Consequently God is *neither omniscient nor omnipotent*. There exists but one single creature of God who has not been spoiled by the Devil: Christ.

The good God actually performed all that the Old Testament attributes to him: He caused the deluge and other destructions in order to counteract sin. Yet all this took place not in our world but in another world, his world. Consequently *John of Lugio accepts the Bible in its entirety as a reliable historical document*, yet a document that refers not to our universe but to a parallel universe. It was likewise in this parallel universe of God that Christ was born, suffered, died, and resuscitated.

Finally, John of Lugio asserts that human souls go from body to body until they are eventually saved, a theory that has to be interpreted as Origenism.

Unfortunately we cannot deduce from the data of the heresiologists what the relation between the two parallel universes was. He might possibly have believed this world to be Hell.²²

Before proceeding, a brief and imperfect picture should be sketched of the ancient trend of thought from which radical Catharism derived: Origenism.

4. Origenism and Radical Catharism

Origenist traits have been discovered in radical Catharism by Marcel Dando (1967),²³ and the hypothesis of a close relation between Origenism and Catharism was embraced by Jean Duvernoy.²⁴

This Origenism is not entirely Origen's original doctrine, which is difficult to reconstruct due to the vicissitudes of his writings. It is a transformation of Origen's genuine teachings effected and practiced by Egyptian monks in the IVth and Vth centuries and systematically refuted by heresiologists like Epiphanius²⁵ and the former Origenist Jerome. The file on the Origenist debate was collected by Antoine Guillaumont in his book on Evagrius of Pontus (1962).²⁶

Epiphanius accuses the Origenists of four major heretical beliefs: 1. that the *body of resurrection* is not identical with the physical body; 2. of being *subordinationist*; 3. of asserting that *the human soul preexists*, that those preexisting souls are angels and superior powers, that they contracted sins and for this reason were imprisoned in this body to be punished, and that God dispatched them down here for the punishment, to undergo the effect of a first judgment;²⁷ and 4. to profess the Platonic doctrine of the *body-tomb*: Coming from above, the soul (*psychē*) "cooled off" (*eppsychthai*) when she was set in the "garment of skin" (Gen. 3:21), which means the terrestrial body.²⁸

All of these are to a certain point authentic ideas of Origen. Even the pun based on the resemblance between the Greek words *psychē*, "soul," and *psychros*, "cold, chill," was used by Origen himself.²⁹ Yet, as P. F. Beatrice has shown, Origen did not endorse the Philonic identification of the "garments of skin" (*dermatinoi chitōnes*) of Genesis with physical bodies, which was, on the contrary, accepted during Epiphanius's own time by orthodox and authoritative Fathers such as Ambrose of Milan.³⁰

In a letter written by Epiphanius in 394, a fifth accusation is added to the four above: that, according to the Origenists, "the Devil will again become what he once was, he will recover the same dignity and return to the Kingdom of heaven."³¹

In a 396 pamphlet Jerome found eight counts on which the Origenists erred:³² subordinationism, preexistence of souls, the final absolution of the Devil, the "garments of skin," the resurrection body, and three others that did not occur in Epiphanius—the allegorical interpretation of Paradise, the idea that after being chased away from Paradise humans lost their resemblance to God, and one last charge that should be quoted here in full: "He thinks that those waters which in the Scriptures are said to be above the heavens are holy and superior

Powers, whereas those which are above the earth and under it are opposed and demonic Powers."³³

To this Jerome adds, according to the oral communication of an Origenist, that they take the soul to be a soul only after being embodied; prior to that, she is either an angel or a demon.³⁴

A ninth charge preserved by the same Jerome concerned the belief that "the sun, the moon and the chorus of the stars are reasonable souls, creatures once incorporeal who are now subject to vanity and to bodies of fire which, in our ignorance, we call the world luminaries. They will be freed from servitude and corruption to enjoy the glorious freedom of the Sons of God."³⁵

In a letter of 401 preserved by Jerome, the Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria, first a sympathizer and then the fiercest persecutor of the Origenists of the Egyptian desert, gives a few details on the resurrection bodies and completes the list of errors with two more counts. The bodies of resurrection are not incorruptible, they are still "corporeal"; it is only after several centuries of subtle corporeality that the being undergoes a "second death," which completely destroys the corporeal substance.³⁶ The two new charges against the Origenists concern the end of Christ's reign and his second crucifixion: "The Christ will one day be crucified for the demons and the spiritual crimes incurred by the superior Powers."³⁷

A twelfth accusation is recorded by the same Theophilus in a 402 letter: According to the Origenists, *God is not almighty*; "He created rational creatures only to the extent that he could."³⁸ And eventually, in a 404 letter, the patriarch adds that the Origenists are encratite: They reject marriage and procreation.³⁹

How many of these accusations are confirmed by the works of the most important IVth-century Origenist, Evagrius of Pontus? Most of them, according to Antoine Guillaumont, the most distinguished scholar of Evagrius, except subordinationism and antisomatism, since Evagrius holds the body to be the most important instrument of salvation.⁴⁰ Yet there is more. Some of the points in Evagrius's doctrine that will assume paramount importance among the radical Cathars have not even been mentioned by the heresiologists. For in fact Evagrius admits a plurality of worlds:

Thus there is a world for the angels, a world for humans, a world for demons. Located in one world, any fallen intellect or soul is immediately united with a body. In other words, any fallen rational nature possesses a body, the angels as well as the humans and the demons. All these bodies are made of the four elements and are thus to some extent material. What differentiates them is simply the variable proportion of

these elements, that is, their "quality," which follows the varying proportions of the three parts that constitute the soul:⁴¹ "There is in the angel predominance of the intellect and of [the element] fire, in humans predominance of concupiscence and earth, in demons predominance of anger and air."⁴²

Furthermore, "the bodies and the worlds, that is, the visible and sensible universe, have been the object of a second creation, distinct from the first, which had as its object the Intellects only, the purely intelligible natures. . . . It was the sin of the rational creatures that led God to the creation of the visible world, and . . . the creation of bodies is connected with the fall of the souls in heaven."⁴³ Yet the second creation, the *visible* creation, is *not evil*:

If the creation of the bodies, of matter, and of the visible world follows indeed the fall of the rational natures, it is not only a catastrophic and deplorable consequence thereof. On the contrary, this second creation is the work of the same God who had created the rational natures only so that they would enjoy his science, and who, making himself "salvific providence". . . , created, after their fall, the bodies and the world in order to allow them to return to their prior state.⁴⁴

More than a prison, a place of punishment, or a tomb, the body is thus an instrument of liberation and salvation, desired by God's providential and benefic disposition.⁴⁵

The creation of the bodies was preceded by a "first judgment," which will be followed by many others.⁴⁶ The last judgment will mark the definitive disappearance of corporeality;⁴⁷ when all will submit to Christ, Christ's reign will come to an end.⁴⁸

What of the Origenism anathematized in the VIth century, in 543 and 553 at the Vth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople? Only a few details are added to the list above, such as the idea that the body of resurrection will be spherical like Plato's androgyne in the *Symposium*.⁴⁹

Bogomilism and mitigated Catharism share almost nothing with Origenism, except perhaps subordinationism, which they certainly could have found elsewhere, and the imprisonment of the angelic soul in the body of clay. On the contrary, Bogomilism is Traducianist, envisions the world as bipartite since God's creation (popular Platonism or Aristotelianism), ignores the capital problem of the corporeality of angels, does not multiply the number of judgments, and does not deny God's omnipotence. We can conclude that Origenism and Byzantine Bogomilism have little more in common than the doctrine of the body-tomb and the interpretation of the garments of skin of Gen. 3:21, which is current Platonism.

In Italy monarchian Catharism oscillates between Bogomil Traducianism and the preexistence of the soul (borrowed from the radical Cathars), popularly interpreted as reincarnation. Another monarchian myth that may be explained by the Origenist idea that all stars have a fiery corporeality as a consequence of sin is the fornication of the Sun and the Moon. That they have intercourse is widespread folklore, but that they are demons seems to be a negative interpretation of Origenism, which one would expect among radical Cathars. Yet heresiologists mention this myth only among the monarchians.

The analogies between radical Catharism and Origenism are so impressive that the former could only be a transformation of the latter, which could only have been performed in Byzantine ascetic religious circles, for the Origenist controversy was not as relevant in the West as it was in the East. We have here a phenomenon of revivalism—the revival of a very sophisticated doctrine, reinterpreted in such a way as to become popularly palatable and combined with a likewise bookish but more superficial Manichaean element (the antagonism of the two Principles). The following traits of Origenism have been revitalized in radical Catharism:

- preexistence of the soul;
- corporeality of the angels;
- double creation and parallel universes;
- multiple judgments;
- the resurrection body;
- denial of God's omnipotence and free will.

Only subordinationism and fall of the soul in the body are common to Origenists, monarchian Cathars (Bogomils, reformed or not), and radical Cathars.

5. Provençal Catharism in the XIVth Century

Jacques Fournier (ca. 1280–1342) became bishop of Pamiers on March 19, 1317, was elected cardinal in 1326 and transferred to Mirepoix, and became pope on December 26, 1334, under the name of Benedict XII. As a result of his inquisitorial zeal while in Pamiers, we have complete information on the preaching of the last significant Cathar Perfect in what by then was southern France: Pierre Authié.⁵⁰

Notary public in Aix-les-Thermes, a cultivated man, Pierre Authié belonged to a "good family of legists with an illustrious clientele."⁵¹

About 1295–96 Pierre and his brother Guillaume “were clerks, knew the law, had wives and children and were rich.”⁵²

One day when Pierre had read in his house a book in Guillaume’s presence, he told his brother what was in the book. His brother read for a moment. Pierre asked: “Now, my brother, what then?” Guillaume answered: “It looks to me as if we’ve lost our souls.” Pierre replied: “Let’s leave, then, brother, and seek for the salvation of our souls.” This said, they abandoned all they had, and went to Lombardy. And there they became good Christians and received the power to make others good Christians and to lead their souls to salvation.⁵³

Pierre Authié’s preaching addressed simple people apt to be persuaded through lively mythical narratives:

Among other things, he said that the heavenly Father had in the beginning made all spirits and souls in heaven, and these spirits and souls were with the heavenly Father. Then the Devil went to the gate of Paradise and wanted to enter but could not, and thus he stood by the gate for one thousand years. Then he entered Paradise by fraud and when he was inside he persuaded the spirits and the souls made by the heavenly Father that their fate wasn’t good, for they were dominated by the heavenly Father, but if they wanted to follow him, he would give them possessions, namely, fields, vines, gold and silver, women and other goods of this lower visible world.⁵⁴

The promise to give the angels “wives whom they would cherish”⁵⁵ is elsewhere replaced by the introduction of a woman “superbly dressed into Paradise, and the spirits rushed to follow her.”⁵⁶

Touched by this persuasion, the spirits and the souls in heaven followed the Devil, and all those who followed him fell from heaven. They poured like heavy rain for nine days and nine nights. The heavenly Father, seeing himself thus abandoned by spirits and souls, rose from his throne and set his foot over the hole through which the spirits and souls were falling. And he told those who remained with him that if one of them would move, there will be no resting place for him forever. And to those who fell he said: “Go, for the time being and *per ja* [Provençal: for now]!” Had he said “from now on,” then not one of these spirits [and souls] would ever be saved and revert to Paradise. Yet, since he said *per ja*, which is “for a while,” all these spirits will revert to heaven.⁵⁷

The fallen spirits are deceived and afflicted by the Devil, who introduces them into physical “tunics” (the Latin translation of the “garments of skin” in Gen. 3:21 is *tunicæ pelliceæ*). “In these bodies the souls forget what they had been in heaven, and are unwilling to leave them

[the bodies] anymore. These bodies are called 'tunics.'⁵⁸ The soul transmigrates in many bodies, of humans and animals (the famous example is here given of the Cathar who remembers having been the horse of a lord and finds the horseshoe that he had lost between two boulders), but after being incarnated in a "good Christian" she reverts to heaven.⁵⁹ Pierre Authié still professes Bogomil phantasiasm: Christ never "adumbrated" himself of something so vile as the womb.⁶⁰ The concept of "adumbration" is explained by the Montaillou curate in this way: "The same way as a man who is in a barrel is in the shadow [*umbra*, hence *adumbrare*] of the barrel without receiving anything from it, but is simply contained down there, thus the Christ dwelt in the Virgin Mary without taking anything from her, and was in her only as the content in the container."⁶¹

This explanation seems clear enough, but Pierre Authié does not seem to understand the concept, for he denies that Christ may "adumbrate" himself in Mary without taking anything from her by asserting that Christ does not even "adumbrate" himself.⁶²

As for the rest, Pierre Authié rejects the worship of the cross and icons, baptism in "material water," the eucharist, marriage, feasts, and the resurrection of the flesh.⁶³

The Cathars knew two distinct reasons for adopting a vegetarian diet. One they had inherited from the Bogomils: Nothing should be taken in that derives *ex coitu* (from sexual intercourse), which is a diabolical operation. The other reason was a consequence of their vulgar interpretation of Origenism as reincarnation of the soul in animal bodies. By eating *fereza* ("food from beasts"), one could mistakenly eat one's own father or mother.⁶⁴ Fish is not included among forbidden foodstuffs either because they are said to be born without intercourse or because they do not appear to be endowed with spirit since they lack blood; the reason fallen spirits avoided incarnation in their bodies was because they were endowed with *legeza*, "ugliness," like the reptiles and the invertebrates.⁶⁵ Two of these explanations are included in Bernard Gui's *Manual of the Inquisitor*:

They would not in any way kill [*nullo modo occiderint*] an animal or a bird, for they say and believe that the spirits that withdraw from the bodies of people who have not been initiated into their sect and into their order by the laying on of hands effected according to their rites, take refuge in animals deprived of reason and even in birds and pass from body to body.⁶⁶ [And the other reason is that] they eat neither meat, or even touch it, nor do they eat cheese or eggs or any being born through generation or intercourse, *per viam generationis seu cohitus*.⁶⁷

The three inalienable negative principles of the Cathar Perfect appear thus to be, according to the formula of the Inquisitor Bernard Gui, "in nullo casu jurant, nullo modo occiderint, non tangunt aliquam mulierem" (they would never swear an oath, would not kill, would not touch any woman).⁶⁸

Arnaud Teisseyre de Lordat, the husband of Guillemette, Pierre Authié's daughter, remembers that Pierre knew the radical interpretation of the Prologue to the Gospel of John three years *before* he suddenly converted and left for Lombardy. "He asked me: 'Do you know what *In him all was made and nothing was made without him* means?'" And he explained this according to the ancient Cathar interpretation, in which *nihil* is taken not as an adverb but as a noun: "Pierre answered that the meaning of the passage was that 'without him nothingness was made,' that is, 'all things were made without him,'"⁶⁹ for all things are but nothingness (*nihil* or *unum purum nihil*, "sheer nothingness").

This exegesis was ancient. It is found for the first time in an author refuted by Durand of Huesca, a former Waldensian converted during a debate held at Pamiers in 1207 between Bishop Diego of Osma, probably accompanied by the subprior Domingo Guzmán, the future Saint Dominic.⁷⁰ Durand's *Summa*, which resumes the topic of a prior work (*Liber Antitheresis*), was written in 1222–23 and submitted for approval to the Curia in 1224.⁷¹ The Cathar author whose thesis is discussed by Durand—probably Bartholomeus of Carcassonne—asserts: "John said in the Gospel: Through him all things were made and without him the *nihil* was made,"⁷² meaning the visible world. A little later (1235), Salvo Burci attributed the same exegesis to the "Albanians."⁷³

Jacques Authié, Pierre's son, "was cultivated, and the testimonies show him deep in his books or 'preaching like an angel.'"⁷⁴ Pierre Maury of Montailou had received from him the same version of the fall of the angels that Jacques's father told. Jacques was a better storyteller and would dwell longer on the "tunics, that is, the bodies of the earth of forgetfulness":⁷⁵ "The Holy Father told the fallen spirits: 'You others will have reversed tunics of different sorts, for you will go from tunic to tunic until you will revert to a tunic in which you will be according to justice and truth, in which you may be saved.'"⁷⁶

The preaching of Pierre and Jacques Authié, to the extent that one can form an idea from the testimony of people in whom the two must not have had much trust, has nothing of radical dualism, let alone the dark grandness of John of Lugio's speculative subtleties. The Authiés are by no means heirs to their Provençal forefathers, the Albigenses, but to the teachings of a Lombard church of the late XIIIth century in which it

is easy to recognize the "French," a.k.a. "Sclavini"—the disciples of Caloiannes or "Bagnolenses" of later heresiologists.

In general the doctrine professed by the Authiés can be defined as monarchian, although that God who uses his foot to plug up the hole in heaven through which his angels escape seems rather outlandish. But the preachers' audience was not disposed to speculate on God's omnipotence or free will. Nazarian phantasmism was preferred over Desiderius's realism, popular Origenism intended as reincarnation over Bogomil Traducianism, and the "garments of skin" received the same attention as of old. During his three years as a novice in Lombardy (1296–99), Pierre Authié must have forgotten the interpretation of the Prologue of John's Gospel that he had revealed to his son-in-law about 1293, which went back to radical Catharism.

To judge Catharism in its entirety only by the crude fairy tales that already prefigure the sad time of the lapsed Perfect Guillaume Bélibaste, last of his species but not best, would be like reconstructing the theology of Duns Scotus from the story of a Languedoc peasant summarizing the Sunday sermon of his curate. Yet it is undeniable that the monarchian schools do not sin by an excess of intellectualism, this being rather the exclusive gift of the radicals.

6. Cathar Dualism

The fifth of the tracts included in the *Book of the Two Principles* of the radical Albanenses bears the title *Contra Garatenses*, "Against the Disciples of Garattus," bishop of the monarchian Cathars of Concorezzo—the irreducible opponents of the Desenzano faction.

I intend to make known to all enlightened people the madness of the Garatists. Albeit believing, like the others [the "Romans"], that there is only one most holy Creator, they still keep preaching on many occasions that there is also another God: the evil God, Prince of this World, who, they say, was first a creature of the good God but subsequently corrupted the four elements created by this true God and from these elements he formed and constituted, in the beginning of the world, man and woman and all other visible bodies from which issued all creatures which now reign over the earth.⁷⁷

If this is the heresy of the Garatists, rhetorically asks the author (and his summary is perfectly correct), then what is the difference between them and the Romans?

If it is true that the Lord and true God made in the beginning man and woman, the birds and the animals and all other visible bodies, then why do you every day condemn the works of flesh and the intercourse of man and woman, asserting that it is the Devil's work? Why is it that you do not eat meat, eggs, cheese, and all things that were created by your excellent Creator? And why is it that you so severely condemn those who do, if you believe that there is one Creator only, author of all that is?⁷⁸

The Garatists are in flagrant logical contradiction: "Every day you repudiate the creation of the Lord and true God, if it is true that it is this very good and merciful God who created and made man and woman and the visible bodies of this world."⁷⁹

Obviously the main point where radicals and monarchians diverge is the meaning of the words *creator* and *factor*. According to the monarchians, God is *creator* of all that is, including primordial matter, whereas the devil is *factor* of the visible world, with God's permission. In this sense the "Albanians" are perfectly right in denouncing them as "Romans," that is, nondualists. The radicals in turn assert that *creator* and *factor* are perfect equivalents, the Evil Principle is both. He is *creator* and *factor* in the sense emphasized in the tract *De creatione*:⁸⁰ because he *organized* the things of this world,⁸¹ whereas God is creator and factor of a parallel universe.⁸² *What* they have got to organize remains unexplained, since there is nothing but themselves. Yet at stake here is not the logic of the radicals but the terrible accusation they cast against the Concorezzo Bogomils—that they are not actual dualists although they profess ethical principles like encratism and vegetarianism that can only be the consequence of a dualistic religion. The "Albanians" were the first to discover that their opponents were pseudodualists only and should have enjoyed the company of the orthodox.

If we could already conclude, in chapter 8, that the Bogomils were pseudodualists for not attributing to the Devil any part in the creation of the world, the more we should here emphasize the nondualistic character of the doctrine of the monarchian Cathars, which never ceases to insist on the fact that *the Devil's operation took place with God's permission*. The accredited definition of heresy perfectly suits the monarchians: The heretic is a misbeliever, not a disbeliever.⁸³

The radicals are more difficult to define. It is obvious that Origenism forms the basis for their belief.⁸⁴ Yet the ethics and the practice of the radicals and the monarchians alike are derived from Bogomilism. This shows that the ascetic intellectuals who revitalized Origenism at some point prior to 1167 and certainly in the Byzantine Empire, where

Origenism could be readily exhumed from books, might have already been Bogomils or anyway knew and approved of Bogomilism to some extent.

Provençal Catharism at the beginning of the XIVth century is not radical anymore. It depends entirely on the doctrine of the monarchian church "of the French" in Lombardy.

As far as reversed biblical exegesis is concerned, the two religions of the Cathars continue to activate new possibilities inherent in the system and at the same time rediscover, or simply adopt, old solutions once used by the Marcionites, the Manichaeans, and obviously the Bogomils, who are their source and their model. Most of the Cathars thus continue to identify the Old Testament god with the Devil, according to an option present in Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and Bogomilism. The school of John of Lugio is revolutionary in so far as it accepts the reality of both the Old and the New Testament, yet in a world other than this one, a parallel universe that, although much superior to ours, is still frankly bad for being corruptible. It is difficult to understand why John of Lugio had to resort to such an unexpected interpretation. Rationalism is one reason, according to which miracles are not, and never have been, possible in this world but may be possible in a parallel one. Yet it may be arbitrary to ascribe to John of Lugio this Protestant understanding of God's silence. We must therefore content ourselves with the observation that the deepest Cathar thinker activated one of the least probable options of reversed exegesis, namely, the reversal of the reversal: The Bible is absolutely false for this world (extremistic reversal), but it is absolutely and literally true in another world (extremistic reversal of the reversal, denial of the denial), to which the perfectly historical narratives of the Old and New Testaments apply. From a systemic viewpoint, this is the most original contribution of Catharism to the working out of the system.

Notes

1. See *De haeresi catharorum in Lombardia*, ed. Antoine Dondaine, "La Hiérarchie cathare en Italie, I: Le 'De haeresi catharorum in Lombardia,'" *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 19 (1949), 305-12. Most sources of Catharism are collected and translated in Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages: Selected Sources Translated and Annotated* (Columbia Univ. Press: New York, 1969), 127-373. (About the radical church of "Drugunthia"-Dragovitsa, see 164-65.) Other texts concerning Catharism are translated in Robert I. Moore, *The Birth of Popular Heresy* (E. Arnold: London, 1975), 88-154.

Texts in Latin from heresiologists are contained in Ignaz von Döllinger, *Beiträge II*. Other important heresiological sources have been made available by Antoine Dondaine, *Un Traité néo-manichéen du XIII^e siècle: Le 'Liber de duobus principis,' suivi d'un fragment de rituel cathare* (also containing the *Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno* of Raniero Sacconi) (Istituto Storico Domenicano Santa Sabina: Rome, 1939), 64–78; "La Hiérarchie cathare en Italie, II: Le 'Tractatus de hereticis' d'Anselme d'Alexandrie, O.P.," III: Catalogue de la hiérarchie cathare en Italie," in *AFP* 20 (1950), 308–24. Moneta of Cremona's *Adversus Catharos et Valdenses libri V* is available only in the old edition of Th. A. Ricchini (Rome, 1743); the most important fragments are translated in Wakefield and Evans, 308–29. The *Liber contra Manicheos* of Durand of Huesca, containing fragments from original testimonies, is available in Christine Thouzellier's edition: *Une Somme anti-cathare: Le Liber contra Manicheos de Durand de Huesca* (Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense: Louvain, Belgium, 1964). A condensate of common places on Catharism is the *Manual of the Inquisitor* of Bernardus Guidonis: Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur*, ed. and trans. G. Mollat (with G. Drioux), vol. 1 (Les Belles Lettres: Paris, 1964²).

The direct sources on Catharism are the following: the *Liber de duobus principis* from the school of John of Lugio, ed. Antoine Dondaine and more recently by Christine Thouzellier, *Livre des Deux Principes* (SC 198) (Cerf: Paris, 1973); also translated in René Nelli, *Écritures cathares: La Cène secrète. Le Livre des deux Principes. Le Rituel Latin. Le Rituel occitan. Textes précathares et cathares* (Denoël: Paris, 1959), 69–201. The Latin Ritual, which will not detain us in this book, was edited and translated by Christine Thouzellier, *Rituel cathare* (SC 236) (Cerf: Paris, 1977). Among the direct sources may also be mentioned the transcripts of the Inquisition, especially those of the investigations led at Pamiers (1318–25) under Bishop Jacques Fournier (for the earlier XIVth century, excerpts are published in Döllinger, *Beiträge II*), published in Latin by Jean Duvernoy, *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier*, 3 vols. (Privat: Toulouse, 1965), and translated into French by the same, *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier (Évêque de Pamiers) 1318–1325*, 3 vols. (Mouton: Paris, The Hague, New York, 1978).

The most important scholarly studies on the Cathars are now the two books by Jean Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme: L'Histoire des Cathares* (Privat: Toulouse, 1979), and *Le Catharisme: La Religion des Cathares* (Privat: Toulouse, 1976). Several other works will be mentioned in further notes.

General bibliographies on Catharism are contained in Herbert Grundmann, "Anhang: Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte der religiösen Bewegungen im Mittelalter, 1955," in *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (1960²; reprint, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1977), 487–567; Carl T. Berkhout and J. B. Russell, *Medieval Heresies: A Bibliography 1960–1979* (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies: Toronto, 1981).

2. Sacconi, in Moore, *The Birth*, 143–44.
3. PG 104 col. 775.
4. Döllinger II, 52.
5. Döllinger II, 53.
6. Wakefield-Evans, 358–61.
7. Wakefield-Evans, 301; text in Döllinger II, 273–79.
8. Moore, *The Birth*, 132.
9. Moore, *The Birth*, 133.
10. Moore, *The Birth*, 138.
11. Moore, *The Birth*, 139; Arno Borst, *Die Katharer*, contests John of Lugio's ordination.
12. PL 204 col. 777; see my "The Sun and The Moon," in *International Journal of Roumanian Studies* 3 (1981–83), 83–97.
13. Döllinger II, 277.
14. Döllinger I, 60–61.

15. Moneta, in Wakefield-Evans, 317–18 (my Eng. adaptation).
16. Döllinger II, 274.
17. See my "The Sun and the Moon," 90–91.
18. Döllinger II, 58.
19. Moore, *The Birth*, 139 (my Eng. adaptation).
20. Arno Borst, *Die Katharer*, 270–72.
21. René Nelli, *La Philosophie du Catharisme: Le Dualisme radical au XIII^e siècle* (Payot: Paris, 1978), 73–124.
22. Wakefield-Evans, 356.
23. Marcel Dando, *Les Origines du Catharisme* (Paris, 1967).
24. Duvernoy, *Religion*, 295ff; 344ff.
25. Epiph., *Pan.* 64.
26. A. Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostika" d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et les Syriens* (Seuil: Paris, 1962).
27. Epiph., *Pan.* 64.4.5–6; see Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 85.
28. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 85–86.
29. De principiis II.8.3; see Henri Crouzel, *Antropologia*, 43.
30. Ambrose, *Ep.* 49.4; see P. F. Beatrice, "Le Turliche di pelle: Antiche letture di Gen. 3.21," in U. Bianchi, ed., *La Tradizione dell'Enkrateia: Motivazioni ontologiche e protologiche* (Ateneo: Rome, 1985), 433–84.
31. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 89.
32. In Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 89–92.
33. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 90.
34. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 91.
35. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 93–94.
36. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 98.
37. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika."
38. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 101.
39. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika."
40. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 110–11. A good English presentation and translation of texts by Evagrius is Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer*, trans. and introduction by John Eudes Bamberger (Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, MI, 1981).
41. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 108.
42. Evagrius, *Kephalaia gnostika* I.68; Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 108.
43. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 109.
44. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 110.
45. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika."
46. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 111.
47. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 116.
48. Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 116–17.
49. Anathematismata V of 543 and X of 553, in Guillaumont, "Kephalaia Gnostika," 141 and 145.
50. The last Cathar Perfect in South France was a certain Guillaume Bélibaste, appropriately defined as "the last, not the best."
51. Duvernoy, *Histoire*, 322.
52. Sibille, widow of Raimond Peyre d'Arques, in Duvernoy, *Registre* II, 566.
53. Duvernoy, *Registre* II 567.
54. Duvernoy, *Registre* II 569; Latin text II, 406–7.
55. Fournier II, 406–7.
56. Fournier II, 34; Duvernoy, *Religion*, 70, n. 83.
57. Duvernoy, *Registre* II 569.

58. Duvernoy, *Registre* II 570.
59. Duvernoy, *Registre* II.
60. Duvernoy, *Registre* II 571.
61. Fournier I, 230; Duvernoy, *Religion*, 84.
62. Duvernoy, *Religion*, 84.
63. *Registre* II 572–73.
64. Duvernoy, *Religion*, 173.
65. Duvernoy, *Religion*, 192; Fournier II, 108.
66. *Manual*, 18.
67. *Manual*, 18.
68. *Manual*, 18.
69. *Registre* II 603.
70. Thouzellier, *Une Somme*, 31.
71. Thouzellier, *Une Somme*, 36–38.
72. Thouzellier, *Une Somme*, 209; see Nelli, *Philosophie du catharisme*, 17; 34, n. 8.
73. Döllinger II, 59.
74. Duvernoy, *Histoire*, 324.
75. Psalm 136:4; Duvernoy, *Registre* 931.
76. Duvernoy, *Registre* 930.
77. *Liber de duobus principiis*, after Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 175.
78. Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 179.
79. Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 180.
80. French trans. in Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 119.
81. Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 161.
82. Nelli, *Écritures cathares*, 162.
83. H. Grundmann, “*Oportet et haereses esse*,” in *L’Eresia medievale*, ed. Ovidio Capitani (Il Mulino: Bologna, 1971), 23–60, quotation from 30.
84. Augustinian influences have been emphasized by Nelli, *Philosophie*, 58–62.

Chapter 10

The Tree of Gnosis

I saw that One was animate
Mankind inanimate fantasy
—YEATS

A famous Chicago gangster of the 1930s used a simple method to make all of his decisions (which were indeed consequential, to himself and others): He tossed a coin. Heads was yes, tails was no. Only once did the information prove wrong, with deadly consequences.

An "Aristotelian square"—two flips of the coin—would have furnished him with a four-way choice: + / -, - / +, + / +, - / -. Combining two events (and two logical "squares"), he would have obtained sixteen choices. More than a few events combined in binary couples would lead to hundreds if not thousands of options, and one would spend longer than one whole day tossing a coin for one's daily quota of decisions.

Yet life is almost by definition a type of operation that we call analogue: It gives the impression of smoothness, because the decisions it requires are too fast to be perceived as "digital," that is, as a sequence of binary switches. The passage from "digital" to "analogue" itself has a ratio, which is one to seven—a process perceived as binary will on the contrary be perceived as continuous if run at a speed seven times greater.

A chess player's mind is trained to analyze hundreds of binary decisions within a complex situation. The fascination many of us have with chess and other games derives from their ability to challenge the mind's computational skills, which, we may add, is all the mind has when viewed at a certain level.

Fascination with religion derives—although much more unexpectedly—from the same source, for religion, like philosophy, science, and even literature, is equally a computational process.

The gangster tossing his coin showed us that life is a multiple-choice mechanism. Myth too. And in myth as in life, the wrong choice can be

deadly. It proved indeed deadly for innumerable Marcionites, Manichaeans, Paulicians, and Cathars, who came to grips with various authorities, were persecuted, hunted down, and exterminated. Yet their original and basic option was closer to the gangster's method than we think. It consisted of a simple, binary alternative: one principle or two principles. Either the Evil derives from Good and then Good is not so good and Evil is not so evil or else Evil and Good are separated, Evil is genuinely evil, and Good is genuinely good. In a certain way it seems astonishing that so much blood was shed for so little. And that all these heretics of old, not unlike ourselves, lived and died for a truth that was only one among multiple choices.

Should we think that their choice was dictated by some obscure "existential root" or more plainly by their idea of the world in a time of economical, political, or religious "crisis," or more often Crisis with capital C? Were they not sick, even neurotic, if they located the world within the sphere of Evil or at any rate made it into a mixed blessing?

A system of ideas is not innocent, and many battles are fought for every binary option in it. So many brave Christians were disqualified by their more vociferous brethren for a simple *iota* that it is not hard to understand why dualists were so tenaciously and persistently tracked down until, apparently, they were altogether uprooted from Western society. Yet the system was not dead, and they were going to take unexpected revenge, as chapter 11 and the Epilogue of this book will make plain. It is not only immoral but simply hard to believe that the losers of history were the expression of some "Crisis," that they were "sick" or "pessimistic." We've spent enough time with them so far to understand that their only sin was *thinking*, and they surely thought better at times than their opponents. The losers of history were losers not in a game of mind but of power.

The morphodynamic of the dualist system may be hard to follow, especially when it comes down to its many transformations at a lower level, but at its top it starts with very simple rules. A number of matters had to be settled in advance, and it must have taken an extraordinary intellectual effort to come to think of the "world" as the sum total of all objects and of a "non-world" from which the world derives. It must have taken less effort to establish from experience the eternal binary pair "good" and "bad," which accompanies every infant at the dawn of its experience, together with contentment and crying.

Here were the terms of the problem: on the one hand a world, created by a (but not necessarily *one*) cause; on the other the pair "good" and "evil." At this basic level, flipping a coin is always consequential.

For it is here that the decision is made whether the world was created by "good" or by "evil" or by "good-and-evil," and in what proportion. It appears that at a very early stage in time these were the terms of the problem, a problem run ever since through billions and billions of human minds. No wonder that, by today, it should appear so complex and abstruse that we fail to understand the import of dualism and we count it among the oddities of history. In reality dualism was like an aborted chess game, if we want to persist in this analogy. It was not a bad game, it was simply interrupted by force. The stake was meaning, but meaning was not in the game itself.

Thus if we say that the world *is created*, then it can be created by Good, by Evil, by both, or by neither. Few creationists, including those of our time, were ever so bold as to assert that the world is simply and genuinely good, and if they did, there was always a Monsieur de Voltaire to contradict them. The world is pervaded with impermanence, suffering, and anxiety; if it was Good who created it, something must have corrupted it in between. *The Devil appears as a necessity from our first reflection on our experience of the world.* And yet the dualists do not exclude a priori any of the possible hypotheses: For the Manichaeans, the world was created by Good to evict Evil; for the Bogomils and the monarchian Cathars, the world was created by Good and organized by Evil, but Evil depends on Good; for most gnostics and Marcionites, the world was created by an intermediary that is neither good nor evil. In Gnosticism he maintains relations with both Good and Evil, and sometimes Evil paradoxically derives from him, although it is superior by nature to the intermediary. For Marcion, Evil equally derives from the intermediary, yet their relation is tense: Evil is the Opponent not exactly of Good but of the intermediary from which it proceeds.

Unde malum? If two Principles are postulated, then Evil is one of them, without origin or beginning. If only one Principle is set *ex hypothesi* (and here everything occurs by decision of the mind, for no "experience" whatsoever can tell us about the mysterious operations of transcendence), then Evil must derive from Good. To explain its appearance, a myth is needed, the myth of the fallen Lucifer or Iblis or Samael. The gnostics morphodynamically reinvented *two* dualistic myths (of a Trickstress and of a male Trickster), which they used in a tight sequence to show the immense distance between transcendence and this world. Contrary to the followers of the Catholic church, the gnostics had no authority to tell them which path to take in the jungle of the mind. Therefore they used all possibilities the mind was able to produce during the few centuries of their existence. Even if few, and persecuted by

all, the gnostics were mentally more creative than their Christian opponents, who eventually, especially when they had sufficient power, decided to canonize the unsolved paradoxes of their faith. The most courageous decision was to allow Christ's *physical* body to go to heaven. Yet all of this could happen only with the immense risk, taken by Catholic Christianity up until very recently, of "ghettoization," as the Italian Catholic historian G. Romanato calls it, meaning that any non-Catholic around who would think at all would certainly think differently. It was, after all, a lucky event that the gnostics were losers in history; for had they not been, they would have chosen one path and walked it forever. Since they had no chance to do it, they deserve the appealing title of champions of free thought in Western history, freedom to think through not one but all possible choices of a logical problem.

Many dualists did not have their own myth to differentiate themselves from Christianity. Marcion, the Bogomils, and the Cathars made use of the myth of Lucifer: Marcion, according to the orthodox formula, applied it only to the lower world of the Demiurge, and the Bogomils and Cathars by transforming the orthodox formula.

We see how, from a seed, Gnosis grows into a tree that starts to split into branches; some branches remain virtual, some actually grow. The generative model of gnostic systems is actually a Tree, the Tree of Gnosis. From this Tree of Knowledge scholars, in their strong respect for tradition, seldom eat; but once they do, they must acknowledge to what extent human beliefs and theories are related to human games.

At this point all Western dualists without exception feel that they should settle their account with the Book of Genesis. Here the game changes. It becomes sequential, like a board game in which the character advances by rolling the die, and any square he or she lands on presents a multiple-choice case (on which a few other choices may depend). Any of the gnostic groups that produce texts seem to play the board game anew every time, and thus the results are different—they are transformations of each other.

This operation can be understood through the simple use of morphology. It does not entail morphodynamics. Yet the basic option, which is in most cases to say that the Old Testament is the Scripture of the Demiurge, can be comprehended only in morphodynamic perspective. We saw that Marcion based his rejection of the Old Testament on Paul's distinction between two regimes of the world: *sub lege* and *sub fide*, under the Law and under Faith. Yet we also saw that the rejection was motivated by a mental operation that sought confirmation in the Bible for the qualities of omnipotence and omniscience of God but could not

find it. It also appeared that the only group that would have been sufficiently close to Judaism to keep using its Scriptures, and sufficiently free to use them away from Judaic interpretive tradition, thereby triggering a rational hermeneutic of suspicion eventually directed against the biblical God, was the Christians themselves. Starting from the hypothesis formulated by distinguished members of the German and Swedish School of Religion like Geo Widengren and Hans Jonas, researchers investigated the possible Samaritan roots of Gnosticism. All in all, the results were rather deceiving. Simon Magus could indeed be largely explained from Samaritan beliefs. Yet the passage from Protognosticism to full-blown Gnosticism could be accomplished only by a dilation of perspective that could not be achieved in a Samaritan setting. Perhaps the first Christian gnostics expanded on the premises of Simon's successors; yet perhaps the morphodynamics of Gnosticism did not need Simon at all.

Let us analyze again the terms of the problem. There are two Principles, and there is the Old Testament. Theoretically the Old Testament can belong to Good, to Evil, to both, or to neither. The orthodox assign it to Good, some of the dualists to Evil, most of them to the intermediary who is good-and-evil, a very few of them to a parallel universe that is neither perfectly good nor evil (although it is more good than evil). And this is in some cases what truly and ultimately separates a sect like the Bogomils or the mitigated Cathars from orthodoxy; it also explains the interest of the militant Lutheran Adolf von Harnack in Marcion, in whom he saw the champion of Lutheranism *avant la lettre*. Harnack thought that Luther should have followed his youthful impulses and Pauline allegiances and expelled the Old Testament from the Christian canon. And wasn't the battle about the Bible the main one that Augustine fought against the shrewd Manichaean Faustus of Milevum, whose impressive intellectual stature still paralyzed the bishop of Hippo long after his opponent's death?

Having once decided that the Old Testament is the Scripture of a lower god, the board game played on the Book of Genesis is easy to follow and is, *entirely and exclusively*, a logical game. Sometimes it gives the impression of "borrowings," but what is borrowed are logical "bricks" that circulate and perpetuate the sequential transformation of each reading of Genesis. And each reading is new and part of a "map of misprision" that will never be complete. Let us follow this board game as it develops.

First the board: the Book of Genesis, put together from different versions by traditionalists who were not thinking of the millennia of rationalism that would follow them.

In a class I gave in 1987 at the University of Chicago, the students and I came to the conclusion that the first two verses of Genesis may admit approximately fifty different interpretations. To start with the first words: "In the *Beginning* God created the heavens and the earth" was interpreted by some Kabbalists as meaning that heaven and earth were created in, or through, the dawning hypostasis called *Beginning*. (This interpretation clearly includes the Prologue of John, and the Prologue of John includes it or perhaps formulates it for the first time: "In the *Beginning* was the Logos.")

The Creator God of Genesis makes the heavens and the earth and then is clearly confronted with a number of things that were not created by him: the Abyss, Darkness, the Waters. We showed that the mitigated gnostics interpreted this as a dualistic cosmogony and reacted vigorously against it by ascribing to Sophia or the Demiurge the origin of Darkness and Matter. Yet even they, as good Platonists, were not shocked at all by the fact that Abyss—interpreted as sheer Space, the Platonic *chōra*—was there with God.

The Spirit of God, *rūah ha-'elōhīm*, which must be a hypostasis of God but enters the story very abruptly, hovers over the Waters. God makes Light, which contrasts with Darkness, makes the Firmament to separate the upper from the lower Waters (whatever this might mean; "upper" and "lower" Waters are subject to perpetual interpretation), dry land appears, God orders it to put forth plants, he makes the luminaries of heaven, then orders the Waters to bring forth creatures. Then there appear (or are made) the birds of the sky, then God orders the earth to bring forth animals that live on the earth surface, then he addresses himself in the plural (Gen. 1:26) to fabricate humanity in his image, makes it male and female and master of creation. Ascertaining that all this was good, God rests one day.

The second chapter of Genesis stems from an entirely different source and entails a different and contradictory version of creation. Adam is created from dust and animated by God's breath (2:7). God makes the eastern Garden of Paradise with the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge in it (2:8-9). Adam is moved to Eden (2:15) and ordered not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (2:16-17). God makes all the animals again and introduces them to Adam, who gives them names (2:18-20). Then God causes "a deep sleep to fall upon" Adam, extracts one rib from him, and out of it he makes woman (2:21-22). Out of nothing the Snake appears and explains to Eve that she will not die from eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge but instead "will be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:4-5). Eve eats of it and passes it to Adam as well (3:6). They are

ashamed of being naked and hide from the sight of God (3:7–8). God does not know where they are (3:9) or what they have done (3:11), then finds out and curses the Snake, the woman, and the man (3:14–19), sets them in “garments of skin” (3:21), and expels them from Paradise; “and east of the Garden of Eden he set the cherubim with a flaming sword turning all around to guard the way to the Tree of Life” (3:24), lest, perhaps, as the common interpretation has it but the text would not say, humankind may become immortal.

Let us stop here and examine a few of the most salient episodes so far, the squares on the game board of Genesis on which our dualists would most certainly dwell.

In the beginning they stumble upon the Abyss, Darkness, and the Waters and try to figure out where they come from. The choices offered to them are the following, and they explored all of them:

1. God on the one hand and the Abyss, Darkness, and the Waters on the other, taken singularly or collectively, are distinct Principles. The Second Principle is the Waters for Irenaeus’s Ophites; Darkness for Hippolytus’s Sethians, the Manichaeans, and the radical Cathars; and, tacitly so, the Abyss for most Platonizing gnostics who do not want to be dualistic and in fact would be surprised to be called such.
2. Everything, including the Abyss, Darkness, and the Waters (primordial Matter) was created by God.
- 2a. but Genesis omitted to tell it. Besides, there is nothing wrong if God created the Abyss and the others, because all creation is good (orthodox, Bogomils, monarchian Cathars).
3. Not God but someone else created everything, and Genesis told it correctly. Something is indeed wrong if God created such things as primordial Matter; but the god of Genesis is not the true God (all Western dualists and pseudodualists with the exception of John of Lugio); consequently there is no harm in ascribing to him the origin of Darkness and primordial Matter (gnostics).

We notice again with some surprise that, between the orthodox and the seemingly speculative gnostics, the former take Genesis less seriously, and the latter take it quite literally. The orthodox are accommodating, for they use the Old Testament as a vast allegory to substantiate their claim that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Old Testament God. One allegory more or less can do no harm. The gnostics, by contrast, do not contend the truth contained in every single contradictory statement of Genesis; they simply want to make sense of it.

Another consequential square on the Genesis game board is 1:26, referring to God as plural. Only a few options are possible:

- A. The premise is that God is truly the high and dignified creator of the ecosystem; this premise is shared by Judaism and orthodox Christianity.
 1. The plural is explained away as being a *plurale maiestatis* with no concrete meaning;
 2. The plural means that God collaborated with someone else in the creation of humanity: Sophia or an angel.

- B. The premise is that the god of Genesis is not the ultimate God.
 1. The plural is tacitly explained away, for humanity was created by whoever the god of Genesis is, without any help (Marcion, the Bogomils, and the Cathars, provided we understand by "humanity" the physical bodies of man and woman);
 2. The plural indicates that whoever the god of Genesis is (either an intermediary or the Devil), he created humanity with the help of his Archons (most gnostics and the Manichaeans).

Let us move on to the next square (2:7): Who blew into Adam's nostrils the breath of life? That question depends on another question: What is the breath of life?

The only logical possibilities are the following:

1. Adam's maker;
2. someone other than Adam's maker.

In either case, he or she might have blown in Adam's nostrils

1. his or her own breath;
2. someone else's breath.

This gives us four choices

1. Adam's maker blows his own breath into Adam's nostrils (orthodox, Marcion, Manichaeans);
2. Adam's maker blows someone else's breath into his nostrils (many gnostics, one Bogomil myth);
3. Not the maker of Adam blows his own breath into Adam's nostrils (certain gnostics, another Bogomil myth);
4. Not the maker of Adam blows not his own breath into his nostrils (some gnostics).

Let us move a few squares ahead, when the game has tightened up and the Snake appears all of a sudden on the board (3:1). Who is the Snake?

We already explored the answers to this question in chapter 4. Yet it would be instructive to have a look at the logic of this multiple choice:

1. The Snake is a representative of the true God (many dualists);
2. The Snake is not the representative of the true God (orthodox, many dualists, and all pseudodualists);
- 2a. He is the representative of the Demiurge or
- 2b. of someone other than the Demiurge.

Choice 2a further splits in two, according to whether the Demiurge is or is not the Devil. The orthodox and the pseudodualists split on this issue only, for they both agree that the Snake is a representative of the Devil, but not that the Devil is the *Demiurge* of this world (although the orthodox give him the mysterious title of "Ruler [*archōn*] of this world" from John 12:31). This model will generate all possible solutions.

The morphodynamics of dualistic systems can be compared with a board game and could, as a matter of fact, be made into a board game of transformations. For indeed the system generated from the different premises mentioned above is nothing but a game of mind—no more and certainly no less.

Game stores today sell very advanced board games with numerous expansions. Theoretically a board game can expand limitlessly; yet in practice the minds of the potential buyers will remain interested in one game for a certain amount of time only. The more advanced among them might already have discovered that *one game is all games*; thus changing to a new game is not necessary. Why so? A game fascinates the human mind because the mind recognizes in it its own functioning, and this recognition does not depend on the kind of game offered to the mind.

The logic of any game is to set before the mind a multiple-choice scheme. The mind will immediately set upon its task of exploring all these possibilities. Theoretically it should do no more, but in practice the human mind is always faced with situations in which, among a plurality of solutions, only one or some are correct, and the incorrect ones may prove fatal. This probably explains why the mind will tend to cling to one choice instead of accepting many of them, but complex social interaction is certainly another reason.

Ancient dualistic trends were part of the explorative mind process, when most solutions to the riddle posed by the emergence of a new

religion out of old religions and philosophies had to be formulated. The morphogenesis of dualism can be followed step by step and understood in the terms of the logical game that was being played for approximately three centuries, before Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire. With this, far-flung solutions were discarded, and the rules of the game became stricter. The gnostics had had their time; the board belonged entirely to mainstream Christians, whose persuasive skills had to do not with logic but with power.

Yet the system of dualism was far from extinct. The rest of this book will analyze some of its actual or presumed diachronic manifestations up to today.

Chapter 11

Modern Nihilism

Wo keine Götter sind, walten Gespenster.
—NOVALIS

1. The Birth of Nihilism

The intention here is not to summarize the debate surrounding *nihilism*, a concept that appeared in 1799 and continues to be a very live option.¹ It will suffice to sketch in a few lines the essence of this “uncanny guest” (Nietzsche) who came knocking at the door of our civilization at the outbreak of the modern era. We must address the work of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900) in order to seek a ruling on the “death of God.”

Nietzsche, as harbinger of the new era, feels and proclaims that the transcendence of the Christian-Platonic faith that dominated Western civilization for over two thousand years has become void, has spent its vital force and creativity. Obviously this means the *liberation* of humankind from transcendence, yet what remains without transcendence is *nothingness* (*das Nichts*, or the Cathars’ *nihil*) and liberation becomes “liberation unto nothingness” (*Befreiung in das Nichts*).² Under these circumstances, there are two alternatives: either to find a substitute or *Ersatz* for transcendence—and this substitute is the Enlightenment’s *belief in Reason* (*Vernunftglauben*), which is not a “hard value” for being deprived of any metaphysical justification—or to accept nihilism as an active force and to become its instruments. This is defined by Nietzsche, with an untranslatable pun, as an “unbuilding”: “man legt Hand an, man *richtet zugrunde*.”³ The verb *richten* means “to build,” *zugrunde* means “down to the ground,” and their combination, “to demolish, unbuild, build down.”

If nihilism is the state that ensues from the "unbuilding" of transcendence and the attitude that pursues transcendence in order to "build it down," then we are entitled to notice that Gnosticism is the obverse of nihilism, for being the champion of transcendence. It has become apparent that one of the most relevant characteristics of Gnosticism and of all other trends of Western dualism is the extreme and extremistic affirmation of transcendence *at the expense* of the physical world. If we persist in calling these trends nihilistic, then we must define their nihilism as the most powerful *metaphysical nihilism* in the history of Western ideas. Modern nihilism, by contrast, is *antimetaphysical*.

Here, nevertheless, a circumstance intervenes that makes the two—Gnosticism and modern nihilism—closely resemble each other: the fact that, for purposes that are the inverse of each other, the two actively "build down" the same transcendence, namely, the Jewish-Platonic one as embodied in nearly two millennia of Christianity. For Western dualism this is the *false* transcendence that has to be unmasked and demolished in order to proclaim the *true* transcendence; for modern nihilism this transcendence is equally *false*, because it is a mental construct that shielded us from the hard fact of nihilism for well over two millennia; it likewise has to be unmasked and "built down." This accounts for many traits that the two inverse forms of nihilism—the metaphysical one and the antimetaphysical one—share, the most conspicuous being their constant attack on the Christian Scriptures, the embodiment, for both of them, of a fallacious transcendence.

Consequently at the outbreak of modern era, *the system of inverse biblical exegesis was once again activated and continues to produce solutions according to the same rules of the game* (see chapter 10), almost as if there were no interruption between the ancient gnostics and Romanticism. This explains the impressive analogies between dualistic mythologies and Romantic mythical narratives. From a systemic viewpoint, we may add that the game of modern nihilism starts from a rule that is the extreme opposite of the rule that produces dualistic scenarios, but it reaches conclusions that are formally identical in so far as it recognizes the need to annihilate the current (Christian) concept of "value." Thus the two systems differ by their first and foremost option—affirm versus deny transcendence; yet the first alternative is more complex, in so far as the affirmation of transcendence goes together with a denial of the common concept of transcendence, the Christian (Jewish-Platonic) one.

If the system of modern nihilism starts with a powerful substitute for transcendence, which is belief in Reason, it discovers sooner or later that there is no value if there is no metasystem in which value is defined.

This is the experience of the existentialist philosophers and is again the mirror equivalent of the dualistic experience, in so far as both recognize the necessity of transcendence; but dualism affirms it and existentialism complains about its complete absence. A writer like Albert Camus would make constant use of gnostic dualistic metaphors in the titles of his major works: *Exile and Kingdom*, *The Stranger*, *The Fall*.

In what follows we will analyze, with no pretense of exhaustiveness, some of the more salient episodes of inverse biblical exegesis in Romantic nihilism and subsequently will pass to the modern debate on Gnosis.

2. The Post-Miltonians

With *Paradise Lost* (1667) John Milton (1608–1674) inaugurated a tradition of mythological narratives using the Bible that would be continued by William Blake (1757–1827) and, in the early XIXth century, by the British Romantics. A nonconformist in social life and in his religious outlook, which became public only 150 years after his death, Milton nevertheless respected the strict limits of orthodoxy in his great poem. Despite his dramatic grandness, his hero Satan remains the jealous opponent of an almighty God. As far as Adam and Eve are concerned, they sin, in the good Augustinian tradition, out of a free will that is, however, not defined in sexual terms, sexual fulfillment being, even among angels, a desirable event.

It will be impossible to analyze here the mythical narratives produced by William Blake under the influence of Thomas Taylor's Platonism, Swedenborg's visionary experience, and George Berkeley's philosophy. Blake's *[First] Book of Urizen* (1794) is a free Genesis paraphrase combined with reminiscences from Greek mythology, in which the awesome primordial being Urizen plays the part of the biblical creator god. Urizen, the architect of this universe, is the hypostasis of the hatred and contempt that Blake himself felt for the soulless, mechanistic philosophy of Newton and for Locke's sensualism, and at the same time he is the legalistic tyrant of the Bible. Creation is defined as both a contraction and a fall in six stages, the six days of Genesis. Blake's narrative contains inverse exegesis tightly interwoven with original elements in a dense plot on which we cannot expand here.⁴

The birthpangs of nihilism are heard in gnostic tones in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1818–19), which likewise belongs to the post-Miltonian tradition. In his *Preface*, Shelley confesses that he did not choose Satan as a main character instead of Prometheus since the latter

"is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge and a desire for personal aggrandizement, which, in the Hero of *Paradise Lost* interfere with the interest."⁵ Nihilistic exegesis was still in its infancy, and Milton's shadow too authoritative to be overcome. Instead of reviving Satan—an operation performed by Lord Byron a few years later—Shelley prefers to stay within Greek, not biblical, mythology, and many opportunities for a reversed exegesis of Genesis are thereby lost. Nevertheless, the regime of the world in Shelley's drama is clearly bad, and this not only because of Jupiter, who threw Prometheus in chains and let him be tortured. Jupiter himself is only a sky god; he can play with meteorological phenomena and nothing more. Mightier than Jupiter are those divinities who govern human life: "Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change. To these / All things are subject but eternal Love."⁶

Jupiter is not really evil; he is an impotent and abusive tyrant who occupied the throne of the Ruler of the world and will be supplanted by the better Ruler Love. Like the gnostic Demiurge, Jupiter is unaware of the existence of a mightier Pleroma above him. With the unchaining of Prometheus, the tyrant will be cast into the abyss, and the nature of the world's Rule will change dramatically, for

the man remains
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
Over himself.⁷

This overly optimistic vision of a world ruled by Love is finally blessed by the Creator of all,

king of suns and stars, Demons and Gods,
Ethereal Dominations, who possess
Elysian, windless, fortunate abodes
Beyond Heaven's constellated wilderness.⁸

The "blest" and "great Republic" of the aeons, a sort of Pleroma around an alien God, manifest themselves through an anonymous Voice to show their approval of the dismissal of the despotic Jupiter.

The analogies between Shelley's myth and gnostic myth are obvious. In both cases an ignorant and impotent celestial tyrant rules over the earth; in both cases a Savior must come to redeem humankind and must suffer to effect redemption; in both cases there is an unknown, transcendent Pleroma; and in both cases a new world regime follows the

unmasking of the false transcendence. Yet Shelley's worldview is very different from the gnostics': All humans will be redeemed on a transfigured Earth, freed from the chains of Power. In so far as this would entail redemption of physicality and Matter, the only ancient equivalent of it is Origenist eschatology. Among all the Romantics who reinvent gnostic myth, Shelley is the only one who needs a higher transcendence to bless the dethronement of Jupiter-Yahweh. Yet his positive vision of the Earth shows that he, like all modern nihilists, disinvests from transcendence and invests in mundane reality. The investment yielded a return in all but philosophical terms, as prophets of doom would now and then remind us still.

With *Cain: A Mystery* (1821), Byron goes one step further: He restores Satan-Lucifer to his rights yet gives him powers far beyond those granted him by the Christian Milton. It is true that the narrative is from the perspective of Cain, who may be deceived by Lucifer; Byron's genius knew how to keep the finale perfectly ambiguous.

Cain may be considered the best systemic introduction to the study of Gnosticism and other Western dualistic trends, for it is an extraordinary illustration of how the Genesis board game can be played at any time and will deliver outcomes that are transformations of each other. Byron, indeed, played the game starting from the (nihilistic, not gnostic) rule that the transcendence of Genesis is false and therefore its traditional exegesis ought to be reversed. He thus produced a narrative that perfectly resembles gnostic myth.

Byron's story starts with the revelation that a god who permitted man to be mortal and the world to be a place of suffering and injustice cannot be good. Lucifer acts as a Savior and discloses to Cain the most potent secret of creation: that *there is a second Power*, which is good. That second power is Lucifer himself, who further reveals to Cain another shocking secret: that he is not mortal, as god wants him to believe, but immortal. Like John in the narrative framework of the *Apocryphon of John*, Cain asks his Savior a number of questions, which sometimes happen to be exactly the same as those asked by John, such as, Who was the Snake in the Garden of Eden? Cain, like many gnostics, believes that the Snake was a spirit, but Lucifer energetically denies that he himself took on the Snake's shape: "The snake *was* the Snake—no more and yet no less." This is the interpretation of the gnostic *Testimony of Truth*, as against the interpretation of the *Apocryphon of John*, according to which the Snake was a representative of Evil, or against the opposite interpretation that makes the Snake into a representative of the good Pleroma. It is as if, at this stage on the game board, the player may draw cards that

allow a definition of the Snake in terms of "Good," "Neutral," or "Evil" and would further indicate who the Snake character really is (he may be Lucifer, Sophia, the Devil, the Demiurge, or some other, and all this makes for a *transformation* of the sequential mind game played along the Book of Genesis).

Lucifer's revelation to Cain contains more than a promise of immortality, should Cain recognize the eternal character of his mind, "if the mind will be itself / And centre of surrounding things."

Lucifer takes Cain on an ecstatic tour of the universe, showing him that it consists of many parallel worlds, all aborted creations of the same god. The multiplication of systems of power belonging to an unhappy creator changes suffering into a cosmic dimension of being.

"Mind" in Byron's poem stands for the Enlightenment's Reason. Consequently his message is that the only salvation of humankind is to abandon despotic transcendence and become centered in Reason. Although Byron's mythical inventions look superficially like gnostic myth, his basic mood is modern nihilism.

The great poet of Recanati, Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837), who in 1833 desperately asks the Maker of the World, Ahriman (Arimane), "Spender of all Evil," to cut his life short before his thirty-fifth birthday, prefigures existentialist philosophy in so far as he is disenchanted with the abyss of nihilism watching from behind the weak mask of Reason. To him Reason is good only for ascertaining the evil essence of the immanent god, not for overcoming his power. God can be defeated only by the power of death. Direct gnostic influence has been suggested, but Leopardi's nihilistic mood is definitely the opposite of the gnostics'.⁹

In 1953 René Nelli noticed that the great epics of French Romanticism were permeated by a Manichaeic spirit.¹⁰ This would apply to Lamartine's (1790–1869) *The Fall of an Angel* (*La Chute d'un ange*, 1837–38),¹¹ as well as to Victor Hugo's *La Fin de Satan*. It is hardly true for Lamartine's poem, in which an angel, infatuated with the beautiful young woman Daidha, is ejected from his spiritual dimension into a physical body, undergoes innumerable humiliations and mistreatments in different human societies, all based on injustice and absurd laws, and eventually realizes that the world is evil and decides to commit suicide with all the members of his family. This suburban Paris tragedy, superficially tinted with nihilism, moves among many literary worlds that abound in eros, use sci-fi devices, and indulge in sadistic performances. Lamartine's poem is not an heir to Manichaeism but a pessimistic precursor of the early XXth-century entertainment novel.

Things are different as far as Hugo's *The End of Satan* is concerned (1854–57, posthumously published in 1886),¹² which is an original narrative belonging to the post-Miltonian tradition. In 1854 Hugo lived in exile at Jersey, practiced spiritism, and received the nocturnal visits of a faithful ghost, the "Dame blanche" that might have inspired the name of the homonymous ice cream. At the autumnal equinox Death herself spoke through the spirit table, spurring him to write a work full of horror and mystery; on October 22 Death gave him a title: *Conseils à Dieu*. At the beginning of 1855 Jesus Christ manifested himself several times, predictably criticizing Christianity and revealing that there is no God at all. Jesus Christ was, however, repeating himself. He had said the same thing sixty years before, in a poem by the Romantic Jean Paul. On March 8 Jesus Christ entertained Hugo on the subject of the *pardon*, and Hugo noted: "I am writing a poem called *Satan pardoned*," adding that he had started it in March of 1854. He continued *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan* at Guernsey, where his nights were inhabited by strange presences. The two poems bear the imprint of this tormented period of his life.

La Fin de Satan lacks the complexity of gnostic myth, yet it succeeds in devising an original plot in which God is trapped by Satan in his own creation, which God therefore repeatedly tries to destroy, without success. God is clearly not almighty, yet his Opponent cannot unseat him for one unexpected reason: As a former Angel, Satan is desperately in love with God and detests the fetid darkness in which he is compelled to abide, which is tantamount to saying that he hates himself as much as he cherishes his enemy. Eventually the two must come to terms, lest God's creation be irremediably spoiled and Satan altogether disgusted with himself and his foul surroundings. Strangely enough, the stakes of the final reconciliation of the two mighty opponents are the destruction of the world, envisioned as a positive outcome.

3. Gnosticism as an Analogue Model

Philosophy, said one of the greatest German philosophers, is a German provincial affair. The modern debate on Gnosis has not yet left this province, where, beside concepts like "secularization" and "nihilism," it continues to fascinate philosophical minds. Actually the stakes here are not modest either. At issue is the meaning of history itself.

It is only by convention that Ferdinand Christian Baur's work *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religionsphilosophie* (Tübingen, 1835) is

said to be the starting signal for the Gnosis debate. One could actually go back further to Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714), whose *Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie* (1699) had, as it seems, a decisive impact on Goethe.

It is Baur anyway who kicks off the fashion of comparing modern thought with ancient Gnosis. For him, Hegel is the heir to Valentinus. In Valentinianism the *absolute Spirit* is the top of the pyramidal Pleroma, and the aeons are the essences through which the Spirit knows itself by creating a negative reflection of itself. The link between aeons is *love*. All of this returns in Hegel, as well as Sophia's fall, which takes on the form of a break in the "Kingdom of the Son of the World," when the "finite spirit" (*endlicher Geist*) appears, which is the equivalent of the Valentinian low-quality *psychē* (soul). The "Kingdom of the Son of the World" will be concluded by the dialectic "negation of negation," a "process of reconciliation" (*der Prozess der Versöhnung*) in which the absolute Spirit recognizes itself for what it is.¹³

Baur remains unaware of gnostic anticosmism (and perhaps dualism), which was only spotted by Hans Jonas in 1934. Therefore his interpretation of Gnosis fits not only Hegel but Christianity and Platonism as well. In modern scholarship and hermeneutics the variations on the meaning of Gnosis itself are considerable, and our intention here is not to establish even a tentative catalog thereof. We already came across Eugen Heinrich Schmitt in our survey of feminist interpretations of Gnosis (chapter 3 above). Yet Schmitt also inaugurates the proliferation of unchecked meanings of the word *Gnosis*. In the Protestant (evangelical) tradition, rather than in that of Clement of Alexandria, who also made a distinction between *gnōsis* and mere *pistis*, "faith," he opposes "Gnosis" intended as inner experience to sheer "faith," which is the vulgar experience of those associated with the Church.¹⁴ According to this definition, the greatest gnostic of modern times would be . . . Count Leo Tolstoy!¹⁵

It was undoubtedly the merit of Hans Jonas's first volume of *Gnosis and the Spirit of Late Antiquity* (1934) to introduce some coherence into the debate. According to Jonas, constitutive of the gnostic systems are *anticosmism* and the idea of *devolution*, that is, of a catastrophic break that interrupts the evolution of the aeons. For Jonas, Hegel is the representative of a worldview quite opposite to that of Gnosis, evolutionary and procosmic.

Philosophically more ambitious, Jacob Taubes's *Western Eschatology* (1947) tackles the thorny question of the destiny of Western civilization, which had also preoccupied Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Indeed,

when writing the book, Taubes himself was a Heideggerian. For Heidegger (*Being and Time*, 1927), a great lover of linguistic puns, the meaning of being shines in its being being-toward-death (*Sein zum Tod*). Taubes transfers this judgment onto the process of history and declares that the meaning of history is revealed only in the cessation of history, in the eschaton. "In the *eschaton* history exceeds its own limits and becomes visible to itself."¹⁶ "Historial" (as opposed to "historical"—one of Heidegger's favorite puns, opposing the word *geschichtlich*, from *Geschichte*, which would be related to *Geschick*, that is, "fate," predestination, to mere *historisch*, "historical," intended as accidental) authenticity belongs therefore, according to Taubes, to those historical forces that speed up the end of world history through a process of "permanent revolution." Taubes thus identifies the leading edge of history with the gnostic-apocalyptic tradition, which he makes into the vocation of Israel, corresponding to Israel's unique characteristic of "spaceless people" and therefore "people of time," the people of a coming New Heaven and New Earth.¹⁷ This is why Israel as historical "place" is the "place of Revolution."¹⁸

Taubes makes no distinction between apocalypticism and Gnosticism. For him, to put it in his own words, Gnosticism is the "historial" ideology of apocalyptic Revolution, which manifests itself in Jesus' preaching of the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, this world is abolished, yet it is slow to disappear. Paul is the first to give this paradox "gnostic" expression by moving Christian salvation from the horizontal dimension of time to the vertical dimension of being, by transforming the end of the world into an individual escape from the prison of the world.¹⁹

Starting with Origen, the Church Fathers choose against "historial" authenticity and systematically condemn the millennial, apocalyptic ferments present at all times in Christianity.²⁰ The eschatological spirit of Christianity is extinguished in the Augustinian conception of the Church, which is a reversal of millennialism: The Church is *already* the Kingdom of Christ on earth.²¹ After Augustine, millennialism becomes altogether sectarian but gains a new momentum in the preaching of Joachim of Flora,²² whose interpretation of history will become political philosophy in the radical Protestant Thomas Münzer, who wants to install the Spiritual Church on earth and justifies totalitarianism based on power if power is exerted by the "good."²³ Enlightenment restores inauthenticity by reestablishing the Church, a "Church of Reason." During Hegel's time, the critical power of Christianity, its *raison d'être*, was altogether consumed. This is Taubes's interpretation of Hegel's

1802 statement (*Glauben und Wissen*) according to which God would be dead. Hegel himself is a Joachimite—he belongs to the millennial tradition and envisions his own philosophy as the last possible one.

Taubes emphasizes the role of the Reformation as a revealer of historical authentic forces. For him, Münzer is a revolutionary theocrat like the Old Testament Prophets. Through violence and subversion, he aims at installing God's Law on earth. Luther, by contrast is a moderate Marcionite, relieved to give over to the lay state that cursed side of existence which falls under the Law and to dedicate all his power to the construction of Christian interiority. Between the two, Münzer would be more perceptive, for he predicted that, saturated by the honey of prayer and grace, the soul (interiority, subjectivity) will be so submerged in sweetness that it will cease to exist: "Wer den bitteren Christum nicht will haben, wird sich am Honig totfressen" (Who shuns the bitterness of Christ will eat honey unto death). Indeed, Lutheran subjectivity would prove precarious, and any attempt to meet God in one's interiority would soon meet only His frightening silence.

With Hegel, the place of historical authenticity moves definitively from religion to philosophy, which takes over the revolutionary task of religion.²⁴ The representatives of "permanent revolution" are Kierkegaard and Marx: "Marx destroys the capitalist-bourgeois world, Kierkegaard the Christian-bourgeois world."²⁵ Whereas Marx publishes his *Communist Manifesto*, the Apocalypse of capitalist society on whose ruins a classless society would appear, Kierkegaard publishes an anti-communist manifesto (*Das Eine was nottut*). For Marx, 1848 was the historical year when the Fourth Estate made its entrance into history; for Kierkegaard, 1848 was the tangible sign of godlessness, the coming of the socialist Antichrist.²⁶ Which of the two was right? For Taubes only a *coincidentia oppositorum* of Marx and Kierkegaard could eliminate the contradiction between the external and the internal orders. But such a state could be reached only in the eschaton, which means that the place of historical authenticity is and remains the gnostic "permanent revolution."²⁷

Taubes's poignant book launched an ongoing debate. It was Eric Voegelin who, although subscribing to Taubes's analysis, questioned both its premises and its results.²⁸

Voegelin ascertains that Christianity, a messianic Jewish movement, possesses an inner tension that ensues from the delay of the expected world end. Since the eschaton (Parousia) never took place, the Church decided to change historical eschatology into supernatural eschatology. Yet the expectation of the world's end would never disappear from the

life of Christian communities. A ferment of anarchy and revolution accompanies Christianity along its whole history. Joachim of Flora, as both Taubes and Löwith had it,²⁹ remains for Voegelin the most important character in the renewal of eschatological expectations. Voegelin articulates Joachim's doctrine in four main points:³⁰ the three phases of world history, resumed by Hegel, Marx, and by the ideologist of the *Third Reich* (an invention of a pathological subject: the writer Moeller van den Bruck, author of a work on Dostoyevski called *Das dritte Reich*, 1923); the great historical Leader, *Dux*, resumed by Marx and Hitler (and, in a pathetic key, one might add, by the Italian *Duce*); the Prophet of a New Age, who is often conflated with the Leader (Marx, Hitler); and, finally, the eschatological age as a community of autonomous persons in direct contact with the Holy Spirit, without the mediation of sacraments and grace (communism).

Voegelin calls Gnosis the great millennial-apocalyptic trend that accompanies Christianity from its inception. For both Taubes and Voegelin, Gnosis is indeed that unique ferment of history which molds the present face of the West. Like nihilism in Heidegger (*Holzwege: Nietzsches Satz "Gott ist tot"*), the "Gnosticism" of modernity constitutes for both Taubes and Voegelin a fatal, historical force that determines the destiny of all peoples of the world, dragged along by the movement of the West. Yet, whereas Taubes qualifies this force positively and opts for "permanent revolution" in order to reach as soon as possible the cessation of history, which would also establish the ultimate meaning of history, Voegelin emphasizes the radical negativity of that "Gnosticism" which becomes more and more important and disquieting in the modern age.³¹

The "gnostic revolution" takes place in stages. One among these is the Reformation, which is the successful takeover of Western institutions by gnostic movements.³² The most patent example of takeover is the British Puritans, who close every opponent's mouth citing John's words: "We are of God, and whoever knows God listens to us."³³ According to Voegelin, the Puritans represent an anti-Christian force camouflaged as Christian. But the genius of scriptural camouflage is John Calvin, whose work constitutes a Christian Qur'an—by which Voegelin means The Book that answers all questions, making all precedent or subsequent knowledge useless. Calvin accomplishes a complete break within the Western intellectual tradition. Other breaks, other Qur'ans: the *Encyclopedia* of Diderot and d'Alembert, the work of Auguste Comte, the work of Marx, and "the patristic literature of Leninism-Stalinism."³⁴ The Qur'anic character of these works entails,

according to Voegelin, active exclusion of all they claim to supplant. The Reformation already replaces argument and persuasion by the immutable and undiscussed truth of a totalitarian society.³⁵ Totalitarianism is, in fact, the accomplishment of the gnostic quest for a civil theology. Today Gnosticism, the nearing of the Christian eschaton, manifests itself in two distinct forms: Marxism, which is the more explicit and less subtle, and "Westernization," which implies the destruction of the "truth of the soul" and contempt for existential problems.³⁶

Voegelin's thesis has been taken quite seriously by Philip J. Lee in a recent work, at least to the extent that it applies to Calvinism.³⁷ The founding fathers of America are made into awesome gnostics. Lee recommends "the Degnosticizing of Protestantism" along disciplinarian lines. Fortunately he goes against the main trend of American liberal Protestantism.

Whether Gnosticism is viewed as that positive movement whose role is to free the world from itself (Taubes) or as a negative world power (*Weltmacht*) that is destroying the world (Voegelin), all parties agree that Karl Marx ought to be assigned a place of honor in it. To demonstrate Marx's gnostic derivation, the Austrian historian of philosophy Ernst Topitsch abandoned historical typology and tried to establish concrete historical links.³⁸ Through Hegel, Marx would draw upon the gnostic traditions contained in the "German Ideology," sort of a German "family inheritance" that goes along with Lutheran theology and permeates the entire history of modern German philosophy,³⁹ from Hegel to Heidegger. An important link in the transmission of the German Ideology was the Pietist Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782), an adept of Lurian Kabbalah, an admirer of Jakob Böhme, and a disciple of Johann Albrecht Bengel (d. 1752), a strange character who took inspiration from Joachim of Flora's theories in order to make numerological predictions from the Revelation of John and ascertained that the world would end in 1836. He never lived to be disappointed, nor did his follower Oetinger, who, spurred by the imminent end (just beyond his grasp), conceived of the project of a millennial Kingdom in which all people would be equal and in which private property, the state, and money would be abolished. It is difficult to establish to what extent Oetinger influenced Hegel, whose "Gnosticism" would primarily be contained in the theory of "alienation" (*Entfremdung, Entäusserung*): The Absolute has to alienate itself in order to become known to itself. Hegelian philosophy of history is nothing but gnostic theodicy in disguise.⁴⁰ Hegel himself prepares the terrain for Marx's theory of "alienation" of the worker's labor.

Topitsch follows the gnostic myth of the fall, alienation, and blindness of the humans deceived by the Demiurge down into the Hegelian myth of alienation of the Spirit and then into the Marxist myth of the alienation of humankind through religion and of its salvation through the exercise of "positive science."⁴¹ Topitsch likewise ascertains that, in Marx's theory, the place of the gnostic elect is taken by the proletarians, who possess the secret lore of class struggle, as well as a true class awareness as against the false, alienated, or ideologizing conscience of everyone else.⁴²

Among so many prophets of doom who conceive of Gnosticism as a perennial historical movement that shuffles like a grim parade through all of Western history, there is one discordant voice: the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg.⁴³ For Blumenberg, whose books are available in English translation, modernity is the stage not of the final victory of Gnosticism but, on the contrary, of its final eviction. The reverse would have taken place in that age of "theology of science" (as Amos Funkenstein brilliantly puts it),⁴⁴ the XVIIth century, when thinkers like Descartes and Leibnitz would discuss—and reject—the idea that the Creator of this world would be a "powerful deceiver" (*deceptor potentissimus*). Many have criticized the precariousness of Blumenberg's position, and Amos Funkenstein, among others, has shown that Descartes's philosophy would not have been thinkable without the influence of late medieval Nominalism, precisely that Nominalism which, according to Blumenberg, is the last Western "relapse" into Gnosticism. Yet Blumenberg entirely forgets that the tenets of the Reformation are the total confirmation of the Augustinian doctrine of original sexual sin and predestination, which otherwise Blumenberg holds for "gnostic." It would therefore be quite easy to overthrow all of Blumenberg's assumptions.

The question we must face in this book is not whether all these essayists are right in overextending the concepts of Gnosticism and Gnosis but *whether it is legitimate to interpret the occurrences mentioned (or invented) by them as outcomes of the gnostic system*. Or, to put it in other words, one should first ascertain whether Taubes's or Voegelin's "Gnosticisms" belong to the Tree of Gnosis of the preceding chapter of this book, whether they are transformations generated by the same principles that generate Western dualistic trends. For this, such powerful phenomena as the ideologies of the Reformation or German classical idealism from Kant onward should be carefully analyzed, an enterprise that can obviously find no place in this book. Gnosticism as a correct analogue model for

Hegelian or Marxist evolutionism may be objectionable, but what actually matters is the hermeneutical trend that has emerged, represented by Taubes, Voegelin, Topitsch, Pellicani, and others, according to which modernity is gnostic. Their creative misunderstanding of Gnosticism is possible, although it may have no legitimacy in the eyes of someone who looks for more than superficial analogies among phenomena. For such a one, the only modern philosopher who may be called gnostic to some extent is one who does not figure on the lists of any of the leading personalities of "modern Gnosticism" mentioned so far: Immanuel Kant, who in his booklet *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (1793) displays gnostic anthropology as his own. Man is evil by nature but contains at the very bottom of his soul (*Seelengrund*) a divine spark of goodness. This spark would allow him to become a "New Man," through a "moral revolution."

The case of existentialism has already been discussed elsewhere.⁴⁵ Like Romanticism, existentialism closely resembles Gnosticism, yet it is the obverse thereof: Whereas Gnosticism is the champion of transcendence, existentialism is the final acknowledgment of its absence.

We will not dwell here on the resemblance between gnostic myth and the myth of Neo-Darwinian biology as emphasized by Hans Jonas.⁴⁶ An assessment of the basic operational identity between religious and scientific myth will detain us elsewhere.⁴⁷ A last word should be spent here on the legitimacy of another enterprise that quite unfortunately has become current among literary historians, who would indiscriminately label as "gnostic" many if not all of the writers in the world, including François Villon, Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Robert Musil, Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann, and Flannery O'Connor.⁴⁸

A more serious case has been made for science fiction inspired by Gnosticism, and the title of Philip K. Dick's novel *The Divine Invasion* has been mentioned in this connection.⁴⁹ A closer look at the novel shows that, indeed, Dick took inspiration from Jewish and Jewish-Christian apocalyptic literature (especially *The Vision of Isaiah*),⁵⁰ yet his novel, which describes the descent of God to the earth through the first heaven controlled by the troops of Beliar the Opponent, and God's encounter with his Wisdom in a kindergarten,⁵¹ makes no use of gnostic material. More convincing is the analogy in the case of L. Ron Hubbard, himself a sci-fi writer who first published his best-selling *Dianetics* as a fiction novel in *Astounding SF*.⁵² The central myth of Hubbard's Scientology by the method of Dianetic auditing starts from the assumption that the immortal Thetans of the beginning are bored and therefore willing to play games in which they build universes. Eventually they are lured into

the universes they created, remain trapped in them, and forget who they are.⁵³

Yet, as Richard Smith perceptively noticed,⁵⁴ Harold Bloom is today the only author of both essays and fiction who consciously identifies himself with the gnostics, both as a literary critic and a writer. In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) Bloom asserts that every act of creation is *ipso facto* an act of destruction toward tradition and believes that the gnostic Valentinus has set the example for such an operation, in so far as he "is troping upon and indeed against his precursor authorities, to reverse his relationship to the Bible and to Plato, by joining himself to an asserted earlier truth that they supposedly have distorted."⁵⁵ And in *Agon* (1982) Bloom praises Gnosticism as "the inaugural and most powerful of Deconstructions because it undid all genealogies, scrambled all hierarchies, allegorized every microcosm/macrocosm relation, and rejected every representation of divinity as non-referential."⁵⁶ With the expert eye of the literary theorist, Bloom has indeed discovered that Gnosticism signals a reversed exegesis of the Scriptures that runs right up against tradition.

The question remains whether Bloom can be qualified as a "gnostic" fiction writer, in which case he would be the only unproblematic one. His narrative in *The Flight to Lucifer*,⁵⁷ which would look magnificent on a Hollywood Technicolor screen, was ostensibly not produced by a gnostic, although it deals with the gnostic planet, Lucifer. "The gnostic planet" is taken here quite literally to be a planet in the universe, where all gnostics are contiguous ethnic groups: The Mandaeans with their leader Enosh live east of the River; on its western shore are the Sethians; west of them are the Manichaeans, followed by the Marcionites with their chief Cerdo, followed by the Kenoma of the Waters of Night, across which are the Arimaneans. North of the Manichaeans are the Scythians and the Hyperboreans, allowed, as shamans, to be part of the dualists' planet. Over the underground civilization of Siniavis reigns Saklas, the Demiurge with his seven Archons. Olam, the aeon of the Northern Pleroma who had entered the apple eaten by Adam, takes the memoryless Seth Valentinus and the strong Primordial Man Thomas Prescors to the planet Lucifer through an intricate labyrinth of black holes. Prescors is tempted there by Ruha, Saklas's sister, by her seductive mother, Achamoth, and by the Arimanean demoness Nekbael, who terminates her lovers in sweet and awesome tortures. Saklas tries to destroy the powerful trio by flood, as he had once destroyed humankind. But the three escape and head north toward Hyperborea, where the shaman Aristreas, once man in Proconnesus, flies in the shape of a

raven, and Abaris shamanizes, projecting piercing bird cries. This narrative of ignorance, premonition, dreams, and bewildering revelations ends with the mutual destruction of Prescors and Saklas and the recovery of Valentinus's memory.

Bloom's fantasy does not derive from a gnostic anticosmic mood. It is an excellent sci-fi novel in which, nevertheless, the most elementary trait of all "Alexandrian systems" to which Gnosticism once belonged has been discarded: the verticality of the oppressive layers of the universe, beyond which looms the promise of liberation.

Notes

1. On the birth of nihilism, see Th. Süss, "Der Nihilismus bei F. H. Jacobi," in Dieter Arendt, *Der Nihilismus als Phänomen der Geistesgeschichte in der wissenschaftlichen Diskussion unseres Jahrhunderts* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1974), 65-78; Ludwig Landgrebe, "Zur Überwindung des europäischen Nihilismus," in Arendt, 19-37. A history of the concept of nihilism and an anthology of salient texts are offered in Giorgio Penzo, ed., *Il Nichilismo da Nietzsche a Sartre* (Città Nuova: Rome, 1976). A synthesis of part of this chapter can be found in my article "The Gnostic Revenge: Gnosticism and Romantic Literature," in Jacob Taubes, ed., *Gnosis und Politik (Religionstheorie und Politische Theologie, 2)* (Fink-Schöningh: Paderborn, West Germany, 1984), 290-306.
2. Landgrebe, "Zur Überwindung," 32.
3. Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht* XV 152, cited in Landgrebe, "Zur Überwindung," 33.
4. See also Richard Smith, "The Modern Relevance of Gnosticism," in J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (rev. ed., Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1988), 532-49, esp. 534.
5. P. B. Shelley, *The Poetical Works* (London and New York, n.d.), 201.
6. Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 230.
7. Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 243.
8. Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 255.
9. For Leopardi, see esp. my "Gnostic Revenge," 300-302.
10. René Nelli, cited in my article "Les Fantasmies du nihilisme," *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 4 (1980), 423.
11. Lamartine, *Oeuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. F.-M. Guyard (Pléiade 65) (Gallimard: Paris, 1963), 803ff.
12. Victor Hugo, *La Légende des siècles. La Fin de satan*, ed. J. Truchet (Pléiade 82) (Gallimard: Paris, 1950). For the redaction of this work, see Jean Gaudon, *Victor Hugo: Le Temps de la contemplation. L'Oeuvre poétique de Victor Hugo des "Misères" au "Seuil du gouffre" (1845-1856)* (Flammarion: Paris, 1969); and Hubert Juin, *Victor Hugo, II: 1844-1870* (Flammarion: Paris, 1984).
13. Baur's analysis was taken further in the only book of Jacob Taubes (1923-1987), written in his twenties, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (Francke: Bern, 1947), 159-61. Taubes drew information on Gnosis from Hans Jonas's *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist I* (1934), and on modern philosophy (the "Hegelian left") from Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche: Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1941; F. Meiner: Hamburg, 1978). By Karl Löwith see also *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1949).

14. Eugen Heinrich Schmitt, *Die Gnosis: Grundlagen der Weltanschauung einer ldereren Kultur*, (E. Diderichs: Leipzig and Jena, 1903) vol. 1, 3.
15. Schmitt, *Die Gnosis*, vol. 1, 9.
16. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 3.
17. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 5ff.
18. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 15.
19. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 71.
20. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 75–76.
21. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 79.
22. On medieval eschatology and Joachim of Flora in particular see Bernard McGinn's excellent books *Visions of the End* and *The Calabrian Abbot*.
23. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 86.
24. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 163–64.
25. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 167.
26. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 190.
27. Taubes, *Eschatologie*, 192–93.
28. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (1952; Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1974⁹); see also his *Wissenschaft Politik und Gnosis* (Kösel: Munich, 1959).
29. Lowith, *Meaning*, 145–59.
30. Voegelin, *New Science*, 111–13.
31. Voegelin, *New Science*, 124–28.
32. Voegelin, *New Science*, 134.
33. Voegelin, *New Science*, 137–38.
34. Voegelin, *New Science*, 140.
35. Voegelin, *New Science*, 142.
36. Voegelin, *New Science*, 163–78. These ideas are resumed by Voegelin in the booklet in German *Wissenschaft Politik und Gnosis* (1959), whose purpose is to analyze the structural analogies between modern philosophy and Gnosis already ascertained by F. C. Baur. The representatives of modern Gnosis (which is a world power, a *Weltmacht*) are Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.
37. Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (Oxford Univ. Press: London and New York, 1987).
38. Ernst Topitsch, "Marxismus und Gnosis," in *Sozialphilosophie zwischen Ideologie und Wissenschaft* (1961; Luchterhand: Neuwied and Berlin, 1966²), 261–96; "Entfremdung und Ideologie: Zur Entmythologisierung des Marxismus," in *Sozialphilosophie*, 297–327.
39. Topitsch, "Marxismus," 262.
40. Topitsch, "Marxismus," 283.
41. "Entfremdung," 300–320.
42. An original follower of Voegelin and Topitsch is the Italian sociologist Luciano Pellicani, author of *I Rivoluzionari di professione: Teoria e prassi dello gnosticismo moderno* (Vallecchi: Florence, 1975), who combines their views with Karl Mannheim's theory of the intellectuals as *freischwebend*—fluctuating between the haves and have-nots and endorsing either position. Pellicani rightly notices that Marx and especially Lenin assigned the role of the gnostic elect not to the proletarians themselves but to the enlightened intellectuals who are supposed to act as leaders of the proletarians. In this Pellicani sees a successful attempt of the intellectuals to take over state power and legitimize it as service to the many (yet) unenlightened, whose interests are thereby taken care of. With the Soviet revolution, the intellectual leadership rapidly degenerates into a totalitarian bureaucratic clique. Other European political thinkers like Alain Besançon and Augusto del Noce share to a certain extent Pellicani's assumptions: see Giovanni Filoramo, *Il Risveglio della gnosi ovvero diventare dio* (Laterza: Bari, 1990), 11–21.
43. Hans Blumenberg, *Sakularisierung und Selbstbehauptung* (rev. ed. of *Die Legitimitat der Neuzeit*, 1966) (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 1974). On Blumenberg, see Odo Marquard, "Das

- gnostische Rezidiv als Gegenneuzeit," in Taubes, ed., *Gnosis und Politik*, 31–36; Wolfgang Hübener, "Das 'gnostische Rezidiv' oder wie Hans Blumenberg der spätmittelalterlichen Theologie den Puls fühlt," in Taubes, 37–53.
44. Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton Univ. Press: Princeton, NJ, 1986).
 45. See my *Gnosticismo e pensiero moderno*; Hans Jonas (L'Erma di Brettschneider: Rome, 1985), 119ff.
 46. See my *Gnosticismo*, 123–25.
 47. Ioan Couliano, *A History of Mind, I: Religion* (in preparation).
 48. See my "Gnostic Revenge."
 49. Richard Smith, "The Modern Relevance," 545–46.
 50. On this apocalypse, see description and bibliography in my book *Out of This World: A History of Otherworldly Journeys and Out-of-Body Experiences, from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Shambhala: Boston, 1991).
 51. P. K. Dick, *The Divine Invasion* (1981; reprint, Grafton Books: London, 1989).
 52. David A. Halperin, "Gnosticism in High Tech: Science Fiction and Cult Formation," in D. A. Halperin, ed., *Religion Sect and Cult* (J. Wright: Boston, 1983), 257–66, esp. 264.
 53. Vanessa Weber, "Modern Cults and Gnosticism: Some Observations on Religious and Totalitarian Movements," in Halperin, ed., *Religion Sect and Cult*, 31–44, esp. 42.
 54. "The Modern Relevance," 547.
 55. Cited in Smith, "The Modern Relevance," 547.
 56. Cited in Smith, "The Modern Relevance," 547.
 57. Harold Bloom, *The Flight to Lucifer: A Gnostic Fantasy* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux: New York, 1979).

Epilogue

GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

The Mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
—MILTON, *Paradise Lost*

The conclusions of this book by far exceed the merely antiquarian interest with which most of us look at Gnosticism and the other trends of Western dualism. The Introduction showed us already that the main theological debates that led to the establishment of Christian doctrine were mind games people played with one another for centuries, mind games not unlike chess (only perhaps less complex), which should not have had any consequences for the parties involved and could not be properly won by anyone, for, unlike chess, they did not include a rule for checkmate. Yet they nevertheless accomplished the moral and physical destruction of many and were won by an exercise of power.

Likewise Western dualism was a mind game that overlapped with the Christian one and used many of its elements (and characters) to implement itself. It was a game that might have yielded no external consequence, since it existed in its own logical dimension. Yet for well over one millennium it committed its players to certain destruction at the hands of those in power.

Early Christian theology and Western dualism were "ideal objects" or systems in a logical dimension, having nothing intrinsically to do with the games of power that were played in their name, which belonged to other dimensions of reality. How the interaction of systems took place in history is another story.

The mathematics of chaos, fractal theory, and other mathematical disciplines have exposed the organized character of those phenomena that have the most anarchic appearance, and the mathematician Rudy Rucker (*Mind Tools*, 1987) has gone so far as to give a mathematical definition to the most anarchic of all: individual subjectivity. Thus practically

no sector of the world and human existence can not be defined as a mind game, with certain rules and often uncertain issue. Among ideal objects, or mind games played with ideas, it is thus predictable that not only religion but also philosophy and science are games entirely similar in nature and built according to the same binary principle. The same problems faced by the dualistic mythologies of old were later faced by classical German philosophy and by modern science. This book falls short of demonstrating this, but it will be followed by others whose main task will be to show how other mind games work, in science rather than religion.

Among this book's conclusions are also others that should be explored further. One is that mind games have necessarily similar mechanisms (because the way the mind works and its capacity have remained unchanged for at least sixty thousand years), and therefore systems that have been sufficiently run in time would tend to overlap not only in shape but in substance. With complex data at hand, we should be able to demonstrate that portions of the map of the Buddhist system would overlap with portions of the Christian system with portions of German idealism with portions of modern scientific thought, because all systems are infinite and tend to explore all possibilities given to them. Accordingly, when sufficiently extended, their maps of reality would certainly coincide.

To many the description of religion as a game of mind will come as a shock, and many believers will be repelled by what may seem a diminishment of their faith. They should not be. They should rather consider the extraordinary fact that, from a systemic perspective, there is no contradiction between religion and science (which are to the same extent mind games), and, moreover, there should be no contradiction among religions either, for where data of sufficient complexity are available, religions can be shown to correspond not only in operation (which is the operation of the mind) but likewise in the territories of reality they explore. And even when religions do not overlap, they still can be contemplated as the morphodynamic development of certain basic rules, perfectly intelligible and sometimes even sensible.

Should this book meet with less favor among fundamentalists of any religion, it will seek comfort in the assumption that it will be welcomed by people of ecumenical allegiance, and certainly by those who note the possible consequences of the perhaps inescapable wave of local particularisms that sweeps the world today. Such a game, played by the wrong minds in the wrong places, may seriously jeopardize two of the noblest

conquests of Western mind and society: that freedom of thinking out everything to its ultimate consequences should never be interfered with by any authority; and that the dangers of freedom are not lessened by its suppression.

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Index

In the body of the index, the following abbreviations are used:

AJ	<i>Apocryphon of John</i>
CC	Coptic Codices
CMC	<i>Cologne Mani Codex</i>
EvPh	<i>Gospel of Philip</i>
Eug	<i>Eugnostos of the Blessed</i>
HA	<i>Hypostasis of the Archons</i>
KCC	<i>Kephalaia (Coptic Codices)</i>
PS	<i>Pistis Sophia</i>
PSem	<i>Paraphrase of Shem</i>
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
SST	<i>Second Treatise of the Great Seth</i>
SJ	<i>Sophia of Jesus Christ</i>
TT	<i>Tripartite Tractate</i>
Z	Zostriano

For a more extensive listing of abbreviations used in the book, consult pages 64-65.

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