

Praise for Ioan Couliano and *The Tree of Gnosis*

*"If Ioan Couliano hadn't unexpectedly disappeared,  
he could have given us more seminal books like this.  
A masterpiece of scholarship."*

—UMBERTO ECO

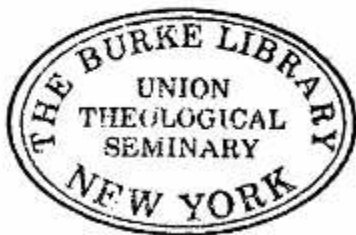
## The Tree of Gnosis

# The Tree of Gnosis

Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity  
to Modern Nihilism

*Ioan P. Couliano*

*Translated into English by H. S. Wiesner  
and the author*



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# Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xvii</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
1. Dualism: A Chronology	23
2. Myths About Gnosticism: An Introduction	50
3. Gnostic Myth 1: Fallen Wisdom	70
4. Gnostic Myth 2: The Ignorant Demiurge	93
5. The Abolition of the Law and of the Actual Father: Marcion of Sinope	145
6. Manichaean Myth	161
7. Paulicianism or Popular Marcionism	189
8. Bogomilism: A Pseudodualism	198
9. The Two Religions of the Cathars	214
10. The Tree of Gnosis	239
11. Modern Nihilism	249
<i>Epilogue: Games People Play</i>	<i>267</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>270</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>281</i>

*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* I. 254–5

## Foreword

In appearance, and in appearance only, the topic of this book is the study of a number of trends, first in religion and then in philosophy, literature, and science, that share a set of common assumptions, such as that this world and its Creator are, if not evil, at least inferior. To this extent, not only will students of medieval history find in this book a completely updated version of Steven Runciman's classic *The Medieval Manichees*, now obsolete, but students of late antiquity will encounter the most complete exposition of gnostic mythology (including Manichaeism and the non-gnostic Marcion) yet attempted.

Although I expect the book to be challenging enough for specialists in all the above mentioned areas, from the historian of late antiquity to the medievalist, I think that the basic novelty of this work does not reside as much in the bulk of information put together for the first time as in its method. Our modern view of history is vague and outdated. It is in need of radical revision in the light of what is occurring in more sophisticated areas of knowledge, whose worldview started changing a hundred years ago. The discipline of history failed to join this trend and in fact has not explicitly changed its general premises perhaps for millennia. This is an embarrassing situation. Its remedy should be far more radical than the invention of a few fashionable labels, in German or more recently in French, that would keep both the scholars and the audience quietly satisfied for a few decades.

Some may object after reading this book that it does not actually go much beyond the methodology of structuralism, in so far as its greatest achievement can be said to consist in showing that the ideas of the different trends of dualistic Gnosis—from Gnosticism to the Cathars to Romantic poets and XXth-century philosophers and biologists—hold together by virtue of belonging to *the same system*, generated by similar premises. They cannot be explained as being derived from each other or anyway not according to the dominating concept of derivation or "descent" commonly used in historical disciplines. (As we will see, in some cases we are confronted with a process that can be defined as "cognitive transmission.") But is this not what a structuralist means by saying that ideas are "synchronic"?

That is undeniable. A structuralist may indeed identify parts of what we call ideal objects, that is, systems of ideas that exist in their "logical dimension" (for an explanation see the Introduction). In order to identify whole systems, the criterion of complexity should be satisfied (the more data we have, the more correct the identification). The form of structuralism practiced by Claude Lévi-Strauss meets this requirement as well. Then to what extent does my approach claim to exceed structuralism's possibilities and intentions?

As the Introduction of this book endeavors to show, ideal objects interact in time to form history. In other words, the mere "morphology" of a system, which is the aim of a structuralist description, is integrated into a dynamic process of extraordinary proportions that is the temporal interaction of all such systems. This process with an infinite number of dimensions we call history. Given its infinite-dimensional character, can we ever hope to understand it? Is it perhaps not wiser to revert to mere "morphologies" of ideal objects instead of attempting to have a look at their uncannily complex patterns of interaction?

At this stage it is perhaps difficult to go far beyond the morphology of systems. Yet it should be repeatedly emphasized that what we aim at is "morphodynamics," the study of events in space-time. In other words, I favor a cognitive approach that would involve diachrony as an obligatory dimension of the world, not one we can dispense with.

The main object of my research is formed by a number of Western religious trends, from Gnosticism to the Provençal and Lombard Cathars, usually called dualistic. A certain generic resemblance among these trends had already been recognized by medieval heresiologists. It was reluctantly confirmed by modern scholarship (understandably inclined to dismiss heresiological reports), starting with Ignaz von Döllinger (1890), according to variable procedures that tended to become more sophisticated in the 1960s. In most cases the direct descent of one of these medieval trends from the chronologically preceding one was sought for (and found only by unscrupulous scholars). This approach delivered surprising results only when huge chronological leaps were ascertained (as between Origenism and Catharism); this meant that old ascetic ideologies were simply reinstated by medieval revivalistic movements.

At the same time, an insistent search for the invariants of "dualism" was taking place, which led, at least in some circles, to the conviction that Western dualistic trends shared a number of traits, such as anticosmism, or the idea that this world is evil; antisomatism, or the idea that the body is evil; encratism, that is, asceticism that went so far as to ban



marriage and procreation. Other traits, although not universal, were often discerned in these movements, such as docetism (the belief that Christ's passion and death on the cross were illusory, as was his body, although the extent of the illusion and the script remained negotiable) and complete or partial vegetarianism. Likewise, from all—even contradictory—viewpoints of the moral systems of different periods, including the Roman, the Jewish, and the Christian, these trends have been described as antinomian, that is, opposed to common order (nomos).

Once we dismiss as illusory the quest for the "pre-Christian" origins of Gnosticism—chronologically first of a long series of Western dualistic movements—which animated the now altogether compromised German school of history of religions (*religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), then the question is legitimate whether Western dualism is anything else but an extremist fringe of Christianity. Such a solution, advanced a number of times with renewed arguments, is certainly tempting.

Yet one is compelled to acknowledge that, beginning with the immediate successors of the apostles, the Church Fathers would condemn docetism. By the mid-II<sup>nd</sup> century, with Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165), the first thorough condemnation of Gnosticism (and of Marcion, viewed as a gnostic, which he was not) resounded. Already by 180–85, when the heresiologist Irenaeus from Asia Minor, who had become bishop of Lyon in the Roman province of Gaul (today France), wrote his long "Exposure and Reversal of the False Gnosis" (*Elenchos kai anatropē tēs pseudōnymou gnōseōs*), the gnostics were the major preoccupation of mainstream Christianity.

In the jungle of diplomatic nuances that scholarship avoids much less than we like to think, it became predictable that some scholars would emphasize the independence of Gnosticism from Christianity while others would try to vindicate the heresiologists by showing that, after all, gnostics were indeed Christian heretics. For whatever reasons generations of German scholars tried (and a few still try) to emphasize the extremely unlikely Iranian roots of both Gnosticism and Christianity, and the derivation of the latter from the former rather than the opposite, it should offend no one to recognize a more than tenuous link between this strange opinion and the Zeitgeist out of which full-blown Nazism sprang at a later stage. That the trend is reversed today, and Gnosticism made almost into a Jewish heresy, is certainly an improvement, yet only to the extent that gnostics used the Tanakh and perhaps early midrashim no less than the Christians, and at times apparently slightly more. Original gnostic mythology is as little Jewish as it is Iranian or Christian.

Then what is gnostic mythology?

Scholars of Gnosticism have a background in biblical philology and theology yet hardly know how anthropologists define myth and how they analyze it. Therefore, anytime the merely "dualistic" roots of gnostic myth are brought to their attention, they dismiss the matter by proudly asserting that, even if it may be true that gnostics "borrowed" some popular stories of creation, they made of them something quite superior and semiphilosophical. Yet one more question arises, which theologians tend to interpret rather naively in a perspective fortunately abandoned by anthropology: If something is "borrowed," one must find a *precise source*. In other words, if gnostic myth is "borrowed" from "popular religion," wherever and whenever this transmission may occur has to be precisely documented. Anthropologists, by contrast, recognized long ago that myth exists in innumerable variants that are transformations of one another and may originate quite independently in the operations of human minds in any setting. To this extent gnostic myth is a particular transformation that belongs to a vast series of myths known as "dualistic" (see chapter 1). The perennial and frustrating quest for establishing unequivocally the "origins" of gnostic myth is thus dismissed as redundant, since any transformation of myth has by definition a cognitive origin. A radical shift of emphasis from the "origins" of Western dualism to the *system* of Gnosis in itself has become necessary, and this book intends to effect it.

This perspective will help us understand that the first link in the chain of Western dualism, Gnosticism, is not a monolithic doctrine but simply a set of transformations belonging to a multidimensional, variable system that allows room for illimitable variation. This system is based on different inherited assumptions, stable though interpretable, of which the myth of the Book of Genesis seems to be the most common. (Clearly, as Birger Pearson noticed, this explains why Gnosticism shares so much with Judaism: the basic data come from the Torah, but the type of exegesis they are submitted to often runs contrary to the major assumptions of the Torah.)

But gnostics do not establish a real tradition, based on hermeneutical continuity, to the extent that they could be defined by "invariants." As a matter of fact, any definition of Gnosticism by invariants is bound to be wrong, as based only on incomplete inference contradicted by whole sectors of data in our possession. Thus not all gnostics were anticosmic, encratite, or docetist; not all of them believed in the Demiurge of this world or even that this world was evil, and not all of them believed in metempsychosis or reincarnation of the preexistent soul.

Yet if gnostics were free to believe everything and its contrary, why do we still maintain the existence of a phenomenon called Gnosticism? This book will show that the system of Western dualism starts from certain premises and has an undeniable existence in its logical dimension. I define as gnostic slices through this system, which are transformations of one another to the extent that the system itself allows them.

On a more general level, though, we have two good criteria that allow us to understand why, and to what extent, Gnosticism was revolutionary in its cultural setting. At this stage the selection of these criteria may seem arbitrary; later on, it will become quite apparent that they are central to the concerns of any culture. One is the criterion of ecosystemic intelligence—that is, the degree to which the universe in which we live can be attributed to an intelligent and good cause. The other one is the anthropic principle—that is, the affirmation of the commensurability and mutual link between human beings and the universe.

If we examine the most important cultural proposals present for consumption at the outset of the Christian era—Platonism, Judaism, and Christianity—we come to the conclusion that they share both the principle of ecosystemic intelligence (this universe is created by a good and highly intelligent cause and is basically good) and the anthropic principle, the proper fit of the universe to its human occupants. Yet Gnosticism rejects both of these principles: even when the gnostic Demiurge is fairly good, he remains inferior and ignorant, while human beings do not belong to this world. This position has been traditionally defined as pessimistic, yet it obviously represents an exceedingly radical form of acosmic optimism, for human beings belong to a higher and better world than this one. Hans Jonas seemed to point this out when he compared Gnosticism and existentialist philosophy, the latter being a rather naively excessive transformation of pessimism in so far as it does reject the anthropic principle but posits no consanguinity between humans and a better world. (According to existentialism, you are simply lost in a world where you do not belong; according to Gnosticism, you are lost in a lower realm as long as you ignore that you belong to a higher one.)

Compared with the major trends that define culture, Gnosticism is certainly a phenomenon of counterculture, and the situation remains more or less the same for all Western dualistic trends that will be analyzed here.

The system of Gnosticism is extremely complex, implying innumerable transformations. Compared with it, all other dualistic trends are simpler. Marcion (chapter 5) shares the rules of gnostic exegesis without being a gnostic. Manichaeism (chapter 6) is a further transformation of a

certain type of Gnosticism. Among medieval movements, the situations vary largely. Paulicianism (chapter 7) is a transformation of Marcionism, whereas Bogomilism (chapter 8) is just a form of orthodox—be it outlandishly archaic—Christianity. Catharism (chapter 9) consists of two doctrines: one is just classical Bogomilism, the other a transformation of IVth-century Origenism, doubtlessly synthesized among a circle of revivalist Eastern monks. Yet beyond their variegated appearances, all Western dualistic trends can be envisaged as different facets of a single larger system.

From the beginning of the XVth to the end of the XVIIIth century, dualism seems to exist only as a historical curiosity in the books of here-siologists and encyclopedists. Yet by 1850 there was already a whole efflorescence of Romantic myth showing extraordinary resemblances to gnostic myth. The last chapter of this book will explore the mechanism that produces pseudognostic scenarios as part of a system set in motion by modern nihilism.

Concerned with structure and system, this book cannot dwell on vague, romantic hypotheses meant to show some interaction between dualism and society. It can only energetically dismiss the wild claim, made only too often, that a correlation exists between dualism and social "crisis." History is a mechanism too vast to slip us secret formulas. It can, now and then, allow us a view of systems of ideas in their logical dimension, but it still withholds from us the infinitely complex map of interaction of such systems.



## Acknowledgments

The project of this book was conceived in 1973, and some of its themes have appeared in my work—a number of other books and a steady flow of articles and book reviews—from 1973 to date. Its French edition, of which the English is an entirely revised version, was written in 1986 during my tenure as a Fellow of the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Study in Wassenaar. My thanks go to Dirk van de Kaa, the director of this institution, which kept me away for one year from the *bellum omnium contra omnes* that follows from the perennial predicament of Dutch universities.

Several times, before and after publication, the ideas of this book have been submitted to larger audiences. During the spring quarter of 1986 they were discussed in a graduate seminar at the University of Chicago. Its students (Carol Anderson, Philip Cray, Ramona Hartweg, Richard Heinemann, and Karen Pechilis) and auditors alike deserve my gratitude. Parts of the book formed the topic of a number of lectures at the University of Chicago: one of the 1986 Hiram Thomas Lectures and one of the 1987 Nathaniel Colver Lectures. For the special warmth of my reception in Chicago I would like to thank many colleagues (and often-times their partners): Gosta Ahlstrom, Dieter Betz, Jerald Brauer, Anne Carr, Wendy Doniger, the late Mircea Eliade, Chris Gamwell, Brian Gerrish, Clark Gilpin, Robert Grant, Joseph M. Kitagawa, Martin Marty, Bernard McGinn, the late Arnaldo Momigliano, Michael Murrin, Frank Reynolds, J. Z. Smith, Larry Sullivan, David Tracy, and Tony Yu, among others.

I lectured on related topics on several other occasions: at the University of Rome, upon the invitation of Ugo Bianchi in February 1989; at the 1989 AAR-SBL meeting in Anaheim, California (both in the Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism section and in the Manichaeism Seminar); at the University of Salerno, at the invitation of Massimo Oldoni and Roberto Rusconi; at Trinity College, Dublin, upon the invitation of Andrew Massey and Werner Jeanrond; as moderator of the colloquium on myth, Torino Book Fair, 1990; and in several other places. I would like to thank all of my associates who made these occasions possible.

During many years I had fruitful exchanges with a great number of scholars. I learned Coptic to check existing translations from Gerard Luttikhuisen (and took exams with him and Herman te Velde at the University of Groningen). And I constantly received offprints and/or support from many in the field, of whom I would especially like to mention Bernard Barc, Dieter Betz, Ugo Bianchi, François Bovon, R. van den Broek, Hubert Cancik, Giovanni Casadio, M. V. Cerutti, J. J. Collins, Carsten Colpe, Arthur Droge, Robert Grant, Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, Giovanni Filoramo, Jarl Fossum, Jean-Claude Fredouille, Florentino Garcia, Gherardo Gnoli, Ithamar Gruenwald, David Hellholm, Moshe Idel, Hans Jonas, Hans Kippenberg, Gerard Luttikhuisen, Giancarlo Mantovani, George MacRae, Michel Meslin, the late Arnaldo Momigliano, Tito Orlandi, Luciano Pellicani, Gilles Quispel, Mac Ricketts, Julien Ries, Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, Alan Segal, Michael Stone, Guy Stroumsa, Lawrence Sullivan, Jacob Taubes, André Vauchez, the late Maarten Vermaseren, Adela Yarbro Collins, Hans Witte, Elémire Zolla—with apologies to those many whom I must have inadvertently omitted from this enumeration.

When I changed my area of study in 1973 from Indology to Gnosticism, and studied with Ugo Bianchi in Milan for almost four years, during which I took various exams in early Christianity, New Testament, biblical theology, anthropology, medieval history, and several other disciplines, I felt myself attracted to Gnosticism in a way that Hans Jonas—whom I had the privilege to meet many times thereafter—would have defined as “existentially rooted.” Now, after a dispassionate analysis of all Western dualistic trends, I think that my apprehension of the world during that period was certainly derived from the twenty-two years I had spent in one of the most totalitarian communist countries: Romania. I escaped in 1972, but the trauma persisted for roughly ten years and was not entirely cured until December 1989, when I saw on television the bodies of the executed Archon of that world and his equally evil consort. If I found healing, Romania has not yet, but that is an entirely different topic. Anyway, for my share of personal interest in Gnosticism I am bitterly indebted to the evil Archons who chased me into exile until I found a hospitable land.



# Introduction

In 1916 Albert Einstein published one of those very few books that matter in human history, called *The Special and General Theory of Relativity, for General Understanding*. The German word is *gemeinverständlich*. To his friends, Einstein jokingly referred to it as *gemeinunverständlich*, "for general misunderstanding."<sup>1</sup>

The private Einstein was more correct than the public one. To the lay person who tries to figure out the consequences of Einstein's theory, the ensuing worldview is mind-boggling. It is so remote from experience that it can in no way be represented without at least some explanation. Einstein himself gave that elsewhere, in cryptic words that say that imagination, dream, and vision, albeit disavowed by scholars, play a part that exceeds mere reasoning in scientific theories.<sup>2</sup>

With a little historical background, one can follow some of Einstein's references. To explain why we are not in a position to understand the world from inside out, he resorts to a rather famous fable: the fable of *Flatland* devised by a Shakespearean scholar, the Reverend Edwin Abbott Abbott,<sup>3</sup> in the early 1880s. Let us suppose that we have a two-dimensional world, with two-dimensional inhabitants. They would be wholly unaware of the existence of the third dimension, and phenomena whose explanation is trivial in a three-dimensional world would be as many riddles to them, which only *Flatland* geniuses might be able to comprehend. Starting from this analogy, Einstein developed his view of the universe as being the hypersurface<sup>4</sup> of a hypersphere. If five dimensions were enough for Einstein to make sense of the physical forces known to him, today physicists in search of a Grand Unified Theory (GUT) of the universe increase the number of dimensions to ten or eleven, seven of which are wrapped up in tiny particles.<sup>5</sup> To give one striking example of the usefulness of this theory, we could just mention that electricity is explained as the result—or rather the reception—of four-dimensional gravity in our three-dimensional world.<sup>6</sup>

Einstein's view of the universe, as predicted, was "generally misunderstood." Nevertheless it gave rise to a proliferation of methods of investigation that profoundly affected the humanities. We can say that, with a few exceptions—the most noteworthy being the biologist D'Arcy



Wentworth Thompson—scholars were not usually establishing any direct filiation between their theories and the Einsteinian universe. Yet, when properly reinterpreted in their historical context, all these theories show astounding similarities. Today we call them cognitive;<sup>7</sup> the Russian scholars, writers, and artists who in the 1920s began a whole movement that bore fruit in linguistics and literary theory called them formalism; they are better known from their French version, which spread under the name of “structuralism.”

No matter how apparently divergent their premises, all of these cognitive methods have one thing in common: They recognize a synchronic or systemic dimension to any historical phenomenon, and, in most cases, they reject our common views of history as meaningless. (In fact the word *history* is meaningless; it is what Gregory Bateson calls an explanatory principle—that is, a principle that, without explaining anything, simply states the limits of our knowledge.) In what follows, I will describe the essence of some of these methods. Yet I have to say from the outset that many of them are of little use to the historian, in so far as they fail in their attempt to integrate system and history, synchrony and diachrony.

The most extraordinary consequence of the Einsteinian space-time continuum for the historian of ideas is the existence of “ideal objects” which become understandable only when they are recognized as such in their own dimension. This may sound even more incomprehensible than Einstein’s universe. To make it understandable let us revert to *Flatland*, and suppose that the flat country is the surface of the soup in a dish. Let us suppose that the circles of oil on that surface are the intelligent inhabitants of Flatland. Obviously, being two-dimensional they can move in two directions only: left-right and forward-backward. The direction up-down is as meaningless to them as would be a new direction to us, toward an unknown fourth dimension (the mathematician Rudy Rucker calls such a direction *ana-kata*).<sup>8</sup> What they see of each other is a line, any space (such as a house or a bank) being closed to them by a line only. Yet, seeing them from a third direction of space, we can directly see their entrails, the interiors of their houses, and we could easily steal from their most well guarded bank safe. (As strange as it might seem, a being in a hypothetical fourth dimension of space would equally enjoy these advantages relative to us.)

Let us now suppose that I disturb all this flat world by starting to eat the soup with a spoon. How would a Souplander experience the spoon?

He or she would be horrified by a strange phenomenon. First a rather short line, corresponding to the tip of the spoon, would appear in

Soupland, which would increase as the spoon reaches for the bottom of the dish and would decrease again when the handle crosses the surface. Then, all of a sudden, a tremendous-soupquake would take place, and part of the world would be absorbed into nowhere. The disruption would continue for a while, as soup drips out of the spoon and crosses Soupland, then the situation would revert to normal.

To the Souplander, the spoon does not appear as a solid, vertical object, as it appears to us. *Souplanders can experience the spoon only as a series of phenomena in time.* It should not come as a surprise that life expectations are rather short in Soupland. Therefore it would take millions or billions of generations of Souplanders to make sense of the spoon phenomena. And it would take a genius of uncommon depth to make calculations that would show that the only way to put them together would be to postulate the existence of a superior dimension—the third—in which objects of an unknown sort exist. (Since they cannot possibly see us, even the most intelligent of the Souplanders would probably believe that the third dimension is just a mathematical fiction that serves only as a heuristic device.)

Similarly, we fail to understand what phenomena may be in space-time (and what “history” really means), especially when the objects of our inquiry are not tangible. Many do not even believe a “history of ideas” to be possible, let alone a history that would not be mere summation but something having to do with “space-time”! Yet the novelty of the multifarious methods that belong to the cognitive approach was to show that ideas are synchronous. In other words, ideas form systems that can be envisaged as “ideal objects.” These ideal objects cross the surface of history called time as the spoon crosses Soupland, that is, in an apparently unpredictable sequence of temporal events.

As I indicated before, no matter how all cognitive methods treating historical phenomena (including ideal objects) synchronically have so far enriched our understanding of the past, it is legitimate to draw a line between those that failed to provide meaningful clues for the integration of synchrony and diachrony and those that did not shrug before this supreme test of our discipline. The century’s fascination with archetypes and repetition, formalism, structuralism, and “morphologies” of different kinds needs neither proof nor exposition here. Yet only a very few of the forebears of the cognitive approach could understand (and a great many of them would be as surprised to find out about this as their critics) that what had triggered their dissatisfaction with traditional methods was actually the new view of time implied in Einstein’s theory of general relativity.

Which are the theories most frequently cited in favor of a synchronic or "morphological" approach? A few scholars would be bold enough to cite Goethe's *Metamorphosis of Plants*, either as tribute to an innocent precursor or because they did not know better. In his second essay on the *Metamorphosis of Plants* (ca. 1790), Goethe thus defined morphology: "Morphology should include the theory of form, formation, and transformation of organic natures."<sup>9</sup> The main idea of Goethe's morphology (which had already been formulated by Caspar Friedrich Wolff in 1759) was that all parts of a plant were metamorphoses of its leaves. In his later years Goethe also "postulated a general spiral trend, supposed to be inherent throughout the plant kingdom and correlated with the vertical upward trend of the stem."<sup>10</sup>

During his travels in Italy (1786–88), Goethe had been looking for the archetypal plant, the *Urpflanze*, "a plant which would be as simple as possible in structure—so elementary in fact that all other forms of growth could be traced to it."<sup>11</sup> Goethe did not know that what he was looking for was not a natural object but its ideal program. He felt insulted when Schiller pointed out the difference to him. Later on he acknowledged that the *Urpflanze* was a "type" (*Typus*), a mental construct, but even then he—together with 150 years of positivism after him—failed to understand that this basic transformation is in a certain sense more real than the plant itself. In Goethe's theory there is a certain general recognition of homologies, but the way transformation takes place remains basically unaccounted for.

Far more than Goethe, the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) was the main source upon which structuralists drew, continually referring to his distinction between "synchrony" and "diachrony" of a language and his emphasis on the synchronic study thereof.<sup>12</sup> With refinements introduced first by Prince Nicholas S. Trubetsky (*Principles of Phonology*, 1939) and then by Roman Jakobson, phonology became the main model for the analysis of myth and narrative.

The man behind this trend was the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who called the world's attention to forgotten scholarship on the constant structures of narrative, such as *The Morphology of Folktales* by Vl. Ja. Propp (1928) and many other studies by Russian formalists. As it has often been emphasized, Lévi-Strauss's first view of myth as an "invariant" (like the phoneme in linguistics) proved to be wrong and was tacitly discarded by its author, who later used the more sophisticated concept of "transformation." Despite his cautious attitude toward enunciating theories, Lévi-Strauss nevertheless explained the wealth of analogy between myths in unrelated geographical areas as a result of the

basic structural identity of the operations performed by human minds everywhere. [In other words, confronted with similar facts, the mind will always produce similar outcomes.]

From his first essays on myth to his formidable *Mythologiques* (1964–1971), a study of South American mythologies in four volumes, Lévi-Strauss made a breakthrough: the discovery of *time*. Yet, notwithstanding his concept of “transformation,” he could never explain how time itself fit into the picture. For his failure to integrate history into his theory, Lévi-Strauss remains—literally and only literally—the most distinguished “prehistorical” ancestor of the cognitive approach.

Many other scholars of religion and myth made use of systemic tools in their approaches. Among the most important were Émile Durkheim, Georges Dumézil, and Mircea Eliade. Durkheim and Dumézil, contrary to Lévi-Strauss and Eliade, thought that religion was heteronomous, that is, that it encoded social relationships. Eliade, by contrast, emphasized the autonomy and irreducibility of religion and endeavored to delineate its depth structures. He did so by rejuvenating the old tool of religious phenomenology, invented around 1850 by Dutch and German Protestant scholars and perfected by an ambiguous master: the Dutchman Gerardus van der Leeuw, professor of theology at the University of Groningen. Unfortunately, phenomenology shares with Goethe’s morphology the impossibility of accounting for historical transformations. Much like Carl Gustav Jung’s version of psychoanalysis, it works with the assumption of certain inexplicable (or not yet explainable) “archetypes” that would be stored in the human “psyche” like a mysterious genetic code. Even if one admits the possibility of such phylogenetic accretions on the individual psyche, one would still have to struggle against the oddities of Jungian theory. In his later years, Eliade tried to combine phenomenology and history in a large tractate on the history of religions.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most sophisticated cognitive scholars of this century remains the biologist D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson (1860–1948), professor at Saint Andrew’s University in Scotland, who was at the same time a powerful mathematician and a consummate classical scholar. He could write with equal ease on Greek mathematics, Greek children’s games, Aristotle, Plato, the morphology of plants and animals, and many other topics. His main work, *On Growth and Form* (1917), was one of the most original (and therefore controversial) of this century.<sup>14</sup> Out of print since 1952, it exists in an abridged edition.<sup>15</sup> Yet Thompson may still become one of the major factors in the new morphological trend present in the works of mathematicians like Rudy Rucker.<sup>16</sup>

D'Arcy Thompson knew too much mathematics to subscribe to the current statement of Neo-Darwinism according to which, given enough time, one hundred monkeys on one hundred typewriters would eventually type the *Divine Comedy*. In fact, given the order of temporal magnitude of this universe, the probability of such an occurrence is practically zero. Being equally harsh on Neo-Darwinian attempts at proving evolution with the aid of morphology, Thompson was marginalized by a scientific community that saw Darwinism vindicated by the progress of genetics. Yet Thompson certainly did not deny heredity. He wrote that heredity was "one of the great factors in biology," "a vastly important as well as mysterious thing"<sup>17</sup>—thereby implying that the Neo-Darwinian viewpoint on it might have been largely wrong. What he categorically dismissed was natural selection, which he qualified as "mystical idealism."<sup>18</sup> Far from criticizing Darwin from some vaguely psychologistic position, Thompson used to repeat the words of the German morphologist W. His: "To think that heredity will build organic beings without mechanical means is a piece of unscientific mysticism."<sup>19</sup>

Thompson used advanced mathematics, including Riemannian topology, to prove a number of crucial things. One was that the form of living creatures, from cells to tissues to skeletons, is largely determined by mechanical forces operating in nature. (Simple life-forms such as protozoa obey the rules of the mechanics of fluids.) Thompson's evolution was first of all determined by hard physical boundaries set upon the magnitude, growth rate, cell structure, cell aggregates, skeletons, and so forth of vegetal and animal species. Accordingly, the celebrated theory of ontogeny repeating phylogeny could be dismissed as false.<sup>20</sup> Another crucial discovery made by Thompson concerned "deformation," which was part of his theory of transformation based on the method of coordinates. Thompson was able to show quite convincingly that many forms in nature are just transformations of one another: the cannon-bone of the ox is a geometrical transformation of the cannon-bone of the giraffe or of the sheep; lanceolate, ovate, and cordate leaves are radial transformations of each other, the leaf veins working as a beautiful system of isogonal coordinates; the straight conical shell of the Pteropon can be changed "into the logarithmic spiral of the Nautiloid" by a simple mathematical operation. And most mammalian skulls, including human ones, can be explained as mathematical deformations of one another.<sup>21</sup>

Yet simple morphology did not satisfy Thompson's exigencies. This extraordinary scholar was aware that the form of an organism was not just a configuration in space but "an event in spacetime."<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the discipline studying it could only be defined as "morphodynamics."<sup>23</sup>



If recent studies have shown that new topologies and the theory of fractals allow us an improved view of the morphodynamics of nature, can we ever hope to develop a similar methodology for ideal objects (such as religion, philosophy, science itself)?

The study of form is not confined to biology. One consequential discovery was made in 1937 by a historian of fashion, Agnes Brooks Young. Prior to that time, fashion was supposed to be a whimsical, ever-changing phenomenon depending on some mysterious *Zeitgeist*. Against this generally held view, Brooks Young noticed that fashion is recurrent. It evolves in formal cycles. As a matter of fact, dress can only vary between tubular and fully expanded. When it attains a maximum expansion it can only revert to tubular, going through the intermediate state of "back-fulness."<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately structuralism obscured Brooks Young's fruitful intuition by narrowing down the meaning of synchrony and reducing the morphodynamics of fashion to a mere morphology. Responsible for this methodological impoverishment was Roland Barthes, according to whom "system of fashion" simply meant a static correlation between accessories. It is as if Barthes operated in Flatland, reducing fashion to two dimensions and excluding time from the process. Agnes Brooks Young, by contrast, was looking for synchronicity in diachrony; she was rather reconstructing the spoon that crosses the soup's surface as a logical object moving through our world.

Like the physical constraints that compel the cell to be spherical and organisms not to expand beyond a certain size dictated by gravity; like the dress that cannot indefinitely expand without becoming disquietingly dysfunctional, and is bound not to contract much beyond the physical contours of the human body, ideal objects are systems operating in a logical dimension and cannot go beyond their (generally quite simple) premises. Systems are fractalic in nature, that is, they tend to produce solutions ad infinitum according to (simple) production rules. And they interact with each other in quite strange ways, forming other systems whose general pattern of uncanny complexity may be called history. At this stage of research, we are unable to go much beyond the mere recognition of systems in their logical dimension, following the analogy of the spoon that crosses Soupland. In other words, we are able to conceive of the spoon, yet the superdimensional world from which the spoon comes is still a riddle to us, and so is the way the spoon inter-

acts with other, innumerable systems from their own logical dimensions to form the complex pattern of what we call history.

In what follows we intend to go far beyond generalities in the study of such ideal objects. The example we therefore choose is one of great complexity, split for convenience into a rather large number of chronological occurrences, ranging from late antiquity to the present day. (Analogies between these occurrences have been noticed earlier, yet so far they have not all been studied in connection with each other.) Yet before we begin delineating the complex mechanism of the system of what could be called Western dualistic Gnosis, we should dwell on a simpler example whose role is both to show explicitly what ideal objects are and of how many sorts they are, and to prepare us for an understanding of the emergence and structure of Gnosis. The German school of history of religions (*religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) postulated for Gnosticism an early, pre-Christian origin. Today this idea has been largely discarded. Indeed, we witness a pattern of complex interaction between Gnosticism and early Christianity. To this extent, early Christian christological and trinitarian debates are of crucial importance for understanding Gnosticism. By showing that those controversies are a typical example of an ideal object that exists in its own synchronical and logical dimension, we would provide likewise one of the necessary keys to the understanding of Gnosticism.

For four hundred years the Christian Fathers debated the nature of Christ and of the Trinity. These debates were by no means primitive, and they involved some of the best minds of that period. Yet it is possible to study them as so many solutions generated by a system that works according to premises set by a number of unquestionable authorities and develops along predictable logical lines. Still, what we know about is just a long series of controversies. Therefore the only legitimate procedure we can follow is to trace first the chronology of the christological and trinitarian controversies and then examine the possibility of rearranging the outcomes according to a systemic logic.

It wasn't for nothing that Saint Jerome declared, "The word *hypostasis* is the poison of faith" (*Ep. XV ad Damasum*). That word's vague meaning of nature, substance, or person was scarcely distinguishable from the meanings of other frequently used Greek words such as *ousia*, *physis*, and *prosōpon*. The Latin Bible translated *hypostasis* with *substantia*, Tertullian with *origo* and *genitura*. Later in the IVth century, Marius Victorinus and Rufinus of Aquileia preferred the word *subsistentia*. The indiscriminate use of the word *hypostasis* in the many semantic contexts in which it can function led to prolonged and fierce theological debates.

In his classic work *Two Ancient Christologies* (1940), R. V. Sellers attributed many IVth- and Vth-century doctrinal disputes to terminological confusion. Indeed, since *hypostasis* could mean either "substance, nature" (*ousia, physis*) or "person" (*prosōpon*), the provision of the Synod of Alexandria (362) that allowed everyone the freedom to say either that in God there was one or there were three *hypostaseis* could only make the problem worse.<sup>25</sup>

Eventually the meaning of *hypostasis* was narrowed down to that of *prosōpon* (*persona*), of which it became an equivalent or near equivalent. The Council of Constantinople (381) would state that the Trinity was composed of "one substance and three hypostases" (i.e., "persons") (*mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*); and the Council of Chalcedon (451), that Christ was "a single [entity] in two natures [*en dyo physeis*], united in a single person and hypostasis [*eis hēn prosōpon kai mian hypostasin*]."

What were the hypostases with which Jesus Christ was to be identified? Whatever the status of the Logos hymn that opens the Gospel of John, it is certainly one of the earliest, if not the earliest, instance of a christology in which Christ is identified with the divine hypostasis called Logos. Logos, meaning many things, including "word" and "reason" in Greek, signified in contemporary Greek philosophy and science a facet of the divine mind, the creating and structuring force of the universe. Although in such early Christian writings as the *Shepherd of Hermas* Christ is identified with the Holy Spirit and appears in the hypostasis of an angel (9.12.6-8), the Logos christology, also known as "high" christology, becomes by the beginning of the IIInd century more influential than all of its alternatives. Not all of these were hypostatic. A "low," Jewish-Christian christology existed in the beginning, which held Christ for a man and a prophet. Irenaeus of Lyon describes this option at length under the name of "Ebionism" and denounces it.<sup>26</sup> Out of it the "adoptionist" solution developed, according to which Jesus was born a human being and was adopted into divine sonship at baptism.

The career of "high" christology, with a tendency toward docetism, is more marked in the theological school of Alexandria, whereas "low" christology, although now a Logos christology in its own right, develops in Antioch. In the fierce IVth- and Vth-century faith controversies, the Alexandrian school progressively defeats the Antiochene school and declares some of its masters heretics.

Among the subapostolic Fathers, Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110 C.E.) is the first to insist on the Logos nature of Christ,<sup>27</sup> which does not eliminate his human nature.<sup>28</sup> As was predictable, by the mid-IIInd century, with Justin Martyr, Logos christology would develop along the lines



traced by the Jewish Platonist Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E.–40 C.E.): the Logos is the Reason of God in which the plan for this universe is inscribed. Jesus Christ is Logos incarnated. By the beginning of the IIIrd century, all major theologians adhere to a Logos christology: Irenaeus of Lyon,<sup>29</sup> Tertullian of Carthage,<sup>30</sup> and Clement of Alexandria.<sup>31</sup>

Philo of Alexandria had already established the equivalence between Logos and biblical Wisdom (Sophia/Hokmah). More than one influential christology would develop along this line. The earliest representative of a Logos/Sophia christology is Theophilus of Antioch, a Greek Christian apologist who probably became bishop of Antioch in 169 C.E. Theophilus keeps up the Philonic and Stoic distinction between a Logos internal to God,<sup>32</sup> also called Sophia (cf. Prov. 8:22), and the Logos “pronounced”<sup>33</sup> as Word. Using biblical imagery, Theophilus develops a naturalistic christology:

Therefore God, having his own Logos innate in his own bowels generated him together with his own Sophia, vomiting him forth [*exereuxamenos*: II.10; cf. Ps. 44:2] before everything else. He used this Logos as his servant in the things created by him, and through him he made all things [cf. John 1:3]. He is called Beginning because he leads and dominates everything fashioned through him. It was he, Spirit of God and Beginning and Sophia and Power of the Most High, who came down into the prophets and spoke through them about the creation of the world and all the rest. For the prophets did not exist when the world came into existence; there were the Sophia of God which is in him and his holy Logos who is always present with him.<sup>34</sup>

The christology of the most distinguished IIIrd-century Father, Origen of Alexandria, is likewise a Logos/Sophia christology. Like Theophilus, Origen tends to call Sophia the Logos preexistent with God.<sup>35</sup>

In the heat of the IVth-century controversies, statements of this kind were suspect of heresy. Arius might have been a pure Origenist when he asserted, according to his fierce opponent Athanasius, that “there are two ‘Wisdoms’ [*sophiai*]: one that is proper to God and exists together with him, and the other the Son who has been brought into being in this Wisdom; only by participating in this Wisdom is the Son called Wisdom and Word.”<sup>36</sup>

Starting with Ignatius of Antioch, the mainstream Church fights both “low” christology, which makes Jesus Christ into a mere human being, and excessive Platonizing christology, known as docetism (from Greek *dokēsis*, “appearance”), which tends to make his body into a mere phantasm made of dream substance (*phantasiasm* is the name of this trend in its extreme form). The middle way is indicated in many early

formulas of faith, emphasizing both Christ's divinity and his humanity. If we read, for example, Origen's christological statements, we can already discern to what extent his vague assumptions were going to become major stumbling blocks in the IVth-century controversies.<sup>37</sup>

Let us briefly mention the main contenders of incarnationist theology around Origen's time, indirectly answered in his formula of faith. One trend was adoptionism or *psilanthropism*, which held Christ for a mere man (*psilos anthrōpos*). Adoptionism evolved from the Jewish-Christian Ebionism denounced by the early Fathers.<sup>38</sup> According to Hippolytus (VII.35), the father of adoptionism was a certain Theodotus the leather merchant from Constantinople, who went to Rome about 190. According to him, Jesus Christ was a simple man—although supremely virtuous—until his baptism, when the Spirit-Christ descended upon him. He never became divine. Others held that he became divine after his resurrection.

Theodotus the leather merchant was followed by Theodotus the banker, Asclepiodotus, and Artemas or Artemon.<sup>39</sup> A later representative of that trend might have been Paul of Samosata, condemned at the Council of Antioch in 268. His doctrine is only scarcely known.<sup>40</sup>

The Logos christology was also rejected by the modalists (or modalistic monarchians), in so far as it seemed to entail binitarianism or belief in two Gods. This impression might have been enhanced by the Philonic use of the expression "God" or "Second God" for the Christ-Logos, as it can be found in Origen. The first modalist was a certain Noetus of Smyrna.<sup>41</sup> His disciple Epigonus went to Rome and found a certain Cleomenes, who accepted his ideas.

It is to the credit of Origen's genius that he tried to solve as many christological problems as he could. He anticipated IVth-century controversies in his insistence that the Logos had merged with a human soul.<sup>42</sup> There is evidence that the chief opponent of the Origenist Arius, Athanasius of Alexandria, did not think that the Logos took on a human soul.<sup>43</sup> At any rate, Apollinaris of Laodicea interpreted the formula saying that Christ was "God made flesh" (*theos ensarkos*) as meaning that the Logos had taken the place of Christ's human mind. This assumption can be understood in the light of the Platonic body-soul-mind (*nous*) trichotomy, according to which the Logos could easily replace the rational soul of a human being. Sensing this, Apollinaris made it his main concern to show, against the adoptionistic tendencies of the theological school of Antioch, that "God in flesh" was radically different from "man deified."<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, he developed the doctrine of Christ as *tertium genus* between God and man, a being whose *flesh* itself was deified and

"united in substance" (*synousiomenon*) with God.<sup>45</sup> Only on this condition can Christ's body save us. Obviously, Apollinaris was trying to answer the problems raised by the bodily assumption of Jesus Christ to heaven, which was part of Christian dogma. He was condemned for his attempt, yet the problem remained unsolved.

The school of Antioch—specifically Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428)—gave Apollinaris an answer that was likewise rejected. They preached disjunction of the two natures (*physeis*) of Christ, which in the union of God and man remained unmixed. An adoptionistic nuance continued indeed to exist in this school, for the union of God and man was not a union of nature: for Diodorus, it was a union by God's grace, whereas for Theodore it was *kat' eudokian*, that is, by God's favor or "good pleasure." Only by virtue of this union without mixture could the Son be referred to as a "person"<sup>46</sup> with two distinct hypostases.<sup>47</sup>

Alexandrian theology could not tolerate this explanation. A conflict no less formidable than the one between Arius and Athanasius now engrossed Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius of Constantinople. It led to the Council of Ephesus (431), where Nestorius was condemned by Cyril's machinations. What were the issues at stake? Was indeed the controversy based on mere verbal misunderstanding (as asserted by R. V. Sellers)? Or was it one more episode in the war between the two theological schools, the Alexandrian and the Antiochene, and their divergent positions, which, in the last instance, would be "high" and "low" christology, Platonizing and adoptionistic tendencies (as recently reconfirmed by R. M. Grant)?<sup>48</sup>

Recent scholarship discovered that between Cyril and Nestorius, Cyril was the heretic. He had been fooled by pseudepigraphers (what scholars call ancient forgers), and had relied on three writings of Apollinaris of Laodicea preserved under false names.<sup>49</sup> From Apollinaris "he adopted monophysite formulae to counter the dyophysite position" of Nestorius.<sup>50</sup> The main concern of the Antiochene school, and of Nestorius in particular, had been to fight Apollinaris's theology. Therefore Nestorius could not accept Cyril's formula, according to which the union between God and man in Christ was "hypostatic." God and man in Christ were, according to Nestorius (and Theodore of Mopsuestia), two *ousiai* and two hypostases unmixed, but one *prosōpon* or person. Anything else would be Apollinarianism. Cyril's contention would prevail, and they would become one *physis* and one hypostasis. Only by affirming this indissoluble union could Cyril explain why Christ's body had been assumed to heaven. This, indeed, is his most powerful argument in the *Second Epistle to Nestorius*:<sup>51</sup> "the body of the

Logos is not alien to him but accompanies him even as he is enthroned with the Father. Again, it is not that there are two Sons enthroned together but rather there is one, on account of the [Logos's] union with the flesh." Although Christ's body was not heavenly,<sup>52</sup> it went to heaven. Only a good deal of Apollinarianism could solve this profound riddle, and Cyril has been accused of subtle docetic inclinations.

With Eutyches of Constantinople the problem rises again and leads to the Council of Chalcedon (451). His christology crosses the labile borderline between Apollinarianism and orthodoxy that had not been completely erased by Cyril of Alexandria. By proclaiming (447) the one nature (*physis*, hence the name of "monophysism" for his movement) of Logos incarnate, Eutyches implicitly asserted that Christ was not a human being like us but a *tertium genus* existing in a nonhuman flesh. The Council of Ephesus (449) declared orthodox his doctrine of "two natures before union, one nature after union," but Pope Leo I challenged it and it was condemned, albeit with the reluctance of the Eastern bishops, at the Council of Chalcedon (451).<sup>53</sup> The Chalcedonian definition of faith asserts that Christ "as to his humanness" was born from the Virgin Mary, Theotokos; he was "made known to us in two natures [*en dyo physessin*], unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably":<sup>54</sup> briefly, one prosopon, one hypostasis, and two natures, which was a decision against Cyril's "one nature, one hypostasis" doctrine as well as against Nestorius's two ousiai, two hypostases, and one prosopon doctrine.

We have tried to describe the major christological debates of this period without excessive simplification yet without going into more detail than necessary. These materials certainly meet one requirement of systemic interpretation: the requirement of *complexity*. Indeed, only in the presence of complexity are the lines of the system discernible; yet complexity itself can disguise and blur the traces of the system to the point where they become unrecognizable.

Based on a prior, simplified christological scheme we developed,<sup>55</sup> we can already specify that the root distinction of the christological system is between "low" and "high" christology—one tending to lower Christ to the human dimension, the other tending to divinize him completely. All other christologies are in between these two.

Let us sum up, in a systematic form, the dichotomies we already traced in the christological debates. The most important is the human-versus-divine opposition. The extremes seem to be psilanthropism and phantasiastic docetism, which would respond to the specifications *only*

human versus *only* divine. The remaining points of contention seem to be situated in a zone where Christ is not denied either humanity or divinity (he is not *only* human or *only* divine). They can thus be stated as follows:

1. Christ is more human than divine.
  2. He is equally human and divine.
  3. He is more divine than human.
1. Whereas the psilanthropic position, illustrated by Ebionism and early adoptionism, states that Christ was only transitorily connected with the divine, later adoptionism, and certainly Paul of Samosata, asserted that he was permanently connected with the divine.
  2. Both orthodoxy, which is closer to "high" Alexandrian christology, and the school of Antioch illustrate the "theandric" position (Christ is fully and equally God and man). Yet Antiochene christology would always share with adoptionism the idea that Christ was not united *by nature* with God the Father. On the contrary, the orthodox would assert that God and Christ had the same nature (*physis, ousia*). According to its "middle-high" tendency, orthodoxy would also adopt Origen's viewpoint, according to which Christ was wholly man, that is, had a human soul.
  3. This was contested by "high" christology, even by those representatives of the school of Alexandria who passed into history as champions of orthodoxy, like Athanasius. The most extreme Alexandrian trend, monophysism (illustrated by Apollinaris of Laodicea and later by Eutyches of Constantinople), asserted that Christ not only did not have a human soul but that he was neither divine nor human: he was a *tertium genus*, for in him the two essences (*hypostaseis*) of Godhood and humankind were mixed together.

Although very close to Apollinaris, Cyril of Alexandria, who acted for a while as representative of orthodoxy, took care to refute the view according to which Christ was a *tertium genus* between human and divine, by affirming that the hypostases were united yet *not mixed*. The lines according to which the system infallibly develops are the following:

divine (1) vs human (2)

only divine (docetism) (1.1) vs not only divine (1.2)

not only human (2.1) vs only human (psilanthropism) (2.2)

more divine than human (1.2.1) vs equally divine and human (1/2)  
vs more human than divine (2.1.1)

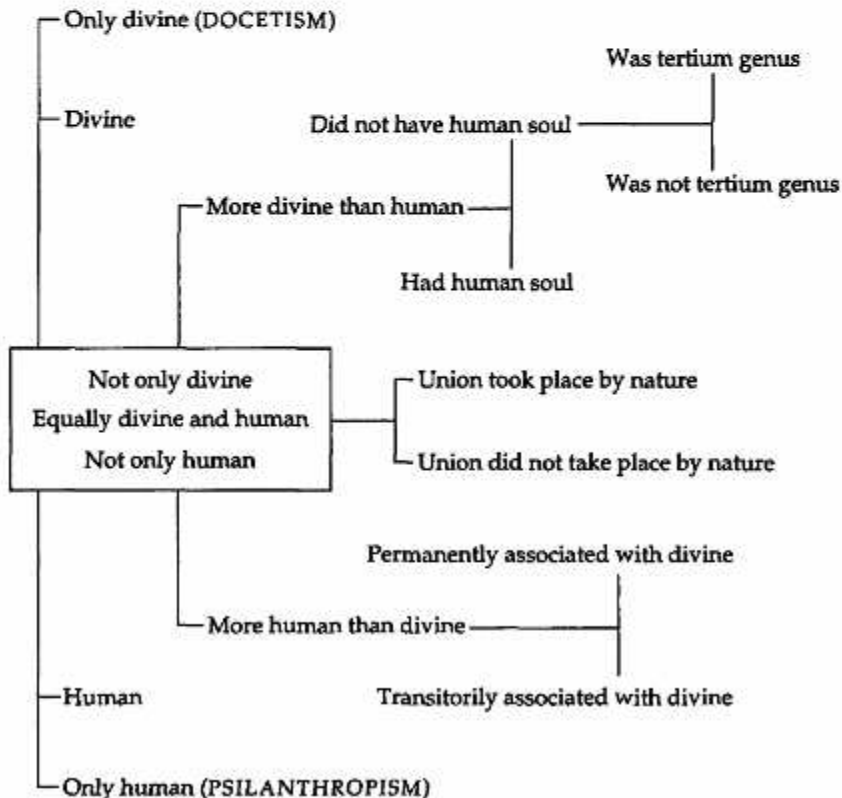
did not have human soul (Athanasius) (1.2.1.1) vs had human soul  
(Origen) (1.2.1.2 or 1/2.1)

was tertium genus (monophysism) (1.2.1.2.1) vs was not tertium  
genus (orthodoxy) (1.2.1.2.2 or 1/2.1.1)

was permanently associated with the divine (Antiochene school)  
(2.1.1.1) vs was not permanently associated with the divine  
(adoptionism) (2.1.1.2 but also 2.2.1)

the union between God and man took place by nature (Cyril of  
Alexandria) (1/2.1.1) vs the union did not take place by nature  
(1/2.1.2 but according to some 2.1.1.2).

These were a few relevant dichotomies according to which the system works. It would be easier to trace the binary oppositions on a table:





At this point we can already draw a conclusion: christology, if interpreted as a viable whole, is not a succession of anarchic, unrelated events in time but a system made up of binary switches that, much like the spoon in Soupland, crosses time in an unpredictable sequence. If the same applies to trinitarian controversies, our case is practically demonstrated: "ideal objects" exist in their logical space, and their morphodynamics is the correct approach to the comprehensive understanding of history.<sup>56</sup>

Trinitarian controversies concern the relationship between the three hypostases of divinity: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The latter is a being even more elusive than the Logos, sometimes identified in early Jewish Christianity with Christ himself, sometimes with an angel, and sometimes even with a feminine hypostasis (*rūah* in Semitic languages is feminine), Mother of the Logos.<sup>57</sup> The hierarchical structure of the Trinity was not actually established before Origen, who, according to Jerome, was subordinationist.<sup>58</sup> Like Philo, Origen calls God *ho theos* and the Son simply *theos* or even "second God,"<sup>59</sup> and states that the three are distinct *hypostaseis*. According to H. A. Wolfson,<sup>60</sup> Origen and Plotinus alike learned from Ammonios Saccas that the Logos is eternally generated. Various Christian theologians borrowed this principle from Plotinus rather than Origen.<sup>61</sup>

The modalist Noetus of Smyrna, according to Tertullian, was a monarchianist in so far as he admitted one God only. The consequence was that God died on the cross—called by Tertullian "patripassianism" (God the Father suffered).<sup>62</sup> This rather naive modalism was made into a serious system by Sabellius,<sup>63</sup> who went to Rome about 215 C.E. and was excommunicated by Pope Callistus (217–22) after having first been supported by him. Sabellius regarded God as a monad called Sonfather (*hyiopator*). Like the sun, Sonfather radiates heat and light without division. God is thus one, but has three "modalities": according to creation and order he is Father, according to redemption he is Son, according to grace he is Holy Spirit.

In condemning Sabellianism, orthodoxy repudiated Origen's subordinationism by establishing equality between heavenly hypostases. Antiochene theology, to which a constant adoptionist tendency has been ascribed, whose import would be the avoidance of any mixture between the divine Logos and man in Christ, was perhaps closer to the Origenist distinctions on this point. Paul of Samosata's trinitarian doctrine is not exactly known. It was perhaps a subtle form of unitarianism, which entailed formal acceptance of the trinitarian formula. He may have taught that the Word was not a substance (*ousia*) but a verbal utterance of the Father, as such not distinct from the Father himself.

The Alexandrian presbyter (ordained 313) Arius (d. 336) was excommunicated by Bishop Alexander of Alexandria in 318. The Nicene formula of faith (325), with its controversial statement that Father and Son are *homoousios*, mainly reflects the Arian controversy. Only three texts can be ascribed to Arius with certainty: a confession of faith presented to Bishop Alexander, a letter to his supporter Eusebius of Nicomedia, and a confession submitted to Emperor Constantine (325 or 327). Some fragments of his poem *Thalia* (ca. 322) are reported by his formidable opponent Athanasius. The letter to Alexander asserts that the Son exists in actuality, yet he is not *agennētos* (ungenerated). The letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia affirms that God and his Son do not coexist, for God must preexist his Son. If not, the Son must be either part of God, or an emanation, or a second god. For Arius, only God is *anarchos*, the Son has an *archē*.

If Athanasius is correct, Arius believed that God and the Son did not share the same *ousia*. He also stated that the Father is invisible and unknowable to the Son. Moreover, the Son is unable to comprehend his own *ousia*. An excerpt from *Thalia* confirms this.<sup>64</sup> The Son is clearly subordinated to the Father. So was he in Origen. According to Origen, Christ was *hypostasis* and *ousia*—that is, real individual subsistence as opposed to a conceptual existence. Faith involves belief in three *hypostaseis* having three different *ousiai* (*In Iohann.* II.10). Origen would not have subscribed to the word *homoousios* as concerning the three persons of the Trinity, simply because *hypostasis* to him was quasi-synonymous with *ousia*. Here Arius simply follows Origen.<sup>65</sup>

In the 362 Council of Alexandria, a number of bishops opted for *homoiousios* (of like substance) instead of *homoousios*. The 381 Council of Constantinople, under pressure of the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers—Basil of Caesarea (d. 379), his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, and his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa—reinstated the word *homoousios* in the light of Gregory of Nazianzus's explanations and decided that the three members of the Trinity were one *ousia* and three *hypostaseis*.

Augustine's discussion of the trinitarian formula ("one essence, three persons") contains only one element fundamentally new, later incorporated in the pseudo-Athanasian credo adopted in the West: that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.<sup>66</sup>

At first glance the system of trinitarian controversies is simple and seems to be organized along three basic dichotomies: one "person" in the Godhead versus more "persons," equal versus subordinate, and distinct versus indistinct. Each element of these dichotomies may act like a



building block in virtually any combination (a situation different from the hierarchical dichotomies in the christological system). Thus it is possible to have a theology that is monarchian, subordinationist, and does not distinguish between Father and Son (modalism, patripassian variant); a trinitarian theology that is subordinationist yet distinguishes Father from Son (Origen, Arius); a trinitarian theology subordinationist and without distinction (Paul of Samosata?); and a trinitarian theology that is not subordinationist and distinguishes between Father and Son ("orthodoxy"). The same system can also be described according to the terminological distinctions of the Fathers themselves (hypostasis versus ousia versus prosopon), but confusion among terms is a strong deterrent against such an endeavor.

At the conclusion of this short analysis, it seems possible to state that trinitarian theology is definitely a "system," that is, an ideal object that exists in its own logical space. Although both christological and trinitarian debates form such systems based on dichotomies, the two systems are different in so far as one is based on a hierarchy of binary oppositions, and the other is composed of units, where single elements can enter virtually any possible combination.

Yet, as we will see in the course of our study, the binary oppositions that belong to the structure of a hierarchical system may easily come loose and enter—as single units or building elements—the composition of another system, either hierarchical or made up of other similar "bricks." This shows not only the flexibility of hierarchies but also the fact that a pattern of active interaction exists between systems that we choose to classify as independent, such as Christianity and Gnosticism. In fact, in many respects the two share the basic system but activate different options in it. This in itself should demonstrate the uselessness of labels, which belie the contiguity of systems of thought. In morphodynamic terms, Christianity and Gnosticism are on a number of accounts transformations (or deformations) of each other, hence perspectives on (and within) the same system.

Whoever has the slightest notion of the history of early Christianity knows how terrible theological debates could be, especially after the Constantinian toleration of Christians (313), and how inconceivably obnoxious were many of those whom the Church has canonized. There seemed to be a lot at stake if, according to a IVth-century Church Father, even in the market people would forget their daily concerns in order to argue about hypostases and prosopa. And we also know that where a few triumphed, many were humiliated, exiled, stoned, or eliminated morally and even physically by abject means perhaps worthy of higher

stakes. Why all this, if what the theologians were playing was only a mental game (not unlike the game of chess, yet relatively simpler)? It was a powerful game, whose rules occupied their minds for centuries and continue to occupy ours. It is interesting to ascertain that power was involved in such a way that, among all possible solutions of the system (which are equally true or equally false), a middle-higher solution would triumph and be proclaimed "orthodox." When the Church decided that the Holy Spirit speaks through conciliar statements, they probably were correct in so far as the rule of the system seems to stabilize it in the middle.

D'Arcy Thompson remarks that the modern founder of species classification, Linnaeus (1707-1778), used the simple, descriptive terms used in plant and animal categorization to group crystals he found by color and shape. When the structural connections that give minerals their distinctive shapes and qualities were discovered to be strictly mathematical, crystals were defined by formulas thereafter. The nature of the object and its study were forever changed.

It is our intention to demonstrate that religion is similarly analyzable. Although, from our viewpoint, scattered across time through history, it is a combination of "ideal objects," not unlike philosophy, and even science. In the course of this work, we will discover more: not only that the structure of all these religious trends, from Gnosticism to Catharism, depends on the same system but also that religion, philosophy, and science do not construct their "ideal objects" differently. Consequently they speak about the same things, in ways that may sound heuristically different if not incompatible but that are systemically identical.

## Notes

1. See Abraham Pais, *"Subtle Is the Lord . . .": The Science and the Life of Albert Einstein* (Oxford Univ. Press: New York, 1982), 266ff.
2. See Pais, *Subtle*, 319.
3. The first edition of *Flatland* must have been in print in 1883; it is no longer extant. Reprints of successive editions are available (see E. Abbott Abbott, *Flatland*, with a preface by Isaac Asimov [Harper & Row: New York, 1983]). The hero of the story is called A Square, as undoubtedly Abbott Abbott himself must have been called in school; see Rudy Rucker, *Geometry, Relativity, and the Fourth Dimension* (Dover: New York, 1977); by the same, *The Fourth Dimension: A Guided Tour of the Higher Universes* (Houghton and Mifflin: Boston, 1984). See my article "A Historian's Kit for the Fourth Dimension," in *Incognita* 2 (1990), 113-29, and my book *Out of This World: A History of Otherworldly Journeys and Out-of-Body Experiences, from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Shambhala: Boston, 1991).

4. The Greek prefix *hyper* or the Latin prefix *super* indicates an object with one dimension more than three; for Einstein, such a dimension is time.
5. See my article "A Historian's Kit for the Fourth Dimension."
6. This does not entail the existence of another world in superspace, as the journalist P. D. Ouspensky believed at the beginning of this century.
7. See Howard Gardner, *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution* (Basic Books: New York, 1985).
8. See Rudy Rucker, *The Fourth Dimension*; more references in my "Historian's Kit for the Fourth Dimension" and in my *Out of This World*.
9. *Goethe's Botanical Writings*, trans. B. Mueller (Univ. of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 1952), 88.
10. See Rudolf Magnus, *Goethe as a Scientist*, trans. H. Norden (Schuman: New York, 1949), 79.
11. Magnus, *Goethe as a Scientist*, 44-45.
12. Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* was first published in 1916, three years after the scholar's death, based on the class notes taken by his disciples.
13. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 3 vols., trans. W. R. Trask et al. (Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1978-85).
14. See W. E. Le Gros Clark and P. B. Medawar, *Essays on Growth and Form Presented to D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1945).
15. The second edition of the complete work was published in 2 vols. by Cambridge Univ. Press in 1942 (1116 pages) and reprinted in 1952.
16. See Rudy Rucker, *Mind Tools* (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1987).
17. *On Growth and Form* (1942 ed.), vol. 2, 1023.
18. Thompson, *On Growth and Form*, vol. 2, 933.
19. Thompson, *On Growth and Form*, vol. 1, 85 n.
20. Thompson, *On Growth and Form*, 285.
21. See D'Arcy W. Thompson, "Morphology and Mathematics," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* 50 (1916), pt. 4, no. 27, 857-95.
22. *On Growth and Form*, vol. 1, 283.
23. *On Growth and Form*, vol. 1, 286. The word had been coined by A. Giard in 1876.
24. Agnes Brooks Young, *Recurring Cycles of Fashion* (Harper & Row: New York, 1937); see my "A Corpus for the Body," *Journal of Modern History*, March 1991.
25. Arians could claim that there were three hypostases in God, thereby meaning that there were three substances; Sabellians could claim that there was one hypostasis in God, thereby meaning one person; and the Monophysites could legitimately claim that there was one hypostasis in Christ, thereby meaning one substance.
26. *Adv. haer.* III.19f.
27. *Ad Magn.* 8.2.
28. *Ad Trall.* 9.1-2.
29. *Adv. haer.* III.18.
30. *Adversus Praxean* 27.
31. *Paed.* I.8; *Protrep.* XI.
32. *Endiathetos: Ad Autolyicum* II.10, in Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, ed. and trans. R. M. Grant (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1970), 39.
33. *Prophorikos*.
34. *Ad Autolyicum* II.10, trans. Grant.
35. "Qui antem initium dat Verbo Dei vel Sapientiae Dei, intueri ne magis in ipsum ingenitum patrem impletatem suam iacet, cum eum neget semper patrem fuisse et genuisse Verbum et habuisse Sapientiam in omnibus anterioribus vel temporibus vel saeculis, vel si quid illud est quod nominari potest" (*De principiis* I.3.31.1-4, p. 126 Görgemanns-Krapp).
36. Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*; cf. R. Williams, *Arianus: Heresy and Tradition* (Darton, Longman & Todd: London, 1987).

37. "Tum deinde quia Christus Iesus, ipse qui venit, ante omnem creaturam natus ex patre est. Qui cum in omnium conditione patri ministrasset ("per ipsum" namque "omnia facta sunt"), novissimis temporibus se ipsum exinanienti homo factus est, incarnatus est, cum deus esset, et homo factus mansit quod erat, deus. Corpus assumpsit nostro corpori simile, eo solo differens, quod natum ex virgine et spiritu sancto est. Et quoniam hic Iesus Christus natus et passus est in veritate et non per phantasiam, communem hanc mortem vere mortuus; vere enim et a mortuis resurrexit et post resurrectionem conversatus cum discipulis suis assumtus est" (*De princ.* I.Praef.4, pp. 88–90 Görgemanns-Krapp).
38. Justin, *Dial. cum Trypho* 47; *Iren.* I.26.1; III.11.7; III.21.1.
39. Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccles.* V.28–29.
40. Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (1960; Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1978), 115ff.
41. In the II<sup>nd</sup>–III<sup>rd</sup> century; cf. Hipp., *Ref.* ix; Epiph., *Pan.* 57.1.8.
42. *De princ.* II.6.3.
43. Frances Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1983), 74.
44. *Anthrōpos entheos*; Young, *From Nicaea*, 185–86.
45. Young, *From Nicaea*, 188–89.
46. *Prosōpon*; Young, *From Nicaea*, 191–210.
47. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *De incarnatione* VII.4, in R. A. Norris, *The Christological Controversy* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1980), 118.
48. R. M. Grant, *Gods and the One God* (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1986); see my review in *History of Religions* 27 (1987), 97–98.
49. Young, *From Nicaea*, 259f.
50. Young, *From Nicaea*, 262.
51. In Norris, *Christological*, 134.
52. *Letter to John of Antioch*, in Norris, *Christological*, 143.
53. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge Univ. Press: Cambridge, 1972), 29–30.
54. Frend, *The Rise*, 2–3.
55. See Mircea Eliade and I. P. Couliano, *Dictionnaire des religions* (Plon: Paris, 1990), 127–29 (Eng. ed., HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).
56. As we will see, history could indeed be defined as "integrated morphodynamics of ideal objects."
57. See James M. Robinson, "Very Goddess and Very Man: Jesus' Better Self," in Karen L. King, ed., *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1988), 113–27.
58. *Ep. ad Avitum*, 124.2: "Filiū quoque minorem a patre eo quod secundus ab illo sit, et spiritum sanctum inferiorem a filio in sanctis quibusque versari, atque hoc ordine maiorem patris fortitudinem esse quam filii et spiritus sancti, et rursus maiorem filii fortitudinem esse quam spiritus sancti, et consequenter ipsius sancti spiritus maiorem esse virtutem ceteris, quae sancta dicuntur."
59. W. G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1980), 14; cf. C. Cels. V.39.
60. Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (1956; Harvard Univ. Press: Cambridge, MA, 1976<sup>3</sup>), 219–22.
61. Alexander of Alexandria (cf. Theodoretus, *Eccl. hist.* 1.3–4; Epiph., *Pan.* 69.6), Marius Victorinus (*Adv. Arium* I.34), and Augustine, who knew part of the *Enneads* in Victorinus's translation (*Enar. in Ps.* 2.6; *Epist.* 238.24; *De Div. Quaest.*, 37; *De Trinit.* V.5.6).
62. Tertullian summarizes in the following words the position of the modalists Epigonus and Cleomenes: "duos unum voluit esse, ut idem pater et filius habeatur" (*Adversus*

*Praxean*, ca. 213). According to them, the Word (*Verbum*) is only *vox et sonus oris*, he has a merely nominal existence. When the Son suffers (*patitur*), the Father suffers with him (*copatitur*).

63. Cf. Hipp. IX.11ff.

64. Cf. Athanasius, *De synodis* 15.

65. Cf. R. Williams, *Arius*, 132–43.

66. Wolfson, *The Philosophy*, 350–59.

# Chapter 1

## Dualism: A Chronology

Heresy begins when lay people start reading and commenting on the Scriptures.

—PETER OF SICILY

### 1. A Working Definition

The word *dualism* (*dualismus*) was coined in 1700 by Thomas Hardy to describe the Zoroastrian doctrine of the two opposite Spirits, the Beneficent and the Maleficent. Its meaning in the history of religions ended up being more technical than it is in philosophy, where it usually designates the opposition of soul and body, or form and matter, or the Cartesian opposition Mind versus Extension, as in A. O. Lovejoy's classic *Revolt Against Dualism*. Under more careful scrutiny, it appears that philosophical dualism is but a species of the broader usage in the history of religions. Here it also came to be applied to all doctrines in which the world and/or human beings, or parts thereof, are the result of separate creations performed by separate creators.<sup>1</sup>

Dualism is a device serving theodicy, which is the attempt to reconcile the existence of a good Creator with the patent imperfections of the world and of human existence. Obviously the problem from its outset is perfectly insoluble unless a certain type of definition of God is used, called *apophatic* (from the Greek *apophasis*, "denial, negation") or negative, in which God appears as unfathomable and beyond any positive predicate such as "good" or "providential." Being beyond good and evil, God may be responsible for occurrences that our limited understanding interprets as painful and nonsensical, such as suffering and death. Although the technique of apophatic theology is very ancient (it is illustrated in Plato's dialogue *Parmenides*), even the masters of this style refused to carry God's unpredictability to a conclusion that seems nevertheless to be

corroborated by several passages of the Tanakh (1 Sam. 2, etc.): that God is the author of evil, reiterated of the omnipotent God of the Qur'an (e.g., VI.17, 39, 65, etc.).

Therefore, given the state of this world, it should not surprise us that such champions of apophatic theology as the gnostics would try to clear the transcendent God of any involvement with the creation of this inferior world. Thus, inventing a second principle responsible for evil appears to be a common device even when it is superfluous.

What is more important, definitions of evil vary. In Zoroastrianism the two Spirits are each in charge of a separate creation, and thus reality is the object of a dual classification: the dog is a good animal, the donkey an evil one. In Plato the body is evil; in later Platonism, matter in general.

Dualistic myths of creation or doctrines of the world abound in the religions and philosophies of humankind. Sometimes the borderline that separates them from monarchian views (holding one principle or *archē*) is tenuous to the point where dualistic developments may characterize monarchian myths and monistic doctrines. In general we cease to consider dualistic a doctrine in which the second principle is created by the first and holds no real power over him, but this is a matter of opinion. Thus, for example, from early Christianity onward the myth of the fall of Lucifer has been used to explain all evil—including original sin according to Augustine. Defining this myth as dualistic, J. B. Russell thinks that medieval Christianity in its entirety was dualistic.<sup>2</sup> A label should not detain us longer than necessary. Whether Christianity was dualistic or not, it certainly differed from Gnosticism in so far as it never implied that this world was created by anyone other than God himself. A poem like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which to a certain extent emphasizes the grandness of the Opponent and his attempts to spoil God's creation, never forgets that Satan is but a subordinate. A great observer of dualism, Harold Bloom, did not fail to notice this: "Milton," he wrote, "who declined every dualism, is . . . read wholly dualistically by the dominant tradition of interpretation, of which C. S. Lewis was a leading representative."<sup>3</sup>

Sophisticated as it may become, dualism is essentially a very simple solution devised by the human mind to account for the manifest flaws of existence. People did not wait for the invention of writing to express it. It occurs in most regions of the world, in myths recorded by anthropologists.<sup>4</sup> A character more often male than female, who may be coeternal with the Primordial Being or born later (sometimes from the Primordial Being himself), spoils creation as a result of his clumsiness



or, more often, of his irresistible urge to play tricks. (Indeed, this character is known as a Trickster.<sup>5</sup>) Anthropologists call dualistic those myths in which the Trickster appears as an antagonist of the Primordial Being.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Quest for the Origins

At the time the massive presence of dualistic myths in Europe was discovered, historians believed perhaps even more than today that the main task of their discipline was to trace back the origin of phenomena. Accordingly, "origins" were endowed with nearly mystical power and prestige. The long quest for the origins of dualism started with A. N. Veselovskii (1872), who attributed the rise of Slavic dualistic legends to the spread of Bogomilism. Dissuaded by the Finnish scholar Julian Kron, Veselovskii converted in 1889 to his hypothesis: Dualistic legends are Finno-Ugrian and Uralo-Altaiic in origin. Two years later (1891), discovering that the French anthropologist De Charencey had published North American dualistic myths, Veselovskii cautiously concluded that the genesis of dualism must have taken place independently in different geographic areas.<sup>7</sup>

The matter would have been settled—and perhaps wisely so—if the extension of dualism had not been discovered to be vaster, both in space and in time, than presumed. To integrate these new factors in his theory, the Ukrainian scholar M. P. Dragomanov had to perform, in 1892–94, an actual tour de force. This exertion notwithstanding, his theory would hold together only with the help of a few quantum leaps, not to mention that even then its premise of mere territorial diffusion appears rather monstrous.

Having assessed that a sizable group of legends in which the Trickster is said to dive after mud needed for the creation of the earth could only have originated in a maritime setting, Dragomanov decided that this setting had to be India. From India the myth migrated to Mesopotamia, from Mesopotamia to Iran (where it influenced Zurvanism, a form of heretical Zoroastrianism that enjoyed perhaps brief favor under a few Sassanian rulers), and from there to both the Caucasus and Europe, where it gave rise to Gnosticism. Through Manichaeism (a form of Gnosticism) the myth reached Central Asia; through the Armenian Paulicians it came back to Europe and influenced Bogomilism. Dragomanov eventually became conscious of his theory's inability to explain North American occurrences of dualistic myths. Therefore,



without seeming to realize it, he contradicted himself altogether by resorting to the assertion of an "independent origination" in different areas.<sup>8</sup>

Oskar Dähnhardt (in 1907–12) distinguished between two main variants of these legends and called one Asian and the other Bogomil. In the Asian type the Trickster is usually a bird, while in the Bogomil type he is called Satana(el). Moreover, two distinct motifs occur in these legends: the "diving" (*Tauchmotif*), possible only in a maritime setting, and dualism. As to the dissemination of the two types, Dähnhardt followed Dragomanov, explaining the North American version as a result of the Asian migrations over the Bering Strait.<sup>9</sup>

That Iran was the homeland of dualism would become an extremely elaborate and fashionable hypothesis with the German school of history of religions (*religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), whose most important representatives were Wilhelm Bousset and Richard Reitzenstein. The critique of their ideas has been offered elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Today they appear as one of the most massively organized and highly acclaimed scholarly blunders of this century, backed by the powerful tools of German philology and its reputation for *Gründlichkeit* (thoroughness). As if to contradict such common ethno-geographical beliefs, Reitzenstein was a volatile spirit indeed, yet able to cling to the latest idea to come to his attention. Thus he was first persuaded that everything late antique came from Egypt, but toward 1920 he switched radically to Iran, using IXth-century C.E. compilations to establish the Persian origins of Platonism(!). Reitzenstein invented the so-called Iranian Mystery of Liberation (*Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium*, 1921), a sort of mystical doctrine that would explain not only Christianity and Gnosticism but even ancient Platonism. The misconception was thoroughly exposed by Carsten Colpe in the early 1960s,<sup>11</sup> yet some of the ideas of the German school still loom large over modern scholarship. This should detain us here no further.<sup>12</sup>

By the 1960s the proliferation of hypotheses concerning the origins of Gnosticism had assumed such proportions that an international convention had to be held in Messene, Italy, in order to assess their validity.<sup>13</sup> It became clear that, although especially the existence of Jewish and Samaritan elements in Gnosticism was emphasized, the most compelling view of gnostic dualism remained that advanced by the French scholar Simone Pétrement<sup>14</sup> and by Ugo Bianchi.<sup>15</sup> In his studies, Bianchi has formulated a typology of dualism more extensive and more complete than his predecessors (including Pétrement) and has attempted—using elements from a theory devised by his master Raffaele Pettazzoni<sup>16</sup>—to transform it into a historical sequence.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Do "Historical Typologies" Work?

Compared with the coarse theory of migration first formulated by Veselovskii and later developed by the German School of Religion, Bianchi's viewpoint represents a huge step forward in the understanding of dualism as a mental process with a sequence in time. Yet like most historians, Bianchi failed to see dualism as an "ideal object" in its logical dimension. The phenomenon appeared thus impoverished and forced into a temporal scheme too narrow to contain it.

Bianchi established a rule of diffusion that utterly disarmed the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*: for a trait to be inherited, it must be present both in the original doctrine and in the derivative product. Zoroastrian dualism is procosmic, Gnosticism is anticosmic. The latter could not be derived from the former. Sassanian Zurvanism entails, it is true, certain elements—a transformation of popular dualism—that seriously question the intelligence of the good principle Ohrmazd.<sup>18</sup> But Zurvanism is no older than the IIIrd century, and Gnosticism appears no later than the beginning of the IInd. The Iranian origin of gnostic dualism is thus excluded.

Dualism in general had been treated by Bianchi as a historicocultural<sup>19</sup> phenomenon: there is a phase in the development of human communities in which certain culturally related ideas appear with compelling force. This, of course, does not exclude diffusion, which remains one of the major factors in the explanation of similarities between cultures. Yet Gnosticism could not be considered as a mere derivate of something else. It was part of a subterranean trend of great importance in the religious life of the Greeks. Here Bianchi largely agreed with Simone Pétrement's thesis, drawing, however, Plato's precursors—and especially Orphism—into discussion.

Even if the existence of ancient Orphic communities has been denied, an Orphic ideology certainly existed before Plato. It entailed world rejection and devaluation of the body, based on the myth of the infant Dionysus killed and eaten by the Titans.<sup>20</sup> From it, the followers of the "Orphic life-style" (*bios orphikos*) derived the concept of a sin (*timōria*, *scelus*) that preceded the birth of humankind, yet which humankind inherited. To expiate it, abstentions (*apochai*) were necessary, entailing vegetarianism. These "Greek Puritans," as they have been defined,<sup>21</sup> also believed in metempsychosis or reincarnation. Here we have already, in the IVth century B.C.E. if not earlier, a set of traits that strongly resemble Gnosticism and the other forms of Western dualism down to the medieval Cathars.

Platonism has much in common with Orphism: the devaluation of the body (antisomatism), the idea of an unspecified "sin" that destined the individual souls to fall and become embodied, metempsychosis.<sup>22</sup> Contrary to those who, like Arthur Darby Nock, make of Gnosticism a sort of Platonism "run wild," Bianchi thinks that Gnosticism is so close to Platonism because both of them originate from dualistic speculations of the kind embodied in Orphism.<sup>23</sup> With the latter, Gnosticism also shares the idea of election and consubstantiality with the divine, for in Orphic myth humankind was born from the ashes of the Titans struck with lightning by Zeus for their deicide, and we thus contain the fragments of Dionysus swallowed by the Titans.

Although Bianchi insisted on saying that it would be an oversimplification to ascribe to him the derivation of Gnosticism from Orphism, his theory of invariants failed to provide an explanation for actual historical occurrences. If Gnosticism is not derived from Orphism, what is the link between the two? Or between Gnosticism and Platonism? Notwithstanding Bianchi's unique knowledge of dualism and his system of distinctive traits that define its species and subspecies, he still saw the relation between them as "historical," that is, chronological, instead of purely logical. Bianchi never envisioned dualism as an "ideal object" and therefore did not recognize that the dimension shared by Orphism, Platonism, Gnosticism, and Western dualistic trends is first and foremost logical. Instead of originating from one another, they all derive from a common source: the human mind.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4. Western Dualism: A Chronology

The system of Western dualism nevertheless crosses time in a sequence with which the reader should be familiar, as again she or he should be familiar with other possible outcomes of Western dualism, in time, space, or culture.

"Western dualism" is a label that includes a number of religious trends, most of which did originate outside Western Europe or North Africa. Marcion came from Sinope in Asia Minor. Mani was Persian and preached in Persia. The Paulicians flourished in Mesopotamia and the Bogomils in Bulgaria and Byzantium. Yet, with the exception of the Paulicians, all these trends, from Gnosticism to the French and Italian Cathars, had a serious impact on Western history and were dealt with by the Western Church as internal heresies.<sup>25</sup>

The "origin" of Gnosticism is practically unknown, the history of its beginnings controversial, but a birthdate after 70 C.E.—related or not to the fall of the Jerusalem Temple—is probable. That is when "Protognosticism" should be placed (see chapter 1.7 below). The great gnostic thinkers belong to the II<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. Basilides was active in Alexandria under the emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pius (117–61). His life history is unknown, but perhaps a later phase of his doctrine is exposed by a number of sources (see chapters 3 and 4 below), sources far more parsimonious when it comes to his "son"—carnal or spiritual—Isidorus, who enriched gnostic doctrine with a tractate, now lost, on the astral wrappings of the soul.

During the same period falls the activity of Marcion, born at Sinope on the Pontus (Black Sea) in Asia Minor, where his father might have been the bishop of the local Christians. Marcion is not a gnostic. In some respects (see chapter 5) his teachings run contrary to those of the gnostics. Adolf von Harnack placed his birthdate about 85 and his death about 160; more radical researchers give as an alternative 70–150, making him a contemporary of the subapostolic Fathers. The last mention of this character, said to be old and influential, occurs about 150 in the *First Apology* of Justin Martyr.

Since the Jewish community of Sinope must have been important, some make of Marcion a christianized Jew. Ancient heresiologists slander him by attributing to him the seduction of a young girl in Sinope, in consequence of which he was alleged to have been excommunicated by his own father. Harnack is probably right in interpreting this as a simple deformation of the common Christian metaphor according to which the heretics have defiled the pure virgin who is the Church. Excommunicated or not, Marcion was able to prove that he had belonged to the Christian community of Sinope.

Marcion was by profession a shipowner and made sea voyages frequently. He stopped in Rome for a few years (139–44 according to Harnack), where he started by making the Roman church a gift of 200,000 sesterces. This is Tertullian's estimate. According to R. M. Grant, "200,000" is not an accurate figure; in popular language it simply means "a lot." Yet many historians, like Hubert Cancik, took it seriously and calculated that the money would have been enough for Marcion to keep house in Rome for twenty-five years.<sup>26</sup>

According to Harnack's calculations, at the end of July 144 C.E., Marcion gave his famous speech on the parable of the good and the bad tree (Luke 6:43) before the assembly of the presbyters of Rome. The

Romans rejected his doctrine and returned his gift. About 150, Justin Martyr ascertained that his heresy had corrupted the whole world. Irenaeus (ca. 180–85) makes him meet the gnostic Cerdo, who went to Rome from Syria under Bishop Hyginus (Iren. I.27.1). If the encounter took place, it certainly remained inconclusive.

The Marcionite church was well organized and, according to Tertullian, closely resembled the Christian church. It had a functional hierarchy, submitted to the same strict discipline as the rest of the faithful. Women held some leadership roles. All members of the community practiced strict asceticism and encratism (rejection of marriage). Meat and wine were forbidden, but fish was not. The sabbath was a fast day. Marcionite ethics were heroic in all respects. Contrary to Christians, who were supposed to accept martyrdom, Marcionites provoked it.

The Marcionite church was missionary. In the II<sup>nd</sup> century it posed serious competition to the Christians, but in the III<sup>rd</sup> it lost all its power in the West. Repeated persecutions obliged Eastern Marcionites to withdraw to rural areas. In the V<sup>th</sup> century, Theodoret of Cyrrhus converted eight Marcionite villages in his diocese to orthodoxy.

About 140, another Christian who was going to be revealed as heretic—but, in this case, a gnostic—Valentinus, left Alexandria for Rome. Tertullian made him a failed competitor for the Holy See, which could only apply to the succession of Bishop Pius in 143. He was present in Rome until the pontificate of Anicetus (154–65). According to Epiphanius of Salamis (late IV<sup>th</sup> century), he settled on the island of Cyprus.

Despite honorable attempts, the original doctrine of Valentinus cannot be reconstructed out of the few extant fragments. Two schools were born from his teaching: the Western school of Ptolemy (Irenaeus's contemporary) and Heracleon, and the Eastern or Anatolian school, to which belonged Markos (Irenaeus's contemporary), Axionicus of Antioch, and Theodotus (of Constantinople?).

Some minor gnostics are vaguely known: Monoimos "the Arab," Prodikos, and the painter Hermogenes of Antioch, who provoked Tertullian's satirical pen.

From the amount of antignostic literature, one may deduce that gnostics were numerous in the first Christian centuries. How many of them were there in Rome? One historian estimates that, for a population of approximately one million inhabitants, II<sup>nd</sup>-century Rome sheltered fifty to eighty thousand practicing Jews, twenty to thirty thousand adepts of Egyptian cults, the same figure for Syrian cults, some twenty thousand Christians, and ten thousand adepts of Mithra. Gnostics are not imagined in excess of a few hundred, perhaps less.<sup>27</sup>



Even if these figures are tentative, it appears that the actual weight of Gnosticism was not numerical but intellectual. About 215–17, Origen begins writing in order to bring back to the Church a lost sheep—his rich friend Ambrose of Alexandria, who was leaning toward Valentinian gnosis.<sup>28</sup> By the mid-IIIrd century, Plotinus critiques the Valentinian gnostics who were present at his own school.<sup>29</sup> Gnostics still existed in Egypt at the end of the IVth century, as witnessed in the Coptic translations of their original tractates; the later of these, like *Pistis Sophia*, are heavily influenced by Manichaeism.

Not much is known about the social history of late Gnosticism. It is probable, however, that gnostic writings circulated among the ascetic cenobites of the first Christian monasteries, founded in Egypt by Pachomius in the second half of the IIIrd century. The burial of the mysterious Nag Hammadi jar, whose discovery in 1945 opened up a new (and far from concluded) chapter in the study of Gnosticism, may be explained by an encyclical of the vigorous Patriarch of Alexandria, Athanasius (d. 373), which forbade, in 367, the possession of extracanonical books. In this case, the Nag Hammadi writings had been the property of a monk.<sup>30</sup>

The most impressive gnostic system and the most successful missionary church are the work of Mani in the IIIrd century.

Mani was born on 14 April 216 C.E. According to the Muslim doxographer Ibn al-Nadīm (ca. 988), his father, Pattek (Arabic *Futtuq*, Greek *Pattikios* or *Patekios*, Latin *Patticius*), a native of Ecbatana/Hamadan, had moved to the twin cities Seleucia-Ctesiphon/al-Madā'in. Struck by a revelation, Mani's father had joined a baptist community, the Elkesaites, Mughtasilah, or Sabaeans of the Mesopotamian marshland.<sup>31</sup> After his birth, Mani remained with his mother, whose name is not certain (she is called *Mais*, *Utāhim*, or *Maryam*); she was an *Ashgāniā*, that is, she belonged to the imperial family of the Arsacids. Later on, Pattek introduced his son to the sect.

At twelve Mani met for the first time his heavenly double, the Twin,<sup>32</sup> Coptic *saich*, Pahlavi *arjamig*, Arabic *al-tauni* (after the Aramaic *tōmā*), who told him that he was going to leave the Mughtasilah. Fragments of the Cologne Mani Codex indicate that he intended to reform the religion of the Elkesaites by ascribing to their mythical founder Alchasaïos a revelation that would have determined him not to molest the elements anymore. In particular, the frequent ablutions of the Mughtasilah constituted a serious disturbance to Water.

Twelve years later—on 19 April 240, according to L. Koenen<sup>33</sup>—Mani received a second visit from his Twin and split from the Elkesaites.

He went to Turan (whose shah he converted) and Makran and reverted to Iran under Shāpūr I (242–72). He reached the city Rēw-Ardashīr on the Persian Gulf, then Babylonia, then Messene and Susiana. In Messene he converted the Lord Mīhrshah by causing him to visit in trance the Paradise of Light.<sup>34</sup> Introduced to Shāpūr I, he joined his retinue following an uncertain event—either the fear that seized the emperor at his sight or the cure of a young girl of his house.<sup>35</sup>

After Shāpūr's death, Mani maintained his position under the short reign of Hormizd I (273–74), but expecting a fall from grace with Bahrām I (274–76 or 277) he made plans to leave Susiana for Khorāsān. His projects thwarted, he took the road to Messene, stopping in Ctesiphon and Belabad, whose Viceroy Baat was his disciple. There he was caught and thrown into prison under charges advanced by powerful enemies: Kerdēr, the chief of the Magi priests (*Mōbadān mōbad*), and the chief of the Fire priests (*Hērbadān hērbad*). According to al-Bīrūnī, Bahram justified this action thus: "This man wishes the destruction of the world. Therefore it is necessary to start with his own destruction, before he could realize his project."<sup>36</sup> On the 4th of the month of Phamenoth, on a Monday at 11:00 A.M.,<sup>37</sup> Mani died after twenty-six days in prison.<sup>38</sup> Two Syriac sources mention that his body, flayed and his skin stuffed with hay, was displayed at the gates of Bēt-Lapat, the city of the Elamites.<sup>39</sup>

His death was followed by a sort of interregnum, after which Sisinnios (Mār Sīsin) and his ally Gabriabios (Mār Gabriab) succeeded him as leaders of the community. Sisinnios's successor was Innaios. Missions were dispatched to east and west. The great Western missionaries were Gabriabios, Mār Zāko, Patecius, Abzaxyā, and Addai, known by Augustine under the name Adimantus. The most successful Eastern missionary was Mār 'Ammō.

Manichaeism saw a considerable expansion. It spread to Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Asia Minor, North Africa, Europe, Eastern Iran, and, later, Central Asia.<sup>40</sup> Rome sheltered Manichaeans from the early IVth century. In 372 their presence in the Holy City was attested by a decree of the Emperor Valentinian. Ten years later the Manichaean auditor Augustine was given hospitality by them and conversed about doctrines.<sup>41</sup> With their recommendation, he was appointed rhetor in the city of Milan, where Ambrose and Filastrius of Brescia had declared a merciless war against Manichaeism.

When Augustine's recantation launched him on a brilliant career in the Catholic church, it was an auditor from Rome, Secundinus, who wrote to him at Hippo (405) in order to call him back to the Manichaean faith.<sup>42</sup> In 443 most Italian Manichaeans apparently lived in Rome,



where their community would be found existing still under Pope Hormisdas (514–23). Yet, it is especially in Asia Minor, at a distance from the threat to their churches, that Manichaeans would proliferate,<sup>43</sup> although by the mid-VIth century the only places where they could be found seemed to be Constantinople and Haran in northern Mesopotamia.<sup>44</sup>

Manichaeism was probably taken to China by a Persian missionary in 694. In 719 a Manichaean astronomer apparently visited the Chinese court. Manichaean books in Chinese were in circulation by the beginning of the VIIIth century, which led to a severe condemnation of their perverse doctrine in 732, but adepts were not prosecuted.

In 758 the officer An Lushān revolted against Emperor Xuan Zōng of the Tang dynasty and occupied the capitals Sian and Luoyang. The emperor called for help, and the Uigur Turks freed Luoyang in November 762. The Uigur Lord Mon Yu, who stayed in Luoyang between November 762 and March 763, met Manichaean monks and, impressed by their doctrine, took four of them to the Uigur court. Shortly thereafter, Manichaeism was declared the state religion in the Uigur Empire, with the result that Manichaeans in China were free to profess their religion. In 840 the Khirgiz destroyed Uigur power; consequently in 843 a harsh persecution against Chinese Manichaeans began. About 981–84 a group of Uigur refugees that had settled near Turfan continued to profess Manichaeism openly, alongside Chinese Buddhism.<sup>45</sup>

In the second half of the IVth century, Christianity merged with Roman society. Many priests and bishops married and had children; bishops were elected by the patriciate, with a view toward their management skills rather than virtue.<sup>46</sup> The peripheries of the empire—Syria, Egypt, and Spain—were cradles of ascetic movements, part of which would sooner or later be declared heretical. Since a number of them have been named in connection with dualism, it is necessary to mention them briefly in order to confirm or dismiss this connection.

The Messalians—from the Syriac *msalleyânê*, “those who pray”<sup>47</sup>—have many names in Greek: Enthousiasts, Choreutes, Adelphians, Eustathians, Lampetians, and Marcianites, among others. They were first mentioned about 370 C.E.<sup>48</sup> The most famous Messalian, perhaps founder of the movement, was a certain Adelphius, who revealed the secrets of the sect to Flavian, patriarch of Antioch (381–404), thus causing the Messalians to be expelled from Syria. They took refuge in the dioceses of Asia and Pontus (Lycaonia and Pamphylia). They were condemned about 388 at Side and anathematized about 390 by the Synod of

Antioch, before being again condemned by the Council of Ephesus (431). During the second half of the Vth century, a certain Lampetius, ordained Christian priest about 460, founded Messalian monasteries in the mountains between Cilicia and Isauria; in Syria, Lampetians were still around about 532-34.

At the end of the VIth century the Messalians were called Marcianites (not Marcionites), after one of their leaders, Marcian, money changer in Constantinople under Justinian and Justin II.

Under persecution, the Messalians of Mesopotamia took refuge in Sassanian Persia. Denounced and condemned by the councils of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (486, 576, 585, perhaps 596), they would be tracked down in the VIIIth century by Babai the Great, inspector of the monasteries during the vacancy of the patriarchal see from 607 to 628. These must have been the last actual Messalians. The accusation of Messalianism still occurred thereafter, but as a formula devoid of meaning.<sup>49</sup>

The doctrine of the Messalians was not actually dualistic, or at least no more than Christian orthodoxy is dualistic. Evil abides in humans as a demon. Three years of prayer expel the demon, bringing back the Holy Spirit. The latter visibly and tangibly settles in a person, similar to a fire that transforms whoever possesses it into a being capable of reading other hearts, having revelations, and above all seeing the demons invisible to others. The expulsion of the demon is a physical operation; he is strenuously evacuated through the mouth and through the nose, spitting and blowing. The "spirituals" can see the demon leaving in panic, like a smoke or a snake.<sup>50</sup> The Spirit confers complete quietude upon those who possess it; the Messalian could therefore in principle indulge in any license, for the Spirit would not be spoiled by it.<sup>51</sup>

The writings of a late-IVth-century monk, Symeon of Mesopotamia, were used in Messalian circles condemned at the Synod of Side in 400.<sup>52</sup> In 1941 Hermann Dörries sought to demonstrate that the writings of Symeon, attributed to Macarius the Great, were Messalian indeed. In a beautiful book published in 1978, Dörries changed his mind, showing that Symeon was neither a Messalian nor a dualist.<sup>53</sup> Symeon believed that evil dominates this world, from which neither Roman legislation nor the message of the Bible were able to expel it.<sup>54</sup> It is an occult power that determines the destiny of humankind, yet *it does not belong to human nature*: on the contrary, it is *against nature*.<sup>55</sup> Evil is not a second principle: it was created good by God and became evil only by exerting its own free will.<sup>56</sup> God uses Satan to test man.<sup>57</sup> According to Dörries, Symeon was not only anti-Manichaean,<sup>58</sup> he was anti-Messalian as well.<sup>59</sup>

In the far West, Priscillian of Ávila, a Spanish ascetic whose intention was perfectly orthodox and whose doctrine was only slightly less so, attained the special status of being the first Christian beheaded for heresy with the complicity of the Church (at Treves in 385). It is now generally believed that the accusations of Manichaeism and magic raised against him by another Spanish bishop, Itacius of Ossonoba, were simply drawn by the latter from well-known heresiological sources without any actual reference to Priscillianism.<sup>60</sup> Despite their condemnation by two councils of Toledo, in 400 and 447, the Council of Braga in 561 still ascertained the existence of Priscillians. The martyrdom of their master, whom they knew to be innocent, had strengthened them to resist for over two centuries, and it is not impossible that his secret tomb became the famous pilgrimage place of Santiago de Compostela.

In Egypt, if Evagrius of Pontus (b. Ibora, 345; d. Egypt, 399) was not the only Origenist, he was certainly the most famous. Thanks to the *Historia lausiaca* of his contemporary Palladius, Evagrius's biography is relatively well known. Born in 345 on the Black Sea coast, he received the lectorate from Basil the Great, and, after the latter's death in 379, he was ordained deacon by Gregory Nazianzen, whom he followed to Constantinople. In 381, when Gregory resigned from the patriarchal see, Evagrius stayed with his successor Nectarius and became infatuated with the wife of a high imperial officer. As a last resort against the consumptive flame of this passion, he fled to Jerusalem, where he was received by Melany the Elder, who persuaded him to take to the desert. Thus in 383 he settled at Nitria for two years, then for fourteen years, until his death, at the Cells desert nearby. The rude Egyptian monks did not greet this Origenist intellectual warmly, but at the Cells he met a number of friends of Melany who shared his views. The most influential among them was Ammonios, nicknamed *ho Parōtēs* ("Earbandage"), since he had cut his ear in order to escape nomination to bishop. Ammonios had three brothers, tall like himself, and the four of them, all disciples of Apa Pambō, were called *hoi Makroi*, "the Tall Ones."

Things went relatively smoothly before the arrival in Palestine of the formidable heresiologist Epiphanius in 393. Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria bestowed his protection upon the Origenists until 399, when he withdrew it not over matters of doctrine but in a petty and insignificant argument. A synod gathered in 400 at Alexandria condemned the works of Origen and those who read them. Expelled from Egypt, the Tall Brothers found fragile hospitality in Constantinople with another victim of intrigues: John Chrysostom. In the meantime Evagrius had died, shortly before Epiphany of 399.

The intellectual protagonist of the anti-Origenist fight was the fierce and erratic Jerome, who had settled in 386 at Bethlehem in a monastery founded by Paula. First a convinced Origenist, Jerome had joined Epiphanius in 393, breaking with his distinguished, longtime friend Rufinus of Aquileia and many others. In 404 the local dispute came to an end through the reconciliation of Theophilus and the Tall Brothers. But Origenism would be definitively and repeatedly condemned, in 543 and in 553 at the Vth ecumenical council, where Evagrius Ponticus and Didymus the Blind (Rufinus's master and onetime favorite of Jerome's, who called the blind man "Didymus the Seeing") were anathematized. Their condemnation was repeated in 692 and 787, at the VIIIth Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.<sup>61</sup> We will later discuss Origenism (chapter 9) according to late-IVth-century heresiological sources.<sup>62</sup>

### 5. Gnosticism in the Middle East?

The German scholar Heinz Halm is the champion of the theory of continuity between Gnosticism and two Shiite traditions: the Extremists or *ghulāt*, who originate in VIIIth-century Iraq and are represented today by the Syrian Nusairi, and the Ismaelites or Qarmatians (Iraq, IXth century), from which the Syrian Druzes split in the XIth century.<sup>63</sup> The analogies found by Halm are rather superficial and involve esoteric speculations on the creation, the letters of the alphabet, syzygies of heavenly aeons, series of prophets, and so forth<sup>64</sup>—all topics sometimes present in Gnosticism (as well as in Jewish mysticism) but not specifically gnostic. The foremost argument devised by Halm in favor of his thesis rests on the alleged resemblances he discovers between the gnostic Demiurge and the Demiurge in certain sectarian Shiite writings. For example, an Ismaili cosmogony of the Xth century features a female hypostasis called Kūnī (feminine imperative: "Be!") that acts like the gnostic demiurge.<sup>65</sup> The text does not communicate to every reader Halm's unshakable conviction.

Similarly, there is nothing gnostic in the myth of *Umm al-kitāb*, the Primordial Book (lit. "Mother of the Book"), written in Persian and not by Ismailis, although found among them at the beginning of the XXth century. According to Halm, the most ancient part of the writing was redacted in Iraq during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (170–93 H./786–809 C.E.). The first sequence derives from the apocryphal *Life of Adam and Eve*, which might have circulated among gnostics and is the source of the story of Iblis in the Qur'ān (VII.11); but it was not originally gnostic.

It tells how Azazil (the Qur'anic Iblis) refuses to worship Salman, the Primordial Man. Therefore Azazil and his 124,000 followers are expelled from the kingdom of heaven. God draws from Azazil his red color, from which God makes a curtain to hide himself from the rebellious angels. Every thousand years God comes out and makes a peace proposal, and every time the rebels reject it. With every rejection God makes a new heaven from a new red curtain, and so far he made eight of them.<sup>66</sup> A similar cosmogony exists among the Syrian Nusairi.<sup>67</sup> Like the Bogomil myth (see chapter 8 below), it unites popular tastes with esoteric knowledge and tends to come up with an answer concerning the number of fallen angels, which, according to Augustine, gives the *numerus praedestinatorum*, the number of free seats for the Righteous in heaven.

Bogomilism, Catharism, and Lurian Kabbalah are deeply interested in the same kind of speculations. However, there is nothing gnostic about them, let alone dualistic. The fall of the Devil is here a Qur'anic story; the Devil is *not* a second principle, and all heavens are created by God from a substance—red color—that belonged to the archangel Azazil. One is obliged to conclude that none of the parallels emphasized by Halm hints at a possible convergence between Gnosticism and Shiite doctrines, let alone at a possible derivation of the latter from the former.

The same applies to materials not studied by Halm, as for example the cosmogony of the *Ahl-i haqq*, who in the 1970s still existed in western Iran, in the Kurdic province Kermanshah.<sup>68</sup> Creation starts with a primordial pearl, after which God wishes to give life to Pîr-Benyāmîn or Jibrayil (the archangel Gabriel), who does not know his creator. When God talks to him, Gabriel answers like the gnostic demiurge: "I do not know who you are, you who talk to me in secret; for I am a free being in the world, and I know no more. No one has mastery over me, and besides me I know no one."<sup>69</sup> But after his ignorance costs him his wings, burned by God's anger, Gabriel is pardoned, recognizes his impotence, and declares himself God's humble servant.<sup>70</sup> No episode of creation follows this brief demonstration of God's omnipotence. No more than the myth of the Yezidis<sup>71</sup> does the cosmogony of the *Ahl-i haqq* contain any gnostic motif.

The situation of the Mandaean of Iraq and Iran is quite different from that of Shiite sects. Like the Jews, the Christians, and the Zoroastrians, they are "people of the book" (*ahl al-kitāb*). Their language is an eastern Aramaic dialect that came into being in lower Babylonia and is related to the upper Babylonian dialect of the Talmud.<sup>72</sup> Their writings are polemical toward Islam, Christianity, and especially Judaism.<sup>73</sup>



Mandaean theogonies are various and contradictory.<sup>74</sup> Mandaean dualism is directly borrowed from Manichaeism. It is based on the opposition between the world of Light and Life and the world of Darkness. Darkness is either coeternal with Light or younger than it. Darkness contains the terrifying Hēwāt/Rūhā (*hēwāt* hints at her shape of beast or reptile), Dark or Muddy Water, the Dragons and the evil Rebels. The King of Darkness is the son of the archdemoness Rūhā. He is also called Snake, Dragon, Monster, Giant, Lord of the World. A tractate of the *Right Ginza*<sup>75</sup> borrows from Manichaeism the formidable appearance of the King of Darkness: he has the head of a lion, the body of a dragon, the wings of an eagle, the sides of a turtle, the hands and feet of a monster (see chapter 6 below). Mandaean cosmogonies oscillate between radical and monarchianist dualism. Mandaism is a precious resource, in so far as it incorporates many authentic gnostic and Manichaean motifs in a kind of unique, undigested patchwork made up of pieces of Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam, in which predominates the gnostic polemical tone toward the cosmic Rulers of the World, the Planets, and the Signs of the Zodiac—all children of Rūhā.

Yet the contention of the German school of history of religions, kept up by a number of modern scholars, that Mandaeism would represent not only a relatively recent blend of religious themes borrowed from all possible quarters but at the same time an example of “pre-Christian Gnosis” is totally unverifiable. Even the most ancient layers of Mandaeism, which are not gnostic at all but simply Jewish Christian and baptist, cannot be much older than Manichaeism.

Nothing concerning early Gnosticism—its origin, chronology, mythology—can be inferred from Mandaeism. Yet a contact between Gnosticism and Mandaeism in its present form took place at some point, probably after the IIIrd or IVth century, which is not the case as far as any Shiite sects are concerned. Any resemblances between Shiite doctrines and Gnosticism, as far as they exist—and they are dim indeed—are due to similar mind processes, yet starting from largely different premises.

## 6. East and West: A Common History?

If the data furnished by the Byzantine writer Peter of Sicily, monk and higoumen, are correct, the sect of the Paulicians, a popular derivate of Marcionism (see chapter 7 below), was constituted in the VIIth century.

Peter of Sicily was sent in 869 by the Byzantine Emperor Basil I to Tibrikē or Tephrik (Tephrikē) on the upper Euphrates River on a concil-

iatory mission to the Paulician chief Chrysokeir during a period when the military power of the Paulicians, allies of the Moslems, had reached an unpleasant climax. In 867 or 868 Chrysokeir had raided the city of Ephesus, making the Church of Saint John into a stable for his horses. Peter of Sicily stayed in Tibrikē nine months without making any progress. Basil was forced to undertake military action in 870, which ended up in disaster in front of the walls of Tibrikē. Yet two years later (872) his son-in-law brilliantly defeated the Paulician army; Chrysokeir was beheaded by a bounty hunter. One century later the Emperor John Tsimisces deported many Paulicians to the province of Thrace (now Bulgaria), around the fortress of Philippopolis. Naturally scholars jumped to the conclusion that they must have been the ancestors of the Bogomils, but the matter is not that simple. In exchange for their military support, the Paulicians were granted religious toleration, but their loyalty was mediocre. During the Epirus campaign against the Normands (1081) about twenty-five hundred Paulicians deserted, and toleration was revoked. The Emperor Alexis I Comnenos, later a notorious persecutor of the Bogomils, intervened personally at Philippopolis to perform mass conversions to orthodoxy. The rest was accomplished by Jesuits in the XVIIth century.

A certain conflation of the Paulicians described by Peter of Sicily with certain "Paulicians," Armenian adoptionists, must have taken place early, for Peter ascribes the founding of the sect of the Paulicians to a certain Paul of Samosata and his brother John, sons of a "Manichaean" woman called Callinice. This Paul must be the heresiarch Paul, bishop of Samosata, a refined adoptionist of the IIIrd century.

The actual founder of the Paulicians was probably a certain Constantine of Mananali on the upper Euphrates (north of Samosata), who received, during the reign of Constans II (641-68) a New Testament (orthodox canon) from a Syrian deacon who was passing by. Heresy, declares Peter, enouncing the common opinion held by his Church for nearly two thousand years, begins when lay people start reading and commenting on the Scriptures. Constantine took the name of one of Paul's disciples (Silvanus), a tradition that was to be kept up by all Paulician leaders and that seems to indicate that someone had simply introduced him to the basic principles of Marcionite New Testament exegesis. (Paul had been Marcion's only hero.)

The Paulicians were persecuted, adherents forced to move often from place to place. Then the sect split and the remaining branch settled near Antioch in Pisidia, knowing its best times under a particularly gifted heresiarch, a certain Sergius-Tychicus, who led for about thirty-five years. Prosecuted for terrorist actions performed in the province of New



Caesarea, the Paulicians were forced to flee the Byzantine Empire and take refuge in Moslem territory with the emir of Melitene, who offered them the village of Argaoun. The collaborative incursions of Sergius and the Moslems doubled in intensity after the former's death in 835, when the leader of the Paulicians became a certain Karbeas, former captain of the imperial guard in the Theme of Anatolia, who had deserted with five thousand soldiers. The most glorious times of the Paulician state were reached under his son-in-law Chrysokeir, and so was its abrupt end.

Superficially, Bogomils and Paulicians have a few things in common, yet their doctrines show no serious relation. Contrary to Paulicianism, Bogomilism does not assert that this world is produced by a second principle. Despite the presence of an apparently bizarre myth, the premises of Bogomilism seem orthodox, yet the ensuing anthropological and ethical consequences have heavy dualistic undertones. The movement deserves to be called pseudodualistic (see chapter 8 below).

Bogomilism was noted for the first time in Bulgaria around 950; after 972 it was the object of a long refutation by a priest Cosmas. Nothing is known about its founder, the priest Bogomil. At the beginning of the XIth century the heresy was present in the Theme of Opsikion in Asia Minor, where the heretics were called *phoundaites*, from Latin *funda*, "bag," borrowed in Greek. These bag-people (Bulgarian *torbeshi*) were beggars, collecting alms in bags. They called themselves Christians. Both medieval heresiologists and modern scholars derive Bogomilism's beliefs, for obscure reasons, from Messalianism.

During Alexis Comnenos's reign, Bogomils had settled in Constantinople. The emperor lured their leader, a pious man called Basil, into a nasty trap: he pretended to contemplate conversion and had Basil spill out all the secrets of his faith while a secretary, hidden behind a curtain, recorded everything, in the presence of the dignitaries of the empire. Embittered and hardened by such guile, Basil refused to retract and was burned at the stake.

Influential Bogomil churches still existed in 1167 in Constantinople, in Bulgaria, and in a territory that Italian sources call Sclavonia—probably Bosnia on the Dalmatian coast, where heterodox Christians, mentioned for the first time in 1199, ended up thirty years later constituting a powerful church. Unfortunately their doctrine is known to us only from late sources (XIVth–XVth century), which attribute to it radical dualism. On the contrary, according to the earlier heresiologists, the church of the "Slavs" professed a monarchianist doctrine similar to the Bogomils'.

If the Bosnians had been radical dualists in the XIIth century, the riddle of Catharism would be solved. But since they were not, it subsists.

As a matter of fact, the Cathars belonged to two quite different groups: one that was simply Bogomil, and another one that preached a radical dualism of intellectual origin, made up of a concoction of Origenism and Manichaeism, with much more of the former than the latter. The two types of Catharism may not share common doctrines but they have similar ethics, stemming from Bogomilism. Radical Catharism was probably fashioned in the Byzantine Empire; the Byzantine priest Nicetas, who visited Provence in 1167, already belonged to the radical order of Drugunthia-Dragovitsa.

The route followed by Bogomilism into Western Europe is supposedly via the Dalmatian coast into Venice, Lombardy, Piedmont, Provence, and into France (Provence at that time was not a territory of the French crown). Two isolated episodes at the beginning of the XIth century may already indicate the penetration of Catharism. In 1143 Cathars were at Cologne. By the mid-XIIth century their northern center was in the province of Champagne, at Mont-Aimé in the region of Vertus.<sup>76</sup> Guibert de Nogent had already signaled a heresy similar to Catharism in 1114 in the Soissonais.<sup>77</sup>

In 1167 the famous Cathar "council" of Saint-Félix-du-Lauragais took place in the presence of *papas* Nicetas, Bogomil bishop of Constantinople, whom the Westerners call *papa* (pope) by analogy (*papas* meaning simply "priest" in Greek). Nicetas confirmed the Cathar bishops for the dioceses of France (Robert d'Épernon) and Albi (Sicard Cellier); reconsoled (*consolamentum* was the name of the Cathar investiture, as we will see) Marc, bishop of Lombardy, who passed from the Bulgarian order (Bogomilism) to the order of Drugunthia-Dragovitsa (radical dualism); and created three new bishops: Bernard Raimond for the diocese of Toulouse, Guiraud Mercier for Carcassonne, and Raimond de Casals for Agen.<sup>78</sup>

In Lombardy, monarchianist dualism proved much stronger than the radical doctrine (see chapter 9 below). After the Cathar organization was destroyed in Provence by a crusade and the fall of the stronghold of Montségur on 16 March 1244, only about two hundred "perfects" ("parfaits") of the radical church remained. At the beginning of the XIVth century, in spite of the fearsome Inquisition, the notary Pierre Authié was intensely active in South France. He had received the *consolamentum* in Lombardy, probably in the church "of the French," and had become monarchian. His doctrine has almost nothing to do with the gloomy radical dualism of the Albigenses one century before.

The fate of the Italian Cathars became problematic after 1300. Tracked down mercilessly, they fled to Sicily or disappeared in the

Piedmontese Alps. They are not mentioned any more after 1412.<sup>79</sup> Jean Duvernoy sees a connection between the emigration of the Cathars to Lombardy and the sudden appearance of the famous Lombard bankers in the XIVth century.<sup>80</sup>

## 7. Jewish Gnosticism?

It was one of Gershom Scholem's favorite ideas that early Jewish mysticism was a form of Gnosticism.<sup>81</sup> It is easy to see that this is not so: multiplication of heavenly angels, watchwords, and seals is something some gnostic texts have in common with Merkabah mysticism, yet it is neither gnostic nor Jewish. It is common Hellenistic currency that circulates among the magical papyri as well. If we were inclined to search for "origins," the late Egyptian derivative of the Pyramid and Coffin texts known as "The Book of the Dead" is probably the closest we could get.<sup>82</sup>

Unfortunately the relation between Jewish mysticism and Gnosticism became one of Scholem's *idées fixes*, leading him to the invention of a "gnostic tradition" that would lead, through Bogomilism and Catharism, to the early Kabbalists of Provence and to the XIth-century book *Bahir*, which features God as "bearer of the cosmic potencies . . . hypostatized as aeons."<sup>83</sup> Yet *nothing* from the fragments of the *Bahir* commented upon by Scholem himself, or translated in English by others,<sup>84</sup> justifies such interpretation. The organization of the world, or humanity, as a tree is an ancient (and banal) analogue or metaphor. Plato spoke of humanity as a tree rooted in heaven. Nowhere do gnostics—who otherwise speculate widely—conceive of God or the world or the Anthropos or the like in terms of a tree of aeons, although they obviously develop contradictory theories concerning the trees of Paradise. The *middoth*, attributes or Powers of God, are not gnostic aeons any more than Philonic Neoplatonic *dynameis*. And the traces of "two Sophias"—an upper and a lower—are illusory.

This being said, it is not surprising to find in the Kabbalistic school of Isaac Luria (1534–1572)—the Holy Lion ('Ari ha-Qadosh) of Safed, whose teachings were mainly preserved by his disciple Hayyim Vital (1534–1620)—some reflections that at first sight have a gnostic flavor.

Luria's doctrine is extremely complex.<sup>85</sup> A few things about it are commonly known, such as God's withdrawal (*tsimtsûm*, "contraction") in himself in order to free space for creation (*tehiru*), or the "breaking of the vessels" (*shevirat ha-kelim*)—that is, the interruption of godly procession and the invasion of the spiritual "channels" by matter, which leads

to the appearance of Evil: the *qelipot*, shards or "shells" of the spiritual channels fallen down in the void of space. Yet out of this initial picture, a whole doctrine develops that the gnostics never imagined.

The world will exist as long as there are souls of the chosen people to be saved, that is, drawn out of the *qelipot*.<sup>86</sup> This happens in only one way: when the just copulate and have children. Thus procreation and reincarnation are positively valued; the "gate of birth" is the only one that recovers great souls engulfed in the shells, for the shells detain not the lesser souls but the greater ones: the more spiritual a soul, the more she is ensnared by Evil, which is likewise spiritual. More than one soul, or "spark" of a soul, can be obtained by a human being.

The number of souls of Israel is 600,000. When all are recovered, the world will end. Many were the speculations on the number of souls, or seats in heaven. They compare nicely with an Augustinian frame of mind, for it was the theologian of Hippo who asserted that the number of seats for the Righteous in heaven is equal with the number of places freed by the fallen angels. Calculations of the kind were current in Bogomilism and Catharism, but not so in Gnosticism. As for reincarnation, it is such a widespread idea that half of the people of the earth share it. It is easy to fall within this half without being gnostic, or Hindu. Some among the gnostics fall together with Lurian Kabbalists, but so do many Melanesian, Polynesian, and North American natives (see Chapter 4 below).

It is impossible to prove either that Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) did or did not have any acquaintance with Kabbalah. For him the Godhead is *Ungrund*. Without his Son, his image is sinister: it is that of the Devil. It is in Christ only that original Darkness becomes God.<sup>87</sup> The body is "frozen desire."<sup>88</sup> God has two expressions: a frightening one, the Old Testament divinity who is only just; and the true God, who is the God of love, not of justice.<sup>89</sup> The Old Testament god is actually the Devil.<sup>90</sup>

Böhme's cosmology has three principles: Darkness, Light, and their mixture.<sup>91</sup> The creation of the world proceeds in two steps, through two demiurges: the first one, called *Verbum fiat*, is a Saturnian entity; the other one, creator of the visible world and World Soul, is the angry god of the Old Testament.<sup>92</sup> The two-stage cosmology presupposes a two-stage anthropology: "Adam is created with two bodies. One is a body of light, perfect image of the human form represented from all eternity by Wisdom and once possessed by Lucifer. The other one is a body of darkness. It resembles the spirit of this world, the spirit of the macrocosm."<sup>93</sup>

Böhme is an important link in a theory that wants to bring Gnosticism very close to us. Here we will examine only that part of it that is

based on historical continuity (the rest will be dealt with in chapter 11 below). Ernst Topitsch believes that, more than any other current of thought at the dawn of modernity, it was German evangelical theology that kept up many Neoplatonic and gnostic motifs carried over by Christian Kabbalah. This powerful combination still formed, until a very recent epoch, the German Ideology, a sort of "family inheritance" which only a very few German philosophers ever abandoned. In the transmission of "gnostic" motifs to the young Hegel, Topitsch assigns a key role to the Pietist Theosophist Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782; see chapter 11 below).<sup>94</sup> If one contemporary philosopher drew largely upon the old "German Ideology," that was certainly Martin Heidegger. The discussion of Heidegger's presumed Gnosticism will be among the last in this book.

Here our brief chronology of dualism comes to an end. The *history* of dualism does in no way form the object of the present study. This research is exclusively concerned with the mythical structures of Western dualistic trends, from Gnosticism to Catharism, and with the discussion concerning the existence of modern Gnosticism. In fact, the debate surrounding Gnosticism and modern nihilism still belongs to the system of Western dualism and can be analyzed as a sequel to it, although a polarity inversion has taken place in the basic rule of production of nihilistic myths and moods (see chapter 11 below). This inversion of polarity accounts for the main difference between Gnosticism and existentialistic nihilism: the former is excessively optimistic, the latter is utterly pessimistic.

## Notes

1. Definitions of dualism have been plentifully produced by Ugo Bianchi, from the first edition of his classic *Il Dualismo religioso: Saggio storico ed etnologico* (L'Erma di Brettschneider: Rome, 1958) to the article "Dualism" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Macmillan: New York, 1987). Other definitions may be found in the second edition of Bianchi's *Dualismo* (1983), in his *Selected Essays on Gnosticism, Dualism and Mysteriosophy* (Brill: Leiden, 1978), and in his *Prometeo Orfeo Adamo: Tematiche religiose sul destino, il male, la salvezza* (Ateneo & Bizzarri: Rome, 1976).
2. J. B. Russell, *Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages* (Univ. of California Press: Berkeley, 1965), 188–91.
3. Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (Continuum: New York, 1983), 104.
4. Ugo Bianchi (*Il Dualismo*, 194–97; *Selected Essays*, 75–85) confines the original area of dualism to central and northeastern Asia, northern Eurasia, Australia, Oceania, and Tierra



- del Fuego. From Asia dualism spread to North America, Europe, and Africa. This is a genetic view that may be superfluous. Because of the predictable character of the dualistic response to the world, it need not be confined to any specific world area.
5. On the Trickster, the latest bibliography is included in the articles in *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, vol. 15, by L. E. Sullivan, "Tricksters: An Overview," 45-46; R. Pelton, "African Tricksters," 46-48; M. Linscott Ricketts, "North American Tricksters," 48-51; L. E. Sullivan, "Mesoamerican and South American Tricksters," 51-53.
  6. According to such a definition, South America—with the exception of Tierra del Fuego—was considered exempt from dualism. Yet dualistic myths having a woman as protagonist seem to exist in this area as well; see my "Feminine versus Masculine: The Sophia Myth and the Origins of Feminism," in H. G. Kippenberg, ed., *Struggles of Gods* (Mouton: Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, 1984), 65-98.
  7. See esp. M. P. Dragomanov, *Notes on the Slavic Religio-Ethical Legends: The Dualistic Creation of the World (1892-94)*, trans. E. W. Count (Mouton: The Hague, 1961); and Jordan Ivanov, *Liros et légendes bogomiles* (1925), trans. M. Ribeyrol (Maisonneuve-Larose: Paris, 1976).
  8. Dragomanov, *Notes*, 21, n. 6. Obviously North American dualistic myths could be explained as a result of the migration of the ancestors of American natives from Asia, yet this would not account for the absence of dualism from South America.
  9. See Oskar Dähnhardt, ed., *Natursagen: Eine Sammlung naturdeutender Sagen Märchen Fabeln und Legenden*, vol. I (1907); *Sagen zum Alten Testament* (reprint, Burt Franklin: New York, 1970), esp. 1-36. The last scholars to analyze these legends in a diffusionistic perspective were Mircea Eliade, in *Zalmoxis, the Vanishing God: Comparative Studies in the Religions and Folklore of Dacia and Eastern Europe*, trans. W. R. Trask (Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1972), 76ff, and Hannjost Lixfeld, *Gott und Teufel als Weltschöpfer* (Fink: Munich, 1971).
  10. Especially in my books *Psychanodia I: A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Brill: Leiden, 1983), 16-23, and *Expériences de l'extase, de l'Hellénisme au Moyen Age* (Payot: Paris, 1984), 9-10, hereinafter referred to as *Exp.*
  11. Carsten Colpe, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule: Darstellung und Kritik ihres Bildes vom gnostischen Erlösermythus* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1961).
  12. I expressed my viewpoint—which is, I believe, the viewpoint of a whole generation of scholarship—on recent representatives of the German school in a series of articles and book reviews. I will spare the reader the details of this debate.
  13. Ugo Bianchi, ed., *The Origins of Gnosticism* (Brill: Leiden, 1967).
  14. Simone Pétrement, *Le Dualisme chez Platon, les Gnostiques et les Manichéens* (1947; reprint, G. Monfort: Brionne, 1982).
  15. Bianchi, *Il Dualismo; Selected Essays*.
  16. Raffaele Pettazzoni, *I Misteri: Saggio di una teoria storico-religiosa* (Bologna, 1923).
  17. Bianchi's typology is certainly the most thoroughgoing morphology of dualism by the method of invariants. Unfortunately it is not flawless. The Italian scholar has ascertained that dualism in its multifarious occurrences is characterized by certain constants: It can be radical versus mitigated, eschatological (or linear) versus dialectical (cyclical), antic cosmic versus pro cosmic. Radical dualism entails the opposition of two coeternal principles, mitigated dualism entails the appearance of the second principle at a certain point in time. Eschatological dualism entails the destruction of the negative principle at doomsday, cyclical dualism the resumption of the original situation in a new cycle. Antic cosmic dualism entails the devaluation of the world, pro cosmic does not. Although Bianchi also considers the pair of opposites antisomatic versus prosomatic, he fails to use it consistently in his typology. Yet there are examples of dualisms that do not devalue the body. As we will see further (chapter 9), Origen's dualism is prosomatic. To be exhaustive, Bianchi should have coined one more dichotomy: anti-hylic (against matter) versus pro-hylic.

Based on this table of binary oppositions, Bianchi defined individual forms of dualism by distinctive traits as follows:

- Zoroastrianism: radical, eschatological, procosmic;
- Orphics, Empedocles, Heraclitus: radical, dialectical;
- Hindu dualism (ātman versus māyā): radical, dialectical;
- Plato: radical, dialectical, procosmic;
- Gnosticism: mitigated, eschatological, anticosmic;
- Manichaeism: radical, anticosmic;
- Neoplatonism: mitigated, eschatological, procosmic;
- Mandaeanism: radical;
- Bogomilism: mitigated, eschatological, anticosmic;
- Cathars (radical): radical, anticosmic;
- Cathars (monarchianist): mitigated, anticosmic.

Some traits could not be completed either because of lack of information or lack of certainty.

18. The versions of the Zurvanite myth have been presented and analyzed in R. C. Zaehner's classic *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1955). A repertoire of popular legends featuring an ignorant creator god was given in my article "A Dualistic Myth in Rumanian Folklore," *Dialogue* 4/5 (1980), 45-50.
19. The historicocultural (*Kulturhistorisch*) school or "Vienna School" led by Father Wilhelm Schmidt held the idea of the development of religion according to "culture-cycles" (*Kulturkreise*). Each phase of material civilization comes with its own religious contents.
20. This myth has been analyzed in my *Exp.*, 49-50.
21. W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (London, 1952).
22. See my "L'Ascension de l'âme" dans les mystères et hors des mystères," in U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren, eds., *La Soteriologia dei culti orientali nell'Impero romano* (Brill: Leiden, 1982), 276-302.
23. Bianchi uses the word mysteriosophy, coined by the Italian scholar Nicola Turchi, to define these peculiar speculations that flourish around the Greek mysteries.
24. As to why the human mind may be tempted to produce dualistic solutions, we advanced a hypothesis in the French edition of this book, based on the abundance of dual hierarchical classifications and on the bicamerality of the human brain, with an unbalanced diversification of functions, which also explains the preeminence of the right hand over the left, on which dual classifications are based; see Rodney Needham, ed., *Right and Left: Essay on Dual Symbolic Classification* (Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1973); *Symbolic Classification* (Goodyear: Santa Monica, CA, 1979); and Julian Jaynes's highly controversial book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1976).
25. The literature on Western dualism is not overwhelming. There is so far no comprehensive study of the connection between late antique (Gnostics, Marcionites, Manichaeans) and medieval (Paulicians, Bogomils, Cathars) trends. The first general work on medieval dualistic movements belongs to Ignaz von Döllinger, *Beiträge zur Sekten-geschichte des Mittelalters*, vol. 1: *Geschichte der gnostisch-manichäischen Sekten im frühen Mittelalter*; vol. 2: *Dokumente vornehmlich zur Geschichte der Valdensier und Katharer* (1890; reprint, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1968). Commonly read and still in print is the short *Medieval Manichees* (1949) by Steven Runciman.

Two other general presentations of medieval dualism exist, but they do not add much to research: Raoul Manselli, *L'Eresia del male* (Morano: Turin, 1963); and Milan Loos, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Academia-M. Nijhoff: Prague, 1974).

Excellent studies on the relation between Bogomilism and the other medieval trends are contained in Dmitri Obolensky's *Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (1948;



Hall: Twickenham, 1972); and in Henri-Charles Puech's conclusion to *Le Traité contre les Bogomiles de Cosmas le Prêtre*, trans. A. Vaillant with a study by H.-Ch. Puech (Imprimerie Nationale-Droz: Paris, 1945). Puech supplemented this study with an article, "Catharisme médiéval et bogomilisme," in his *Sur le Manichéisme et autres essais* (Flammarion: Paris, 1979), 395-427.

The latest biographical survey was performed by Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, "Sur l'histoire des influences du gnosticisme," in B. Aland, ed., *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1978), 316-50.

There is one attempt, incomplete and inconclusive, to mutually compare the mythologies of dualistic trends: Hans Söderberg, *La Religion des Cathares* (Uppsala, Sweden, 1949).

26. Hubert Cancik, "Gnostiker in Rom: Zur Religionsgeschichte der Stadt Rom im 2. Jahrhundert nach Christus," in Jacob Taubes, ed., *Gnosis und Politik* (Fink-Schöningh: Munich and Paderborn, 1984), 163-84, esp. 179.
27. See Cancik, "Gnostiker in Rom," 172.
28. See Henri Crouzel, in U. Bianchi and H. Crouzel, eds., *Arché et Telos: L'Antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa* (Vita e Pensiero: Milan, 1981), 272.
29. *Enneads* II.9; see my *Gnosticismo e pensiero moderno: Hans Jonas* (L'Erma di Bretschneider: Rome, 1985), 112ff.
30. Gilles Quispel, "Gnosis," in M. J. Vermaseren, ed., *Die orientalischen Religionen in Römerreich* (Brill: Leiden, 1981), 416.
31. For Sabaeans see the learned article by Michel Tardieu, "Sabiens coraniques et 'Sabiens' de Harran," *Journal Asiatique* 274 (1986), 1-39.
32. *The Cologne Mani Codex* (P.Colon. inv. nr. 4780) "Concerning the Origin of His Body," ed. and trans. Ron Cameron and Arthur J. Dewey (Scholars Press: Missoula, MT, 1979), 13.2, p. 15f.
33. L. Koenen, "Das Datum der Offenbarung und Geburt Manis," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 8 (1971), 247-50.
34. M 47 in Parthian, trans. in L. J. R. Ort, *Mani: A Religio-Historical Description of His Personality* (Brill: Leiden, 1967), 145.
35. M 566 in Parthian, Ort, *Mani*, 50-52.
36. See Alexander Böhlig, *Gnosis III: Der Manichäismus* (Artemis: Zurich and Munich, 1980), 26.
37. Coptic Homilies 60.10ff.
38. The interpretations of this date vary: February 14, 276 (H. H. Schaeder); March 2, 274 (W. B. Henning); February 26, 277 (S. H. Taqizadeh). See Ort, *Mani*, 154-56.
39. Ort, *Mani*, 184-87.
40. See Prosper Alfarc, *Les Écritures manichéennes*, vol. 2: *Étude analytique* (Nourry: Paris, 1919), 56ff.
41. *Confessions* V.19.
42. Prosper Alfarc, *L'Évolution intellectuelle de Saint Augustin* (Nourry: Paris, 1918), 88-89.
43. Alfarc, *Écritures*, vol. 2, 66.
44. Tardieu, "Sabiens coraniques," 23-24, n. 105.
45. Peter Bryder, *The Chinese Transformation of Manichaeism: A Study of Chinese Manichaean Terminology* (Plus Ultra: Löberöd, 1985), 1-11.
46. See the excellent presentation by É.-Ch. Babut, *Priscillien et le Priscillianisme* (Champion: Paris, 1909).
47. See Antoine Guillaumont, "Messaliens," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 10, pt. 2 (1979), col. 1074-83.
48. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on the Heresies* 22.4 (between 363 and 373), and Epiphanius, *Pan.* 80 (376-77), mentioning their presence in Antioch and their Mesopotamian origin.
49. Guillaumont, "Messaliens," cols. 1074-79.
50. Guillaumont, "Messaliens," col. 1080.

51. Guillaumont, "Messaliens," col. 1081.
52. Reinhardt Staats, "Messalianism and Antimesalianism in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Virginitate*," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* 2 (1983), 27-44, esp. 27.
53. Hermann Dörries, *Die Theologie des Makarios/Symeon* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1978). For further discussion see Werner Strothmann, ed., *Makarios-Symposium über das Böse* (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1983).
54. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 21-22.
55. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 23.
56. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 30-39.
57. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 38.
58. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 78-93.
59. Dörries, *Theologie des Makarios/Symeon*, 26-27.
60. See Babut, *Priscillien*, 44-51 and 253-90; his thesis was entirely confirmed by Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Ávila* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1976).
61. See the beautiful book of Antoine Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia gnostika" d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et les Syriens* (Seuil: Paris, 1962), 16-66.
62. It is not easy to establish to what extent Origen's own doctrine was meant in this debate. Choosing between those who make Origen into a dualist close to the gnostics and those who make him into a perfectly "orthodox" Father (orthodox, of course, by criteria set centuries after his death) is difficult simply because the fall of the Intellectuals in Origen, determined by the exercise of their own free will, seems no more "dualistic" than the fall of Lucifer in Augustine, likewise caused by free will.
63. Heinz Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis: Die extreme Schia und die 'Alawiten* (Artemis: Zurich, 1982), 14-15.
64. Heinz Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismā'īliya: Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis* (Steiner: Wiesbaden, 1978), 18-138.
65. Halm, *Kosmologie*, 80.
66. Halm, *Kosmologie*, 146.
67. Halm, *Kosmologie*, 147-48.
68. Mohammed Mokri, "Introduction" to Nur Ali-Shah Elahi, *L'Ésotérisme kurde*, trans. M. Mokri (Albin Michel: Paris, 1966), 9.
69. Mokri, trans., *L'Ésotérisme kurde*, 19-20.
70. Mokri, trans., *L'Ésotérisme kurde*, 22.
71. For a different opinion, though, see the article "I miti cosmogonici degli Yezidi," in Giulia Sfameni Gasparro's *Gnostica et Hermetica* (Ateneo: Rome, 1982).
72. See Kurt Rudolph, *Die Mandäer I: Prolegomena. Das Mandäerproblem* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1960), 13. Rudolph's trilogy is still the best synthetic presentation of Mandaean beliefs, despite its very idiosyncratic interpretations. Its other two volumes are: *Die Mandäer II: Der Kult* (1961) and *Theogonie, Kosmogonie und Anthropogonie in den mandäischen Schriften: Eine literarische und traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (1965).
73. Rudolph, *Mandäer I*, 47-55.
74. Rudolph, *Theogonie*, 78, mentions no less than eleven different theogonies.
75. XII.6, in Rudolph, *Theogonie*, 92.
76. Jean Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme: L'Histoire des Cathares* (Privat: Toulouse, 1979), 116ff.
77. The evidence has been contested by Robert I. Moore (*The Origins of European Dissent* [Lane: London, 1977], 67) on the grounds that Guibert was an utterly unreliable witness. But the alternative then would have it that Guibert made up Catharism all by himself, relying only on his knowledge of ancient heresies. In a certain sense this is what the Byzantine monks had done, but they were professionals.
78. Duvernoy, 216-17.
79. See Arno Borst, *Die Katharer* (Stuttgart: 1953).
80. Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme*, 245-54. •

81. See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (JTS: New York, 1970).
82. See my book *Out of This World: A History of Otherworldly Journeys and Out-of-Body Experiences, from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Shambhala: Boston, 1991).
83. G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, trans. A. Arkush (Jewish Publication Society-Princeton Univ. Press: Princeton, NJ, 1987), 67.
84. *The Early Kabbalah*, ed. and introduction by Joseph Dan, trans. Ronald C. Kiener, preface by Moshe Idel (Paulist Press: New York, 1986), 57-69.
85. For a short summary, see Gershom Scholem's excellent book *Sabbatai Swi: The Mystical Messiah 1626-1676* (Princeton Univ. Press: Princeton, NJ, 1973).
86. Hayyim Vital, *On the Revolutions of the Soul (Sha'ar ha-gilgulim)*, trans. into Latin by Fr. Mercurius van Helmont, in Knorr von Rosenroth, *Cabbala denudata*, vol. 3; cf. Ernst Benz, in *Cahiers de l'Hermétisme: Kabbalistes chrétiens* (Albin Michel: Paris, 1979), 107 and n. 35. A French translation of this tractate, very poor, was published in 1903 by Edgar Jegut and reprinted by Les Éditions d'Aujourd'hui: Plan-de-la-Tour, 1984. François Secret published a corrected version of the same.
87. Pierre Deghaye, "La Sagesse dans l'oeuvre de Jacob Böhme," in *Cahiers de l'Hermétisme: Sophia ou l'Âme du Monde* (Albin Michel: Paris, 1983), 145-94, esp. 148.
88. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 163.
89. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 175.
90. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 164.
91. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 174.
92. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 169-76.
93. Deghaye, "La Sagesse," 181.
94. Ernst Topitsch, "Marxismus und Gnosis," in *Sozialphilosophie zwischen Ideologie und Wissenschaft* (Luchterhand: Neuwied and Berlin, 1966<sup>2</sup>), 261-96.

# Chapter 2

## Myths About Gnosticism: An Introduction

Gnosticism was the inaugural and most powerful  
of Deconstructions.

—HAROLD BLOOM, *Agon*, 1982

It has been fashionable for thirty years to begin every presentation of Gnosticism with the suspenseful story of the discovery, in December 1945, in the middle of a blood feud, of the mysterious jar deposited in a cave near the village of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt. The narrative, too many times told and retold, recedes now out of timeliness, expired from the short-term memory of humankind. Its best narrator remains James M. Robinson, the general editor of the English translation of the Codices,<sup>1</sup> who condensed it into a perfectly balanced script with black and white characters who seem to step out of a novella by Hemingway or a Humphrey Bogart movie.<sup>2</sup>

After the novelty of the discovery, and with the publication of every single bit of text by and about gnostics,<sup>3</sup> the euphoria faded away into preoccupation. But all of these materials are seriously in need of reassessment and new global interpretations that so far have failed to appear. Scholars seem not yet ready for synthesis. As the same James Robinson puts it, "In a sense the flood of new source material has so engrossed scholarly energy that our generation seems to be lost in the detail of translation and interpretation with the broader questions in part lost from view."<sup>4</sup>

What did the Nag Hammadi discovery teach us? I gave elsewhere an unintentionally entertaining survey of contradictory assessments of the find.<sup>5</sup> To summarize it briefly, one of the major opinions has it that the new Coptic Codices peremptorily demonstrate the existence of a pre-Christian Gnosticism of Near Eastern origin. The other holds that

the new material vindicates the heresiologists by showing that they had been very accurate in their reports, and shows without a shadow of a doubt that such a thing as a pre- or non-Christian Gnosticism is a German invention. If that much seems to be true, so is it true that a non-Christian Gnosticism, late as it may be (mid-IIIrd century?), certainly existed. As for a pre-Christian Gnosis, at the end of a painstaking analysis of the evidence, Edwin M. Yamauchi concluded: "Gnosticism with a fully articulated theology, cosmology, anthropology, and soteriology cannot be discerned clearly until the post-Christian era."<sup>6</sup> In other words, even if—as we will see—something like a Samaritan or Jewish "proto-Gnosticism" probably existed, full-blown Gnosticism comes, at its earliest, at the end of the 1st or the beginning of the 2nd century C.E. That much we knew long before Nag Hammadi, despite the systematic distortion of facts and chronologies in the legacy of the German school of history of religions.

Not unlike XVIIIth-century science, research on Gnosticism in the first half of our century (with the partial exception of Hans Jonas's beautiful existentialistic analysis in the first volume of *Gnosis and the Spirit of Late Antiquity*, 1934) was dominated by two concerns:

1. origins;
2. classification.

A history of research, undertaken elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> is beyond the scope of this book. Suffice it to say the German school of history of religions supplied complete theories concerning the "origins" of Gnosticism (and anything else) and painstaking classifications thereof, as monumental as useless, whose latest extrapolations are ungainly hypotheses concerning a "school" of Thomas the Apostle and the existence of a "Sethian" Gnosticism, still held with vigor in the works of a few idiosyncratic scholars.<sup>8</sup> Genetic claims have been deduced from classifications, and vice versa. Today it has become increasingly clear that such assumptions cannot be proven unless the scholar himself becomes a "gnostic"—that is, pretends to be in possession of secret knowledge that allows him or her to perceive the links between systems in such a way that they would yield information about actual gnostic groups. Such knowledge is by nature verifiable in no other way. A number of "gnostic" scholars of Gnosticism undoubtedly exist, as we noted elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> But their species seems to be declining under pressure from more rewarding directions of research.

In sketching here the main hypotheses concerning the origins of Gnosticism, we must observe from the outset that all of them are based

on a number of implicit, hidden assumptions that have nothing to do with Gnosticism in itself but with the world of the scholars of Gnosticism. The latter have their own "mythologies of history," to use here an expression applied by Quentin Skinner to political history. Whoever deals with them ought not trust unconditionally the illusion of objectivity they put forward but should exert to a reasonable extent the instrument of *Ideologiekritik* (criticism of ideology), uncovering the hidden assumptions *before* believing the overt ones, which are subordinated to the former and may in fact contradict them. Such an operation should never abandon the principle that *covert assumptions are prior and hierarchically superior to overt ones*. In other words, if the scholar claims that he is as impartial as the mechanic who takes apart the pieces of a motor and puts them together again yet at the same time makes an estimate as to the country of origin of the pieces and their age, his choice is by no means determined by his overt premise and promise of objectivity but by hidden assumptions of which he is as unaware as we are until we begin to be suspicious of them. A hermeneutics of suspicion may be reductive and perhaps unnecessary as far as religion itself is concerned, but it is certainly the only one that can responsibly be applied to scholars of religion in their historical setting.

A team of German historians has gone very far in uncovering the "mythologies of history" of their predecessors at the turn of the century and during the Weimar Republic. In plain words, we may ascertain that the secret desire of the German school of history of religion was to show the *Eastern origins of Western ideologies and institutions*, with Hellenistic Judaism, Gnosticism, and Christianity as late outcomes of the same. The candidate to play the "source" in the history of Western ideas was the most unlikely, but also the least understood, and therefore the easiest to manipulate in any direction: Iranian religion.

We could speculate endlessly upon the consequences of this hidden choice, energetically motivated by "objectivity"; in fact, it is possible if not probable that some scholars of the German school of history of religions already shared a number of premises made explicit by the *Völkische Bewegung* or Populist Movement at the beginning of the XXth century and later fully endorsed by the Nazis.<sup>10</sup> The German School of Religion was thus preparing the terrain for claims for an "Aryan Jesus," a Jesus who, in fact, was anti-Jewish. And some of the greatest scholars of the period—in first place Rudolf Bultmann himself, who by no means could be suspected of Nazi sympathies or anti-Semitism—were ensnared by the "objective" appearance of these lucubrations held by venerable colleagues and gave them authoritative support.



All might well have started as a genuine error of precursors in the history of dualism, such as Veselovskii, Dragomanov, and others, who, as shown in chapter 1, believed "Aryan" Iran to be the ultimate homeland of all dualism. This hypothesis first appealed to Wilhelm Anz,<sup>11</sup> and was resumed by Wilhelm Bousset a few years later,<sup>12</sup> leading to the main theory of Gnosticism developed by Bousset in his consequential *Major Problems of Gnosis* (1907),<sup>13</sup> on which most of the documentation of Hans Jonas's beautiful *Gnostic Religion* was based.<sup>14</sup>

Bousset's idea that gnostic dualism is entirely of Iranian origin became scholarly dogma with the help of some of the greatest scholars of the early XXth century: Albert Dieterich, Richard Reitzenstein, Joseph Kroll, Franz Cumont, Rudolf Bultmann, and others. Understandably it affected, if not infected, all comparative research for a long time and is still reproduced in manuals or in papers put together by dilettantes in need of quickly processed information, who stumble upon monstrous products of the German school of history of religions in some public library that bought their 1970s reprints.

Piece by piece, all the arguments of the German School of Religion have been refuted, largely by other German scholars after World War II.<sup>15</sup> As far as dualism is concerned, it became increasingly clear that Zoroastrian dualism, which was favorable to the world (procosmic), could hardly explain the appearance of gnostic anticosmic dualism; and that Zurvanite dualism, which devalues the intelligence of the good god Ohrmazd, was far too late to be made the origin of gnostic dualism.<sup>16</sup> Genetic hypotheses abandoned Iran in favor of Greece, Samaria, or Judaism itself.

For a time, Robert M. Grant's theory was fashionable, sponsored by the French patristic scholar Cardinal Jean Daniélou, according to which the root of gnostic dualism must be sought for in the dissatisfaction generated in certain Jewish circles by the fall of the Second Temple of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Later on, R. M. Grant abandoned it in favor of a stronger emphasis on Middle Platonic philosophical elements as primary components of Gnosticism.<sup>17</sup>

Both Simone Pétrement and Ugo Bianchi saw in ancient Greece the roots of anticosmic dualism; for them Gnosticism became an outcome of Hellenism, yet not as enounced in the famous formula of Adolf von Harnack, which called Gnosticism "eine akute Hellenisierung des Christentums," an acute hellenization of Christianity, but rather the opposite: an acute christianization of Hellenism.<sup>18</sup> Obviously the relation between (allegedly) early, Iranian Gnosticism and Christianity that had obsessed the German School of Religion and had received such an



unequivocal response from Rudolf Bultmann (Christianity is a variant of Gnosticism) continued to occupy the center of the debate. It will be impossible to dwell here on even a few of the controversies that follow this theme. In the United States the rather simplified thesis of the German school penetrated through the translation of Walter Schmithals's book *Gnosticism in Corinth*;<sup>19</sup> today scholars like James M. Robinson entirely reject it.<sup>20</sup> In general, the ranks of students of Bultmannian persuasion have been thinned out by age and increase in knowledge. And the complementary thesis of the Fourth Gospel as a gnostic product has not added very much to the entire debate.<sup>21</sup>

If dualism remains largely unexplained by inductive procedures, research on the origins of Gnosticism has lately explored two other main hypotheses: the Jewish and/or Samaritan background of Gnosticism.

Many are the scholars who favor the Jewish background hypothesis. Perhaps their most equilibrated and influential spokesman today is Birger A. Pearson, who maintains that Gnosticism represents a rebellion within Judaism, and therefore in many cases it rests upon rabbinical exegeses of biblical texts and haggadoth; and even when its direct links with Judaism come loose, Gnosticism is still largely inclined, by a basic anti-Judaic attitude, to speculate upon Jewish Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

An evolutionary hypothesis that would set the roots of Gnosticism in Samaria has recently been developed by Jarl E. Fossum;<sup>23</sup> it was sympathetically reviewed by us elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> It largely draws upon the existence of Samaritan and Jewish binitarian or ditheistic tendencies, according to which the world was not created by God but by an angel or Power. Such tendencies had already been explored by Alan F. Segal in a consequential book.<sup>25</sup> They were present in the philosophies of Philo and Numenius; yet they do not account for the patent enmity that links, and at the same time separates, the two gods of Gnosticism.

The quest for the origins of Gnosticism was not the only game played by modern scholarship. No later than the 1920s, awareness grew that the true problems of Gnosis were neither origins nor classifications. In 1924/25, H. H. Schaefer could thus write, criticizing his predecessor Wilhelm Bousset: "Bousset's book on the *Major Problems of Gnosis* does not actually highlight any such 'problem'; it does not deal with 'problems' at all, but with some more or less fortuitous pieces of tradition and symbols that constitute the imaginary expression of those problems. It should be called not *Major Problems*, but something like *Major Style*

*Elements of Gnosis*.<sup>26</sup> With Hans Jonas (1934), the first attempt was made to define the essence of Gnosticism by invariants.

In the early 1930s, invariants were not yet fashionable. The definition of the phoneme in linguistics as an "invariant" goes back to N. S. Trubetskoy (1939) and was further refined by another linguist, Roman Jakobson, who introduced the concept of "distinctive traits" or atomic components—the building blocks of the phoneme as invariant. The first to apply Jakobson's insight assiduously, although not quite correctly, to myth was Claude Lévi-Strauss in the late 1940s.<sup>27</sup> Although later on Lévi-Strauss developed a concept of "transformation" that hardly resembles phonology, surprisingly enough his early thesis was largely followed by scholars of Gnosticism, who tried to establish a set of "distinctive features" according to which Gnosticism, Christianity, Platonism, Judaism, and other religions would be phoneme-like "invariants."

Hans Jonas recognized that Gnosticism was dualistic and thereby different from nondualistic trends; he also established that it was anti-cosmic and not procosmic, and that it came in two variants: mitigated and radical. The mitigated type he called Syro-Egyptian, and the radical, that is, Manichaeism, he called Iranian. Another feature of Gnosticism established by Jonas concerned the so-called vertical system or Alexandrian system, which Gnosticism shares with Neoplatonism, consisting of a hierarchy of principles, the lower always deriving from the higher.<sup>28</sup> Characteristic of "mitigated" mythical scenarios was what Jonas called devolution—that is, a catastrophic event that at some point interrupted the smooth expansion of being. Yet, as Ugo Bianchi has shown, such a "devolutionary" event is also constitutive of Platonism at all times.

One more trait was added by the German scholar Hans-Martin Schenke, who noticed that Gnosticism contained the idea of consubstantiality between the spiritual part of human beings and the transcendent divinity. The anthropic principle is thereby denied: humans do not belong to this world, nor do they conform to it. Although a few other distinctive features have been devised by scholars like Carsten Colpe and Ugo Bianchi, the definition of Gnosticism as invariant is already complete when one states that "Gnosticism is a dualistic religion, characterized by anticosmic dualism (either mitigated or radical; if mitigated, then it includes a vertical devolutionary system) and by the idea of consubstantiality of humankind with its noncosmic origins."

This definition is unfortunately too generic. One main problem stems from the concept of dualism itself: If a subordinated divine power

that runs amok creates an inferior world that nevertheless bears resemblance to the upper world, is this dualism? And if it is, what is the difference between it and Christian doctrine? Yet some gnostic doctrines, whether we define them as dualistic or not, are not "anticosmic": they limit themselves to ascribing low intelligence and power to the cause that created the human ecosystem (the universe). And, finally, Platonism also conceives of humans as literally rooted in divinity through their Intellect and are thus consubstantial with it. Then what is the usefulness of "distinctive traits" if they are unable to tell us the difference between Gnosticism, Platonism, and Christianity?

As shown above, such attempts at defining Gnosticism as an invariant have not been entirely fruitless, since they have enabled us eventually to develop a simple system of oppositions that permits a rapid survey of differences between Judaism, Platonism, and Christianity on the one hand and Gnosticism on the other. Judaism, Platonism, and Christianity embody the hidden assumptions of Hellenistic culture in so far as they subscribe to the principle of an intelligent and good cause that created the world and share the anthropic principle. Gnosticism, by contrast, is a phenomenon of counterculture in so far as it denies both the principle of ecosystemic intelligence and the anthropic principle.

The most assiduous partisan of the invariant methodology is undoubtedly the Italian scholar Ugo Bianchi, who ascribed a number of distinctive features to the entire system of Western dualism, from Gnosticism to Catharism: anticosmism, antisomatism, metensomatosis (reincarnation), encratism, docetism, often vegetarianism. In-depth analysis shows that these traits may indeed characterize some Western trends but do not characterize others. Bianchi's attempt to formulate a genetic hypothesis based on distinctive traits proved especially problematic, as will become increasingly clear in what follows. Indeed, Bianchi could trace back most traits of Western dualism to the ancient Greek Orphics, to whom Plato was much indebted, and conclude that, in some way, Gnosticism derives from Orphic speculations.<sup>29</sup>

We have shown in the preceding chapter that speculative systems are composed of certain "bricks." These may be either shuffled in fortuitous arrangements or combined according to certain hierarchical criteria. At the turn of the century, one of the greatest architects ever, Frank Lloyd Wright of Chicago, had the quite remarkable idea of building houses that would be the enlarged image of a colored cubes game with which he had played as a child. That game can still be purchased at the Wright Home and Studio, and it delivers indeed the secret of the unmistakable harmony of Wright's edifices and objects. If our doctrinal

"bricks" were Wright's colored cubes, we could see how they interlace in strange patterns. For they work much like a set of cubes, or a perforated ribbon in the ancestor of modern computers, called a Turing machine after its unhappy inventor, the great cybernetician Alan Turing.

How do such "bricks" appear? They are the outcome of simple mind processes. Let us take, for example, metempsychosis—the belief that the preexistent soul of humans would be reembodied (this is the literal meaning of the word *metempsychosis*) in new bodies. A follower of the German school of history of religions, the Belgian scholar Franz Cumont, spent a long time trying to demonstrate that all belief in metempsychosis came from India, and the Greek Pythagoreans had received it, strangely enough, via Iran (where it had left no trace).<sup>30</sup> Had Cumont consulted any of the anthropological surveys available before his time, he would have found out that Indians and Pythagoreans were not the only ones to believe in reincarnation. They shared this idea with quite a few others: from Africa, with the Swas of Kenya, the Wanikas, the Akikiyus, the Bari of the White Nile, the Mandingo, the Edo, the Ibo, the Ewes, the Yorubas, the Kagoro, the Akan, the Twi, the Zulus, the Bantus, the Barotse, the Ba-ila, and the Marovi tribes of Madagascar; from Oceania and Malaysia, with the Tahitians, the Okinawans, the Papuans of New Guinea, the Melanesians, the Marquesans, Indonesian tribes, the Solomon Islanders, the Sandwich Islanders, the Fijians, the Dayaks and other Borneo tribes, the Balinese, the Poso-Alfures of Celebes, the tribes of New Caledonia, and the New Zealand Maoris; from Asia, with the Andaman Islanders, the Santals of Bengal, the Dravidians and Nayars of southern India, the Khonds of eastern India, the Anagami Nagas of Assam, the Changs of the Naga Hills, the Karens of Burma, the Semang of the Malay Peninsula, the Giliaks, Yenisei Ostyaks and Buriats, the Cheremiss of Central Russia, and a few others; from North America, with the Algonquins, the Dakotas, the Hurons, the Iroquois, the Mohave, the Moqui (Hopi), the Nachez, the Nutkas, the Tacullis, the Kiowas, the Creeks, the Winnebagos, the Ahts of Vancouver Island, the Denes, the Montagnais, the Tlingit, the Haidas, the Tsimshians, the Eskimos, the Aleuts, and the Athapaskans; from South America, the Caribs, Mayas, and Quiches, Patagonians, Peruvians, Sontals, Popayans, Powhattans, and Tlalacans of Mexico, the Icannes and Chiriquanes of Brazil, and undoubtedly more.<sup>31</sup>

Even if—as we will see shortly—views of reincarnation differ very widely, they all start from a common premise that is just one inevitable intellectual "brick" upon which any human mind, anywhere and at any time, would stumble, should it begin from the commonly shared

assumption that we have a body and a mind experienced as a three-dimensional screen that can by no means be identified with the body. This duality, which does not precisely reflect the opposition between "hardware" and "software" but rather that between machine (including software) and actual mind-performance, is inherent to all humans and may easily lead, as it actually did, to the idea that the mind-performance is separable from the body. In many traditions the mind-performance is known as "soul" or equivalents, and is supposed to exist independently from the body. This, of course, was perceived as a great discovery at a certain stage of introspection of humankind, perhaps tens of thousands of years ago, and as a great secret ever since.

As soon as human mind admits that beings (humans, animals, all sentient beings) consist of soul and body, then the problem of the soul/body relation arises immediately. Only a few solutions are available, stemming from two major dichotomies:

1. The soul preexists the body versus the soul does not preexist the body.
2. The soul is created versus the soul is uncreated.

That souls are created and preexistent is a very common view shared by Hindus, Platonists, some gnostics, Origenists, and many others. That souls are created and do not exist before their bodies is a combination of views held by orthodox Christians approximately since Augustine. That souls do not preexist their bodies and are not created is a doctrine called Traducianism, held by Tertullian of Carthage and quite orthodox in his time.<sup>32</sup> According to it, souls are generated from the psychic copulation of the parents in exactly the same way as bodies are generated from their physical copulation. The fourth hypothesis, that souls preexist bodies without being individually created, is held by many North American peoples, who believe in a permanent tank of soul stuff from which individual souls come and to which they revert, and by the XIIIth-century Muslim Aristotelian of Spain, Averroës, who likewise believed that the Universal Intellect is one: individual intellects are reabsorbed into it after death.

Metempsychosis, creationism, and Traducianism are not only the three main doctrines the scholar stumbles upon all over late antiquity; they are *necessarily* three of the most common logical solutions to the question of the relation between mind and body. As such, they are atemporal and ubiquitous. They do not "originate" in India and "cross" Iran; they are present in all human minds that contemplate them by contemplating the problem. May this serve as a clear illustration of our view of



“genesis” and “cognitive transmission” of ideas, as opposed to the view of a certain elementary historicism.

Although it has already been shown that Gnosticism—like any idea or system of ideas—originated nowhere else than in human minds, it is the task of the historian to establish as precisely as possible *when* this happened and *what* human minds produced the gnostic configuration of thought.

Traditionally the paternity of all Christian heresies was attributed to Simon Magus of Samaria: “Simon autem Samaritanus ex quo universae haereses substituerunt,” as Irenaeus of Lyon put it.<sup>33</sup> In order to assess the validity of this opinion, often contested, it is imperative to examine here briefly the entire file on Simon and his successors.

Let us begin with the original writing attributed to him by Hippolytus,<sup>34</sup> the *Great Revelation (Apophysis Megalē)*. It contains a nondualistic doctrine in which the supreme God is at the same time the good demiurge of the universe.<sup>35</sup> Additionally it contains an allegorical interpretation of the Pentateuch with no trace of anti-Judaism. Yet the heresiologists emphasize that Simon would ascribe the Law to the despotism of the heavenly angels who rule the world badly. It is therefore obvious that the author of the *Apophysis* could not be the same Simon portrayed by a good number of testimonies. It is likewise obvious that, as long as no decisive factor will intervene to solve the problem, four and only four solutions are possible, which only describe a range of possibilities but do not help us establish the truth: 1. The *Apophysis* is the true doctrine of Simon, the rest is invention (+ / -); 2. Simon cannot possibly have written the *Apophysis*, being the true father of Gnosticism (- / +); 3. Simon is neither a gnostic nor the author of the *Apophysis* (- / -); 4. Simon is both the first gnostic and the author of the *Apophysis*—first one and then the other (+ / +).

Scholars of all times have been fascinated with one of these hypotheses at a time. No wonder endless arguments ensued, for all of them are perfectly contradictory and unverifiable to the same extent. There is no objective solution to the problem, each one of the four hypotheses being equally “true” or “false.” Once researchers have, through painstaking efforts, filled up all four cases, they can only repeat themselves. Yet, as we will see, this elementary logic would hardly deter them from their endeavor.

For the sake of brevity, let us consider here only post-World War II research; as predictable, it faithfully reflects prewar scholarship.



J. M. A. Salles-Dabadie oscillates, if I figure him out correctly, between hypothesis 1 (+ / -) and hypothesis 4 (+ / +), but only through sheer absentmindedness, for he does not seem to notice the contradiction between Simon as depicted by heresiologists and the *Apophasis*. According to him, the *Apophasis* was authored by Simon and precedes Gnosticism. It was written under Stoic, Platonic, Hermetic, and Philonic influence.<sup>36</sup>

Before going any further, let us briefly examine Simon's gnostic file. The most important testimony belongs to Irenaeus, who is the main source for later heresiologists, probably next to Hippolytus's lost *Syntagma* (ca. 210) on which Pseudo-Tertullian (before 250), Filastrius of Brescia (380/90), and Theodoret of Cyrillus (ca. 453) are based. Irenaeus does not ascribe to Simon the idea of an evil demiurge of the universe. The world has been produced by angels and powers stemming from Ennoia, the Thought of the primordial Father. These angels contest the rulership of the world among themselves (*unusquisque eorum concupiscere principatum*), and therefore the world is badly ruled (*cum enim male moderarentur angeli mundum*).<sup>37</sup> They seize their Mother (Ennoia) and hold her prisoner "out of jealousy, for they do not want to be taken for someone else's product" (*quoniam nollent progenus alterius cuiusdam putari esse*)—that is, they claim to be primordial and do not wish to be reminded that they have a Mother, and therefore they must have an unknown Father.

They prevent Ennoia from going back to heaven to the Father and in order to weigh her down, they placed her in a human body (*in corpore humano includeretur*).<sup>38</sup> She transmigrates from one woman's body to another. At one point she is the beautiful Helen of Troy, but eventually she lands as a prostitute in a brothel in Tyre. Simon, who is the hypostasis of the Father or the Great Power, comes to buy her off. As strange as it may sound, this story was a rather common allegory of the fate of the noble Intellect imprisoned in a body. Nor was the link between transmigration and prostitution extraordinary: Pythagoras was said to remember all his precedent embodiments, one of which had been the beautiful prostitute Alco.<sup>39</sup>

Simon and his partner Helena-Ennoia have the power to free humankind from the tyranny of the angels, the authors of the Law. The Law is arbitrary and was invented for the sole purpose of enslaving humankind. The world will be destroyed, and Simon's adepts will obtain freedom.<sup>40</sup> Besides this scenario, which has nothing Christian in it, Irenaeus asserts that Simon pretended to be Jesus Christ and interpreted the latter's body docetically, as a pure figment.<sup>41</sup> The development of

"Simon's novel" in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions* will not detain us here. Both of these writings, as well as later heresiologists, corroborate Irenaeus's information according to which Simon was the first gnostic.<sup>42</sup>

Most scholars who dwell on Simon lately decided for the negative hypothesis (- / -): he was neither a gnostic nor the author of the *Apophysis*. Thus, for Karlmann Beyschlag the *Apophysis* has no relation whatsoever to Simon, being a product of IInd-century Platonism.<sup>43</sup> But Simon's original doctrine was not gnostic either. All information about Simon is distorted by heresiologists, who try to make a gnostic of him by attributing to him the traits of a later Christian Gnosticism.<sup>44</sup>

With a few differences, this is also Gerd Lüdemann's thesis: Irenaeus would ascribe to Simon pieces of the doctrines of Basilides and the Carpocratians.<sup>45</sup>

Simone Pétrement follows Beyschlag, with a further emphasis on the Christian origin of the system commonly attributed to Simon.<sup>46</sup>

Jarl E. Fossum places Simon within a Samaritan setting.<sup>47</sup> According to him, the Samaritans Simon and Menander and the Jew Cerinthus were "Proto-Gnostics."<sup>48</sup> This is a variant of hypothesis 2 (- / +).

Irenaeus makes of Menander Simon's direct successor and ascribes to him the knowledge of magical means that ensure his disciples victory over the creators of the world and immortality through baptism.<sup>49</sup> The Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* speak about two angels dispatched by the Simonian Great Power, one to create the world and one to give the Law;<sup>50</sup> and a passage of the *Recognitions* mentions the creator of the world who claims to be God.<sup>51</sup> The two angels—the world creator and the angel of the Torah—are present in Jewish tradition.<sup>52</sup> Thus we may indeed surmise that a number of elements were added to the primitive doctrine of Simon by his successors, but it is difficult to state what of this was the work of Menander.

More is known about Saturninus or Satornilus, whom Irenaeus makes into Menander's successor.<sup>53</sup> According to him, the world was created by seven angels, one of whom was the God of the Jews.<sup>54</sup> Man had been made by the angels, who had imitated a luminous image of the Father. Like a worm, man would crawl without being able to stand. The Father sent him a spark of life to animate him. After death, "the spark will be safe, the rest of man will perish."<sup>55</sup> This is, *in nuce*, gnostic anthropology.

Irenaeus gives the impression that gnostic doctrine is the result of an evolution from the primitive simplicity of Simon's scenario, with its lack of precision as to the identity of the heavenly angels, toward an

embryonic system in which the Old Testament God is one of the seven planets who rule the world and are responsible for the body and lower soul of humanity. This is, in very broad outline, what Gnosticism has to say. It is clear that this evolutionary hypothesis advanced by heresiologists is but one among many. The gnostic emphasis on the negativity of the cosmic Rulers may be new, but its constituent elements had been there from the late IIIrd century B.C.E., the beginning of Hellenistic Pseudo-Hermetic astrology. That the heresiologists introduce Gnosticism as the outcome of an evolution seems to be contradicted by the full-blown gnostic systems of the IIrd century C.E., which appear rather as products of a revolution.

If the origins of Gnosticism are surrounded by mystery, unless we believe the Christian heresiologists who assume Gnosticism to be born between Simon and Saturninus, classifications from the heresiologists to date are no less hazardous, in fact, they become even more so with the German school of history of religions and its recent continuators. Although the heresiologists certainly made up many, impelled by a prophecy in Isaiah, we have reasons to believe that modern scholars invented more gnostic systems and clusters of systems than they did. If asked, the scholars themselves could probably not explain this obscure rage for order. From a systemic perspective, we are able to explain it for them.

Indeed, classifications may well be as many abortive attempts at understanding the mechanism that produces the system itself by rearranging sequentially and sometimes hierarchically all sorts of singular "bricks." Classifications ascertain the presence of bricks in more than one doctrine and try to link genetically doctrines in which similar bricks are present. Unfortunately the procedure may prove incorrect as soon as one ventures to apply it to products whose lineage is unknown, for bricks can be derived in many ways and can occur as a result of similar mental processes. And if the lineage is known, the procedure is useless. All reasons for which most classifications, to begin with the monumental ones devised by the German School of Religion, must be discarded and replaced by the dynamic concept of "transformation," with logical bricks replacing each other and forming ever-new sequences.

It should be noticed from the beginning that *all* gnostic systems, without exception, appear as transformations of one another and therefore can be said to be part of a larger "ideal object," whose possibilities are being explored by human minds at all times, regardless of time and

space. However, the doctrines of some gnostic texts are transformations of one another in a narrower sense—they can move into one another through a rather limited number of transformations. Some such doctrines are genetically connected, forming the large group of Valentinian Gnosticism, with its ramifications. Some others have been genetically connected, more by modern scholarship than by the heresiologists, but the most we can say is simply that they are close transformations of one another. One example is Sethian Gnosticism as defined by Hippolytus (not by modern scholars) and the systems of the Nag Hammadi tractates the *Paraphrase of Shem* and *Zostrianos*. Another example is formed by a number of writings and testimonies that are all transformations of the same basic text—the first chapters of Genesis: the *Apocryphon of John* (A), the tractate *On the Origin of the World* (SST), the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (HA), and Irenaeus's summary of the doctrine of the Ophites "and others." To these, one later (after mid-IIIrd century) and more complex text may be added: *Pistis Sophia* (PS). In the coming chapters we will follow the lead of these texts in order to establish how gnostic myth originates in the transformation of other myths, and how gnostic doctrines ultimately derive from one another not through direct transmission but through a cognitive process of transformation.

In splitting gnostic myth into two chapters, our intention was to show that it actually consists of two parts, which in other contexts would often function as complete myths: the myth of Sophia the Trickstress and the myth of the Demiurge, her son.

## Notes

1. James M. Robinson, gen. ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (rev. ed., Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1988).
2. James M. Robinson, "From the Cliff to Cairo: The Story of the Discovery and the Middlemen of the Nag Hammadi Codices," in *Colloque International sur les Textes de Nag Hammadi* (hereinafter NH) (Quebec, August 1978) (Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi, 1—henceforth BCNH—published by the Univ. of Laval Press, Quebec, and Peeters, Louvain, Belgium), 1981, 21–58.
3. Here follows an extensive survey of primary sources and translations, together with the most important secondary literature. For the sake of brevity, idiosyncratic translations and studies have not been included. Titles follow *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Indispensable for a general presentation of this topic is the book written in French by Michel Tardieu and Jean-Daniel Dubois, *Introduction à la littérature gnostique I: Histoire du mot "gnostique."* *Instruments de travail. Collections retrouvées avant 1945* (Cerf-CNRS: Paris, 1986).

Unless otherwise stated, all translations included in the chapters on Gnosticism of this book are mine.

The following abbreviations have been used, mainly based on the siglae established by Michel Tardieu and J.-D. Dubois (*Introduction*, vol. 1, 141-43):

BG	Berlin Papyrus 8502	
	1: Gospel of Mary	EvMr
	2: Apocryphon of John	AJ
	3: Sophia of Jesus Christ	SJ
	4: Acts of Peter	AcPt
PS	Pistis Sophia	
J	The Books of Ieu (1 & 2)	
NH	Nag Hammadi Codices	
	I 1: The Prayer of the Apostle Paul	OrPl
	2: The Apocryphon of James	AJc
	3: The Gospel of Truth	EV
	4: The Treatise on Resurrection	R
	5: The Tripartite Tractate	TT
	II 1: AJ	
	2: The Gospel of Thomas	EvTh
	3: The Gospel of Philip	EvPh
	4: The Hypostasis of the Archons	HA
	5: On the Origin of the World	SST
	6: The Exegesis of the Soul	EA
	7: The Book of Thomas the Contender	Th
	III 1: AJ	
	2: The Gospel of the Egyptians	EE
	3: Eugnostos the Blessed	Eug
	4: SJ	
	5: The Dialogue of the Savior	DS
	IV 1: AJ	
	2: EE	
	V 1: Eug	
	2: The Apocalypse of Paul	ApPl
	3: The First Apocalypse of James	1 ApJc
	4: The Second Apocalypse of James	2 ApJc
	5: The Apocalypse of Adam	ApAd
	VI 1: The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles	AcPtD
	2: The Thunder, Perfect Mind (Brontê)	Br
	3: Authoritative Teaching (Authentikos Logos)	AL
	4: The Concept of Our Great Power (Noëma)	N
	5: (Fragment of the <i>Republic</i> of Plato)	
	6: The Discourse of the Eighth and the Ninth	Og
	7: The Prayer of Thanksgiving (Hermetic)	G
	8: Asclepius	Ascl
	VII 1: The Paraphrase of Shem	PSem
	2: The Second Treatise of the Great Seth	ST
	3: The Apocalypse of Peter	ApPt
	4: The Teachings of Silvanus	Sil
	5: The Three Stelae of Seth	TSS
	VIII 1: Zostrinos	Z
	2: The Letter of Peter to Philip	EpPt
	IX 1: Melchizedek	Me
	2: The Thought of Norea	Nor
	3: The Testimony of Truth	TVer
	X 1: Marsanes	Ma

XI 1:	The Interpretation of Knowledge	Al
2:	A Valentinian Exposition	Pr
3:	Allogenes	Al
4:	Hypsiphron	Hy
XII 1:	The Sentences of Sextus	Se
2:	EvVer	
3:	Fragments	Fr
XIII 1:	Trimorphic Protennoia	P
2:	SST	

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*Cartonnage*, 1979.

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- BG: T. *Écrits gnostiques: Codex de Berlin*, trans. and commentary by Michel Tardieu (Cerf: Paris, 1984) (contains all four versions of AJ in parallel).



- PSJ: S.-T. *Koptisch-gnostische Schriften, Erster Band: Die Pistis Sophia. Die Beiden Bücher des Jeü. Unbekanntes altgnostisches Werk*, ed. and trans. Carl Schmidt, rev. ed. by Walter Till (Akademie: Berlin [East], 1954).
- PS: M. *Pistis Sophia*, text ed. Carl Schmidt, trans. and notes by Violet Macdermot (NHS 9), 1978.
- J: M. *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*, text ed. Carl Schmidt, trans. and notes by Violet Macdermot (NHS 13), 1978.

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- I: *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex), I: Introduction, Texts and Translation; II: Notes*, ed. Harry W. Attridge (NHS 22), 1985.
- I EvVer: *Euangelium veritatis*, ed. M. Malinine, H.-Ch. Puech, and G. Quispel (Rascher: Zurich, 1956).
- IR: *De resurrectione (Epistula ad Rheginum)*, ed. M. Malinine, H.-Ch. Puech, G. Quispel, and W. Till (Rascher: Zurich and Stuttgart, 1963).
- II: *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7, together with XIII, 2; Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1) and P. Oxy. 1,654, 655*, 2 vols., ed. Bentley Layton (NHS 20-21), 1989.
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- II HA: *L'Hypostase des Archontes*, ed. and French trans. Bernard Barc (BCNH 5), 1980.
- III-IV EE: *The Gospel of the Egyptians. The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, ed. A. Böhlig, F. Wisse, and P. Labib (NHS 4), 1975.
- V-VI: *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2-5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,1 and 4*, ed. D. M. Parrott (NHS 11), 1979.
- VII ST: *Le Deuxième Traité du Grand Seth*, ed. and French trans. Louis Painchaud (BCNH 6), 1982.
- VII TSS: *Les Trois Stèles de Seth, Hymne gnostique à la Triade*, ed. and trans. Paul Claude (BCNH 8), 1983.
- VIII EpPt: *La Lettre de Pierre à Philippe*, ed. and tr. by J.-É. Ménard (BCNH 1), 1977.
- IX-X: *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, ed. B. A. Pearson (NHS 15), 1981.
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5. See my *Gnosticismo e pensiero moderno: Hans Jonas* (L'Erma di Brettschneider: Rome, 1985).
6. Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidence* (1973; reprint, Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1983), 245.
7. In my *Gnosticismo; Psychanodia I: A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Brill: Leiden, 1983), 16–31; *Expériences de l'extase, de l'Hellénisme au Moyen Age* (Payot: Paris, 1984), 45–77, etc.
8. A few judicious accounts of "Sethian Gnosticism" do exist, which tend to view it not as an actual historical trend but as a heuristic model. See esp. John D. Turner, "Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History," in Hedrick and Hodgson, eds., *Nag Hammadi*, 55–86.
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14. Full discussion of the theses of the German school of history of religions is contained in my books *Psychanodia I*, 16–23, and *Gnosticismo*, pass.
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  30. Franz Cumont, *Lux perpetua* (Paris, 1949), 143ff; see my *Psychomedia* I, 29-30.
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  32. See Tertulliani *De anima*, ed. with introduction and commentary by J. H. Waszink (Meulenhoff: Amsterdam, 1947), 27.
  33. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I.23.2 (hereinafter Iren.).
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  47. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 162ff.
  48. Fossum, *The Name of God*, 337, n. 216.
  49. Iren. I.23.5.
  50. *Hom.* II.18.12.
  51. *Rec.* I.2.57.
  52. Fossum, 257ff.
  53. Iren. I.24.1-2.
  54. Ps.-Tert., p. 214,6-9; Fil. 16,2f; Epiph. 87.248.1f.
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