THE DESCENT OF ISHTAR, THE FALL OF SOPHIA, AND THE JEWISH ROOTS OF GNOSTICISM

By Edwin M. Yamauchi

I The Fall of Sophia

The Fall of Sophia is one of the most important elements in Gnostic mythology./1/ The myth of the Fall occurs in many different versions among such groups as the Barbelo-Gnostics,/2/ and the Sethian-Ophites./3/ The occurrence of non-Christian Sethian texts in the Nag Hammadi collection inclines G. W. MacRae to favour the Sethian-Ophite version as "the more original"./4/

More elaborated versions of the Fall of Sophia appear in various Valentinian writings./5/ In one version Sophia transgresses by acting presumptuously without her consort; in another version she attempts to imitate the creative power of the Father by generating without her consort. G. C. Stead, who has analysed the Valentinian materials, believes that both versions represent later elaborations of the teachings of Valentinus himself./6/

Sophia's fall ultimately and indirectly results in the creation of matter, evil, and death. According to some versions Sophia produces a "lower Sophia", who in turn produces a demiurge who creates matter. Stead distinguishes five different Sophia figures, including a Sophia who falls and leaves the heavenly world but who is pardoned and restored./7/

The Fall or Descent of Sophia is described or alluded to in many of the Nag Hammadi texts. Especially noteworthy is a long passage in *The Apocryphon of John* (CG II,1; III,

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1. H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Beacon, Boston (1963) 181-193.
2. R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism, A Sourcebook*, Harper, New York, *Gnosticism, An Anthology*, Collins, London (1961) 50-51.
3. *Ibid.*, 53-55.
4. G. W. MacRae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth", *NovT* 12 (1970) 87.
5. Grant, *Gnosticism*, 166-171.
6. "The Valentinian Myth of Sophia", *JTS* 20 (1969) 80-81, 103.
7. *Ibid.*, 93.

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1; IV,1; BG 8502,2) which describes how the aeon Sophia "wanted to bring forth a likeness out of herself without the consent of the Spirit", and how she brought forth the demiurge Yaltabaoth (Yaldabaoth), an archon who is a caricature of the Old Testament God./8/

Another reference is found in *The Hypostasis of Archons* (CG II,4; 94,29): "And immediately Sophia stretched forth her finger and introduced Light into Matter, and she pursued it down to the region of Chaos."/9/ *On the Origin of the World* (CG II,5) sets forth a different relationship between Sophia and the androgynous Yaldabaoth, and also describes the creation of an androgynous man from a drop of light cast by Sophia./10/ *The Sophia of Jesus Christ* (CG III,4; 114,14) states that "Sophia, the Mother of the Universe and the consort, desired by herself to bring these to existence without her male (consort)"./11/ In *The Trimorphic Protennoia* (CG XIII,1; 40,15) we read references to "the guileless Sophia" who descended./12/ In *The Tripartite Tractate* (CG I,5) the Fall of Sophia has been transformed into the Fall of the Logos./13/

Of special interest is the reference in *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (CG VII,2; 50,25-29) to Sophia as a "whore"./14/ The epithet *Prounikos*, literally "lustful", was applied by the Barbelo-Gnostics to the Holy Spirit, whom they also called Sophia./15/ The Sethian-Ophites also called Sophia *Prounikos*./16/

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8. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. J. M. Robinson, Harper & Row, New York (1977) 103-104; Grant, *Gnosticism*, 74-75; S. Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis*, Munksgaard, Copenhagen (1963) 62-65, 193-195.
9. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 158.
10. *Ibid.*, 163-171.
11. *Ibid.*, 225.
12. *Ibid.*, 464-465, cf. 469.
13. *Ibid.*, 68-69; cf. J. Zandee, "Gnostic Ideas on the Fall and Salvation", *Numen* 11 (1964) 24-26.
14. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 330.
15. Grant, *Gnosticism*, 50.
16. *Ibid.*, 55; cf. J. Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*, Viking, New York, Hollis & Carter, London (1960) 14-15, 212; N. A. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia", *Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale*.

II The Descent of Ishtar

In his exposition of the Fall of Sophia, Hans Jonas had posed the following question:

> How this figure, or at least its name, came to be combined in gnostic thought with the moon-, mother-, and love-goddess of Near Eastern religion, to form that ambiguous figure encompassing the whole scale from the highest to the lowest, from the most spiritual to the utterly sensual (as expressed in the very combination "Sophia-Prunikos", "Wisdom the Whore"), we do not know and, lacking evidence of any intermediate stages, cannot even hypothetically reconstruct./17/

In 1907 W. Bousset had suggested that the Descent of Sophia might be a reflection of the Babylonian myth of the Descent of Ishtar (itself based on the Sumerian Descent of Inanna)./18/ That suggestion has been repeated by other scholars,/19/ most notably by R. M. Grant in a work published in 1959, revised in 1966./20/ After commenting upon the relationship of Simon Magus to the prostitute Helen, Grant speculated about the mythological background of the story. Citing both the Sumerian Descent of Inanna and the Akkadian Descent of Ishtar, Grant concluded: "These are some of the ingredients which may have gone into the Simonian portrait of Helen: something about the Wisdom of God, combined with the old story of the degradation of Ishtar and her experiences in the underworld."/21/

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17. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 176-177.
18. W. Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, *FRLANT* 10; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen (1907) 263, n. 3; Doresse, *The Secret Books*, 218.
19. E.g. W. L. Knox, "The Divine Wisdom", *JTS* 38 (1937) 230-237; T. F. Glasson, "The Descent of Ishtar", *Congregational Quarterly* 32 (1954) 313-321.
20. R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, Harper & Row, New York (rev. ed., 1966).
21. *Ibid.*, 84, 212.

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This line of reasoning has now been extensively developed by Gilles Quispel with his interpretation of the Nag Hammadi tractate, *The Thunder* (CG VI,2).[22] There is some uncertainty as to what the initial letter of the title in the Coptic text was as only a small part of it remains. Was it a "T" or an "N"? In the former case it should be translated *The Thunder: Perfect Mind*, and in the latter case *Nebront: Perfect Mind*. A careful examination of the manuscript has convinced Krause and MacRae that the letter should be a "T", or the Coptic definite article. *Brontē* is the Greek word for "thunder".

The Thunder is a unique document in which a female revealer, probably Sophia, expresses herself in all kinds of paradoxes and contradictions.[23] There are some limited parallels to *The Thunder* in the Isis aretalogies, [24] and in a passage from *On the Origin of the World* (CG II,5; 114,8-10) in which Eve declares: "I am the portion of my mother, and I am the mother. I am the woman and I am the virgin. I am the pregnant one. I am the physician. I am the midwife."[25] But in *The Thunder* there are striking antitheses as well as "I am" proclamations:

> For I am the first and the last.
> I am the honoured one and the scorned one.
> I am the whore and the holy one.
> I am the wife and the virgin.
> I am the mother and the daughter.
> I am the members of my mother.
> I am the barren one and many are her sons.
> I am she whose wedding is great, and I have not taken a husband.

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22. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 271-277; H. G. Bethze, "Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptsich-gnostische Schriften, 'Nebront', Die zweite Schrift aus Nag-Hammadi-Codex VI", *TLZ* 98 (1973) 97-104.
23. The speaker is not explicitly identified as Sophia, but this is a reasonable identification. Cf. *Gnosis und Neues Testament*, ed. K.-W. Tröger, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Berlin (1973) 47-48, 214.
24. Cf. G. W. MacRae, "The *Ego*-Proclamation in Gnostic Sources", *The Trial of Jesus*, ed. E. Bammel, SCM, London (1970) 122-134.
25. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 271.

I am the midwife and she who does not bear.
I am the solace of my labour pains.
I am the bride and the bridegroom, and it is my husband who begot me (13,17-31)./26/

The most striking parallel which can be found to this remarkable litany is the speech of Ewat (Mandaic *ᶜuat*), an epithet of the Mandaean "Holy Spirit"./27/

I am death, I am Life,
I am darkness, I am light,
I am error, I am truth,
I am destruction, I am construction,
I am the blow, I am the healing. (*Right Ginza*, 207) /28/

Quispel has hailed *The Thunder* as "the most impressive writing that I know."/29/ He assigns an extraordinary antiquity to the text: "It might have been written in the third century B.C., like *Siracides*, when Palestine was a part of Ptolemaic Hellenistic Egypt . . . . On the other hand, the writing is so sophisticated that a later date, the first century B.C., and a Hellenistic milieu, Alexandria, all seem preferable."/30/

Quispel especially seizes on the lines in 13,19-20, which he translates: "I am the prostitute and the saint, I am the woman and the virgin."/31/ This leads him to associate *The Thunder* with fallen Sophia. The fact that

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26. *Ibid.*, 271-272.
27. In Mandaean texts the epithet *Qadush* (cf. "holy" in Hebrew) is used in a perverse sense for that which is unholy. *Ruha* "Spirit" is an evil, female demon. Cf. E. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (1970) 55; E. S. Drower, "Mandaean Polemic", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25 (1962) 438-448.
28. Cited by G. Quispel, "Jewish Gnosis and Mandaean Gnosticism", *Les textes de Nag Hammadi*, ed. J.-E. Ménard, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1975) 105.
29. *Ibid.*, 82; cf. also reviews by G. Quispel in *BO* 32. 5-6 (1975) 421-422; and in *VC* 29 (1975) 235.
30. Quispel, "Jewish Gnosis", 86.
31. *Ibid.*, 89.

Ishtar was called "The Prostitute" in Sumerian and Akkadian leads him to postulate an ancient tradition of Wisdom/Astarte/Anath which flourished in ancient Israel. He states, "But our admittedly bold hypothesis is that the Alexandrians have not invented this spontaneously, but have preserved the more unorthodox view, not unknown in ancient Israel, namely that the Lord had a spouse called Anat Jahu."/32/

What can we say to the boldly imaginative leaps of Quispel's provocative proposals? The warning of R. McL. Wilson comes to mind:

> The parallels are certainly there, but we must always ask "What do these parallels *signify*?". It is not difficult to establish an *Arbeitshypothese* that there may be some relation between A and B, then scour the literature for parallels, and then conclude that B, as ostensibly later, is dependent on A. But the facts are not so simple./33/

In the context of the entire tractate, it would seem that Quispel has attempted to erect a mighty edifice on too narrow a base. The phrase "the prostitute and the saint", after all, is but one of a series of paradoxes. The significance of the passage does not lie in any isolated phrase but in the overall concept of paradox.

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32. *Ibid.*, 95. Quispel (*Ibid.*, 99) argues that "Holy prostitution was unknown to the Egyptian religion", and derives the figure of the Prostitute Anath-Astarte-Wisdom from Syrian-Israelite traditions. The association of Israel with Syria is gratuitous. For the actual background as opposed to Quispel's speculative reconstruction see E. Yamauchi, "Cultic Prostitution", *Orient and Occident*, ed. H. Hoffner; Butzon & Bercker, Kevelaer (1973) 216-218; W. Helck, *Die Beziehungen Agyptens zu Vorderasien im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden (1962) 482-514; R. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten in Agypten*, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1967) 110-122.

33. R. McL. Wilson, "'Jewish Gnosis' and Gnostic Origins", *HUCA* 45 (1974) 186.

According to G. W. MacRae, *The Thunder* "is a striking way to assert the divine transcendance, for it implies the rejection of all value systems that are at home in the world"./34/ The last lines may be interpreted as advocating antinomian ethics (21,20-32):

> For many are the pleasant forms which exist in numerous sins, and incontinencies, and disgraceful passions, and fleeting pleasures, which (men) embrace until they become sober and go up to their resting place. And they will find me there, and they will live, and they will not die again./35/

B. Pearson has proposed to identify the document as one of Simonian Gnosticism, noting that Simon Magus' consort was Helen, a prostitute./36/ If this thesis can be maintained and if the patristic accounts can be trusted, the document may go back to the first century. But these are weighty "if's", inasmuch as the patristic accounts about Simon are seriously suspect.

The text might also be associated with other antinomian Gnostic groups such as the followers of Basilides, of Carpocrates, of the Cainites, etc./37/ Incidentally, this would be the only example among the Nag Hammadi texts of a document advocating libertine rather than ascetic ethics.

On the other hand, P. Perkins suggests that "the author is contrasting the behaviour of people before they become Gnostics with the immortality of the Gnostic who knows where he will find Sophia"./38/ Her interpretation seems more plausible to me than that of *The Thunder* as an antinomian text.

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34. G. W. MacRae, "Discourses of the Gnostic Revealer", Nag Hammadi Seminar paper, SBL Conference, Nov., 1973, 9.
35. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 277.
36. B. A. Pearson, "The Thunder: Perfect Mind (CG VI,2)", a paper given at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, March, 1973.
37. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics*, 25-28.
38. P. Perkins, "Ad coniectionem *Tonitrus* (CG VI,2", Nag Hammadi Seminar paper, SBL Conference, Nov., 1973.

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As to the suggestion by Ouispel and others that the Fall of Sophia is to be associated with the Descent of Inanna/Ishtar, one needs to examine the texts themselves. In doing so one will discover that both in the Sumerian and in the Akkadian versions the conclusion of the story is missing./39/ In spite of this lack, scholars long assumed that the goddess had descended to raise her consort Dumuzi/Tammuz from the Underworld. This unfounded assumption has been the basis of many biblical interpretations./40/

In 1960 S. N. Kramer succeeded in assembling thirty fragments of the myth, "The Death of Dumuzi", which proves that Inanna did not descend to the Underworld to resurrect her consort but instead sent him there as her substitute./41/ The only textual evidence to suggest that Dumuzi was raised from the dead is a fragmentary text which implies that his sister Geshtinanna took his place as a substitute for half the year./42/

It may thus be seen that apart from the mere fact of the "descent" of Ishtar and of Sophia, and their common designation as "Prostitute", there are no convincing correlations in the developments of the myths as far as the motives, the modes, and the results of their descents are concerned. Hence we must look elsewhere for the origins of the myth of Sophia's fall.

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39. *ANET* 52-57, 107-109; E. Yamauchi, "The Descent of Ishtar", *The Biblical World*, ed. C. F. Pfeiffer; Baker, Grand Rapids (1966) 196-200.
40. E. Yamauchi, "Tammuz and the Bible", *JBL* 81 (1965) 283-290; *idem*, "Additional Notes on Tammuz", *JSS* 11 (1966) 10-15.
41. *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. S. N. Kramer, Doubleday, New York (1961) 110-115; S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians*, University of Chicago Press (1963) 156-160; T. Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, University Press, Cambridge (1970).
42. S. N. Kramer, "Dumuzi's Annual Resurrection", *BASOR* 183 (1966) 31; *idem*, *The Sacred Marriage Rite*, Indiana University, Bloomington (1969) 154-155, n. 4, 156, n. 15.

III Jewish Origins of the Fall of Sophia

C. Talbert has suggested that there are Jewish antecedents which better explain the Christian redeemer myth than any alleged pre-Christian Gnostic myth. He notes that Judaism knew of the descent of pre-existent wisdom (Sirach 24; 1 Enoch 42:1-2)./43/

The thesis of a Jewish origin for the Fall of Sophia has been most persuasively advanced by G. W. MacRae. After noting Jewish traditions which connected Wisdom with creation, MacRae suggests that the basis of the Fall of Sophia may go back to the Jewish traditions of the fall of celestial beings (Gen 6) and above all the fall of Eve (Gen 3)./44/

O. Betz had objected to such a derivation because the Wisdom of hellenistic Judaism was a positive concept, whereas the Sophia of Gnosticism was at least in part a negative being./45/ MacRae, who acknowledges the difficulty, is none the less convinced that the myth of the fall was connected to a revolt *within* Judaism./46/ But he did not attempt to resolve the problem: "But once more it must be stressed that this explanation is meant to account only for the materials out of which the myth was made, not for the basic anticosmic attitude that inspired the making of it."/47/

IV The Use of the Old Testament

One of the most significant developments in the history of Gnostic studies is the increasing emphasis on the possibility of a Jewish origin of Gnosticism which has

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43. C. H. Talbert, "The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity", *NTS* 22 (1976) 419.
44. MacRae, "The Jewish Background", 98, 100.
45. O. Betz, "Was am Anfang geschah: Das jüdische Erbe in den neugefundenen koptischen-gnostischen Schriften", *Abraham unser Vater*, ed. O. Betz, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1963) 40.
46. MacRae, "The Jewish Background", 97.
47. *Ibid.*, 101.

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been stressed in the studies of G. W. MacRae and of G. Quispel./48/

The perverse use of materials from the Old Testament had, of course, been known from the church fathers./49/ But the Nag Hammadi materials have both confirmed and expanded our knowledge of the Old Testament materials used by the Gnostics.

The mere citation of Old Testament texts, however, does not thereby demonstrate a Jewish origin. R. McL. Wilson warns:

> . . . the occasional occurrence in the list of references to the LXX version must give warning against the facile assumption that Old Testament quotations are proof of Jewish origin, for the LXX was also a Christian book, and in time indeed a Christian rather than a Jewish book. No proof of a pre-Christian Jewish Gnosticism - or Gnosis - is to be found on this basis alone./50/

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48. G. Quispel, "The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge", *Kyriakon*, ed. P. Granfield and J. A. Jungmann, Münster: Aschendorff, Münster (1970) 1.271-276. Quispel also believes in the Jewish origin of the Mandaeans, a conclusion which I have questioned. See Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics*, 53-67.
49. Cf. Justin's teaching about the love between the Father Elohim and the female Eden. See Quispel, "Jewish Gnosis", 97-98; R. M. Grant, "Gnosis Revisited", *Church History* 23 (1954) 136-145.
50. R. McL. Wilson, "The Gnostics and the Old Testament", *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism*, Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, Stockholm (1977) 168. J. W. Drane, "Gnosticism and the New Testament", *Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin* 68 (1974) 11, believes that OT materials may have been indirectly transmitted to the Gnostics. Cf. the reservations of I. Gruenwald, "Aspects of the Jewish-Gnostic Controversy", *Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale*.

Also to the point is the observation of Walter Beltz that every passage of the Old Testament found in the Nag Hammadi texts is also cited or alluded to in the New Testament./51/

At the very least one must set to one side Old Testament quotations in such Christianized works as *The Apocryphon of John*,/52/ and in Christian Gnostic works such as *The Exegesis of the Soul* (CG II,6). The latter not only quotes verbally ten passages from the Old Testament (Gn. 2:24; 12:1; Pss. 6:7-10; 44:11-12 [LXX]; 102:1-5 [LXX]; Ho. 2:4-9; Is. 30:15; 30:19-20; Je. 3:1-4; Ezk. 16:23-26), but also from the New Testament (Mt. 5:4-6; Lk. 9:23; Acts 15:29; 1 Cor. 5:9,11), and from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as well./53/

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51. W. Beltz, "Gnosis und Altes Testament-Uberlegungen zur Frage nach dem jüdischen Ursprung der Gnosis", *ZRGG* 28 (1976) 356-357. Similarly, O. Betz, "Das Problem der Gnosis seit der Entdeckung der Texte von Nag Hammadi", *Verkundigung und Forschung, Evangelische Theologie Beiheft* 21.2 (1976) 60, remarks: "Die antijüdische Tendenz ist nicht nur gegen den Schöpfergott, sondern auch gegen das jüdische Gesetz gerichtet, während andererseits die Psalmen und die Propheten positiv bewertet werden; in ihnen hat man offensichtlich den wahren Gott und nicht etwa den heidnischen Demiurgen Jaldabaoth gefunden. Diese differenzierte Stellung zum Alten Testament lässt sich am ehesten aus der christlichen Tradition erklären, dh. Gnosis ist in ihrer Komplexität und Radikalität doch wohl die akute Hellenisierung des Christentums."
52. S. Giversen, "The Apocryphon of John and Genesis", *ST* 17 (1963) 60-76.
53. P. Nagel, "Die Septuaginta-Zitate in der koptisch-gnostischen 'Exegese über die Seele' (Nag Hammadi Codex II)", *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 22/23 (1974) 249-269; A. Guillaumont, "Une citation de l'Apocryphe d'Ezéchiel dans l'Exégèse au sujet de l'âme (Nag Hammadi II,6)", and R. McL. Wilson, "Old Testament Exegesis in the Gnostic Exegesis on the Soul", *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Pahor Labib*, ed. M. Krause, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1975) 35-39, and 217-224; Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften, "Die Exegese über die Seele", *TLZ* 101 (1976) 93-104.

It is striking that for the most part the Gnostics' knowledge or at least use of the Old Testament is limited. As Wilson observes, "It may be of some significance that they show no particular interest in the historical books"./54/ Then, too, with the outstanding exception of *The Exegesis on the Soul* almost all of the Old Testament materials are either perversions or allusions and not direct citations./55/

V Jewish Haggadic Traditions

On the other hand, it should be noted that the use of the Genesis materials in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (CG II,4), for example, betrays a knowledge of Aramaic and of Jewish haggadic traditions found in the later Midrashim. /56/ We read of Norea, who destroys Noah's ark and who is the object of the archon's desire and the recipient of

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54. Wilson, "The Gnostics and the Old Testament", 167. Cf. O. Wintermute, "A Study of Gnostic Exegesis of the Old Testament", *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays*, ed. J. M. Efird, Duke University, Durham (1972) 241-270.

55. R. Kasser, "Citations des grand prophètes bibliques dans les textes gnostiques coptes", in Krause, *Essays*, 57, observes: "En fait, les citations expresses de l'Ancient Testament sont, dans les livres gnostiques, extrêmement rares. Dans ces ouvrages, on trouvera, rare aussi quoique un peu plus fréquentes, quelques allusions, quelques formules d'aspect vétérotestamentaires, emprunts éventuels mais trop incertains, trop vagues, trop inexacts pour être utilisables dans la critique textuelle." The same may also be said about the alleged Old Testament materials in the Mandaic texts; cf. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics*, 53-54. It is noteworthy that, in contrast with the contemporary Aramaic magic bowls, the Mandaic magic bowls do not include any Old Testament citations. See E. Yamauchi, "Aramaic Magic Bowls", *JAOS* 85 (1965) 511-523.

56. Cf. R. Bullard, *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, de Gruyter, Berlin (1970) 58; C. Colpe, "Heidnische, jüdische und christliche Überlieferung in den Schriften aus Nag Hammadi IV", *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 18 (1975) 152-153.

the revelation from the angel Eleleth. Norea is well known from Jewish sources,/57/ and also appears in Mandaic texts as Nuraita./58/

Speaking of *The Testimony of Truth* (CG IX,3), John Dart quotes B. Pearson as saying:

> "It is a gnostic midrash utilizing Jewish traditions. At the same time it is very simple and undeveloped, evidently a piece of 'primitive' Gnosticism." As to its date and place of composition, Pearson ventured a guess; the first century B.C. in Palestine or Syria./59/

But what makes Pearson believe that such a document existed at such an early date? Pearson is indeed able to point out numerous parallels to Jewish haggadic traditions./60/ But why should one believe on this evidence that the document reaches back into the pre-Christian era?

Apart from Philo there is not a single source which he cites which can be assumed to go back to the first century BC or the first century AD without a convincing demonstration. For example, *Bereshith Rabba*, which contains midrashim on Genesis dates to the third century AD. According to H. L. Strack:

> From the first third of the third Christian century on the existence of Haggadah books is attested on many sides. However, the purely haggadic Midrashim which have come down to us date from later times. The "tannaitic Midrashim" ascend in their more

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57. B. Layton, "The Hypostasis of the Archons, or *The Reality of the Rulers*", *HTR* 67 (1974) 368-369, 388-389.
58. E. S. Drower and R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1963) 291, 294 under *nhuraita, nuraita*.
59. J. Dart, *The Laughing Savior*, Harper & Row, New York (1976) 64.
60. B. Pearson, "Jewish Haggadic Traditions in *The Testimony of Truth* from Nag Hammadi (CG IX,3), "*Ex Orbe Religionum (Studia Geo Widengren)* ed. C. J. Bleeker, S. G. F. Brandon and M. Simon, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1972) 457-470.

ancient elements to the second century./61/

To explain a phrase concerning the serpent in the tractate, Pearson quotes from Rabbi Meir, who was a disciple of Rabbi Aqiba in the second century. He also cites the Targum Jonathan, which must be dated in its present form to the fifth century AD./62/ On what basis then does Pearson establish his dating? It is a "guess". /63/ Call it wishful thinking.

In any event, as the document now stands it is clearly from a post-Christian date. As Pearson himself writes in the introduction of the text in the *Nag Hammadi Library*:

> The *Testimony of Truth* is a Christian Gnostic tractate with homiletical and polemical characteristics . . . . While no definite conclusion can be drawn concerning authorship, two possibilities have been tentatively suggested: Julius Cassianus (about 190 C.E.) and Hierakas of Leontopolis (about 300 C.E.)./64/

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61. H. L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, Jewish Publication Society, New York (1959) 203. On the problems of establishing very early rabbinic traditions, see J. Neusner, "The Written Tradition in the Pre-Rabbinic Period", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 4 (1973) 65: "But I must stress that not a single one of the rabbinic traditions assigned to pre-70 authorities provides an attestation for any other one of those traditions, so far as I can see, and this strongly suggests the major part of the works of commentary began at Yavneh, not before."
62. Pearson, "Jewish Haggadic Traditions", 462.
63. *Ibid.*, 470.
64. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 406. Betz, "Das Problem der Gnosis", 67-68, doubts Pearson's analysis of a primitive Jewish Gnostic source in this document: "Tatsächlich aber unterscheidet sich die in diesem gnostischen Text gebotene Exegese nach Form und Inhalt wesentlich von der jüdischen; ferner sind die gnostische Animosität gegen den Schöpfergott und die Sympathie für die Schlange im Paradies keineswegs noch in einem Anfangsstadium, sondern voll entwickelt. . . . ME. liegt in dem von Pearson behandelten Textstück ein ad hoc gewähltes Verfahren des christlichen Gnostikers vor, das der polemisch-lehrhafte Zweck durchaus nahelegt."

B. Pearson has also made a study of the Jewish traditions found in the Nag Hammadi tractate *Melchizedek*, from which he concludes: "Overall, it appears to me that the figure of Melchizedek in CG IX,1 is derived directly from *Jewish* traditions, without the mediation of Christianity."/65/ Melchizedek was the glorious yet enigmatic figure to whom Jesus is compared in Hebrews 7./66/ The discovery of a Qumran document featuring Melchizedek has helped us to understand better pre-Christian traditions of Melchizedek,/67/ though the Hebrews tradition seems closer to Philo than to Qumran. /68/ Later Christians enlarged still further upon the Melchizedek figure as we see from the Slavonic Enoch./69/

Though it is quite indubitable that some Melchizedek traditions are pre-Christian, it is still dubious that Pearson's analysis can sustain a pre-Christian Jewish Gnosticism inasmuch as the Nag Hammadi *Melchizedek* is quite clearly a Christian Gnostic text, which is most remarkable for its anti-docetic polemic. As W. Beltz concludes, though the treatise is quite fragmentary. it does permit the conclusion "that here also the *tertium*

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65. B. A. Pearson, "The Figure of Melchizedek in the First Tractate . . . Cod. IX", *Proceedings of the XIIth International Association for the History of Religions*, ed. C. J. Bleeker, *et al.*, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1975) 207.
66. I. Hunt, "Recent Melkizedek Study", *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. J. L. McKenzie; Herder & Herder, New York (1962) 21-33; B. Demarest, *A History of Interpretation of Hebrews 7, 1-10*, J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen (1976); F. L. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, Cambridge University Press (1976).
67. Y. Yadin, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews", *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 4 (1965) 36-55; M. de Jonge and A. S. van der Woude, "11Q Melchizedek and the New Testament", *NTS* 12 (1965/1966) 301-326.
68. J. W. Thompson, "The Conceptual Background and Purpose of the Midrash in Hebrews VII", *NovT* 19 (1977) 209-223.
69. J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1976) 114-116.

comparationis of the Gnostic author is the analogy Melchisedek-Jesus".[70]

Jewish traditions about Seth have led James Robinson to contend that, "It is not inconceivable that such a Christian Gnostic movement as the Sethians may simply be a Christian outgrowth of a Jewish Gnostic group", since such non-Christian Gnostic texts as *The Apocalypse of Adam* and *The Three Steles of Seth* are Sethian tractates.[71]

Now it is quite true that we have rabbinic traditions about Seth, the godly son of Adam, on the one hand, and Gnostic texts which feature Seth, the father of the enlightened seed of Gnostics, on the other hand. But it should be noted, first of all, that the rabbinic materials are very late in date. According to J. Townsend,

> Seth is hardly a subject of great interest in Rabbinic circles. Tannaitic literature hardly mentions him. A survey of the various concordances and biblical indices reveals no mention of Seth in the *Mishnah*, the *Tosefta*, *Mekhilta de Rabbi Shim'on ben Yoḥai*, *Sifra*, and *Sifre*. There is one reference in *Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishma'el*. Therefore, this survey necessarily depends upon relatively late sources.[72]

In the second place, the rabbinic traditions about Seth have almost nothing in common with the Gnostic traditions. The former revolve around the birth of Seth, Seth's righteous character, Seth and the Messiah, etc.[73] The Gnostic traditions, on the other hand, involve Seth as an

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70. Beltz, "Gnosis und Altes Testament", 356.
71. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 7.
72. J. T. Townsend, "Seth in Rabbinic Literature", Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, Dec., 1977, 1.
73. D. Berman, "Seth in Rabbinic Literature", Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, Dec., 1977.

author, the Great Seth, the incarnate Seth, etc./74/ The one common tradition is a view that Seth was the ancestor of the whole human race as attributed to some Gnostics by Irenaeus. Usually, however, Seth is the ancestor of only the enlightened seed of the Gnostics.

VI Anti-Jewish Use of Jewish Materials

It is certainly undeniable that Jewish Scriptures and traditions have been utilized in the Gnostic texts, though it is certainly dubious that these traditions descend back to the pre-Christian era or even to the first century AD. In any case, the other side of the coin is the fact that these Jewish elements have usually been used in an essentially anti-Jewish manner.

F. Wisse argues that in *The Apocryphon of John*:

> The vilification of the Old Testament God is not a sign of anti-Semitism, but a necessary consequence of the belief that the world is evil by nature. The Old Testament itself is not rejected, for it reveals, when correctly interpreted, not only the evil nature of the Creator, but also the beginnings of the Gnostic race./75/

But such an explanation can only be maintained from a Gnostic point of view. The contrary usage of Old Testament materials is amply confirmed by such Nag

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74. G. W. MacRae, "Seth in Gnostic Texts and Traditions", *SBL 1977 Seminar Papers*, Scholars Press, Missoula (1977) 17-24; A. F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature*, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1977) 119-120, concludes: "We should not come to any hasty conclusions about the origins of gnosticism simply because some Jewish Haggadic elements are present in certain gnostic treatises. We cannot, however, deny that both the Jews and the gnostics believed that there was a special generation throughout the ages. The relationship, however, was obviously limited to Philo and the Samaritans, since it is only in their writings that the idea of Seth as 'another seed' is found."
75. F. Wisse, "John, Apocryphon of", *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Suppt.* 482.

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Hammadi texts as: *The Apocryphon of John, The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Philip, The Hypostasis (Nature) of the Archons, On the Origin of the World, The Second Apocalypse of James, The Apocalypse of Adam, The Paraphrase of Shem,* and *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth.*

This is a fundamental enigma. As Pearson admits, "Paradoxically, the hermeneutical thrust in the use of these materials is outspokenly heretical, even 'anti-Jewish'"./76/ MacRae, who has stressed the Jewish elements in the Nag Hammadi texts, concedes, "nor are there solid grounds for thinking that the basic anticosmic dualism of any Gnostic system is itself to be derived from Jewish traditions"./77/ Drane is therefore led to deny a Jewish origin for Gnosticism:

> The way in which Old Testament materials are utilized . . . hardly suggests that those Gnostics who used these ideas could ever have been Jews, while the fact that Gnostic knowledge of the Old Testament tends to be limited to the first few chapters of Genesis indicates no more than that the Gnostics found a convenient cosmological framework in this section of the Old Testament./78/

VII Scholem's Jewish Gnostics

But were there no examples of Jewish Gnostics? James Robinson claims, "The Nag Hammadi Codices open up the prehistory of Gershom Scholem's book, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*"./79/ Though some of Scholem's materials may go back to the pupils of Johanan ben Zakkai, who flourished at the end of the

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76. B. A. Pearson, "Nag Hammadi Codices", 1974 *Yearbook of the Encyclopedia Judaica*, Keter, Jerusalem (1974) 247.
77. G. W. MacRae, "Nag Hammadi", *IDBSup* 618.
78. Drane, "Gnosticism and the New Testament", 10.
79. J. M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Codices*, The Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, Claremont (1974) 8.

first century AD,/80/ most of his references come from the second century and much later, as Gruenwald notes:

> Some of the literary remains of the *merkava* Mysticism may well go back to the second century C.E., yet the material as it lies before us today reveals clear traces of the work of later editors, who not only added new material to the old but also interfered with the old texts before them./81/

There is moreover a serious objection to the designation of the Jewish sages involved in Merkabah mysticism as Gnostics. Scholars such as Hans Jonas, D. Flusser, and H. J. W. Drijvers have objected that the Jewish mysticism cited by Scholem is hardly Gnostic in the usual sense of the word./82/ As Gruenwald points out:

> One may add to this that the anti-cosmic tones in so many of the texts of gnosticism are totally absent in the *Hekhalot* literature. In the *Hekhalot* mysticism there is nothing of the element of escape from the bondage of the Archons ruling this world. The heavenly ascent of the mystic is nothing but an emotional rapture; it is by no means to be interpreted in gnosticistic (sic) terms of escape. In short, there are no dualistic traces in Jewish *merkava* mysticism./83/

Similar objections may be levelled against Jean Daniélou's use of the phrase Jewish Gnosticism for the pre-Christian period as he is referring to somewhat unorthodox but not dualistic manifestations of Judaism. /84/

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80. For the variations and amplifications of the *merkavah* traditions of Eleazar ben ʿArakh, disciple of Johanan ben Zakkai, see J. Neusner, "The Development of the *Merkavah* Tradition", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 2 (1971) 149-160; *idem, Life of Rabban Johanan Ben Zakkai*, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1962).
81. I. Gruenwald, "Knowledge and Vision", *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 (1973) 90.
82. Cf. E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids; Tyndale Press, London (1973) 150-151.
83. Gruenwald, "Knowledge and Vision", 91.
84. J. W. Drane, *Paul: Libertine or Legalist*, SPCK, London (1975) 157, n. 74; Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, 144-146.

VIII Disappointed Jewish Apocalypticism

But what of Gnostic affinities with Jewish apocalyptic movements?/85/ In 1959 R. M. Grant offered the intriguing thesis of the failure of the apocalyptic hopes at the destruction of the temple in AD 70 as the catalyst which may have led to the anti-cosmic dualism of the Gnostics./86/

Grant's thesis was sharply criticized as there is strong evidence of continued apocalyptic hopes leading to disturbances under Trajan and finally to the Bar Kochba War under Hadrian (AD 132-135)./87/ The Jews had once before experienced the destruction of their temple by Nebuchadnezzar and were able to see God's hand in judgment in the destruction by Titus./88/ Rabbi Aqiba was even able to rejoice at the ruin of the temple as a harbinger of the messianic age./89/

In particular, critics of Grant pointed out that we have the apocalyptic works of the Syrian *Baruch* and *4 Ezra*. The latter corresponds to chapters 3-14 of what is called *2 Esdras* in English versions. There is a clear reference to the destruction of the temple in AD 70 in 9:21-22. The work is primarily a book of lamentations; its messianic age is placed at a distance and will last 400 years (7:28). It is dated to the last decade of the first

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85. K. Schubert, "Jüdischer Hellenismus und jüdische Gnosis", *Wort und Wahrheit* 18 (1963) 455-457.
86. R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*.
87. Cf. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, 157-158. On the disturbances under Trajan, see A. Fuks, "Aspects of the Jewish Revolt in AD 115-117", *JRS* 51 (1961) 98-104.
88. R. Goldenberg, "The Broken Axis: Rabbinic Judaism and the Fall of Jerusalem", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Supplement* 45 (1977) F 869-882.
89. R. P. Benoit, "Rabbi Aquiba ben Joseph sage et héros Judaïsme", *RB* 54 (1947) 84.

century AD or soon thereafter./90/

At the SBL conference in Chicago in November, 1973, Professor Grant abandoned his own thesis. None the less his theory may still deserve consideration with some necessary modifications. B. Pearson comments, "His view that the fall of Jerusalem was the decisive historical event out of which Gnosticism arose is surely wrong, but otherwise his theory has its merits"./91/ Following Grant's lead, Pearson has argued:

> There is a strong case to be made for the view that ancient Gnosticism developed, in large part, from a disappointed messianism, or rather as a transmuted messianism. . . Such a transmuted messianism, for the ancient period, is better understood as arising in the national homeland, i.e. in Palestine itself, rather than in the Diaspora./92/

Pearson believes that Gnosticism arose out of Judaism in the pre-Christian period or at any rate by the early first century AD. But where do we have disappointed messianism at this early date? True, we have a number of messianic pretenders such as Judas, Theudas, and the Egyptian, but none of any consequence.

IX The Bar Kochba Revolt

The answer to the historical question of when the Jews experienced such a major disappointed messianism is

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90. E. Breech, "These Fragments I Have Shored against My Ruins: The Form and Function of 4 Ezra", *JBL* 92 (1973) 267-274; J. M. Myers, *I and II Esdras*, Doubleday, New York (1974), especially 125-127, 129-131; F. Zimmerman, "Underlying Documents of IV Ezra", *JQR* 51 (1960) 107-134.
The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch likewise refers to the destruction of the temple in AD 70 and was composed *c.*AD 90. See L. Rost, *Judaism 'outside the Hebrew Canon*, Abingdon, Nashville (1976) 125-129.
91. B. A. Pearson, "Friedlander Revisited", *Studia Philonica* 2 (1973) 39, n. 50.
92. *Ibid.*, 35.

surely obvious - the Bar Kochba Revolt!

On the surface the calamities of the second revolt are dreadfully similar to the first revolt - thousands of casualties and prisoners, devastation everywhere. But there are major differences. During the first revolt there were many conflicting factions./93/ During the second revolt the Jews as a whole were united under a supreme military leader, Bar Kochba./94/

But most significant is the fact that the greatest rabbi of the day, Aqiba, hailed Bar Kochba as "the king Messiah". Though G. S. Aleksandrov has recently tried to minimise Aqiba's role,/95/ most scholars believe that Aqiba's part was decisive in gaining for Bar Kochba the support of many other rabbis./96/

X An Apostate Rabbi

Do we have any evidence that rabbis after the Bar Kochba Revolt expressed disillusionment and also dualistic, possibly Gnostic sentiments? Indeed, we have a celebrated case in the apostate rabbi, *Elisha ben Abuyah*, nicknamed *Aḥer* ("The Other"), who was the teacher of Rabbi Meir, one of the most distinguished successors of Aqiba. What do we know of Elisha?

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93. S. Applebaum, "The Zealots: The Case for Revaluation", *JRS* 61 (1971) 153-170; M. Hengel, *Die Zeloten*, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1961); D. M. Rhoads, *Israel in Revolution: 6-74 C.E.* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); M. Smith, "Zealots and Sicarii", *HTR* 64 (1971) 1-19.
94. S. Applebaum, *Prolegoména to the Study of the Second Jewish Revolt (A.D. 132-135)*, British Archaeological Reports, Oxford (1976); J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Bar Cochba Period", *The Bible in Current Thought*, ed. J. L. McKenzie, Herder and Herder, New York (1962) 133-168; Y. Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba*, Random House, New York (1971).
95. G. S. Aleksandrov, "The Role of ᶜAquiba in the Bar-Kokhva Rebellion", *REJ* 132 (1973) 65-72.
96. Cf. G. Alon, *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World*, Magnes Press, Jerusalem (1977).

He was a student of Greek (Jer. Meg. 1.9) and read forbidden works (*sifre minim*). An early source classes Elisha as one of four men who delved in ecstatic mysticism: "Our Rabbis taught: Four men entered the Garden (*pardes, i.e.* paradise), namely Ben ᶜAzzai and Ben Zoma, Aḥer and R. Akiba" (Ḥagigah 14b)./97/ The first died, the second became demented, Aḥer "mutilated the shoots", and only Aqiba remained unharmed. Commenting on Aḥer's apostasy, the Talmud says that he beheld Metatron: "Perhaps, - God forfend! - there are two divinities!"

L. Ginzberg felt that Elisha was simply a Sadducee. But according to Pearson, "it can hardly be doubted any longer that Elisha ben Abuya (Aher) was a Gnostic heretic"./98/

Though there are various traditions, the most probable reason for his apostasy was his disillusionment in the doctrine of divine providence and punishment as a result of the persecutions following the failure of the Bar Kochba revolt. He is reported to have seen the tongue of Rabbi Judah ha-Naḥtom in a dog's mouth; another version has the tongue of Ḥuẓpit in a pig's mouth. He is accused of informing on fellow Jews and of consorting with prostitutes. His pupil Rabbi Meir did not disown him but tried to bring him to repentance on his death bed./99/

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97. *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Moᶜed*, trans. I. Abrahams; Soncino, London (1938) 90-92.
98. Pearson, "Friedländer Revisited", 33. On the other hand in an important monograph which I did not have when I originally prepared this paper for presentation, A. F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1977), concludes that the early traditions of the "two powers" were of complementary beings and that it was not until the end of the second century that we have antagonistic powers of a dualistic or Gnostic system. He further concludes (p. xi), "This evidence gives limited and disinterested support to the church fathers' contention that gnosticism arose later than Christianity".
99. A. Büchler, "Die Erlösung Elisa' b. Abujahs aus dem Höllenfeuer", *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 76 (1932) 412-456.

After the failure of Bar Kochba, as A. H. Silver points out, there was a marked change in messianic expectations. Rabbis no longer taught an imminent expectation of the messiah.

> The Bar Kochba revolution shattered these Messianic hopes and brought tragic disillusionment into the hearts of the people, so that the Rabbis who lived after this fateful apocalyptic debacle sought to project the Messianic hope to a more distant future, thereby discouraging, if possible, a recrudescence of such intense hopes in the immediacy of the Messiah's advent./100/

Such a pitch of messianic fever among Jews was not again reached until the seventeenth century when the notorious Sabbatai Ṣevi aroused the hopes of Jews in many countries. When he apostasized and became a Muslim in 1666, there was shock and disbelief. The followers of the Sabbatian movement have significantly been accused of "gnostic" and antinomian traits. According to G. Scholem:

> The gnostic character of most Sabbatian systems is surprising indeed. . . . Nevertheless, the significance of extraneous, Christian influences should not be exaggerated. Certain developments are immanent in the very nature and structure of religious phenomena. Sabbatian theology would probably have developed the way it did even without Christian gnosticism and the return of many marranos to their ancestral religion, Lurianic kabbalism, the Sabbatians' original system of reference, was, after all, based on an essentially gnostic set of ideas./101/

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100. A. H. Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel*, Beacon, Boston (1959) 15.

101. G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi*, Princeton University Press (1973) 797; cf. W. D. Davies, "From Schweitzer to Scholem: Reflections on Sabbatai Svi", *JBL* 95 (1976) 553: "They took Sabbatai Svi as a paradigm and an example to be imitated. To do so, they had to call evil good. They had to justify apostasy itself as messianic and redemptive. To do so in the end was to destroy all values dear to Judaism. It implied an ultimate cynicism and nihilism, born doubtless of a profound despair, in which the demand of God was mocked."

In modern times the tragedy of the Nazi Holocaust has caused at least one major Jewish thinker to reject the God of the Old Testament./102/ Whereas Elie Wiesel and E. L. Fackenheim have offered different reactions to the Holocaust,/103/ Richard Rubenstein has come to the radical conclusion that the Holocaust proves that God is not omnipotent. As one who reached similar conclusions he cites the rabbi, Elisha ben Abuyah:

> He also elected an absurd and meaningless cosmos rather than interpret the suffering of the innocent as divinely inflicted retribution of sin. In the face of overwhelming Jewish suffering during the Hadrianic War, he exclaimed "*Leth din v'leth dyan*" - "There is neither judgement nor Judge"./104/

Similar sentiments are attributed to Cain by the recently recovered Neofiti Targum:

> Cain answered and said to Abel, There is no Judgment, there is no Judge, there is no other world, there is no gift of good reward for the just and no punishment for the wicked./105/

Pearson cites this passage as evidence for his view of a pre-Christian Jewish Gnosticism. A. Diez Macho, who discovered the Neofiti Codex in the Vatican library in 1956, believes that the targum may be pre-Christian in origin./106/ Other scholars, however, find cogent

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102. The defection of such Jews as Sigmund Freud is not comparable as their apostasy was based on intellectual reasons. Cf. Peter Gay, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans*, Oxford University Press, New York (1978).
103. E. L. Fackenheim, *The Human Conditions after Auschwitz*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse (1971).
104. R. Rubinstein, *After Auschwitz*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis (1966) 68. Cf. D. W. Silvermann, "The Holocaust: A Living Force", *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 32 (1977) 139.
105. Cited by Pearson, "Friedländer Revisited", 33.
106. *Neophyti I-III*, ed. A. Diez Macho, Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, Madrid (1968, 1970, 1971).

reasons for dating the targum no earlier than the third century AD./107/ We would suggest that a further reason for dating the targum at least after the second century is this close parallel between Cain's sentiments and those expressed by Elisha ben Abuya.

XI Conclusions

Why has so obvious an answer to the question of how Jewish elements came to be used in an anti-Jewish way been missed? It is primarily because scholars such as Pearson have had a mental block. They are so convinced that Gnosticism is a pre-Christian phenomenon that they have been searching in the wrong century - the first rather than the second.

But surely, one may respond, there is evidence of at least a rudimentary or embryonic Gnosticism by the end of the first century. We have references in the New Testament itself to those who held a docetic view of Christ (1 John), and to those who believed in a present resurrection (2 Tim 2:18). We also have references to those who espoused an ascetic attitude toward marriage from what seems to be a negative outlook upon the physical creation (1 Tim 4:3-4). These seem to boast in a falsely named "gnosis" (1 Tim 6:20). We also have the evidence of Ignatius of Antioch, who combatted docetic views of Christ at the beginning of the second century - some years before the Bar Kochba revolt.

Logically we would expect Gnosticism as an integrated system of beliefs to develop first a cosmology, second its anthropology, third its soteriology, and fourth its ethics, all arranged around a dualistic axis. Historically, however, the evidences point to quite a different sequence.

Scholars have been misled in conceiving of Gnosticism in organic analogies, that is, in regarding primitive Gnosticism as a creature with all of its parts present - if in rudimentary form. Hence it has been assumed that if

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107. See especially the review by J. Fitzmyer in *JBL* 91 (1972) 575-578. Cf. B. Grossfield, *A Bibliography of Targum Literature*, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati (1972); R. le Déaut, "The Current Status of Targumic Studies", *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 4 (1974) 3-32.

anthropological docetism is attested by the end of the first century, dualistic cosmology must also have been presumed.

James Robinson and Helmut Koester have developed a concept which is seminal in many ways but which I find misleading in others - the concept of trajectories./108/ The word connotes the paths of missiles following a predictable parabola, whose points of origins can be calculated rather precisely.

Intellectual and religious movements are more comparable with confluents and currents, whose courses are far more unpredictable. In some cases we may have tributaries funneling into a major river as the rivers of the Punjab flow into the Indus; at times we may have a tributary flowing from a river as the Bahr al-Yusuf flows from the Nile, or a river dividing into several streams as the Nile did in its ancient delta; or we may have a complex system of interlocking canals as with the Tigris and the Euphrates, eventually merging as the single Shatt al-Arab. We may also have streams running side by side without meeting. The concept of confluences may help us to appreciate what happened in the development of Gnosticism in the first and second centuries.

No single source can satisfactorily explain all the facets of a syncretistic religion like Gnosticism which has no historic founder./109/ We must adopt a polyphyletic rather than a monophyletic model of origins. To oversimplify the situation let me highlight three major confluences which flowed together to form the mature Gnosticism of the second century.

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108. J. M. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia (1971). See the review by R. McL. Wilson, *JTS* 23 (1972) 476.

109. This is the weakness of G. van Groningen, *First Century Gnosticism*, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1967).

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First of all, *Hellenism*, which was certainly pre-Christian, formed the intellectual climate of the age which viewed the human body with prejudice. Hellenistic philosophy and astrology provided Gnosticism with its *anthropology*./110/ This anthropology viewed man's spirit/soul as a divine spark imprisoned in the body's tomb - a view prefigured by Plato and the Orphics./111/ Such an anthropology can be found quite independent of a dualistic cosmology, for example, in the Hermetica, some of which were found in the Nag Hammadi Library./112/

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110. F. Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans*, Dover, New York (1960 reprint of 1912 ed.); J. Lindsay, *Origins of Astrology*, Frederick Muller, London (1971); *Ancient Astrology, Theory and Practice (The Mathesis of Firmicus Maternus)* tr. J. R. Bram, Noyes Park Ridge, New Jersey (1975). The latter work contains a full bibliography of both primary and secondary sources on the subject.
F. Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism*, Dover, New York (1959 reprint of 1922 ed.); R. M. Grant, "The Resurrection of the Body", *JR* 28 (1948) 124-130, 188-208.

111. A Coptic translation of Plato's *Republic* 588B-589B was found at Nag Hammadi (CG VI,5); Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 290-291. Cf. A. Böhlig and F. Wisse, *Zum Hellenismus in den Schriften von Nag Hammadi*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden (1975); P. Courcelle, "L'ame au tombeau", *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris (1974) 331-336.

112. A. D. Nock, "Gnosticism", *HTR* 57 (1964) 276, remarked: "Outside the Christian orbit we have seen in the Hermetica a fusion of Platonism and Judaism which produced a scheme of individual redemption without a personal redeemer and without any final cosmic conclusion repairing the original fault (such a conclusion as after all Manichaeism still provided)." Cf. E. Yamauchi, "Hermetic Literature", *IDBSup* 408; *idem*, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, 69-72. In the Nag Hammadi Codex VI we have the following Hermetic works: CG VI,3, *Authoritative Teaching (on the Soul)*;

It is this hellenistic view of the body and soul/spirit which led intellectuals, who were not necessarily Gnostics, to reject the doctrines of the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Jesus in favour of a docetic Christology. As Martin Hengel has remarked:

> Thus the basic themes of christology, the humiliation and ignominious death of the pre-existent redeemer, presented in the first verse of the hymn in Philippians 2.6-11, is obscured, rather than elucidated, by references to a pagan pre-Christian redeemer myth. In particular, the gnostic "docetism" which did away with the scandal of the death of Jesus on the cross in the interest of the impassibility of the God of the philosophers demonstrates that the gnostic systems are at an "acute Hellenization" of the Christian creed, i.e. necessary consequences of a popular philosophical influence./113/

In reaction to Adolf Harnack's attempt to explain Gnosticism as the "acute hellenization" of Christianity, scholars are currently in danger of undervaluing the obvious hellenistic elements of Gnosticism. There are

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112 Contd.
CG VI,6, *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*; CG VI,7, *The Prayer of Thanksgiving*, which is the same as the Latin *Asclepius* 41; and CG VI,8, *The Apocalypse from Asclepius*, which is nearly identical with *Asclepius* 21-29. See Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 278-283, 297-307. K. W. Tröger, a German scholar with a broad view of Gnosticism, believes that the Hermetica can be called Gnostic: K.-W. Tröger, *Mysterienglaube und Gnosis in Corpus Hermeticum XIII*, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin (1971); *idem*, "Die hermetische Gnosis", in Tröger, *Gnosis und Neues Testament*, 97-120. The Hermetica, however, lack the radical dualism of Gnosticism; creation is not regarded in itself as an evil, and the demiurge is not a rebel but the son of the supreme God. See G. van Moorsel, *The Mysteries of Hermes Trismegistus*, Domplein, Utrecht (1955).

113. M. Hengel, *Crucifixion*, SCM, London (1977) 15-16.

ample evidences of philosophic influences in the Nag Hammadi Library, including a fragment of Plato's *Republic*, and traces of Stoicism, Pythagoreanism, Middle Platonism, and Neo-platonism especially in *The Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, *Marsanes*, and *Allogenes* - Gnostic treatises whose channels have not admitted the confluences of Christianity though they are quite clearly later than the rise of Christianity.

In the second place, in contrast to Bultmann and those who follow him, it has become quite clear to many scholars that it was *Christianity* which provided Gnosticism with its *soteriology*, namely the redeemer figure, and not the other way around./114/ All the non-Christian Gnostic tractates from the Nag Hammadi Library adduced by James Robinson to prove otherwise seem, to this writer at least, to originate in the second century. A comparable development took place with the impact of

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114. See Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, 163-169; G. Quispel, "Der gnostische Anthropos und die jüdische Tradition", *Er Jb* 22 (1953) 195-234; H.-M. Schenke, *Der Gott "Mensch" in der Gnosis*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen (1962); C. Colpe, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen (1961); *idem*, "New Testament and Gnostic Christology", *Religions in Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner; E. J. Brill, Leiden (1968) 227-243; M. Hengel, *The Son of God*, Fortress, Philadelphia, SCM Press, London (1976) 33. Talbert, "The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer", 419, n. 2, observes: "Since J. M. Robinson's negative review of Colpe's book . . . scholarly opinion has seemed to conform Colpe's and Schenke's conclusions. . . . W. Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, Westminster, Philadelphia, SCM Press (1968) 151, sums up the situation: 'After Carsten Colpe's book . . . it must be considered very questionable whether in the pre-Christian period there had been a complete redeemer myth that was then merely transferred to Jesus.'"

Christianity upon pagan religions in the attribution of a resurrection to Adonis and to Attis in the second century as Lambrechts has demonstrated./115/

Finally, as MacRae, Pearson, and others have shown from the Nag Hammadi texts, we may concur that *Judaism* provided Gnosticism with its *cosmological myth*. But in my view this development did not take place in the pre-Christian era or even in the first century, but rather in the early second century in the wake of profound disillusionment after the failure of the Bar Kochba revolt.

R. McL. Wilson makes an important observation:

> Another such point is indicated in Jonas' programmatic statement about "a Gnosticism without a fallen god", already quoted, for it has been noted that the earliest Christian gnostics do not *expressly* name the God of the Old Testament as creator of the world, nor does the name Ialdabaoth yet appear. It would of course be easy to assume that the God of the Old Testament was one of the creator angels, or even their leader, but the texts do not say so. Rather it may be that we have here a stage prior to the radical gnostic repudiation of the world and its Creator - which on this basis could be located with some confidence at a particular period in the second century./116/

As to the origin of Ialdabaoth, G. Scholem makes a proposal which fits in with the reconstruction which we have offered:

> I propose that it owes its invention to a heretical Jew familiar with Aramaic, the Hebrew Bible and the literature or practice of the magicians, a Jew who

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115. P. Lambrechts, "Les fêtes 'phrygiennes' de Cybèle et d'-Attis", *Bulletin de l'institut historique Belge de Rome*, 27 (1952) 141-170; *idem*, "La 'résurrection d'Adonis'", *Mélanges Isidore Levy*, Edition de l'institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales, Brussels (1955) especially 214-240. For a contrary view, see M. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, Thames & Hudson, London (1977).

116. R. McL. Wilson, "From Gnosis to Gnosticism", *Mélanges . . . Henri-Charles Puech*, 428-429.

in the context of the Ophitic myth, created it as a secret name of Samael. If I say a Jew, I have in mind Jews who went over to Gnostic heresies, such as the famous Tannaitic teacher Elisha ben Abuya in the first half of the second century, who surely was not the first Gnostic sectarian (Hebrew: *min*), but only the most widely known./117/

Nothing in the Nag Hammadi texts precludes our reconstruction, and many aspects even of the non-Christian texts suggest it.

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117. G. Scholem, "Jaldabaoth Reconsidered", *Mélanges . . . Henri-Charles Puech*, 418-419. F. M. Cross, "The 'Olden Gods' in Ancient Near Eastern Creation Myths", *Magnalia Dei*, ed. F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke, and P. D. Miller, Doubleday, New York (1976) 335, suggests that Jaldabaoth means "the child of Chaos", after Sankunyaton's *Baau* (biblical *bōhū*), the spouse of the wind *Qodm*. The notion that Jewish or Jewish Gnostic materials which are free from Christian elements are thereby pre-Christian is quite fallacious. There is, to be sure, the celebrated passage about Jesus, certainly with Christian interpolations, in Josephus' *Antiquities*. Cf. P. Winter, "Josephus on Jesus", *Journal of Historical Studies* 1 (1968) 289-302; S. Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and Its Implications*, The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem (1971). But in the mass of rabbinic literature there are very few explicit references to Jesus and to Christians (e.g. b. Sanh. 43a, 107b; b. Sota 47a; j. Hag. 2.2). See E. Bammel, "Christian Origins in Jewish Traditions", *NTS* 13 (1967) 317-335; W. Horbury, "The Trial of Jesus in Jewish Tradition", *The Trial of Jesus*, ed. E. Bammel, SCM, London (1970) 103-121; D. R. Catchpole, *The Trial of Jesus*, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1971) 1-5. Apart from these pejorative references to Jesus as a magician or as "Ben Pandera", the rabbis adopted the strategy of silence or referred to the Christians under the general term of *minim* "heretics". The latter may also have included Gnostics. Cf. R. Marcus, "Pharisees, Essenes,

117 Contd.
and Gnostics", *JBL* 23 (1954) 157-159; R. Kimelman, "R. Yohanan and the Minim: New Evidence for the Identification of Third-Century Minim with Gnosticizing Jewish Christians", *Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale*. Kimelman discusses the rare references of the rabb rabbis to the *nôṣrîm* "Nazarenes, i.e. Christians", and to the *'āven gilyôn* "falsehood of blank paper", a cacophemistic adaptation of the Greek *euaggelion* "Gospel".
Jewish Gnostic materials which are free from Christian elements may therefore be no more pre-Christian than the mass of rabbinic materials which deliberately avoided references to Christianity. Cf. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, 143-162.

Note This article is based on a paper presented at the International Conference on Gnosticism, Yale, March 1978.