

Definition of Gnosticism

The doctrine of salvation by knowledge. This definition, based on the etymology of the word (*gnosis* "knowledge", *gnostikos*, "good at knowing"), is correct as far as it goes, but it gives only one, though perhaps the predominant, characteristic of Gnostic systems of thought. Whereas Judaism and Christianity, and almost all pagan systems, hold that the soul attains its proper end by obedience of mind and will to the Supreme Power, i.e. by faith and works, it is markedly peculiar to Gnosticism that it places the salvation of the soul merely in the possession of a quasi-intuitive knowledge of the mysteries of the universe and of magic formulae indicative of that knowledge. Gnostics were "people who knew", and their knowledge at once constituted them a superior class of beings, whose present and future status was essentially different from that of those who, for whatever reason, did not know. A more complete and historical definition of Gnosticism would be:

A collective name for a large number of greatly-varying and [pantheistic](#)-idealistic sects, which flourished from some time before the Christian Era down to the fifth century, and which, while borrowing the phraseology and some of the tenets of the chief religions of the day, and especially of Christianity, held matter to be a deterioration of spirit, and the whole universe a depravation of the Deity, and taught the ultimate end of all being to be the overcoming of the grossness of matter and the return to the Parent-Spirit, which return they held to be inaugurated and facilitated by the appearance of some God-sent Savior.

However unsatisfactory this definition may be, the obscurity, multiplicity, and wild confusion of Gnostic systems will hardly allow of another. Many scholars, moreover, would hold that every attempt to give a generic description of Gnostic sects is labor lost.

ORIGIN

The beginnings of Gnosticism have long been a matter of controversy and are still largely a subject of research. The more these origins are studied, the farther they seem to recede in the past. Whereas formerly Gnosticism was considered mostly a corruption of Christianity, it now seems clear that the first traces of Gnostic systems can be discerned some centuries before the Christian Era. Its Eastern origin was already maintained by Gieseler and Neander; F. Ch. Bauer (1831) and Lassen (1858) sought to prove its relation to the religions of India; Lipsius (1860) pointed to Syria and Phoenicia as its home, and Hilgenfeld (1884) thought it was connected with later Mazdeism. Joel (1880), Weingarten (1881), Koffmane (1881), Anrich (1894), and Wobbermin (1896) sought to account for the rise of Gnosticism by the influence of Greek Platonic philosophy and the Greek mysteries, while Harnack described it as "acute Hellenization of Christianity". For the past twenty-five years, however, the trend of scholarship has steadily moved towards proving the pre-Christian Oriental origins of Gnosticism. At the Fifth Congress of Orientalists (Berlin, 1882) Kessler brought out the connection between Gnosis and the Babylonian religion. By this latter name, however, he meant not the original religion of Babylonia, but the syncretistic religion which arose after the conquest of Cyrus. The same idea is brought out in his "Mani" seven years later. In the same year F.W. Brandt published his "Mandäische Religion". This Mandaean religion is so unmistakably a form of Gnosticism that it seems beyond doubt that Gnosticism existed independent of, and anterior to, Christianity. In more recent years (1897) Wilhelm Anz pointed out the close similarity between Babylonian astrology and the Gnostic theories of the Hebdomad and Ogdoad. Though in many instances speculations on the Babylonian *Astrallehre* have gone beyond all sober scholarship, yet in this particular instance the inferences made by Anz seem sound and reliable. Researches in the same direction were continued and instituted on a wider scale by W. Bousset, in 1907, and led to carefully ascertained results. In 1898 the attempt was made by M. Friedländer to trace Gnosticism in pre-Christian Judaism. His opinion that the Rabbinic term *Minnim* designated not Christians, as was commonly believed, but Antinomian Gnostics, has not found universal acceptance. In fact, E. Schürer brought sufficient proof to show that *Minnim* is the exact Aramaean dialectic

equivalent for *ethne*. Nevertheless Friedländer's essay retains its value in tracing strong antinomian tendencies with Gnostic colouring on Jewish soil. Not a few scholars have laboured to find the source of Gnostic theories on Hellenistic and, specifically, Alexandrian soil. In 1880 Joel sought to prove that the germ of all Gnostic theories was to be found in Plato. Though this may be dismissed as an exaggeration, some Greek influence on the birth, but especially on the growth, of Gnosticism cannot be denied. In Trismegistic literature, as pointed out by Reitzenstein (*Poimandres*, 1904), we find much that is strangely akin to Gnosticism. Its Egyptian origin was defended by E. Amélineau, in 1887, and illustrated by A. Dietrich, in 1891 (*Abraxas Studien*) and 1903 (*Mithrasliturgie*). The relation of Plotinus's philosophy to Gnosticism was brought out by C. Schmidt in 1901. The relation of Plotinus's philosophy to Gnosticism was brought out by C. Schmidt in 1901. That Alexandrian thought had some share at least in the development of Christian Gnosticism is clear from the fact that the bulk of Gnostic literature which we possess comes to us from Egyptian (Coptic) sources. That this share was not a predominant one is, however, acknowledged by O. Gruppe in his "*Griechische Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte*" (1902). It is true that the Greek mysteries, as G. Anrich pointed out in 1894, had much in common with esoteric Gnosticism; but there remains the further question, in how far these Greek mysteries, as they are known to us, were the genuine product of Greek thought, and not much rather due to the overpowering influence of Orientalism.

Although the origins of [Gnosticism](#) are still largely enveloped in obscurity, so much light has been shed on the problem by the combined labours of many scholars that it is possible to give the following tentative solution: Although Gnosticism may at first sight appear a mere thoughtless syncretism of well nigh all religious systems in antiquity, it has in reality one deep root-principle, which assimilated in every soil what is needed for its life and growth; this principle is philosophical and religious pessimism. The Gnostics, it is true, borrowed their terminology almost entirely from existing religions, but they only used it to illustrate their great idea of the essential evil of this present existence and the duty to escape it by the help of magic spells and a superhuman Saviour. Whatever they borrowed, this pessimism they did not borrow -- not from Greek thought, which was a joyous acknowledgment of and homage to the beautiful and noble in this world, with a studied disregard of the element of sorrow; not from Egyptian thought, which did not allow its elaborate speculations on retribution and judgment in the netherworld to cast a gloom on this present existence, but considered the universe created or evolved under the presiding wisdom of Thoth; not from Iranian thought, which held to the absolute supremacy of Ahura Mazda and only allowed Ahriman a subordinate share in the creation, or rather counter-creation, of the world; not from Indian Brahminic thought, which was [Pantheism](#) pure and simple, or God dwelling in, nay identified with, the universe, rather than the Universe existing as the contradictory of God; not, lastly, from Semitic thought, for Semitic religions were strangely reticent as to the fate of the soul after death, and saw all practical wisdom in the worship of Baal, or Marduk, or Assur, or Hadad, that they might live long on this earth. This utter pessimism, bemoaning the existence of the whole universe as a corruption and a calamity, with a feverish craving to be freed from the body of this death and a mad hope that, if we only knew, we could by some mystic words undo the cursed spell of this existence -- this is the foundation of all Gnostic thought. It has the same parent-soil as Buddhism; but Buddhism is ethical, it endeavours to obtain its end by the extinction of all desire; Gnosticism is pseudo-intellectual, and trusts exclusively to magical knowledge. Moreover, Gnosticism, placed in other historical surroundings, developed from the first on other lines than Buddhism.

When Cyrus entered Babylon in 539 B.C., two great worlds of thought met, and syncretism in religion, as far as we know it, began. Iranian thought began to mix with the ancient civilization of Babylon. The idea of the great struggle between evil and good, ever continuing in this universe, is the parent idea of Mazdeism, or Iranian dualism. This, and the imagined existence of numberless intermediate spirits, angels and devas, as the conviction which overcame the contentedness of Semitism. On the other hand, the unshakable trust, in astrology, the persuasion that the planetary system had a fatalistic influence on this world's affairs, stood its ground on the soil of Chaldea. The greatness of the Seven -- the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, the Sun, Jupiter, and Saturn -- the sacred Hebdomad, symbolized for millenniums by the staged towers of Babylonia, remained undiminished. They ceased, indeed, to be worshipped as deities, but they remained *archontes* and *dynameis*, rules and powers whose almost irresistible force was dreaded by man. Practically, they were changed from gods to devas, or evil spirits. The religions of the invaders and of the invaded effected a

compromise: the astral faith of Babylon was true, but beyond the Hebdomad was the infinite light in the Ogdoad, and every human soul had to pass the adverse influence of the god or gods of the Hebdomad before it could ascend to the only good God beyond. This ascent of the soul through the planetary spheres to the heaven beyond (an idea not unknown even to ancient Babylonian speculations) began to be conceived as a struggle with adverse powers, and became the first and predominant idea in Gnosticism. The second great component of Gnostic thought is magic, properly so called, i.e. the power *ex opere operato* of weird names, sounds, gestures, and actions, as also the mixture of elements to produce effects totally disproportionate to the cause. These magic formulae, which caused laughter and disgust to outsiders, are not a later and accidental corruption, but an essential part of Gnosticism, for they are found in all forms of Christian Gnosticism and likewise in Mandaëism. No Gnosis was essentially complete without the knowledge of the formulae, which, once pronounced, were the undoing of the higher hostile powers. Magic is the original sin of Gnosticism, nor is it difficult to guess whence it is inherited. To a certain extent it formed part of every pagan religion, especially the ancient mysteries, yet the thousands of magic tablets unearthed in Assyria and Babylonia show us where the rankest growth of magic was to be found. Moreover, the terms and names of earliest of Gnosticism bear an unmistakable similarity to Semitic sounds and words. Gnosticism came early into contact with Judaism, and it betrays a knowledge of the Old Testament, if only to reject it or borrow a few names from it. Considering the strong, well-organized, and highly-cultured Jewish colonies in the Euphrates valley, this early contact with Judaism is perfectly natural. Perhaps the Gnostic idea of a Redeemer is not unconnected with Jewish Messianic hopes. But from the first the Gnostic conception of a Saviour is more superhuman than that of popular Judaism; their *Manda d'Haye*, or *Soter*, is some immediate manifestation of the Deity, a Light-King, an *Æon (Aion)*, and an emanation of the good God. When Gnosticism came in touch with Christianity, which must have happened almost immediately on its appearance, Gnosticism threw herself with strange rapidity into Christian forms of thought, borrowed its nomenclature, acknowledged Jesus as Saviour of the world, simulated its sacraments, pretended to be an esoteric revelation of Christ and His Apostles, flooded the world with apocryphal Gospels, and Acts, and Apocalypses, to substantiate its claim. As Christianity grew within and without the Roman Empire, Gnosticism spread as a fungus at its root, and claimed to be the only true form of Christianity, unfit, indeed, for the vulgar crowd, but set apart for the gifted and the elect. So rank was its poisonous growth that there seemed danger of its stifling Christianity altogether, and the earliest Fathers devoted their energies to uprooting it. Though in reality the spirit of Gnosticism is utterly alien to that of Christianity, it then seemed to the unwary merely a modification or refinement thereof. When domiciled on Greek soil, Gnosticism, slightly changing its barbarous and Semitic terminology and giving its "emanations" and "syzygies" Greek names, sounded somewhat like neo-Platonism, though it was strongly repudiated by Plotinus. In Egypt the national worship left its mark more on Gnostic practice than on its theories.

In dealing with the origins of [Gnosticism](#), one might be tempted to mention Manichaeism, as a number of Gnostic ideas seem to be borrowed from Manichaeism, where they are obviously at home. This, however, would hardly be correct. Manichaeism, as historically connected with Mani, its founder, could not have arisen much earlier than A.D. 250, when Gnosticism was already in rapid decline. Manichaeism, however, in many of its elements dates back far beyond its commonly accepted founder; but then it is a parallel development with the Gnosis, rather than one of its sources. Sometimes Manichaeism is even classed as a form of Gnosticism and styled Parsee Gnosis, as distinguished from Syrian and Egyptian Gnosis. This classification, however, ignores the fact that the two systems, though they have the doctrine of the evil of matter in common, start from different principles, Manichaeism from dualism, while [Gnosticism](#), as an idealistic [Pantheism](#), proceeds from the conception of matter as a gradual deterioration of the Godhead.

DOCTRINES

Owing to the multiplicity and divergence of Gnostic theories, a detailed exposition in this article would be unsatisfactory and confusing and to a certain extent even misleading, since Gnosticism never possessed a nucleus of stable doctrine, or any sort of *depositum fidei* round which a number of varied developments and heresies or sects might be grouped; at most it had some leading ideas, which are more or less clearly traceable in different schools. Moreover, a fair idea of Gnostic doctrines can be obtained from the articles on

leaders and phases of Gnostic thought (e.g. BASILIDES; VALENTINUS; MARCION; DOCETAE; DEMIURGE). We shall here only indicate some main phases of thought, which can be regarded as keys and which, though not fitting all systems, will unlock most of the mysteries of the Gnosis.

(a) Cosmogony

Gnosticism is thinly disguised Pantheism. In the beginning was the Depth; the Fulness of Being; the Not-Being God; the First Father, the Monad, the Man; the First Source, the unknown God (*Bythos pleroma, ouk on theos, propator, monas, anthropos, proarche, hagnostos theos*), or by whatever other name it might be called. This undefined infinite Something, thought it might be addressed by the title of the Good God, was not a personal Being, but, like Tad of Brahma of the Hindus, the "Great Unknown" of modern thought. The Unknown God, however, was in the beginning pure spirituality; matter as yet was not. This source of all being causes to emanate (*proballei*) from itself a number of pure spirit forces. In the different systems these emanations are differently named, classified, and described, but the emanation theory itself is common to all forms of Gnosticism. In the Basilidian Gnosis they are called sonships (*uiotetes*), in Valentinianism they form antithetic pairs or "syzygies" (*syzygoi*); Depth and Silence produce Mind and Truth; these produce Reason and Life, these again Man and State (*ekklesia*). According to Marcus, they are numbers and sounds. These are the primary roots of the Æons. With bewildering fertility hierarchies of Æons are thus produced, sometimes to the number of thirty. These Æons belong to the purely ideal, noumenal, intelligible, or supersensible world; they are immaterial, they are hypostatic ideas. Together with the source from which they emanate they form the *pleroma*. The transition from the immaterial to the material, from the noumenal to the sensible, is brought about by a flaw, or a passion, or a sin, in one of the Æons. According to Basilides, it is a flaw in the last sonship; according to others it is the passion of the female Æon Sophia; according to others the sin of the Great Archon, or Æon-Creator, of the Universe. The ultimate end of all Gnosis is *metanoia*, or repentance, the undoing of the sin of material existence and the return to the Pleroma.

(b) Sophia-Myth

In the greater number of Gnostic systems an important role is played by the Æon Wisdom -- Sophia or Achamoth. In some sense she seems to represent the supreme female principle, as for instance in the Ptolemaic system, in which the mother of the seven heavens is called Achamoth, in the Valentinian system, in which *he ano Sophia*, the Wisdom above, is distinguished from *he kato Sophia*, or Achamoth, the former being the female principle of the noumenal world, and in the Archotian system, where we find a "Lightsome Mother" (*he meter he photeine*), and in which beyond the heavens of the Archons is *he meter ton panton* and likewise in the Barbelognosis, where the female Barbelos is but the counterpart of the Unknown Father, which also occurs amongst the Ophites described by Irenaeus (*Adv. Haeres.*, III, vii, 4). Moreover, the Eucharistic prayer in the Acts of Thomas (ch. 1) seems addressed to this supreme female principle. W. Bousset's suggestion, that the Gnostic Sophia is nothing else than a disguise for the Dea Syra, the great goddess Istar, or Astarte, seems worthy of consideration. On the other hand, the Æon Sophia usually plays another role; she is *he Prouneikos* or "the Lustful One", once a virginal goddess, who by her fall from original purity is the cause of this sinful material world. One of the earliest forms of this myth is found in Simonian Gnosis, in which Simon, the Great Power, finds Helena, who during ten years had been a prostitute in Tyre, but who is Simon's *ennoia*, or understanding, and whom his followers worshipped under the form of Athena, the goddess of wisdom. According to Valentinus's system, as described by Hippolytus (*Book VI*, xxv-xxvi), Sophia is the youngest of the twenty-eight Æons. Observing the multitude of Æons and the power of begetting them, she hurries back into the depth of the Father, and seeks to emulate him by producing offspring without conjugal intercourse, but only projects an abortion, a formless substance. Upon this she is cast out of Pleroma. According to the Valentinian system as described by Irenaeus (*op. cit.*, I) and Tertullian (*Adv. Valent.*, ix), Sophia conceives a passion for the First Father himself, or rather, under pretext of love she seeks to know him, the Unknowable, and to comprehend his greatness. She should have suffered the consequence of her audacity by ultimate dissolution into the immensity of the Father, but for the Boundary Spirit. According to the Pistis Sophia (ch. xxix) Sophia, daughter of Barbelos, originally dwelt in the highest, or thirteenth heaven, but she is seduced by the demon Authades by means of a ray of light, which she

mistook as an emanation from the First Father. Authades thus enticed her into Chaos below the twelve Æons, where she was imprisoned by evil powers. According to these ideas, matter is the fruit of the sin of Sophia; this, however, was but a Valentinian development; in the older speculations the existence of matter is tacitly presupposed as eternal with the Pleroma, and through her sin Sophia falls from the realm of light into Chaos or realm of darkness. This original dualism, however, was overcome by the predominant spirit of Gnosticism, pantheistic emanationism. The Sophia myth is completely absent from the Basilidian and kindred systems. It is suggested, with great verisimilitude, that the Egyptian myth of Isis was the original source of the Gnostic "lower wisdom". In many systems this *Kato Sophia* is sharply distinguished from the Higher Wisdom mentioned above; as, for instance, in the magic formula for the dead mentioned by Irenaeus (op. cit., I, xxi, 5), in which the departed has to address the hostile archons thus: "I am a vessel more precious than the female who made you. If your mother ignores the source whence she is, I know myself, and I know whence I am and invoke the incorruptible Sophia, who is in the Father, the mother of your mother, who has neither father nor husband. A man-woman, born from a woman, has made you, not knowing her mother, but thinking herself alone. But I invoke her mother." This agrees with the system minutely described by Irenaeus (op. cit., I, iv-v), where Sophia Achamoth, or Lower Wisdom, the daughter of Higher Wisdom, becomes the mother of the Demiurge; she being the Ogdoad, her son the Hebdomad, they form a counterpart of the heavenly Ogdoad in the Pleromata. This is evidently a clumsy attempt to fuse into one two systems radically different, the Basilidian and the Valentinian; the ignorance of the Great Archon, which is the central idea of Basilides, is here transferred to Sophia, and the hybrid system ends in bewildering confusion.

(c) Soteriology

Gnostic salvation is not merely individual redemption of each human soul; it is a cosmic process. It is the return of all things to what they were before the flaw in the sphere of the Æons brought matter into existence and imprisoned some part of the Divine Light into the evil Hyle (*Hyle*). This setting free of the light sparks is the process of salvation; when all light shall have left Hyle, it will be burnt up, destroyed, or be a sort of everlasting hell for the Hylicoi. In Basilidianism it is the Third Filiation that is captive in matter, and is gradually being saved, now that the knowledge of its existence has been brought to the first Archon and then to the Second Archon, to each by his respective Son; and the news has been spread through the Hebdomad by Jesus the son of Mary, who died to redeem the Third Filiation. In Valentinianism the process is extraordinarily elaborate. When this world has been born from Sophia in consequence of her sin, Nous and Aletheia, two Æons, by command of the Father, produce two new Æons, Christ and the Holy Ghost; these restore order in the Pleroma, and in consequence all Æons together produce a new Æon, Jesus Logos, Soter, or Christ, whom they offer to the Father. Christ, the Son of Nous and Aletheia, has pity on the abortive substance born of Sophia and gives it essence and form. Whereupon Sophia tries to rise again to the Father, but in vain. Now the Æon Jesus-Soter is sent as second Saviour, he unites himself to the man Jesus, the son of Mary, at his baptism, and becomes the Saviour of men. Man is a creature of the Demiurge, a compound of soul, body, and spirit. His salvation consists in the return of his *pneuma* or spirit to the Pleroma; or if he be only a Psychicist, not a full Gnostic, his soul (*psyche*) shall return to Achamoth. There is no resurrection of the body. (For further details and differences see VALENTINUS.)

In Marcionism, the most dualistic phase of Gnosticism, salvation consisted in the possession of the knowledge of the Good God and the rejection of the Demiurge. The Good God revealed himself in Jesus and appeared as man in Judea; to know him, and to become entirely free from the yoke of the World-Creator or God of the Old Testament, is the end of all salvation. The Gnostic Saviour, therefore, is entirely different from the Christian one. For

- the Gnostic Saviour does not save. Gnosticism lacks the idea of atonement. There is no sin to be atoned for, except ignorance be that sin. Nor does the Saviour in any sense benefit the human race by vicarious sufferings. Nor, finally, does he immediately and actively affect any individual human soul by the power of grace or draw it to God. He was a teacher, he once brought into the world the truth, which alone can save. As a flame sets naphtha on fire, so the Saviour's light ignites predisposed souls moving down the stream of time. Of a real Saviour who with love human and Divine seeks out

sinners to save them, Gnosticism knows nothing.

- The Gnostic Saviour has no human nature, he is an æon, not a man; he only *seemed* a man, as the three Angels who visited Abraham seemed to be men. (For a detailed exposition see DOCETAE.) The Æon Soter is brought into the strangest relation to Sophia: in some systems he is her brother, in others her son, in other again her spouse. He is sometimes identified with Christ, sometimes with Jesus; sometimes Christ and Jesus are the same æon, sometimes they are different; sometimes Christ and the Holy Ghost are identified. Gnosticism did its best to utilize the Christian concept of the Holy Ghost, but never quite succeeded. She made him the Horos, or Methorion Pneuma (*Horos, Methorion Pneuma*), the Boundary-Spirit, the Sweet Odour of the Second Filiation, a companion æon with Christos, etc., etc. In some systems he is entirely left out.

(d) Eschatology

It is the merit of recent scholarship to have proved that Gnostic eschatology, consisting in the soul's struggle with hostile archons in its attempt to reach the Pleroma, is simply the soul's ascent, in Babylonian astrology, through the realms of the seven planets to Anu. Origen (*Contra Celsum*, VI, xxxi), referring to the Ophitic system, gives us the names of the seven archons as Jaldabaoth, Jao, Sabaoth, Adonaios, Astaphaios, Ailoaios, and Oraios, and tells us that Jaldabaoth is the planet Saturn. Astraphaios is beyond doubt the planet Venus, as there are gnostic gems with a female figure and the legend *ASTAPHE*, which name is also used in magic spells as the name of a goddess. In the Mandaean system Adonaios represents the Sun. Moreover, St. Irenaeus tells us: "Sanctam Hebdomadem VII stellas, quas dictunt planetas, esse volunt." It is safe, therefore, to take the above seven Gnostic names as designating the seven stars, then considered planets,

- Jaldabaoth (Child of Chaos? -- Saturn, called "the Lion-faced", *leontoeides*) is the outermost, and therefore the chief ruler, and later on the Demiurge par excellence.
- Jao (*Iao*, perhaps from Jahu, Jahveh, but possibly also from the magic cry *iao* in the mysteries) is Jupiter.
- Sabaoth (the Old-Testament title -- God of Hosts) was misunderstood; "of hosts" was thought a proper name, hence Jupiter Sabbas (*Jahve Sabaoth*) was Mars.
- Astaphaios (taken from magic tablets) was Venus.
- Adonaios (from the Hebrew term for "the Lord", used of God; Adonis of the Syrians representing the Winter sun in the cosmic tragedy of Tammuz) was the Sun;
- Ailoaios, or sometimes Ailoein (Elohim, God), Mercury;
- Oraios (Jaroah? or light?), the Moon.

In the hellenized form of Gnosticism either all or some of these names are replaced by personified vices. Authadia (*Authades*), or Audacity, is the obvious description of Jaldabaoth, the presumptuous Demiurge, who is lion-faced as the Archon Authadia. Of the Archons Kakhia, Zelos, Phthonos, Errinnys, Epithymia, the last obviously represents Venus. The number seven is obtained by placing a proarchon or chief archon at the head. That these names are only a disguise for the Sancta Hebdomas is clear, for Sophia, the mother of them, retains the name of Ogdoas, Octonatio. Occasionally one meets with the Archon *Esaldaios*, which is evidently the El Shaddai of the Bible, and he is described as the Archon "number four" (*harithmo tetartos*) and must represent the Sun. In the system of the Gnostics mentioned by Epiphanius we find, as the Seven Archons, Iao, Saklas, Seth, David, Eloiein, Elilaios, and Jaldabaoth (or no. 6 Jaldabaoth, no. 7 Sabaoth). Of these, Saklas is the chief demon of Manichaeism; Elilaios is probably connected with En-lil, the Bel of Nippur, the ancient god of Babylonia. In this, as in several other systems, the traces of the planetary seven have been obscured, but hardly in any have they become totally effaced. What tended most to obliterate the sevenfold distinction was the identification of the God of the Jews, the Lawgiver, with Jaldabaoth and his designation as World-creator, whereas formerly the seven planets together ruled the world. This confusion, however, was suggested by the very fact that at least five of the seven archons bore Old-Testament names for God -- El Shaddai, Adonai, Elohim, Jehovah, Sabaoth.

(e) Doctrine of the Primeval Man

The speculations on Primeval Man (*Protanthropos*, Adam) occupy a prominent place in several Gnostic systems. According to Irenaeus (I, xxix, 3) the Æon Autogenes emits the true and perfect Anthrôpos, also called Adamas; he has a helpmate, "Perfect Knowledge", and receives an irresistible force, so that all things rest in him. Others say (Irenaeus, I, xxx) there is a blessed and incorruptible and endless light in the power of Bythos; this is the Father of all things who is invoked as the First Man, who, with his Ennœa, emits "the Son of Man", or Euteranthrôpos. According to Valentinus, Adam was created in the name of Anthrôpos and overawes the demons by the fear of the pre-existent man (*tou proontos anthropou*). In the Valentinian syzygies and in the Marcosian system we meet in the fourth (originally the third) place Anthrôpos and Ecclesia. In the Pistis Sophia the Æon Jeu is called the First Man, he is the overseer of the Light, messenger of the First Precept, and constitutes the forces of the Heimarmene. In the Books of the Jeu this "great Man" is the King of the Light-treasure, he is enthroned above all things and is the goal of all souls. According to the Naassenes, the Protanthropos is the first element; the fundamental being before its differentiation into individuals. "The Son of Man" is the same being after it has been individualized into existing things and thus sunk into matter. The Gnostic Anthrôpos, therefore, or *Adamas*, as it is sometimes called, is a cosmogonic element, pure mind as distinct from matter, mind conceived hypostatically as emanating from God and not yet darkened by contact with matter. This mind is considered as the reason of humanity, or humanity itself, as a personified idea, a category without corporeality, the human reason conceived as the World-Soul. This speculation about the Anthrôpos is completely developed in Manichaeism, where, in fact, it is the basis of the whole system. God, in danger of the power of darkness, creates with the help of the Spirit, the five worlds, the twelve elements, and the Eternal Man, and makes him combat the darkness. But this Man is somehow overcome by evil and swallowed up by darkness. The present universe is in throes to deliver the captive Man from the powers of darkness. In the Clementine Homilies the cosmogonic Anthrôpos is strangely mixed up with the historical figure of the first man, Adam. Adam "was the true prophet, running through all ages, and hastening to rest"; "the Christ, who was from the beginning and is always, who was ever present to every generation in a hidden manner indeed, yet ever present". In fact Adam was, to use Modernist language, the Godhead immanent in the world and ever manifesting itself to the inner consciousness of the elect. The same idea, somewhat modified, occurs in Hermetic literature, especially the "Poimandres". It is elaborated by Philo, makes an ingenious distinction between the human being created first "after God's image and likeness" and the historic figures of Adam and Eve created afterwards. Adam *kat eikona* is: "Idea, Genus, Character, belonging to the world, of Understanding, without body, neither male nor female; he is the Beginning, the Name of God, the Logos, immortal, incorruptible" (De opif. mund., 134-148; De conf. ling., 146). These ideas in Talmudism, Philonism, Gnosticism, and Trismegistic literature, all come from once source, the late Mazdean development of the Gayomarthians, or worshipper of the Super-Man.

(f) The Barbelo

This Gnostic figure, appearing in a number of systems, the Nicolaites, the "Gnostics" of Epiphanius, the Sethians, the system of the "Evangelium Mariae" and that in Iren., I, xxix, 2 sq., remains to a certain extent an enigma. The name *barbelo*, *barbeloth*, *barthenos* has not been explained with certainty. In any case she represents the supreme female principle, is in fact the highest Godhead in its female aspect. Barbelo has most of the functions of the *ano Sophia* as described above. So prominent was her place amongst some Gnostics that some schools were designated as Barbeliotae, Barbelo worshippers of Barbelognostics. She is probably none other than the Light-Maiden of the Pistis Sophia, the *thygater tou photos* or simply the Maiden, *parthenos*. In Epiphanius (Haer., xxvi, 1) and Philastrius (Haer., xxxiii) Parthenos (Barbelos) seems identical with Noria, who plays a great role as wife either of Noe or of Seth. The suggestion, that Noria is "Maiden", *parthenos*, Istar, Athena, Wisdom, Sophia, or Archamothe, seems worthy of consideration.

RITEs

We are not so well informed about the practical and ritual side of Gnosticism as we are about its doctrinal and theoretical side. However, St. Irenaeus's account of the Marcosians, Hippolytus's account of the

Elcesaites, the liturgical portions of the "Acta Thomae", some passages in the Pseudo-Clementines, and above all Coptic Gnostic and Mandaean literature gives us at least some insight into their liturgical practices.

(a) Baptism

All Gnostic sects possessed this rite in some way; in Mandaeanism daily baptism is one of the great practices of the system. The formulae used by Christian Gnostics seem to have varied widely from that enjoyed by Christ. The Marcosians said: "In [eis] the name of the unknown Father of all, in [eis] the Truth, the Mother of all, in him, who came down on Jesus [eis ton katelthonta eis Iesoun]". The Elcesaites said: "In [en] the name of the great and highest God and in the name of his Son, the great King". In Iren. (I, xxi, 3) we find the formula: "In the name that was hidden from every divinity and lordship and truth, which [name] Jesus the Nazarene has put on in the regions of light" and several other formulae, which were sometimes pronounced in Hebrew or Aramaic. The Mandaeans said: "The name of the Life and the name of the Manda d'Haye is named over thee". In connection with Baptism the *Sphragis* was of great importance; in what the seal or sign consisted wherewith they were marked is not easy to say. There was also the tradition of a name either by utterance or by handing a tablet with some mystic word on it.

(b) Confirmation

The anointing of the candidate with chrism, or odoriferous ointment, is a Gnostic rite which overshadows the importance of baptism. In the "Acta Thomae", so some scholars maintain, it had completely replaced baptism, and was the sole sacrament of initiation. This however is not yet proven. The Marcosians went so far as to reject Christian baptism and to substitute a mixture of oil and water which they poured over the head of the candidate. By confirmation the Gnostics intended not so much to give the Holy Ghost as to seal the candidates against the attacks of the archons, or to drive them away by the sweet odour which is above all things (*tes uter ta hola euodias*). The balsam was somehow supposed to have flowed from the Tree of Life, and this tree was again mystically connected with the Cross; for the chrism is in the "Acta Thomae" called "the hidden mystery in which the Cross is shown to us".

(c) The Eucharist

It is remarkable that so little is known of the Gnostic substitute for the Eucharist. In a number of passages we read of the breaking of the bread, but in what this consisted is not easy to determine. The use of salt in this rite seems to have been important (Clem., Hom. xiv), for we read distinctly how St. Peter broke the bread of the Eucharist and "putting salt thereon, he gave first to the mother and then to us". There is furthermore a great likelihood, though no certainty, that the Eucharist referred to in the "Acta Thomae" was merely a breaking of bread without the use of the cup. This point is strongly controverted, but the contrary can hardly be proven. It is beyond doubt that the Gnostics often substituted water for the wine (Acta Thomae, Baptism of Mygdonia, ch. cxxi). What formula of consecration was used we do not know, but the bread was certainly signed with the Cross. It is to be noted that the Gnostics called the Eucharist by Christian sacrificial terms -- *prospora*, "oblation", *Thysia* (II bk. of Jeû, 45). In the Coptic Books (*Pistis Sophia*, 142; II Jeû, 45-47) we find a long description of some apparently Eucharistic ceremonies carried out by Jesus Himself. In these fire and incense, two flasks, and also two cups, one with water, the other with wine, and branches of the vine are used. Christ crowns the Apostles with olive wreaths, begs Melchisedech to come and change wine into water for baptism, puts herbs in the Apostles' mouths and hands. Whether these actions in some sense reflect the ritual of Gnosticism, or are only imaginations of the author, cannot be decided. The Gnostics seem also to have used oil sacramentally for the healing of the sick, and even the dead were anointed by them to be rendered safe and invisible in their transit through the realms of the archons.

(d) The Nymphôn

They possessed a special Gnostic sacrament of the bridechamber (*nymphon*) in which, through some symbolical actions, their souls were wedded to their angels in the Pleroma. Details of its rites are not as yet

known. Tertullian no doubt alluded to them in the words "Eleusinia fecerunt lenocinia".

(e) The Magic Vowels

An extraordinary prominence is given to the utterance of the vowels: *alpha, epsilon, eta, iota, omicron, upsilon, omega*. The Saviour and His disciples are supposed in the midst of their sentences to have broken out in an interminable gibberish of only vowels; magic spells have come down to us consisting of vowels by the fourscore; on amulets the seven vowels, repeated according to all sorts of artifices, form a very common inscription. Within the last few years these Gnostic vowels, so long a mystery, have been the object of careful study by Ruelle, Poirée, and Leclercq, and it may be considered proven that each vowel represents one of the seven planets, or archons; that the seven together represent the Universe, but without consonants they represent the Ideal and Infinite not yet imprisoned and limited by matter; that they represent a musical scale, probably like the Gregorian 1 tone re-re, or d, e, f, g, a, b, c, and many a Gnostic sheet of vowels is in fact a sheet of music. But research on this subject has only just begun. Among the Gnostics the Ophites were particularly fond of representing their cosmogonic speculations by diagrams, circles within circles, squares, and parallel lines, and other mathematical figures combined, with names written within them. How far these sacred diagrams were used as symbols in their liturgy, we do not know.

SCHOOLS OF GNOSTICISM

Gnosticism possessed no central authority for either doctrine or discipline; considered as a whole it had no organization similar to the vast organization of the Catholic Church. It was but a large conglomeration of sects, of which Marcionism alone attempted in some way to rival the constitution of the Church, and even Marcionism had no unity. No other classification of these sects is possible than that according to their main trend of thought. We can therefore distinguish: (a) Syrian or Semitic; (b) Hellenistic or Alexandrian; (c) dualistic; (d) antinomian Gnostics.

(a) The Syrian School

This school represents the oldest phase of Gnosticism, as Western Asia was the birthplace of the movement. Dositheus, Simon Magus, Menander, Cerinthus, Cerdo, Saturninus Justin, the Bardesanites, Sevrians, Ebionites, Encratites, Ophites, Naassenes, the Gnostics of the "acts of Thomas", the Sethians, the Peratae, the Cainites may be said to belong to this school. The more fantastic elements and elaborate genealogies and syzygies of æons of the later Gnosis are still absent in these systems. The terminology is some barbarous form of Semitic; Egypt is the symbolic name for the soul's land of bondage. The opposition between the good God and the World-Creator is not eternal or cosmogonic, though there is strong ethical opposition to Jehovah the God of the Jews. He is the last of the seven angels who fashioned this world out of eternally pre-existent matter. The demiurgic angels, attempting to create man, created but a miserable worm, to which the Good God, however, gave the spark of divine life. The rule of the god of the Jews must pass away, for the good God calls us to his own immediate service through Christ his Son. We obey the Supreme Deity by abstaining from flesh meat and marriage, and by leading an ascetic life. Such was the system of Saturninus of Antioch, who taught during the reign of Hadrian (c. A.D. 120). The Naassenes (from *Nahas*, the Hebrew for serpent) were worshippers of the serpent as a symbol of wisdom, which the God of the Jews tried to hide from men. The Ophites (*ophianoï*, from *ophis*, serpent), who, when transplanted on Alexandrian soil, supplied the main ideas of Valentinianism, become one of the most widely spread sects of Gnosticism. Though not strictly serpent-worshippers, they recognized the serpent as symbol of the supreme emanation, Achamoth or Divine Wisdom. They were styled Gnostics *par excellence*. The Sethians saw in Seth the father of all spiritual (*pneumatikoi*) men; in Cain and Abel the father of the psychic (*psychikoi*) and hylic (*hylikoi*) men. According to the Peratae there exists a trinity of Father, Son, and Hyle (Matter). The Son is the Cosmic Serpent, who freed Eve from the power of the rule of Hyle. The universe they symbolized by a triangle enclosed in a circle. The number three is the key to all mysteries. There are three supreme principles: the not-generated, the self-generated, the generated. There are three logoi, of gods; the Saviour has a threefold nature, threefold body, threefold power, etc. They are called Peratae (*peran*) because they have "crossed over" out of Egypt, through

the Red Sea of generation. They are the true Hebrews, in fact (the word comes from the Hebrew meaning "to cross over"). The Peratae were founded by Euphrates and Celbes (Acembes?) and Ademes. This Euphrates, whose name is perhaps connected with the name Peratae itself, is said to be the founder of the Ophites mentioned by Celsus about A.D. 175. The Cainites were so called because they venerated Cain, and Esau, and the Sodomites, and Core, and Judas, because they had all resisted the god of the Jews.

(b) The Hellenistic or Alexandrian School

These systems were more abstract, and philosophical, and self-consistent than the Syrian. The Semitic nomenclature was almost entirely replaced by Greek names. The cosmogonic problem had outgrown all proportions, the ethical side was less prominent, asceticism less strictly enforced. The two great thinkers of this school were Basilides and Valentinus. Though born at Antioch, in Syria, Basilides founded his school in Alexandria (c. A.D. 130), and was followed by his son Isidorus. His system was the most consistent and sober emanationism that Gnosticism ever produced. His school never spread so widely as the next to be mentioned, but in Spain it survived for several centuries. Valentinus, who taught first at Alexandria and then at Rome (c. A.D. 160), elaborated a system of sexual duality in the process of emanation; a long series of male and female pairs of personified ideas is employed to bridge over the distance from the unknown God to this present world. His system is more confused than Basilidianism, especially as it is disturbed by the intrusion of the figure or figures of *Sophia* in the cosmogonic process. Being Syrian Ophitism in Egyptian guise, it can claim to be the true representative of the Gnostic spirit. The *reductio ad absurdum* of these unbridled speculations can be seen in the Pitis Sophia, which is light-maidens, paralemptores, spheres, Heimarmene, thirteen æons, light-treasures, realms of the midst, realms of the right and of the left, Jaldabaoth, Adamas, Michael, Gabriel, Christ, the Saviour, and mysteries without number whirl past and return like witches in a dance. The impression created on the same reader can only be fitly described in the words of "Jabberwocky": "gyre and gimble on the wabe". We learn from Hippolytus (Adv. Haer., IV, xxxv), Tertullian (Adv. Valent., iv) and Clemens Alex. (Exc. ex Theod., title) that there were two main schools of Valentinianism, the Italian and the Anatolian or Asiatic. In the Italian school were teachers of note: Secundus, who divided the Ogdoad within the Pleroma into two tetrads, Right and Left; Epiphanes, who described this Tetras as Monotes, Henotes, Monas, and To Hen; and possibly Colorbasus, unless his name be a misreading of *Kol Arba* "All Four". But the most important were Ptolemy and Heracleon. Ptolemy is especially known to fame by his letter to Flora, a noble lady who had written to him as Prom Presbyter (Texte u. Unters., N.S., XIII, Anal. z. alt. Gesch. d. Chr.) to explain the meaning of the Old Testament. This Ptolemy split up the names and numbers of the æons into personified substances outside the deity, as Tertullian relates. He was given to Biblical studies, and was a man of unbridled imagination. Clemens Alex. (Strom., IV, ix, 73) calls Heracleon the most eminent teacher of the Valentinian school. Origen devotes a large part of his commentary on St. John to combating Heracleon's commentary on the same Evangelist. Heracleon called the source of all being Anthropos, instead of Bythos, and rejected the immortality of the soul -- meaning, probably, the merely psychic element. He apparently stood nearer to the Catholic Church than Ptolemy and was a man of better judgment. Tertullian mentions two other names (Valent., iv), Theotimus and (De Carne Christ, xvii) Alexander. The Anatolian school had as a prominent teacher Axionicus (Tertull., Adv. Valent., iv; Hipp., Adv. Haer., VI, 30) who had his *collegium* at Antioch about A.D. 220, "the master's most faithful disciple". Theodotus is only known to us from the fragment of his writings preserved by Clement of Alexandria. Marcus the Conjuror's system, an elaborate speculation with ciphers and numbers, is given by Irenaeus (I, 11-12) and also by Hippolytus (VI, 42). Irenaeus's account of Marcus was repudiated by the Marcosians, but Hippolytus asserts that they did so without reason. Marcus was probably an Egyptian and a contemporary of Irenaeus. A system not unlike that of the Marcosians was worked out by Monoimus the Arabian, to whom Hippolytus devotes chapters 5 to 8 of Book VIII, and who is mentioned only by Theodoret besides him. Hippolytus is right in calling these two Gnostics imitations of Pythagoras rather than Christians. According to the Epistles of Julian the Apostate, Valentinian collegia existed in Asia Minor up to his own times (d. 363).

(c) The Dualistic School

Some dualism was indeed congenial with Gnosticism, yet but rarely did it overcome the main tendency of [Gnosticism](#), i.e. [Pantheism](#). This, however, was certainly the case in the system of Marcion, who distinguished between the God of the New Testament and the God of the Old Testament, as between two eternal principles, the first being Good, *agathos*; the second merely *dikaïos*, or just; yet even Marcion did not carry this system to its ultimate consequences. He may be considered rather as a forerunner of Mani than a pure Gnostic. Three of his disciples, Potitus, Basilicus, and Lucanus, are mentioned by Eusebius as being true to their master's dualism (H.E., V, xiii), but Apelles, his chief disciple, though he went farther than his master in rejecting the Old-Testament Scriptures, returned to monotheism by considering the Inspirer of Old-Testament prophecies to be not a god, but an evil angel. On the other hand, Syneros and Prepon, also his disciples, postulated three different principles. A somewhat different dualism was taught by Hermogenes in the beginning of the second century at Carthage. The opponent of the good God was not the God of the Jews, but Eternal Matter, the source of all evil. This Gnostic was combated by Theophilus of Antioch and Tertullian.

(d) The Antinomian School

As a moral law was given by the God of the Jews, and opposition to the God of the Jews was a duty, the breaking of the moral law to spite its give was considered a solemn obligation. Such a sect, called the Nicolaites, existed in Apostolic times, their principle, according to Origen, was *parachresthai te sarki*. Carpocrates, whom Tertullian (De animâ, xxxv) calls a magician and a fornicator, was a contemporary of Basilides. One could only escape the cosmic powers through discharging one's obligations to them by infamous conduct. To disregard all law and sink oneself into the Monad by remembering one's pre-existence in the Cosmic Unit -- such was the Gnosis of Carpocrates. His son Epiphanes followed his father's doctrine so closely that he died in consequence of his sins at the age of seventeen. Antinomian views were further maintained by the Prodicians and Antitactae. No more ghastly instance of insane immorality can be found than the one mentioned Pistis Sophia itself as practised by some Gnostics. St. Justin (Apol., I, xxvi), Irenaeus (I, xxv, 3) and Eusebius (H.E., IV, vii) make it clear that "the reputation of these men brought infamy upon the whole race of Christians".

LITERATURE

The Gnostics developed an astounding literary activity, which produced a quantity of writings far surpassing contemporary output of Catholic literature. They were most prolific in the sphere of fiction, as it is safe to say that three-fourths of the early Christians romances about Christ and His disciples emanated from Gnostic circles. Besides these -- often crude and clumsy -- romances they possessed what may be called "theosophic" treatises and revelations of a highly mystical character. These are best described as a stupefying roar of bombast occasionally interrupted by a few words of real sublimity. Trainé remarks with justice: "Anyone who reads the teachings of the Gnostics breathes in an atmosphere of fever and fancies himself in a hospital, amongst delirious patients, who are lost in gazing at their own teeming thought and who fix their lustrous eyes on empty space" (Essais de crit. et d'histoire, Paris, 1904). Gnostic literature, therefore, possesses little or no intrinsic value, however great its value for history and psychology. It is of unparalleled importance in the study of the surroundings in which Christianity first arose. The bulk of it is unfortunately no longer extant. With the exception of some Coptic translations and some expurgated or Catholicized Syriac versions, we possess only a number of fragments of what once must have formed a large library. Most of this literature will be found catalogued under the names of Gnostic authors in the articles BASILIDES; BARDESANES; CERINTHUS; MARCION; SIMON MAGUS; PTOLEMY; VALENTINUS. We shall enumerate in the following paragraphs only anonymous Gnostic works and such writings as are not attributed to any of the above authors.

The Nicolaites possessed "some books under the name of Jaldabaoth", a book called "Nôria" (the mythical wife of Noe), prophecy of Barcabbas, who was a soothsayer among the Basilidians, a "Gospel of the

Consummation", and a kind of apocalypse called "the Gospel of Eva" (Epiph., Adv. Haer., xxv, xxvi; Philastr., 33). The Ophites possessed "thousands" of apocrypha, as Epiphanius tells us; among these he specially mentions: "Questions of Mary, great and small" (some of these questions are perhaps extant in the Pistis Sophia); also many books under the name of "Seth", "Revelations of Adam", Apocryphal Gospels attributed to Apostles; an Apocalypse of Elias, and a book called "Genna Marias". Of these writings some revelations of Adam and Seth, eight in number, are probably extant in an Armenian translation, published in the Mechitarist collection of the Old-Testament apocrypha (Venice, 1896). See Preuschen "Die apocryph. Gnost. Adamschr." (Giessen, 1900). The Cainites possessed a "Gospel of Judas", an "Ascension of Paul" (*anabatikon Paulou*) and some other book, of which we do not know the title, but which, according to Epiphanius, was full of wickedness. The Prodicians, according to Clem. Alex., possessed apocrypha under the name of Zoroaster (Strom., I, xv, 69). The Antinomians had an apocryphon "full of audacity and wickedness" (Strom., III, iv, 29; Origen, "In Matth.", xxviii). The Naassenes had a book out of which Hippolytus largely quotes, but of which we do not know the title. It contained a commentary on Bible texts, hymns, and psalms. The Peratae possessed a similar book. The Sethians possessed a "Paraphrasis Seth", consisting of seven books, explanatory of their system, a book called *Allogeneis*, or "Foreigners", an "Apocalypse of Adam", a book attributed to Moses, and others. The Archontians possessed a large and small book entitled "Symphonia"; this possibly extant in Pitra's "Analecta Sacra" (Paris, 1888). The Gnostics attacked by Plotinus possessed apocrypha attributed to Zoroaster, Zostrian, Nichotheus, Allogenes (the Sethian Book "Allogeneis"?), and others.

In addition to these writings the following apocrypha are evidently of Gnostic authorship:

- "The Gospel of the Twelve" -- This is first referred to by Origen (Hom. I, in Luc.), is identical with the Gospel of the Ebionites, and is also called the "Gospel according to Matthew", because in it Christ refers to St. Matthew in the second person, and the author speaks of the other Apostles and himself as "we". This Gospel was written before A.D. 200, and has no connection with the so-called Hebrew St. Matthew or the Gospel according to the Hebrews.
- "The Gospel according to the Egyptians", i.e. Christian countryfolk of Egypt, not Alexandrians. It was written about A.D. 150 and referred to by Clem. Alex. (Strom., III, ix, 63; xiii, 93) and Origen (Hom. I, in Luc), and was largely used in non-Catholic circles. Only small fragments are extant in Clem. Alex. (Strom. and Excerpt. ex Theod.). Some people have referred the Oxyrhynchus "Logia" and the Strasburg Coptic papyri to this Gospel, but this is a mere guess.
- "The Gospel of Peter", written about A.D. 140 in Antioch (see DOCETAE). Another Petrine Gospel, see description of the Ahmin Codex.
- A "Gospel of Matthias" written about A.D. 125, used in Basilidian circles (see BASILIDES).
- A "Gospel of Philip" and a "Gospel of Thomas". According to the Pistis Sophia, the three Apostles Matthew [read Matthias], Thomas, and Philip received a Divine commission to report all Christ's revelations after His Resurrection. The Gospel of Thomas must have been of considerable length (1300 lines); part of it, in an expurgated recension, is possibly extant in the once popular, but vulgar and foolish, "Stories of the Infancy of Our Lord by Thomas, an Israelite philosopher", of which two Greek, as Latin, a Syriac, and a Slavonic version exist.
- "Acts of Peter" (*Praxis Petrou*), written about A.D. 165. Large fragments of this Gnostic production have been preserved to us in the original Greek and also in a Latin translation under the title of "Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Peter", to which the Latin adds, "a Lino episcopo conscriptum". Greater portions of this apocryphon are translated in the so-called "Actus Petri cum Simone", and likewise in Sahidic and Slavonic, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions. These fragments have been gathered by Lipsius and Bonnet in "Acta apostolorum apocr." (Leipzig, 1891), I. Though these recensions of the "Acts of Peter" have been somewhat Catholicized, their Gnostic character is unmistakable, and they are of value for Gnostic symbolism.
- Closely connected with the "Acts of Peter" are the "Acts of Andrew" and the "Acts of John", which three have perhaps one and the same author, a certain Leucius Charinus, and were written before A.D. 200. They have come down to us in a number of Catholic recensions and in different versions. For the Acts of Andrew see Bonnet, "Acta", as above (1898), II, 1, pp. 1-127; for "Acts of John", *ibid.*, pp.

151-216. To find the primitive Gnostic form in the bewildering variety and multiplicity of fragments and modifications is still a task for scholars.

- Of paramount importance for the understanding of Gnosticism are the "Acts of Thomas", as they have been preserved in their entirety and contain the earliest Gnostic ritual, poetry, and speculation. They exist in two recensions, the Greek and the Syriac. It seems most likely, though not certain, that the original was Syriac; it is suggested that they were written about A.D. 232, when the relics of St. Thomas were translated to Edessa. Of the greatest value are the two prayers of Consecration, the "Ode to Wisdom" and the "Hymn of the Soul", which are inserted in the Syriac narrative, and which are wanting in the Greek Acts, though independent Greek texts of these passages are extant (Syriac with English translation by W. Wright, "Apocr. Acts of the Apost.", London, 1871). The "Hymn to the Soul" has been translated many times into English, especially, by A. Bevan, "Texts and Studies", Cambridge 1897; cf. F. Burkitt in "Journal of Theological Studies" (Oxford, 1900). The most complete edition of the Greek Acts is by M. Bonnet in "Acta", as above, II, 2 (Leipzig, 1903; see BARDESANES). The Acts, though written in the service of Gnosticism, and full of the weirdest adventures, are not entirely without an historical background.

There are a number of other apocrypha in which scholars have claimed to find traces of Gnostic authorship, but these traces are mostly vague and unsatisfactory. In connection with these undoubtedly Gnostic apocrypha mention must be made of the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies. It is true that these are more often classed under Judaistic than under strictly Gnostic literature, but their affinity to Gnostic speculations is at least a first sight so close and their connection with the Book of Elxai (cf. ELCESAITES) so generally recognized that they cannot be omitted in a list of Gnostic writings. If the theory maintained by Dom Chapman in "The Date of the Clementines" (Zeitschrift f. N. Test. Wiss., 1908) and in the article CLEMENTINES in the Catholic Encyclopedia be correct, and consequently Pseudo-Clemens be a crypto-Arian who wrote A.D. 330, the "Homilies" might still have at least some value in the study of Gnosticism. But Dom Chapman's theory, though ingenious, is too daring and as yet too unsupported, to justify the omission of the "Homilies" in this place.

A great, if not the greatest, part of Gnostic literature, which has been saved from the general wreck of Gnostic writings, is preserved to us in three Coptic codices, commonly called the Askew, the Bruce, and the Akhmim Codex. The Askew Codex, of the fifth or sixth century, contains the lengthy treatise "Pistis Sophia", i.e. Faith-Wisdom. This is a work in four books, written between A.D. 250 and 300; the fourth book, however, is an adaptation of an earlier work. The first two books describe the fall of the Æon Sophia and her salvation by the Æon Soter; the last two books describe the origin of sin and evil and the need of Gnostic repentance. In fact the whole is a treatise on repentance, as the last two books only apply in practice the example of penance set by Sophia. The work consists of a number of questions and answers between Christ and His male and female disciples in which five "Ode of Solomon", followed by mystical adaptations of the same, are inserted. As the questioning is mostly done by Mary, the Pistis Sophia is probably identical with the "Questions of Mary" mentioned above. The codex also contains extracts from the "Book of the Saviour". The dreary monotony of these writings can only be realized by those who have read them. An English translation of the Latin translation of the Coptic, which itself is a translation of the Greek, was made by G.R.S. Mead (London, 1896). The Bruce papyrus is of about the same date as the Askew vellum codex and contains two treatises:

- the two books of Jeû, the first speculative and cosmogonic, the second practical, viz., the overcoming of the hostile world powers and the securing of salvation by the practice of certain rites: this latter book is styled "Of the Great Logos according to the mystery".
- A treatise with unknown title, as the first and last pages are lost. This work is of a purely speculative character and of great antiquity, written between A.D. 150 and 200 in Sethian or Archontian circles, and containing a reference to the prophets Marsanes, Nikotheus, and Phosilampes.

No complete English translations of these treatises exist; some passages, however, are translated in the aforesaid G.R.S. Mead's "Fragments of a Faith Forgotten". Both the Bruce and Askew Codices have been

translated into German by C. Schmidt (1892) in "Texte u. Unters" and (1901) in the Berlin "Greek Fathers". A Latin translation exists of the "Pistis Sophia" by Schwartz and Petermann (Berlin, 1851) and a French one of the Bruce Codex by Amélineau (Paris, 1890). The Akhmim Codex of the fifth century, found in 1896, and now in the Egyptian Museum at Berlin, contains

- a "Gospel of Mary", called in the subscriptions "An Apocryphon of John": this Gospel must be of the highest antiquity, as St. Irenaeus, about A.D. 170, made use of it in his description of the Barbelo-Gnostics;
- a "Sophia Jesu Christi", containing revelations of Christ after His Resurrection;
- a "Praxis Petri", containing a fantastic relation of the miracle worked on Peter's daughter.

The study of Gnosticism is seriously retarded by the entirely unaccountable delay in the publication of these treatises; for these thirteen years past we possess only the brief account of this codex published in the "Sitzungsber. d. k. preus. Acad." (Berlin, 1896), pp. 839-847.

This account of Gnostic literature would be incomplete without reference to a treatise commonly published amongst the works of Clement of Alexandria and called "Excerpta ex Theodoto". It consists of a number of Gnostic extracts made by Clement for his own use with the idea of future refutation; and, with Clement's notes and remarks on the same, form a very confusing anthology. See O. Bibelius, "Studien zur Gesch. der Valent." in "Zeitschr. f. N. Nest. Wiss." (Giessen, 1908).

Oriental non-Christian Gnosticism has left us the sacred books of the Mandaeans, viz.,

- the "Genzâ rabâ" or "Great Treasure", a large collection of miscellaneous treatises of different date, some as late, probably, as the ninth, some as early, perhaps, as the third century. The Genzâ was translated into Latin, by Norberg (Copenhagen, 1817), and the most important treatises into German, by W. Brandt (Leipzig, 1892).
- Kolasta, Hymns and Instructions on baptism and the journey of the soul, published in Mandaean by J. Euting (Stuttgart, 1867).
- Drâshê d'Jahya, a biography of John the Baptist "ab utero usque ad tumulum" -- as Abraham Echellensis puts it -- not published.

Alexandrian non-Christian Gnosticism is perceptible in Trismegistic literature, published in English translation by G.R.S. Mead (London and Benares, 1902, three volumes). Specifically Jewish Gnosticism left no literature, but Gnostic speculations have an echo in several Jewish works, such as the Book of Enoch, the Zohar the Talmudic treatise Chagiga XV. See Gförer, "Philo", Vol. I, and Karppe, "Etudes sur. ore. nat. d. Zohar" (Paris, 1901).

REFUTATION OF GNOSTICISM

From the first Gnosticism met with the most determined opposition from the Catholic Church. The last words of the aged St. Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy are usually taken as referring to Gnosticism, which is described as "Profane novelties of words and oppositions of knowledge falsely so called [*antitheseis tes pseudonomou gnoseos* -- the antitheses of so-called Gnosis] which some professing have erred concerning the faith". Most probably St. Paul's use of the terms *pleroma*, *the æon of this world*, *the archon of the power of the air*, in Ephesians and Colossians, was suggested by the abuse of these terms by the Gnostics. Other allusions to Gnosticism in the New Testament are possible, but cannot be proven, such as Tit., iii, 9; I Tim., iv, 3; I John, iv, 1-3. The first anti-Gnostic writer was St. Justin Martyr (d. c. 165). His "Syntagma" (*Syntagma kata pason ton gegenemenon aireseon*), long thought lost, is substantially contained in the "Libellus adv. omn. haeres.", usually attached to Tertullian's "De Praescriptione"; such at least is the thesis of J. Kunze (1894) which is largely accepted. Of St. Justin's anti-Gnostic treatise on the Resurrection (*Peri anastaseos*) considerable fragments are extant in Methodius' "Dialogue on the Resurrection" and in St. John

Damascene's "Sacra Parellela". St. Justin's "Comendium against Marcion", quoted by St. Irenaeus (IV, vi, 2; V, xxvi, 2), is possibly identical with his Syntagma". Immediately after St. Justin, Miltiades, a Christian philosopher of Asia Minor, is mentioned by Tertullian and Hippolytus (Adv. Valent., v, and Eus., H.E., V., xxviii, 4) as having combated the Gnostics and especially the Valentinians. His writings are lost. Theophilus of Antioch (d. c. 185) wrote against the heresy of Hermogenes, and also an excellent treatise against Marcion (*kata Markionos Logos*). The book against Marcion is probably extant in the "Dialogus de rectâ in Deum fide" of Pseudo-Origen. For Agrippa Castor see BASILIDES. Hegesippus, a Palestinian, traveled by way of Corinth to Rome, where he arrived under Anicetus (155-166), to ascertain the sound and orthodox faith from Apostolic tradition. He met many bishops on his way, who all taught the same faith and in Rome he made a list of the popes from Peter to Anicetus. In consequence he wrote five books of Memoirs (*Upomnemata*) "in a most simple style, giving the true tradition of Apostolic doctrine", becoming "a champion of the truth against the godless heresies" (Eus., H.E., IV, vii sqq., xxi sqq.). Of this work only a few fragments remain, and these are historical rather than theological. Rhodon, a disciple of Tatian, Philip, Bishop of Gortyna in Crete, and a certain Modestus wrote against Marcion, but their writings are lost. Irenaeus (Adv., Haer., I, xv, 6) and Epiphanius (xxxiv, 11) quote a short poem against the Oriental Valentinians and the conjuror Marcus by "an aged" but unknown author; and Zachaeus, Bishop of Caesarea, is said to have written against the Valentinians and especially Ptolemy.

Beyond all comparison most important is the great anti-Gnostic work of St. Irenaeus, *Elegchos kai anatropetes psudonymou gnoseos*, usually called "Adversus Haereses". It consists of five books, evidently not written at one time; the first three books about A.D. 180; the last two about a dozen years later. The greater part of the first book has come down to us in the original Greek, the rest in a very ancient and anxiously close Latin translation, and some fragments in Syriac. St. Irenaeus knew the Gnostics from personal intercourse and from their own writings and gives minute descriptions of their systems, especially of the Valentinians and Barbelo-Gnostics. A good test of how St. Irenaeus employed his Gnostic sources can be made by comparing the newly found "Evangelium Mariae" with Adv. Haer., I, xxiv. Numerous attempts to discredit Irenaeus as a witness have proved failures (see SAINT IRENAEUS). Besides his great work, Irenaeus wrote an open letter to the Roman priest Florinus, who thought of joining the Valentinians; and when the unfortunate priest had apostatized, and had become a Gnostic, Irenaeus wrote on his account a treatise "On the Ogdoad", and also a letter to Pope Victor, begging him to use his authority against him. Only a few passages of these writings are extant. Eusebius (H.E., IV, xxiii, 4) mentions a letter of Dionysius of Corinth (c. 170) to the Nicomedians, in which he attacks the heresy of Marcion. The letter is not extant. Clement of Alexandria (d. c. 215) only indirectly combated Gnosticism by defending the true Christian Gnosis, especially in "Paedagogos", Bk. I, "Stromateis", Bk. II, III, V, and in the so-called eighth book or "Excerpta ex Theodoto". Origen devoted no work exclusively to the refutation of Gnosticism but his four books "On First Principles" (*Peri archon*), written about the year 230, and preserved to us only in some Greek fragments and a free Latin translation by Rufinus, is practically a refutation of Gnostic dualism, Doectism, and Emanationism. About the year 300 an unknown Syrian author, sometimes erroneously identified with Origen, and often called by the literary pseudonym Adamantius, or "The Man of Steel", wrote a long dialogue of which the title is lost, but which is usually designated by the words, "De rectâ in Deum fide". This dialogue, usually divided into five books, contains discussions with representatives of two sects of Marcionism, of Valentinianism, and of Bardesanism. The writer plagiarizes extensively from Theophilus of Antioch and Methodius of Olympus, especially the latter's anti-Gnostic dialogue "On Free Will" (*Peri tou autexousiou*).

The greatest anti-Gnostic controversialist of the early Christian Church is Tertullian (b. 169), who practically devoted his life to combating this dreadful sum of all heresies. We need but mention the titles of his anti-Gnostic works: "De Praescriptione haereticorum"; "Adversus Marcionem"; a book "Adversus Valentinianos"; "Scorpiace"; "De Carne Christi"; "De Resurrectione Carnis"; and finally "Adversus Praxeam". A storehouse of information rather than a refutation is the great work of Hippolytus, written some time after A.D. 234, once called "Philosophoumena" and ascribed to Origen, but since the discovery of Books IV-X, in 1842, known by the name of its true author and its true title, "Refutation of All Heresies" (*katapason aireseon elegchos*) The publication of the Athos Codex by E. Miller (Oxford, 1851) revolutionized the study of Gnosticism and rendered works published previous to that date antiquated and

almost worthless. To students of Gnosticism this work is as indispensable as that of St. Irenaeus. There is an English translation by J. MacMahon in "The Ante-Nicene Library" (Edinburgh, 1868). Hippolytus tried to prove that all Gnosticism was derived from heathen philosophy; his speculations may be disregarded, but, as he was in possession of a great number of Gnostic writings from which he quotes, his information is priceless. As he wrote nearly fifty years after St. Irenaeus, whose disciple he had been, he describes a later development of Gnosis than the Bishop of Lyons. Besides his greater work, Hippolytus wrote, many years previously (before 217), a small compendium against all heresies, giving a list of the same, thirty-two in number, from Dositheus to Noetus; also a treatise against Marcion.

As, from the beginning of the fourth century, Gnosticism was in rapid decline, there was less need of champions of orthodoxy, hence there is a long interval between Adamantius's dialogue and St. Epiphanius's "Panarion", begun in the year 374. St. Epiphanius, who in his youth was brought into closest contact with Gnostic sects in Egypt, and especially the Phibionists, and perhaps even, as some hold, belonged to this sect himself, is still a first-class authority. With marvelous industry he gathered information on all sides, but his injudicious and too credulous acceptance of many details can hardly be excused. Philastrius of Brescia, a few years later (383), gave to the Latin Church what St. Epiphanius had given to the Greek. He counted and described no fewer than one hundred and twenty-eight heresies, but took the word in a somewhat wide and vague sense. Though dependent on the "Syntagma" of Hippolytus, his account is entirely independent of that of Epiphanius. Another Latin writer, who probably lived in the middle of the fifth century in Southern Gaul, and who is probably identical with Arnobius the Younger, left a work, commonly called "Praedestinatus", consisting of three books, in the first of which he describes ninety heresies from Simon Magus to the Praedestinationists. This work unfortunately contains many doubtful and fabulous statements. Some time after the Council of Chalcedon (451) Theodoret wrote a "Compendium of Heretical Fables" which is of considerable value for the history of Gnosticism, because it gives in a very concise and objective way the history of the heresies since the time of Simon Magus. St. Augustine's book "De Haeresibus" (written about 428) is too dependent on Philastrius and Epiphanius to be of much value. Amongst anti-Gnostic writers we must finally mention the neo-Platonist Plotinus (d. A.D. 270), who wrote a treatise "Against the Gnostics". These were evidently scholars who frequented his *collegia*, but whose Oriental and fantastic pessimism was irreconcilable with Plotinus's views.

CONCLUSION

The attempt to picture Gnosticism as a mighty movement of the human mind towards the noblest and highest truth, a movement in some way parallel to that of Christianity, has completely failed. It has been abandoned by recent unprejudiced scholars such as W. Bousset and O. Gruppe, and it is to be regretted that it should have been renewed by an English writer, G.R.S. Mead, in "Fragments of a Faith Forgotten", an unscholarly and misleading work, which in English-speaking countries may retard the sober and true appreciation of Gnosticism as it was in historical fact. Gnosticism was not an advance, it was a retrogression. It was born amidst the last throes of expiring cults and civilizations in Western Asia and Egypt. Though hellenized, these countries remained Oriental and Semitic to the core. This Oriental spirit -- Attis of Asia Minor, Istar of Babylonia, Isis of Egypt, with the astrological and cosmogonic lore of the Asiatic world -- first sore beset by Ahuramazda in the East, and then overwhelmed by the Divine greatness of Jesus Christ in the West, called a truce by the fusion of both Parseeism and Christianity with itself. It tried to do for the East what Neo-Platonism tried to do for the West. During at least two centuries it was a real danger to Christianity, though not so great as some modern writers would make us believe, as if the merest breath might have changed the fortunes of Gnostic, as against orthodox, Christianity. Similar things are said of Mithraism and neo-Platonism as against the religion of Jesus Christ. But these sayings have more piquancy than objective truth. Christianity survived, and not Gnosticism, because the former was the fittest -- immeasurably, nay infinitely, so. Gnosticism died not by chance, but because it lacked vital power within itself; and no amount of theosophistic literature, flooding English and German markets, can give life to that which perished from intrinsic and essential defects. It is striking that the two earliest champions of Christianity against Gnosticism -- Hegesippus and Irenaeus -- brought out so clearly the method of warfare which alone was possible, but which also alone sufficed to secure the victory in the conflict, a method which Tertullian some years later

scientifically explained in his "De Praescriptione". Both Hegesippus and Irenaeus proved that Gnostic doctrines did not belong to that deposit of faith which was taught by the true succession of bishops in the primary sees of Christendom; both in triumphant conclusion drew up a list of the Bishops of Rome, from Peter to the Roman bishop of their day; as Gnosticism was not taught by that Church with which the Christians everywhere must agree, it stood self-condemned. A just verdict on the Gnostics is that of O. Gruppe (*Ausführungen*, p. 162): the circumstances of the period gave them a certain importance. But a living force they never were, either in general history or in the history of Christendom. Gnosticism deserves attention as showing what mention dispositions Christianity found in existence, what obstacles it had to overcome to maintain its own life; but "means of mental progress it never was".

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