

NOTES AND DISCUSSION

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THE GNOSTIC MANUSCRIPTS OF UPPER EGYPT

DISCOVERY OF A COPTIC LIBRARY AT NAG HAMÂDI

Our epoch, fertile in inventions in the most diverse fields, has in recent years seen several discoveries which hold extraordinary interest for history in general and for the history of religions in particular. Around 1930 seven volumes of Manichean writings were discovered at Fayum; in 1941, a few miles outside Cairo, near Tura, unpublished works of Origen and his disciple Didymus the Blind were found; the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls occurred around 1945, and in Egypt, at roughly this same time, an equally fortuitous find was made of a considerable body of Coptic manuscripts dating perhaps from the third century A.D. Although these last have not been entirely deciphered, they are considered by specialists to be prodigiously rich; such a find, says one, "does not merely enrich or renew our previous knowledge of the liter-

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ature, the genealogy, or the history of Gnosticism: it revolutionizes this knowledge, and opens to research in the field a path absolutely distinct from all those which criticism has previously followed.”¹

As we proceed, we shall see some of the repercussions of this discovery as well as some of the numerous problems it has raised. We may state at the outset that it is of interest to various fields: Hellenistic syncretism, as well as the history of primitive Christianity, that of dogmas and the formation of the Canon; ancient Iranian thought such as “Essene” Judaism or Manicheism; and the links that may exist among so many varied currents and notably the cross-comparisons possible among all these discoveries. It is easy to see the broad range of questions that can be raised.

To most of them it is premature to attempt an answer, and, in any case, an article like this can hope only to point out the questions. Moreover, despite the already quite considerable body of publications on this subject (we shall indicate the chief of these in a bibliographical appendix), the rarity at present of editions and translations of the texts themselves will condition the presentation of this study. It will be possible to linger in a relatively detailed fashion only on the writings to which we have had access, either in the form of an integral translation or in the more fragmentary form of quotations commented upon and introduced into studies by specialists who have devoted themselves to this research. This is running the risk of a certain imbalance between the rather schematic and sometimes very dry enumeration of the manuscripts, with which we shall begin, and the more elaborate developments which we shall attempt on dealing with the better-known writings. For all the information we are about to summarize we are completely indebted to the original works and to the details communicated to us, especially by H. Charles Puech, professor at the Collège de France, to whom we express our gratitude here.

PLACE AND HISTORY OF THE DISCOVERY

The village of Nag Hamâdi is situated on the left bank of the Nile about a hundred kilometers downstream from Luxor, in the middle of a region whose capital, Hu—the Diospolis Parva of the Greeks—was at one time a capital of Upper Egypt. A large curve of the river incloses the sugar-cane plantations which surround three villages: el-Qasr, ed-Dabbah, and es-Sayyad, which is the Schenesit-Khenoboskion of

1. H. Ch. Puech, *Les nouveaux écrits gnostiques découverts en Haute-Égypte*.

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antiquity. St. Pachomius came here at the beginning of the fourth century to follow the teachings of the abbot Palemon before gathering around him ascetics destined to live as cenobites according to the first eremitic rule. Farther north the region is dominated by a high limestone cliff, Djebel-et-Tarif, pierced halfway up its side by hypogea dating from the sixth dynasty: these are the pharaonic tombs of princes who governed the region at that time.

Beneath the gaping openings of the great tombs, the cliff is pierced by multiple cavities, narrow and deep, in which bodies were hastily buried. The vaults are scattered even to a height of around a hundred meters from the foot of the mountain, as far as the desert hall in which a large number of excavations show to what degree they have all been pillaged by peasants, come to take from them the natural fertilizer called *Sebakh*. This, then, is the ancient cemetery which served the city of Diospolis Parva, then the village of Khenoboskion, a vast but poor necropolis in which bodies were placed in their shrouds at the bottom of a hole.²

It was in cavities of the southern part of this cemetery that peasants from neighboring villages discovered, no doubt around 1945, a huge jar—a *zir*—filled with papyrus manuscripts, some of which were leather-bound. The now-celebrated Dead Sea Scrolls were, it will be recalled, also found in jars.

As is so often the case in this sort of discovery, rumor had it that a part of the pages exhumed by the fellahs was burned or otherwise destroyed. All, or what remained, was sold for three Egyptian pounds—under ten dollars—and brought to Cairo. In 1946 one of the volumes was brought by a Belgian antiquary, Albert Eid, who has since died; another by the conservator of the Coptic Museum of old Cairo, Togo Mina. They were described before the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres on February 20, 1948, by Puech and Jean Doresse.³ As for the other volumes—thirteen in all were discovered, complete or in part—they were acquired, after many changes of ownership, by a private collector who sought the expertise of the Coptic Museum. A résumé of the report thus established was delivered by Mr. Doresse before the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in 1949. After lengthy negotiations ending in the seizure, following “legal action,” of

2. J. Doresse, *Les Livres secrets des gnostiques d'Égypte* (Paris: Plon, 1958), pp. 150–51.

3. H. Ch. Puech and J. Doresse, “Nouveaux écrits gnostiques découverts en Égypte,” in *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1948, pp. 87–95; J. Doresse, “Nouveaux documents gnostiques coptes découverts en Haute-Égypte,” *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1949, pp. 176–80.

eleven of these manuscripts by the Egyptian government,⁴ the collection was placed in the Coptic Museum. The incomplete Eid Codex, however, had left Egypt and had been acquired on May 10, 1952, by the Jung Institute of Zurich and has since borne the name of the celebrated psychologist. An international committee was set up for the publication of these writings, meeting for the first time in 1956.⁵ The first volume of photographic reproductions, made by Dr. Pahor Labib, now director of the Coptic Museum, has recently appeared.⁶

These thirteen volumes representing about a thousand pages, of which 794 are complete, include about forty-nine writings, previously unknown except for two; they are all written in Coptic—the language which represents the last stage of the ancient Egyptian. Ten of these compilations are written in an Upper Egyptian dialect, Sahidic Coptic; the Jung Codex uses another dialect of Middle Egypt, Subakhmimic. A further dialect used has not yet been identified.

Eleven of these codices are in the form of books, made of leaves of papyrus bound rather as portfolios of supple leather, and one is decorated with an Egyptian cross. Except for the Jung Codex, these manuscripts measure about 25 by 15 centimeters. Their calligraphy is remarkably neat. Here is Puech's classification of the writings.⁷

Codex I was added to the Coptic Museum in 1946. This volume of 134 pages, entirely in Sahidic, contains five writings; it probably dates from the middle or the second half of the fourth century.⁸

The first of the writings it contains, and the most important, is the *Apokryphon*—"Secret Book" or "The Secret"—of John. It must date from before the middle of the second century, for St. Irenaeus used it in the composition of the twenty-ninth chapter, Book i, of his work on the

4. Pahor Labib, *Coptic Gnostic Papyri in the Coptic Museum of Old Cairo* (Cairo, 1956), p. 1.

5. This meeting took place in Cairo from September 29 to October 27, 1956. The committee then included: Dr. Pahor Labib, director of the Coptic Museum; Professors Samy Gabra, Murad Kamel, G. Sobhy, Yassah Abd-el-Masih, and Jean Dorese (C.N.R.S., Paris); Dr. C. A. Meier (Jung Institute, Zurich); Professors Theodore C. Peterson (U.S.A.), H. Ch. Puech (Collège de France), G. Quispel (Utrecht), and W. Till (Manchester). See Labib, *op. cit.*, p. 2, and H. Ch. Puech, in *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, CLI (1957), 267–70.

6. Labib, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

7. In the *Encyclopédie française* (1957), I, 19, pp. 19-42-4 to 19-42-13.

8. The dates indicated for the various manuscripts are those which have been provisionally established; they are open to discussion, given the uncertainties which still surround Coptic paleography.

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refutation of heresies (*Adversus haereses*). There are two other extant versions of the *Apokryphon*, as we shall see, in other volumes discovered at Nag Hamâdi; in addition, a papyrus codex dating from the fifth century, the *Papyrus Berolinensis 8502* acquired late in the nineteenth century by the Berlin Museum and only recently published, contains a fourth recension of this text.

The second writing, entitled *The Sacred Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, commences: "Here is the book written by the Great Seth. He placed it in the high mountains on which the sun never rises and, indeed, can never rise. Since the days of the prophets, of the apostles, and of the preachers, never even has [his] name appeared in the hearts of men, and could not do so. Their ears have never heard this name. . . ." It is believed to have been transcribed by a Gnostic doctor, Goggeſsas surnamed Eugnostus. It is a work of decadent and cabalistic Gnosticism.

The third writing is attached to this same personage; it is, in fact, called *Epistle of Eugnostus the Most Fortunate to His Own*. The fourth, *La Sophia*, or *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, reproduces this epistle almost word for word.

As to the fifth and last writing, *The Dialogue of the Savior*, the poor condition of the manuscript thus far renders a detailed analysis impossible.

The *Jung Codex*, numbered II in this classification,⁹ stands out from the other works of this body of material: its format is larger (29 × 14 cm.); its writing is different; its idiom is Subakhmimic. It dates from around the middle of the fourth century. About a hundred pages had been acquired by the Jung Institute; they should be completed by 44 pages found in a group at the Coptic Museum. The Codex contains four writings, ending in a brief *Prayer of the Apostle* (no doubt Peter).

The first of these writings is a *Letter from James* to an unknown addressee, in which the Lord's brother indicates that before the Ascension—which he says took place not forty days after the Resurrection, as reported in the Acts of the Apostles, 1:3, but five hundred and fifty days later—Christ intrusted to him, at the same time as to Peter, some secret teachings. The importance attributed to James, the Lord's brother and first bishop of Jerusalem, is the order in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Elsewhere, Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* ii. 1, 3–4) reports,

9. H. Ch. Puech and G. Quispel, "Les Études gnostiques du Codex Jung," in *Vigiliae Christianae*, I (1954), 1–51.

according to a work of which only fragments are known, the *Hypotyposes* of Clement of Alexandria, that, after his Resurrection, Christ “transmitted the *Gnosis* to James the Just, to John, and to Peter, who themselves (transmitted it) to the other apostles.”

The second writing of this Codex is the *Gospel of Truth*, an incontestably Valentinian work¹⁰ which may be dated before A.D. 180; we have, in fact, testimony on this subject by St. Irenaeus, who mentions it around 180 or 185. It was translated and published, under the title of *Evangelium Veritatis*, by Malinine, Puech, and Quispel in 1956. We shall refer to it again.

The third writing is a *Discourse on the Resurrection* in the form of an epistle addressed to a certain Rheginos. This, too, we shall examine later.

There follows an important treatise, untitled, which Puech and Quispel consider as probably due to Heracleon, one of the leaders of the Valentinian Gnostic school. It would then date from the end of the second century.

This is a vast dogmatic Compendium touching on theology, cosmology, the creation of humanity, soteriology, the end of the world. There is a notable exposé of a remarkable theory of the relations between the Father and the Monogene, which anticipates the Trinitarian speculations of the Christian doctors of the third and fourth centuries. Pre-existing, however, like the Son, from all eternity, the third member, the third Hypostasis of the Trinity, is here the Church, and not the Holy Spirit.¹¹

This text is extremely difficult to interpret; its language is full of *hapax*, and its thought is abstruse.

Codex III is both the most voluminous and the most magnificent. It contains 175 pages (21 × 27 cm.) in a decorated binding. Written in Sahidic, it dates perhaps from the middle of the third century, possibly from the fourth, or even from the fifth century.

The first writing of the collection is a new and longer version of the *Apokryphon* of John, which, as we have seen, forms part of the first Codex. The second writing is the *Gospel According to St. Thomas*. We merely mention it here, as its importance will require a more detailed

10. The Valentinian origin of this writing is, however, disputed, and we believe wrongly so, by Hans-Martin Schenke, who announces a work on the subject (*Theologische Literaturzeitung*, Vol. LXXXIII [1958], col. 497, No. 1).

11. H. Ch. Puech and G. Quispel, “Le quatrième écrit gnostique du Codex Jung,” in *Vigiliae Christianae*, IX (1955), 65–102.

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examination farther on. There follows a *Gospel According to St. Philip*, to which Epiphanius refers (*Panarion* xxvi. 13. 2–4) and which he declares to have been used by the “Gnostics”; a writing entitled *Hypostasis of the Archontes*, a sort of mythical paraphrase of Genesis, treating especially of the Deluge; an untitled apocalypse; a treatise on the *Exegesis of the Soul* containing biblical quotations drawn from the prophet Hosea and the Psalms as well as allusions to the poet Homer and constituting an example of the utilization of pagan myths by the Gnostics;¹² and, finally, ending the collection, *The Book of Thomas the Athlete, Written by Him for the Perfect*, which is supposed to be “secret Words spoken by the Savior to Jude Thomas and consigned by Matthew.” This is a dialogue between Jesus and Thomas on the fate of souls after death and a description of hell.

Of *Codex IV*, there remain but eight unmatched sheets, unbound; it includes the end of a treatise entitled the *Triple Discourse of the Triple Protennoia*, or *Sacred Book Written by the Father*—that is, by Seth—and a revelation, also Sethian, in the form of an epistle.

Codex V, of 126 pages, is intact. Written in Sahidic, before the middle of the fourth century, it is composed of four treatises: a *Paraphrase of Séem*, or *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*; an *Apocalypse of Peter*; the *Teachings of Sylvanos*; and an opuscle of about 10 pages, entitled *Revelation by Dositheus of Three Stele* (prayers?) of Seth. These are three hymns.

Codex VI, which seems to date from the third century, uses two dialects, one not yet identified, the other Sahidic. It contains an *Interpretation of the Gnose* and a writing entitled the *Supreme Allogene*, which would seem to be identical to the *Apocalypse of Allogene*, or of the Allogenes, of “the Stranger” or “the Strangers,” that is, of Seth and his descendants. This is cited by Porphyry among the books used by the Roman Gnostics opposed by Plotinus, mentioned as well by Epiphanius apropos the “Gnostics,” of the Sethians and the Archontics, and of whom Theodorus Bar Konaï speaks again in the eighth century in his notice on the Audians.¹³ Then comes a third writing, an untitled revelation, which must be the *Apocalypse of Messos* whose title Porphyry, in

12. Cf. J. Doresse, “Hermès et la Gnose,” in *Novum testamentum*, I (1956), 62.

13. H. Ch. Puech, “Fragments retrouvés de l’Apocalypse d’Allogène,” in *Mélanges Franz Cumart* (“Annuaire de l’Institut de Philosophie et d’Histoire Orientales et Slaves de l’Université de Bruxelles,” Vol. IV [Brussels, 1936]), pp. 935–62; and the article of the *Encyclopédie française* mentioned above (n. 7).

the sixteenth chapter of his *Life of Plotinus*, joins to those of the Revelations of Zoroaster, Zostrian, Nicotheus, and Allogene.¹⁴

Codex VII, also written in Sahidic, and somewhat deteriorated, dates from the end of the third century or from the beginning of the fourth. It contains fragments of a second version of the *Epistle of Eugnostus*; an *Apocalypse of Paul* describing the ascension of the apostle traversing one after another the gates of the seven heavens; a *Revelation of James*, followed by a text beginning with these words: "Here are the words which James the Just pronounced at Jerusalem. . . ." Then comes a *Revelation of Adam to His Son Seth*, an opuscle of 22 pages relating revelations which Adam, in his seven hundredth year, is said to have made to his son Seth. They concern such matters as the Fall of Man, the Deluge, the Illuminators of the Gnose, and the successive Saviors.

Codex VIII, from the same copier as the preceding, is somewhat mutilated. It contains another recension of the *Apokryphon* of John and of the *Sacred Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, plus fragments of an untitled text.

Codex IX, written in the same dialect, at the same time, and by the same scribe as the two preceding collections, includes an Apocalypse, an epistle from Peter to Philip, and especially a long *Revelation*, called in the précis that of Zostrian.

Codex X seems to have been composed at the end of the third century or the beginning of the fourth. But it has so far been too little studied for us to discuss it in detail.

Codex XI, about 80 pages in length, is distinguished by its particularly beautiful writing and also by the fact that it has been much read: feathers placed between some of its pages no doubt served as book-marks. Written in Sahidic, it probably dates from the end of the fourth century. Its principal interest for us arises from the coexistence in the same collection of Christian or Gnostic Christian writings and of hermetic treatises from a pagan Gnose; it contains, after some *Acts of Peter*, an *Authentic Discourse of Hermes to Tat*, followed by another treatise, perhaps hermetic too, *The Thought . . . of the Great Power*. The untitled treatise which follows is a dialogue in which Hermes Trismegistus, the *Nous* (intellect), exposes to his son "the mysteries of the Hebdomad, the Ogdoad and the Ennead." The next work is a Gnostic revelation, treating of the Deluge and of the end of time. Then comes a text which ends in a prayer that had already existed in the

14. Puech, "Fragments retrouvés de l'Apocalypse d'Allogène," *op. cit.*

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Latin hermetic treatise, the *Asclepius*, and which is also found in Greek in a magic papyrus of Paris, the *Mimaut Papyrus*. The seventh and last writing of this collection takes up, from paragraphs 21 to 29, the text of this same Latin *Asclepius* with but minor differences. The question to be asked is obvious, although no answer is possible at the present stage of research: "Does such a juxtaposition of apparently heterogeneous works signify that pagan Gnose and Christian Gnose really live in symbiosis, or did it result from the act of a collector more anxious to accumulate esoteric texts than to introduce unity and rigor into his choice?"¹⁵ The first case would offer a particularly interesting example of syncretism.

Codices XII and *XIII*, the last two volumes of the collection, are made up of dissimilar sheets of which we can say nothing here.

Such is the first classification, necessarily incomplete and schematic, which can at the present stage of research be given of the manuscripts composing the Coptic library of Nag Hamâdi. What is its origin?

It seems evident that a collection of such richness, owing to several scribes and spread out over more than a century, belonged to a true Gnostic community. With the exception of several of these writings—hermetic writings, *Gospel of Thomas*, *Jung Codex*, perhaps introduced later into an already existing library—the collection presents a basic unity, whatever the variety of genres represented: it appears to have been the property of a Sethian community.¹⁶ Epiphanius, in his *Panarion* (notices xxv, xxvi, xxxix, and xl), speaks of these sects, certain members of which he had himself visited during a voyage he had made to Egypt early in the fourth century. It may be that the Sethians of Nag Hamâdi were in touch with other sects, notably with Valentinians. This same Epiphanius attests that some were adepts in the Thebaid (*Panarion* xxvi. 7. 1). A fairly eclectic choice may have governed the enrichment of the library we are considering, in which the common use of books was then undertaken by holders of varying Gnostic doctrines.

We have already glimpsed the extraordinary interest presented for the history of religions by the discovery of a library of such breadth. We should now like to reconsider certain aspects of the writings.

Gnostic literature, we have said. What do we mean by this?

The name of Gnose, or Gnosticism, has sometimes been reserved for

15. Puech, article quoted from the *Encyclopédie française*.

16. This identification derives from Puech's study published in 1936 in *Mélanges Franz Cumart* (cf. n. 13).

the doctrines professed by various sects considered as heretical, from the beginnings of Christianity: the *Acts of the Apostles* thus make known to us the name of Simon the Mage. Heresiologies, in their refutations, later report—more or less imperfectly and in fragmentary fashion—the teachings of Gnostic masters: St. Irenaeus in his *Adversus haereses*, around A.D. 180, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, St. Epiphanius in his *Panarion*, and many others. The polemical character of their exposés making them subject to caution, one of the interests offered by the discovery of Nag Hamâdi, and by no means the least, is to restore to us authentic and complete texts.

In the Acts and in the Epistles we find trace of the struggle which primitive Christianity had to wage against Gnostic tendencies, a struggle which became more and more intensified and no doubt reached its apogee in the second century. The works of Christian writers of that time bear witness to the bitterness of the struggle. However, they all look upon the Gnose (from a Greek word signifying “knowledge”)—however they may describe it—as a phenomenon to be considered uniquely *in relation to* Christianity, as a heresy within the church.¹⁷ We cannot view it in this light today. The comparative history of religions shows us that the term must be given a much wider meaning; it is essentially concerned, as a matter of fact, with a specific religious attitude in regard to the problem of salvation. We have here a “specific phenomenon, common to various domains in the History of Religions and, therefore, general. Of this phenomenon, heterodox Christian Gnosés represent but one expression among many others.” They constitute “the results of a meeting and a juncture between the new religion and a current of ideas and feelings which existed before it or which was at first foreign to it and was to remain so in essence.”¹⁸ There exist pagan Gnosés, such as Hermetism; extra-Christian Gnosés such as Mandeism; oriental Gnosés like Ishmaelism. We find in all of these a single *style* of thought—here sublime, there flawed by immoderation—rather than a veritable doctrine. It has been called a “romantic Platonism,” in recognition of the fact that the sentiment almost always disclosed in it is indeed “the romantic sentiment par excellence: the feeling of the limits of destiny and the desire to burst these limits, to break out

17. See H. Ch. Puech, “La Gnose et le Temps,” *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, XX (1952), 57 ff.

18. H. Ch. Puech, in *Annuaire du Collège de France*, 1953, pp. 163 ff.

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of the human condition, to escape from everything.”¹⁹ It is this underlying structure of thought, it has been noted, that “invariably conditions the imaginative forms of Gnostic myths,” which are not destined to be “articles of faith,” but “transparent symbols,” “the poetic raiment of conceptual relationships.”²⁰ On the origin of the Gnose and the different theories proposed, we cannot speak here. Suffice it to say that, with integral texts finally at our disposal for the first time, we are henceforth in the presence not only of the “swarm of images” of which Professor Scholem has spoken but also, and especially, of a harrowing experience, of a profound human problem. We touch concretely a religious trembling, the expression of a terrified unrest before the tragic aspect of the condition of all mortals. The man of that era asked himself burning questions; he lived within the profound movements of a world that was ending, uprooted from the reassuring inclosure of ancient institutions with their tutelary deities; the great god Pan was dead and was not yet definitively replaced. Now through one of those chance occurrences of history, the cry of his anguish suddenly reaches us, across the ages; and we live perhaps in the time most capable of understanding his cry. It is but a short step from the sentiment of the absurd, in the century of the concentration camp and Hiroshima, of Kafka, and of Sartre’s *Nausea*, to the terror which seized the Gnostic faced with the evil-doing forces he felt within and outside himself, leaving him a prey to fatality—exiled, abandoned, forgotten in a body which was to him a prison, in the depths of a Cosmos which enslaved him and buried him in time. It is this existential attitude which permits the operation of regroupments across the bounds of space, cultures, and religions, the perceptions of spiritual relationship, much more than the nature of the “explanations,” thanks to which the Gnostics constructed for themselves a universe in which they might finally find life, from the moment they believed themselves able to answer the questions which tormented them concerning the origin of man, his reason, and his purpose. Escaping from ignorance and oblivion, conscious that in reality he is not of this world, that he is “foreign” to it, that he is “a fallen god who remembers the heavens,” man, thanks to a knowledge, a saving Gnose, “in the course of an illumination which is both regeneration and divinization, re-grasped himself in his truth, remembered himself anew, thus achieving,

19. Simone Pètrement, *Le Dualisme chez Platon, les Gnostiques et les Manichéens* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1947), p. 129.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 148; cf. also n. 32.

with the possession of his veritable 'self' and condition, the explanation of his destiny."²¹

If the Gnostic's consciousness of the absurdity of things and of the horror of evil appears to us so close to our own way of feeling things, we must not for all that lose sight of an essential difference; it has been very rightly said that

the Gnose is not mere pessimism, but joy and feeling of triumph. It has two faces: one shows grief, the other is extraordinarily joyous, and they are inseparable. This is a pervading idea: we have conquered the world, we have been delivered by a power which the world did not know before, we have received something more precious and stronger than the whole universe. The joy of grace bursts forth in these poems.²²

The Gnose is, above all, the search for salvation; the modern attitude, marked by the same nostalgia, is often its refusal.

This conception of man's liberation through knowledge is to be found as well in Hermetism, Manicheism, Catharism, the Jewish Cabala, as well as in the Islamic Gnozes. Confrontation of Gnostic themes and traditions, oriental and Occidental; comparison of structures; search for connections between one Gnose and another: a whole field of research is opened to us, at the very moment when, through a remarkable coincidence, we have for the first time access to authentic and complete treatises of Ishmaelian doctrine. From this point on, the works of H. Corbin show us that in Ishmaelism we are indeed in the presence of a Gnose; it is, in fact, a matter

of a teaching which does not tend toward a pure knowledge, or a mode of knowledge which is not a simple act of knowing. It is not a teaching of masses, it is an initiatory teaching transmitted to each adept chosen by name; it is an esoteric knowledge, a knowledge of Truth which produces as such a new birth, a metamorphosis, the salvation of the soul. By means of a spiritual exegesis, Ishmaelism operates on the data of the Koranic Revelation in the same way as the ancient Gnose operated on Christian data. It effects a transmutation of all these data, events, and persons, into symbols. In doing this, it operates a transmutation of the soul, its resurrection, and it thus bears the fundamental character relating it to the other forms of the Gnose.²³

Thus, and leaving aside, of course, any consideration of *the various*

21. Puech, article cited in *Annuaire du Collège de France* (cf. n. 18).

22. Pètremont, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

23. H. Corbin, "De la Gnose antique à la Gnose ismaélienne," in *Convegno dalle scienze morali storiche e filologiche* (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei), 27 May–1 June 1956, p. 107.

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Gnoses, their masters, their doctrines, their history, we see the outline of what characterizes *the Gnose* itself—basically the existential attitude of man terrified before the vanity of things and the horror of evil. Gnostic “systems” will be the fruit of meditations on a Revelation—written down or not—which is shown to bring salvation, for it constitutes the support of esoteric knowledge. Thus were thought out and explained, for example, the themes of Genesis: creation, fall, deluge, were subjected to a subtle exegesis, generative of myths more often than not contrary to orthodox biblical interpretation. How could a world so evil be conceived of as the work of a benign God? The Gnostic will answer with the dualist notion of an Unknowable and Perfect God and of a Demiurge who created the universe. Man will escape the fatality weighing upon creation only through esoteric knowledge dispensed by the Saviors of the world to the elect, to the spiritual, to the “Pneumatic.” Hence the mysterious character of the secret doctrine, incomprehensible to the masses. As for the images, allegories, and schemes of thought in which the doctrine has flowed as into different molds, all this will depend upon extremely varied contributions and will reflect that vision of the world which is “scientific” at a given time. In this way, the great cosmological myths of the Gnose are to express themselves as a function of astrological and astronomical conceptions, often in a visionary and apocalyptic form, utilizing all literary genres and wearing the mystical speculations of fictions of all kinds.

The varied documentation offered us by the ensemble of the Nag Hamâdi library can thus be divided under various headings: here a matter of revelations on the origin of the world attributed to “prophets” and notably to “the great Seth,” such as the *Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, the *Allogene*, the *Apocalypses*, and so forth; there pseudo-biblical apocrypha; there again Gnostic treatises on the margin of Christianity. We shall now examine three of the last, which, among others, have been studied in greater detail in publications which we shall utilize: the *Discourse on the Resurrection*, the *Gospel of Truth*, and the *Gospel of Thomas*. The first of these writings shows us a Gnostic interpretation of themes from the Pauline *mystique*; the second is a meditation, doubtless by one of the greatest Gnostic doctors, on the profound meaning of the evangelist “message”; the third, which should be considered separately because of its heterogeneity, raises a whole series of questions bearing on the “synoptic problem.”

The *Discourse on the Resurrection*, addressed to a certain Rheghinus,

third writing of the Jung Codex, has been studied by Puech and Quispel in an article which appeared in *Vigiliae Christianae*²⁴ and by Quispel in one of the essays of the book devoted to this manuscript.²⁵ We are reproducing the essentials of these two studies here.

The importance of this rather brief epistle, which our authors attribute to Valentinus himself or to a disciple of the great Gnostic doctor of the second century, lies in the fact that it permits us for the first time to see what Gnostics thought about the Resurrection. Hellenism believed in an immortality more or less impersonal and automatic. The conceptions of the early church were not Greek but Semitic; it was man in his entirety, with his own individuality, who was to be judged among the dead and resuscitated. The Valentinians, it seems, believe in a resurrection purely spiritual and "already accomplished"—a doctrine opposed by St. Paul (II Tim. 2:18). Here is the passage as translated for us:

The Savior has destroyed death, but not secretly in such a way that we can be ignorant of it. For He has not remained in the perishable world. He was transported into the imperishable Eon. And He arose having engulfed the visible in the invisible, and He has furnished us with the way to our own immortality. So, as the Apostle (Paul) has said, we have suffered with Him and we have arisen with Him and we have mounted to heaven with Him. But if we are manifest in the world having put on the Christ, we are rays of Christ and we are sustained by Him until our own setting. That is our death in this life. We are drawn to heaven by Him like rays by the sun, without any obstacle before us. That is the spiritual resurrection which absorbs psychic resurrection as well as that of the flesh.

This passage is remarkable on two counts: while the influence of St. Paul is not precisely seen in *Orthodox* Christian writers of the second century, here we find the characteristic themes of Pauline Christology and *mystique* in the writings of a Gnostic: "Death during this earthly existence; life and resurrection in Christ, through Him and with Him; the 'putting on' of Christ; absorption of the visible in the invisible, of death in life; all these motifs, stated in a few lines, are Pauline." In addition, and in very curious fashion, this Pauline *mystique* is expressed according to a solar eschatology: the Christ is assimilated to the sun, just like the "god with seven rays" of the Chaldean Gnose. The souls

24. H. Ch. Puech and G. Quispel, "Les Seuls gnostiques du Codex Jung," in *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. VIII (1954).

25. G. Quispel, "The Jung Codex and Its Significance," in *The Jung Codex* (London, 1955), pp. 37-78.

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of the faithful who, at death, will be brought back to their source and united to it²⁶ are described as being its rays: like Plutarch saying (*De facie in orbe lunae* 82, 943D) that in the Beyond the souls have the appearance of rays. We observe here a Valentinian attempt at Christianization of the syncretist religion of their time. It is in any case striking to see that “the essential themes of the Pauline *mystique* are present here, repeated, orchestrated. They thus appear to owe their earliest fortune to the Gnostics. However difficult it may be to establish the extent to which these ‘heretics’ were faithful to the thought of the Apostle, and to what extent they betrayed it, the fact is patent.”²⁷

The *Gospel of Truth*, second writing of the Jung Codex [pp. 16, 31–43, 24), was edited and translated, as we have indicated, in 1956.²⁸ We know of its existence, thanks to the testimony of St. Irenaeus, who speaks of it in his *Adversus haereses* (iii. 11. 9), about A.D. 180 or 185, establishing that the work was composed before that date. Pseudo-Tertullian also refers to it (*Adversus omnes haereses* 4 [Kroymann ed., p. 221]). Its language and doctrine relate it to Valentinian Gnosticism. W. C. Van Unnik, who studied it carefully, attributes it to Valentinus himself and thinks it can be dated at about A.D. 140–50. Clement of Alexandria informs us that Valentinus had begun his teaching during the reign of Hadrian (A.D. 117–38) and had continued his activities in Rome during that of Antoninus Pius (d. A.D. 161). Tertullian relates that Valentinus had aspired to the episcopacy and broke with the great church after his failure. If the *Gospel of Truth* was indeed composed by the chief of the Valentinian school at the time indicated, that is, before this rupture, “we should henceforth be in a position to grasp in its very earliest lines the formation of the Gnostic doctrine proper to Valentinus, still but partially disengaged from the more orthodox Christian envelope in which its first attempts at formulation had taken place.”²⁹

Why this name of Gospel? St. Irenaeus cites it thus, stating carefully that it agrees in no way whatever with the four canonical Gospels. Nor

26. All these references are given in the article mentioned above, nn. 24 and 25.

27. Puech and Quispel, “Les Seuls gnostiques . . .,” *op. cit.*

28. Four pages were lacking, which have been found and reclassified. The translation could not be included in the edition of 1956. A version by H. M. Schenke will be found in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, July, 1958, cols. 498–500. See also H. Ch. Puech in *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 1957, pp. 267–70.

29. Puech, article quoted in *Encyclopédie française*.

does its purpose resemble in any way the other apocryphal gospels which always claim to correct on one point or another the canonical gospels. Nor does its structure conform to the type of those Gnostic gospels in which the risen Christ confers secret and sublime revelations on several chosen disciples. And, unlike all these gospels, it contains no account of the life of Jesus, no quoting of his words. It has rather the form of a homily, a meditation. Its doctrine offers no specifically Gnostic characteristics: no trace of eons is found in it, or any distinction between Father and Demiurge. Christ is designated as Logos, Savior, Messenger; but the "orthodox" contemporaries of Valentinus employ these same terms. The analysis of the text shows that its author knew the canonical Gospels, the Pauline Epistles, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apocalypse, though there is no trace of the Acts of the Apostles, the first Epistle of John, nor the first of Peter. This is invaluable for the history of the canon: we see that in Rome, at the middle of the second century, a collection of writings approximately identical to that of our canonical books served as authority. For the author of our text they were bringers of Good News, on which he meditated and which he was to present, in his turn, in condensed form.

In the eyes of its author, that of which Jesus proclaimed the joyous news, and which he made effective is, for man, the knowledge or the recognition of God in self and of self in God, the discovery of the true being of God which is, at the same time, discovered in oneself by oneself. To whoever participates in the grace of the Gospel, or to draw the knot closer, to whoever is capable of participation in it, the Gnose reveals his identity or his basic personality, reveals his authentic "self" and making him recover the consciousness and possession of it, gives it back as it were to oneself. In this way, the Gnose saves him. More exactly, by permitting him to become once again conscious of his true nature and origin, it brings him, with the explanation of his destiny, the definitive certainty of his salvation: it reveals him to himself as a being—by right and for all eternity—saved. In other terms, it delivers him from "Deficiency" and gives him access to "Pleroma"; by dissipating ignorance, anguish, and suffering, the nightmares inherent in his present condition, in his illusory and absurd existence in the nothingness, the night, the lie of this world, it liberates him from the world to restore him to himself, in the permanence of his integral being, in the fullness and the light of its truth. Such is the teaching, the benefit of the Gospel; such is the fundamental, even the unique theme, of our *Gospel*.³⁰

We have given such a long quotation because, in going beyond the specificity of the work being considered here, it seemed to us to enlight-

30. M. Malinève, H. Ch. Puech, G. Quispel, *Evangelis veritatis*, French trans., Introduction, pp. xv–xvi.

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en admirably certain of those characteristics common to every Gnose that we have indicated and that we shall encounter again and again in our research. The *Gospel of Truth* presents them as follows:

The Gospel of Truth is joy for those who have received from the Father of Truth the grace to know Him through the power of the Word come from the Pleroma, immanent to the Thought and the Intellect of the Father, [Him] who is the one who is called "The Savior." . . . Ignorance in regard to the Father has produced anguish and terror. And anguish has thickened like a fog. . . . Since oblivion has been produced because they know not the Father, then, if they know the Father, oblivion will no longer be, from that moment. This is the Gospel of Him whom they seek, [the Gospel] which He has revealed to the Perfect, thanks to the mercies of the Father as a hidden mystery [Him] Jesus Christ. Through Him, He has illumined those who are in darkness because of oblivion. . . . This is why Error has been aroused against Him. It pursued Him, oppressed Him, annihilated Him. He was nailed to wood. . . .

But, as for the men awakened to knowledge through him, "they learned [to contemplate] the aspects of the Face of the Father. They knew, they were known. They were glorified, they glorified. They know whence they have come and where they are going, like someone who, having been drunk, has become sober and who, come to himself, has re-established what is his own." And then "the Father is in them and they are in the Father, being perfect, being indivisible from this authentically good Being. They lack nothing, in nothing, but they rest, refreshed by the Spirit."

One passage—to which some lines of the *Iliad* (xxii. 199–201) have been compared—tragically describes the condition of man in the world, enchained by ignorance, of man who thinks or should think: "I am like the shadows and the phantoms of the night." The text states:

When light has become day, that man understands that the terror which had seized him was nothing. . . . So long as ignorance inspired them with terror and confusion and left them unstable, torn, and divided . . . as though they were plunged in sleep . . . they were prey to troubled dreams: or they fled somewhere; or they are, without strength, launched in pursuit of one thing or another; or they find themselves brawling, scattering blows; or they receive blows in their turn; or they may fall from the heights; or they may fly into the air without even having wings. At other times, it is as if someone wished to kill them, though no one pursues them; or as if they themselves were killing people near them, for they are spattered with blood. Until the moment when those who pass through all this awaken . . . they have hurled ignorance far from them, like sleep, which they hold as nothing, no more than they hold fictions for real things. But they abandon them like a dream of the night and, the Gnose of the Father, they appreciate at the level of Light. Thus did each one act—as if he

were asleep—at the time when he was ignorant, and thus did he arise, as if awakening. Blessed the man who has come to himself and awakened. And Most Blessed He who has opened the eyes of the blind [*Gospel of Truth*, from the French trans., pp. 28–30].

All the visages of fright, all haunting nightmares, are here translated into dynamic images rather than as an evocation of nocturnal phantoms: the dreamer is pursued, strikes, is struck, flees, kills, is sullied. Life is indeed, as Macbeth conceives it, “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” The antithesis of this will be, with the serenity brought by knowledge, rest, the *anapausis* dear to every Gnose.

One of these images is particularly striking, for all the resonances of vertigo and of gulf, of abyss and fall, which it arouses: this is the horror of the nightmare consisting of “falling from the heights.” Literary examples of this “falling psychism,” from Edgar Allan Poe to Von Baader, from Pascal to Baudelaire, have been collected by G. Bachelard,³¹ who, speaking of our unconscious “hollowed out by an imaginary abyss into which, in us, every thing may fall, every thing may come to nothingness,” comments on these images of oneiric fall which are the expression of a “wounded imagination”:

They are so many variations on an anthropologically fundamental dynamic theme. They are images which systematically surpass experiences, which give a permanent reality to ephemeral dangers. And above all, they tend to *dramatize* the fall, to make of it a destiny, a sort of *death*. They translate our fall-being, our being-becoming-in-the-becoming-of-the-fall. They make us know *thundering, stunning time*. Meditating on the images of falling, we will have a new proof that it is by surpassing reality that the imagination reveals to us *our* reality.

The italics are those of the author. And do they not stress just that existential anguish which the Gnostic was to crystallize into an ontological system?

Having reached this point, it seems that there is one remark which must be made. It may seem contradictory that, after having indicated that the *Gospel of Truth* did not present a specifically Gnostic character, we have just emphasized the traits that relate it to the Gnose. But we did this because we have viewed the question in a double light: we have sometimes attempted to distinguish what constitutes the structure of a given religious feeling; we can then, after having perceived its broad lines, recognize that we are beyond any doubt in a “Gnostic”

31. G. Bachelard, *La Terre et les rêveries de la Volonté* (Paris: José Corti, 1948), chap. xii and p. 353.

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climate. At other times, approaching the matter from the point of view of doctrine, we observe that most of the data of Gnostic "systems" are effectively lacking in the writing we are considering—not a trace of dualism in creation; none of those myths which we are accustomed to meet in the Apocalypses of the Gnose; a God forgotten rather than unknowable; even, it seems, none of this docetism with which the Christian Gnose is tinged and which can be found even in the Koran, making of Christ a purely spiritual being who was incapable of suffering in the flesh. Or, rather, it is through these negative aspects, and as if in hollow form, that certain elements of a Gnostic conception will appear. W. C. Van Unnik sums them up in a word: what is lacking here is the underlying Israelite basis of the New Testament; under the mask of the latter, the concern here is really with quite another *Weltanschauung*.³² He observes that it is less the notion of Gnosis, or Christology, which presents a difference from the canonical Gospels, and more the problem of evil, which is here not disobedience to the order of God but ignorance. This amounts at the same time to a telescoping of history. In such a view—and this is valid for every Gnose, particularly for the Islamic Gnosés—there can be no linear time of salvation, as in Judaism, Christianity, Islam; nor is time the cyclical time of Hellenism; there is instead what might be called a vertical time, ending in the elimination of history, since salvation is a regrasping of self-consciousness for man who thus escapes the hold of the world; salvation is, definitively, a timeless event, through which the parts of God come to the consciousness.³³ The *Gospel of Truth* is a "book revealed in (men's) hearts." It is the voice which awakens one out of oblivion.

However, within this framework so little "historical," "a place was found, even a decisive place, for the story of Jesus." Still, it must be noted, there is no question of Parousia or of an end to time; no line which can admit of a final point. But the Revelation of God and of the human self passes through the Christ. The *Gospel of Truth* is clearly Christocentric. It is Christ who gives Truth; He is the Son. He is also the *Name* of the Father.

The *Gospel of Truth* contains a long passage (pp. 3–41) on the divine Name conceived as a divine manifestation, as an independent hyposta-

32. Article mentioned in *Codex Jung*, especially p. 128.

33. See Puech, "La Gnose et le Temps," *op. cit.*

sis acting as mediator of revelation. This poses the problem of relationships between our writing and the Jewish Gnose.

We shall limit ourselves to recalling the speculations of the Jewish *mystique*—more or less heterodox—particularly in the first centuries of the Christian Era, on the Name considered as mediator. On the other hand, the unknown God of the Gnose often receives the name of Ião, whose etymology obviously derives from Yahveh. St. Irenaeus points out (I. 21. 3) that this name Ião is found in a liturgical formula of the Valentinians. We have seen that our text considers the role of Christ as that of a revealer of the hidden Name of God. There is more than coincidence in all this.

The *Gospel According to Thomas*³⁴ is the second writing of the Codex and bears the number III in the classification given above. Written in Sahidic, it can for the moment be dated only approximately (second half of the third, fourth, or even fifth century). It takes up 20 pages in this collection (photographic plates 20–99 of the Pahor Labib edition).

As was the case for the *Gospel of Truth*, we are not dealing here with a gospel in the sense that we give this word: it is simply a collection of a hundred and fourteen logia or words attributed to Jesus, given in no apparent order, without an organized plan. The total body seems inorganic, each of the logia being independent of the others; certain of them are related through the artificial link of a similarity of words. They are not located in a narrative framework and are introduced, one after another, by the same formula: “Jesus has said . . .” or “He has said. . . .” (We might refer here to the series of the *Gospel of Mark*, chap. 4, in which the aphorisms are introduced with the words “And He said. . . .”)

The *Gospel of Thomas* begins thus: “Here are the secret words which Jesus the Living has said and which Didymus Jude Thomas has written. And He said: ‘He who finds the interpretation of these words shall not taste death.’”

Puech has compared this prologue with the fragment of a third-century papyrus found in 1903 at Oxyrhynchos and which is numbered 654. This sheet being torn down the middle, its reconstruction must necessarily be a delicate matter. Puech has shown that this papyrus reproduced exactly, in Greek, not only the prologue of the *Gospel of*

34. Besides Puech's article in the *Encyclopédie française*, already mentioned, we have utilized his paper read before the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in 1957 (*Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1957, pp. 146–66).

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Thomas but even the six logia which follow it in the Coptic text. The papyrus thus must represent a Greek version of the Words of Jesus which the *Gospel of Thomas* translated into Coptic.

These secret words were revealed to Thomas, the supposed writer of the work. Who is he? The Synoptics tell us of an Apostle Thomas; the Gospel of John adds the detail that he was called "Didymus" ("the Twin"). The form employed in our writing is redundant: *Didymes* meaning "twin" in Greek, *toma* having the same meaning in Aramaic. Now, the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, well known, also speak five times of the apostle "Jude Thomas" and of "Jude Thomas Didymus." There would seem, then, to be a common tradition. Thus it is that in the thirty-ninth chapter of these *Acta Tomae*, a young ass speaking before the crowd addresses Thomas in these terms: "O twin brother of Christ, O apostle sent from the Most High, co-initiate to the hidden word of Christ [in the Syriac version: "Thou who took part in the secret word of the *Vivificator*"], thou who received his secret logia."

Why this attribution to Thomas of a role so eminent and so special? The material of the *Gospel According to Thomas* does not enlighten us on his subject. The name of Thomas does not appear; there are no allusions to him except in the extraordinary logion which is the thirteenth of our collection:

Jesus said to his disciples: Compare me and tell me whom I resemble. Simon Peter said to him: Thou art like a just Angel [or Envoy]. Matthew said to him: Thou art like a man who is a wise philosopher. Thomas said to him: Master, my mouth will absolutely not accept my saying what you are like. Jesus said to him: I am not thy master, because thou hast drunk, thou hast been intoxicated at the boiling spring which I have distributed. And he took him, withdrew, and said three words to him. When Thomas had gone [returned] to his companions, they asked him: What did Jesus say to thee? Thomas said to them: If I tell one of the words he said to me, you will take stones and throw them at me, and a fire will come forth from these stones and you will be burned.

What might these three mysterious words be? Professor Oscar Cullmann thought of the celebrated saying of Jesus: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Puech compares them to a statement of Thomas, also quoted in a Coptic fragment of the apocryphal Gospel called that of Bartholomew: "I believe, my Lord and my God [cf. John 20:28] that thou art the Father, that thou art the Son, and that thou art the Holy Spirit." Elsewhere, in the *Acts of Thomas* (chap. 47), we find recalled the event related in our logion 13: "And the apostle Thomas began by saying: "Jesus, secret mystery which has been revealed to me,

thou art he who has discovered most numerous mysteries unto me, who hast taken me aside from all my companions and told me *three words* of which I am on fire, and I cannot tell them to others.”

Before the discovery of Nag Hamâdi, we knew of the *Gospel According to Thomas* only the title and apparently one passage. Its existence was known, thanks especially to Origen, who mentions it as a heterodox writing in his *Homily on Luke*, around the year 233, and thanks to Eusebius of Cesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History*. On the other hand, we have testimony of Byzantine authors: Cyril of Jerusalem, Peter of Sicily, Pseudo-Photius, Pseudo-Leonce of Byzantium, Timothy of Constantinople, the *Acts* of the second Council of Nicea, the *Pseudo-Gelasian Decree*, which indicate that a *Gospel According to Thomas* was in use among the Manicheans and which mention it here and there along with a *Gospel According to Philip*. Now, in the manuscript of Nag Hamâdi as in the list of these Manicheist writings, the *Gospel According to Thomas* is followed immediately by the *Gospel According to Philip*.

Elsewhere, in addition to the title, we used to believe that we had a quotation drawn from this gospel. Hippolytus, or whoever may be the author of the *Elenchos*, makes mention in about A.D. 230 of the gospel entitled *According to Thomas* when discussing the doctrine of the Naassene Gnostics concerning the “interior kingdom,” saying that it is of this that they expressly spoke when they said: “He who seeks me will find me among children of seven years or older; for it is there that, in the fourteenth eon, after having remained hidden, I manifest myself” (*Elenchos* v. 7. 20). Although we do not find in the Coptic text the exact lines quoted by Hippolytus, Puech believes that in both cases we are concerned with the same *Gospel According to Thomas*. In fact, the passage of the Naassene work of which Hippolytus speaks seems to be rather closely related to the logia of Jesus preceding or immediately following, in our Coptic writing, the logion 4 (Pl. 81), which the quotation from Hippolytus resembles: “Jesus said: the man old in his days will not hesitate to question a little child of seven days concerning the Place of Life, and he will live, for there are many among the first who will be the last, and they will be but one.” The language itself is very different, as is readily seen; but the context presents such similarities that it is possible that the Naassenes had at their disposal a slightly different version of our *Gospel According to Thomas*. Another logion (11, Pl. 82) thus conceived, “When you have eaten what is dead, you have made of

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it what is living; when you shall be in Light, what will you do?" is in every case almost identical to the other declaration of the Naassenes also quoted by Hippolytus (*Elenchos* v, 8, 32): "You, who have eaten dead things and made living things, what will you do if you eat living things?" In addition, it is certain that Mani knew the same writing as the one discovered at Nag Hamâdi and that we finally possess the complete text of the work to which all these witnesses were referring.

To what extent do the logia that make up the *Gospel According to Thomas* constitute hitherto unpublished material? They may be classed in five categories:

1. Certain logia are identical to those of the four canonical Gospels, or are related to them, the same in substance, and in slightly modified form.

2. Other logia are identical to those given by the three papyri of Oxyrrhynchos, 654, 1, and 655 (the second of which was discovered in 1897 and the two others in 1903), in a Greek text the serious mutilation of which made reconstruction difficult. All these sayings are found in the same order at the beginning and in two other places in the *Gospel According to Thomas*, with the exception of the fifth saying of *P. Oxyrrhynchos I*, which is found split in two parts of the Coptic text.

3. Other logia appear to be extracts from apocryphal gospels (*Gospel According to the Hebrews* or *Gospel According to the Egyptians*).

4. Some, finally, are already quoted by authors, ecclesiastical or otherwise, from the first centuries of the Christian Era, down to medieval documents.

5. Finally, more than forty of the logia appear to be absolutely new in the present stage of research.

From the point of view of form, there are several points to be examined, and, first of all, the very formula which introduces the logia: "He said" (in Coptic: "He has said"). This formula serves to call remarkable facts to mind, underlining the authoritative value of what is announced. Thus to the word of Jesus is attributed the authority of sacred texts, of Scriptures. When, in similar formulas, the verb is used in the present tense, as is the case in certain passages of the Greek papyri of Oxyrrhynchos corresponding to our sayings, this attests to the interest, not only historical, but durable and living, of these words addressed by Jesus in the past. Papias, around A.D. 130, speaks of this force of the "living Word." And the prologue of the *Gospel According to Thomas*, as we have seen, qualifies Jesus as *living*.

The literary form of the logia is somewhat varied. Sometimes, they have the form of maxims, like logion 56 Pl. 90): "Jesus has said: He who has known the world has fallen in a cadaver [according to another logion 'in the body'] and he who has fallen in a cadaver [or 'in the body'] the world is not worthy of him."

Or take logion 53: "Jesus said: Look toward the Living in order that you may live and not die." Or logion 35: "Jesus said: "A foot or a stem of a vine has been planted outside the Father. It will be pulled out and it will perish." Or logion 41: "Jesus has said: He who has in his hand, to him shall be given, and he who has not, the little bit that he has will be taken from him" (cf. Matt. 13:12).

Other logia are "marcarisms," as in the Sermon on the Mount: "Jesus has said: Blessed the man who has suffered: he has found Life" (logion 58, Pl 91). Or "Jesus has said: Blessed are the poor, for to them belongs the Kingdom of Heaven," "Jesus has said: Blessed are the lonely and the elect, for you shall obtain the Kingdom. In fact, you are issued from it: you shall return to it anew." (logion 49, Pl. 89). Or, on the contrary: "Jesus has said: Misfortune to the flesh which depends on the soul; misfortune to the soul which depends on the flesh" (logion 112, Pl. 88).

We also find parables such as these: "Jesus has said: The Kingdom of the Father is like a woman carrying a vessel full of flour, walking along a distant path. The handle of the vessel is broken, the flour is spread behind her on the path. She did not know this, [and] she had no knowledge of the accident when she arrived at her house: she set down the vessel, [and] she found it empty" (logion 97, Pl. 97); "Jesus has said: The Kingdom is like a shepherd who has a hundred sheep; one of them has strayed, which was the largest one; he left the ninety-nine and sought this one until he found it; when he found it, he said to the sheep: I love you more than the ninety-nine others" (logion 106, Pl. 98); "Jesus has said: Man is like a wise fisherman who cast a net in the sea. He drew it from the sea full of little fish. Among them, the wise fisherman found a large and beautiful fish. He threw all the little fish into the sea. He chose the big fish without difficulty. Let him who has ears to hear with, hear." Or, again, logion 98 (Pl. 97): "Jesus has said: The Kingdom of the Father is like a man who wished to kill a great man: he took his sword into his house, he pierced its wall in order to know whether his hand would be assured; then he killed the great man."

Logia of another type are introduced by a question or consist of a

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colloquy. For example, logion 113 (Pl. 99): "The disciples said to him: The Kingdom, on what day will it come? He answered them: It will not come with waiting; nothing will be said, behold it is here or there. But the Kingdom of the Father is spread over the earth, and men do not see it." Or logion 22 (Pl. 85): "Jesus saw little children suckling. He said to his disciples: These little ones who suckle are like those who enter the Kingdom. They said to him: If we become little ones, shall we enter the Kingdom? Jesus said to them: When you shall make one of two, and when you shall make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and what is on high like what is below, when you shall make one thing of man with woman, so that man is not man and woman is not woman . . . then you shall enter (into the Kingdom)." Or, finally: "His disciples said to him: Is circumcision useful or not? He said to them: If it were useful, the father would engender them circumcised within their mother. But true circumcision in spirit has been entirely profitable" (logion 53, Pl. 90).

Several Coptic logia are almost identical to their synoptic parallels. Compare, for example, logion 35 of the *Gospel According to Thomas*, which is thus conceived, "It is not possible for someone to enter the house of the strong and take it by violence without binding his hands. Then he will upset his house," with Matt. 12:29: "Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? Then only will he spoil his house." How strong is the resemblance is easily seen. Verse 27 of Mark, chapter 3, is identical. On the other hand, the Luke 11:21-22 expresses the idea in somewhat different form: "When a strong man armed keepeth his place, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." Here, the Coptic text is closer to Matthew and Mark than Luke is.

Logion 34, "If a blind man lead a blind man, they are accustomed to fall, both of them, into a pit," is almost identical with Luke 6:39 and with Matt. 15:14.

And this word from our Coptic writing may be compared with Matt. 13:3—it differs only in detail: "Jesus has said: Here he who sows has gone forth. He has filled his hand. He has cast the seed. Part of it has fallen on the road. Birds have come and gathered it. Other seed has fallen on rock, has not taken root in the earth, and has not sprung up as ears. Other seed has fallen among thorns. These have choked the

seed and the worms have eaten it, and other seed has fallen on good ground and it has brought forth good fruit and has produced sixtyfold and one-hundred-twentyfold.”

The most varied procedures appear in the composition of certain of these logia related to the Synoptics: dissociation or combination, displacement of one by the other, transformation. For example, one of the Coptic sayings declares: “Jesus has said: There is no prophet who is received in his own village, the physician is not accustomed to cure those whom he knows.” The Synoptic parallels (Mark 6:4; Matt. 13:47; Luke 4:24; and John 4:44) speak only of the prophet and not of the physician. Is this a proverb? In the passage of Luke which precedes the passage parallel to the Coptic this proverb is quoted: “Physician, heal thyself.” It is to be noted as well that the wording of our logion is particularly close to that of Luke. The question immediately occurs to us: Is our logion the source of the Scriptures, or vice versa?

Several elements sometimes seem to overlap, for example, logion 33 (Pl. 87): “Jesus has said: What you hear with your ear [and] with the other ear, proclaim it from the housetops. No one, after all, lights a lamp in order to put it under a bushel, nor has the habit of putting it in a hidden place, but customarily places it on a candlestick, so that whoever enters and leaves may see its light.” (This is the last of the Coptic logia for which we have the Greek text in the papyrus of Oxyrrhynchos.) Now we read in Luke 8:16–17: “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear. . . .” Now, in Matt. 10:27, after the recollection, in terms identical to those of Luke, that what is hidden shall be discovered and what is secret, known, we find this: “What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.”

Certain logia are found again in patristic literature, in the Manichean writings, and in other Gnostic or heretical texts. A first list of these will be found in Puech’s paper for the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.³⁵ We shall cite but a few of them. Such is the case of a very ancient saying, quoted by Origen (*Hom. Jerem.* 20. 3) and by Didymus (*Com. Ps.* 88. 8): “Jesus has said: Whoever is near me is

35. In *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1957, pp. 165–66.

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near the fire, and whoever is far from me is far from the Kingdom" (logion 82, Pl. 95). Another logion is quoted by St. Augustine in the *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum* (ii. 4). He indicates that this word, whose origin he does not know, was written in an anonymous tract found, around the year 420, on the maritime shore of Carthage: "His disciples said to him: 'Twenty-four prophets have spoken in Israel, and they all spoke of thee.' He said to them: 'You have forsaken Him who is living in your presence, and you have spoken of those who are dead'" (Coptic logion 52, Pl. 90).

Other logia no doubt come from apocryphal gospels: the *Gospel According to the Hebrews* or the *Gospel According to the Egyptians*. For example, logion 2 (Pl. 80): "Let him who seeks cease not his search until he finds, and when he has found, he will be troubled, and if he is troubled, he will be astonished, and he will reign over all." This saying is cited notably by Clement of Alexandria (*Stromates* ii. 9. 45. 5 and v. 14. 96. 3) and given the first time as coming from the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*.

The diversity of forms which a single word may take is illustrated particularly by logion 38 of the *Gospel According to Thomas*. We know, actually, four versions of it. The first, a Coptic text, has: "Jesus has said: Many times you have desired to hear my words, those which I say to you, and for which you have no other from whom to hear them. Days will come when you will look for me, and you will not find me." St. Irenaeus [*Adversus haereses* i. 20. 2] renders it this way: "Many times I have desired to hear one of these words, and I have had no one to tell them to me." However, we read in the *Acts of John*, chapter 96, that Jesus said to John at the moment of Crucifixion: "John, someone must hear this from me, for I need someone who hears it." In another narrative context, the Coptic Manichean Psalmist (p. 187, ll. 27-29 [Allberry]) reports that at the time of the Resurrection, Christ told Mary Magdalene to remind Peter of what he had said to him on the Mount of Olives: "I have something to say, I have no one to whom to say it."

There is in addition to the problem of the transmission of these sayings that of their fabrication. Sometimes we can spot a retouching process quite clearly. Thus, in the Coptic text: "Jesus has said: Perhaps men think that I have come to cast peace upon the world, and they do not know that I have come to cast divisions on the earth, a fire, a sword, and war. For of five who shall be in a house, there are three

who will be against two, and two against three. The father against the son, the son against the father . . . and they stand alone.” In this logion, whose substance appears close to that of Luke 12:51, is added: “they shall stand alone.” This is one of the favorite themes of the collection. It should perhaps be seen as an added Gnostic trace.

An inverse case of retouching by omission or amputation has been especially studied by Puech. It concerns a saying known in four different forms. In the Coptic version of the *Gospel According to Thomas* it is: “Jesus has said: Know what is before thy face and what is hidden will be revealed to you, for there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed.” In the Manichean *Kephalia* (p. 163, ll. 28–29) Mani declares to his listeners: “On this mystery [of light and darkness] the Savior has provided an answer to his disciples: ‘Know what is before your face, and what is hidden from you will be revealed to you.’” Now, in the Greek papyrus of Oxyrrhynchos, No. 654, we find this: “Jesus said: Know what is before your glance, and what is hidden from you will be revealed to you, for there is nothing hidden which shall not become manifest, and *there is nothing* buried which shall not arise.” This last clause was likewise found by Puech inscribed on a fragment of shroud also coming from Oxyrrhynchos.³⁶ These words expressing faith in the resurrection of bodies must have appeared shocking to the Gnostics, who therefore suppressed them.

Other traits seem to bear witness to more profound alterations. We have seen the eminent role attributed to Thomas, writer of our gospel, confidant of Christ, who took him alone apart in order to confide in him a revelation so sublime that it would scandalize the other apostles, including Simon Peter (logion 13). Now, in the saying which in our collection immediately precedes this line of the confession of Cesarea [cf. Luke 9:18–20], it is James, first bishop of Jerusalem, who is brought into the foreground: “The disciples said to Jesus: We know that you will leave us. Who shall become great among us? Jesus said to them: Where you shall go, you shall go toward James the Just, for whom heaven and earth have been made.” The pre-eminent role of James in the Judeo-Christian tradition is well known (cf. Epiphanius *Pseudo-Clementines* [*Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius] ii. 1, 2–4). Three of the writings of Nag Hamâdi are placed under his patronage, and it is

36. Puech, “Un logion de Jésus sur bandelette funéraire,” *Bulletin de la Société Ernest Renan*, No. 3, (1954), pp. 126–29.

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to him that the Naassenes claimed to attach the chief part of their teaching.

Would there have been successive alterations? Oscar Cullmann used the following working hypothesis: a first reworking in an Ebionite, Judeo-Christian direction, hence the major role of James; then a second recasting to place our collection under the authority of Thomas, which might have been the work of Encratic Gnostics.

Quispel, struck by the affinities between our logia with evangelical quotations found in Judeo-Christian writings and based on numerous parallels with the *Pseudo-Clementines* (Hom. XVIII, 16; Rec. II, 28; Hom. III, 27; Rec. III, 62) supposes a common source, which might be the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, a Judeo-Christian apocryphon of Palestinian origin. Evangelical non-canonical traditions are also found in various *Diatessara* or "Lives" of Jesus, which survive in Latin, English, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Armenian, and Persian, and which may all derive from the *Diatessaron* of Tatian, which dates from around 170. For example, the Tuscan *Diatessaron* contains this: "He who shall say a word *against the Father*, this will be forgiven him." The Persian *Diatessaron* contains this saying: "Love and honor thy friend like thy soul" (Massina, p. 225, l. 6), and our Coptic collection (logion 25): "Love thy brother like thy soul." According to Quispel, one must not discount the possibility that certain unpublished words of Jesus contained in the *Gospel According to Thomas*, which, in their phraseology, style, and vocabulary disclose their Palestinian origin, have the same historical value as those found in the four canonical Gospels. They may have been preserved in a more primitive form than the one given them by our gospels. The new logia do not always or necessarily represent a better tradition than that of the canonical Gospels. The author of the *Gospel According to Thomas* had to modify the text which he found in his source; besides, the text we now have may have been revised by a Gnostic editor, as the logia of Oxyrrhynchos would seem to show. In any case, the fact that a great number of our Coptic logia are, if not identical, at least very similar to the Synoptic—though they come, according to the hypothesis under consideration, from an Aramaic tradition at once different and independent—would make of the *Gospel According to Thomas* a guaranty of the veracity of the quotations from our gospels.³⁷

37. G. Quispel, "The Gospel of Thomas and the New Testament," *Vigiliae Christianae*, XI, No. 4 (December, 1957), 189–207.

Certain logia have had a curious fate elsewhere, for example, the last saying of our *Gospel According to Thomas* (logion 114, Pl. 99): "Simon Peter said to them: Let Mary go out from among us, for women are not worthy of Life. Jesus said: Behold I draw her near in order to make her male, so that she also may become a living spirit like unto you, males, for every woman who shall be made [become] male shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." Puech found echos of this even among the Cathares of the fourteenth century and in the trials of the Inquisition against them.

Another Coptic logion, "Jesus has said: I shall give you what the eye has not seen, what the ear has not heard, what the hand has not touched and what has not entered the heart of man," has its parallel in I Corinthians, where Paul gives these words as coming from the Scriptures, without expressly connecting them with Christ. It is curious to find this same word—as well as the mention of the fact that "heaven and earth have been made for him" (logion 13)—in certain *hadiths* (Moslem prophetic traditions).

What date can be set for the *Gospel According to Thomas*? Given the disparate character of the collection, the problem really applies to each of the sayings which form the gospel. Besides this, we are told that several versions of the work existed. Puech is inclined to fix the earliest writing of our gospel at around A.D. 140 or even a bit later, in the second half of the second century. But what was its first "kernel"? Certain Aramaic characteristics would lead one to suppose an extremely early Palestinian tradition. In any case, a very close analysis of the texts has led Puech to admit the existence of at least two versions of the *Gospel of Thomas*: one which would have been read until the fifth or sixth century by Orthodox Christians—the Greek papyri of Oxyrrhynchos providing this "orthodox" version; the other version reworked later in a "heterodox" direction.

All the subtlety and complexity of the problems can readily be seen. We shall limit ourselves here to stressing the extraordinary interest presented by our writing for the literary history of the New Testament—what has been called the "synoptic problem." Let us review its nature briefly.

If the three so-called Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) are compared, one immediately notices that they present simultaneously very great differences and no less striking similarities. These similarities are not explained merely by the identical nature of the subject mat-

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ter; in fact, the Fourth Gospel, which also treats of the life of Jesus, places it in an entirely different framework. This close literary relationship among the Synoptic Gospels has given rise to various explanations.

The works undertaken, especially since 1920, by scholars who have devoted themselves to the study of the history of forms—*Formgeschichte*—such as Dibelius, Schmidt, Bultmann, etc., have shown that the literary framework of the Gospels is a late creation, gathering and connecting between them fragments classified as tales or histories, on the one hand, and sayings or logia, on the other. Once this has been said, how can one explain the *simultaneity* of a relationship so close and of divergences so wide among the three Synoptic Gospels?

Five principal solutions have been proposed:

a) A first Gospel (Matthew) was used successively by Mark and then by Luke. This was the hypothesis proposed by St. Augustine.

b) The three Gospels drew on a common Aramaic source, lost today. This solution was proposed by Lessing.

c) There had existed isolated tales, writings, which were then grouped together. The name of Schleiermacher is attached to this hypothesis.

d) The hypothesis known as the “oral tradition” must be considered, from which the Evangelists are supposed to have drawn their information before writing it down.

e) The “two-sources” tradition, commonly accepted today, which involves the utilization of one Gospel by another (with Mark considered the first, and Matthew and Luke using his version, and the logia of Jesus as the second source.

We may then wonder whether those of our Coptic logia which are related to the Synoptics might not constitute—at least in a primitive form—a source anterior to our gospels. Mark himself might have known a source similar to our logia and very ancient.

Whatever possible answers may one day be found for the questions raised by our text, one fact appears certain: We can now foresee that the study of parallels existing among the Synoptic Gospels must henceforth take into account certain of the logia of Jesus in the version of Nag Hamâdi and be compared with them; in other words, our synopses must henceforth include a fourth column of references to the *Gospel According to Thomas*.

If we now replace in the body of the discovery the only texts which current research and publications (to which we have repeatedly referred) have permitted us to examine a bit more closely, we cannot fail

to be struck as much by its richness as by the breadth and the diversity of the problems which arise concerning each of the manuscripts. One element appears of prime importance: for the first time we have access to sources, whereas we had had but allusions, more or less truncated quotations often subject to caution, or conjectural reconstructions which clearly showed, especially so far as the papyri of Oxyrrhynchos were concerned, how hazardous or fragile they were. From a more certain documentation it will now be possible "to envisage the primitive relationships of the Gnose with Iranian doctrines more or less authentic, or with Egyptian hermetism. It will be possible to retrace, in the elaboration of this, the part played by Greek philosophy . . . to consider its links with Manicheism . . . and at the same time retrace, on [this] basis . . . the history of the relationships of our sects to the Christianity with which they attempted to compete."³⁸ We shall also be able to study the doctrinal relationships with what we know of the Dead Sea manuscripts as well as with the Eastern Gnooses.

Placed thus in the presence of a religious universe, of a world of beliefs wherein met all the currents of ancient thought, in which all the myths of both Occident and Orient abound, we can tangibly feel a harmony with that time of crisis and spiritual ferment. Faced like our own with new values, it was forced to try, with prodigious effort, to adapt ancient modes of thought to them.

The answers brought by the Gnose to questions thus posed left their imprint on the Manichean world, like the imprint made by the Cathares sects, the esoteric movement during the century of the Enlightenment, German idealism, and so on. Whatever may be the realignments and the structural comparisons which research now under way permits us to effect, we can already sense what resonances may be evoked in modern thought by these papyri exhumed from the sands of Egypt after nearly two thousand years.

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38. J. Dorese, "Nouveaux textes gnostiques coptes," *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. III, No. 3 (July, 1949).

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