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RUDOLF BULTMANN'S CONCEPT OF  
GNOSTICISM AND SOME CONTEMPORARY  
CRITICISM OF IT

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis  
Department of New Testament Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

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CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF Gnosticism; Esold; S.T.M., 1967

Short Title .

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Not long ago scholars regarded Christianity, as it spread from the narrow confines of Palestine to the limits of the setting sun, as the one potent and directive force in the midst of an impotent and bewildered world, the one ray of light in darkness. Now it is known that the knowledge of the religious history of this area is fragmentary in certain respects.

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At the conquest of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C., many forces were awakened and unleashed which had been inert for years. The old centers of Oriental civilization, after several thousand years of intellectual development, had all but come to a standstill. The injection of Greek thought into the culture of the entire Mediterranean area opened the way for reaching change to take place. The term "Hellenistic," meaning a mixture of things Greek with non-Greek,

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Not long ago scholars regarded Christianity, as it spread from the narrow confines of Palestine to the limits of the setting sun, as the one potent and directive force in the midst of an impotent and bewildered world, the one ray of light in darkness. Now it is realized that our knowledge of the religious history of this area is fragmentary in certain respects. There is a great gap in the tradition that extends from the Persian conquest to the very end of the first century A.D. and thus embraces that crucial period that precedes the rise of the mystery religions and Christianity. The only Eastern religion whose history we can follow with some degree of certainty and continuity during these centuries is Judaism, and Judaism, while certainly not separated from the movement of its times, is not a complete source of knowledge of that which stirred the soul of the greater Orient.

At the conquest of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C., many forces were awakened and unleashed which had been inert for years. The old centers of Oriental civilization, after several thousand years of intellectual development, had all but come to a standstill. The injection of Greek thought into the culture of the entire Mediterranean area caused far reaching change to take place. The term "Hellenistic," meaning a mixture of things Greek with non-Greek,

is usually applied to these changes.<sup>1</sup>

As the cultures involved interchanged ideas, a movement or force developed which was connected with the Greek word  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$ , knowledge. Gnosticism, the term usually used to define the second century A.D. form of this  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$ , arose during this period following the conquest of Alexander. As will be shown, our knowledge of the origins and of the nature of Gnosticism is vague, perhaps due to our great distance in time from the events, and also due to the various levels of the ensuing development.

A knowledge of Gnosticism is important for the study of the early church, especially in the second century. Early Christianity found itself in a Graeco-Roman or Hellenistic culture as it stepped over the boundaries of Judaism. These early years of growth and adjustment were important. When we remember that Valentinus, Justin Martyr, and Hermas were Christians living at the same time in Rome, the importance is made more significant.

Since Gnosticism constitutes one of the fundamental movements in Christian antiquity, the study of Gnosticism is important for New Testament scholarship. Was Paul writing against Gnostics when he wrote, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1)? To what extent were postapostolic documents directed against incipient Gnosticism? Was the

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<sup>1</sup>Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion (Second revised edition; Boston: Beacon Press, c.1963), pp. 3-27.

New Testament influenced by Gnosticism? Was Gnosticism influenced by the New Testament? These questions are certainly challenging ones with great import for Christianity.

The importance of Rudolf Bultmann on the contemporary theological scene is unquestioned. Although many scholars have not agreed with what Bultmann has said and have denigrated his work, the influence of Bultmann has been felt from his writings and from the part which his followers have played, especially in European theological circles.<sup>2</sup> Bultmann astounded the theological world by his article on "Neues Testament und Mythologie" which was delivered as a paper during World War II and later published.<sup>3</sup> Bultmann holds that Scripture allows for the reshaping of the forms in which the message of Scripture is clothed, with the retention of the content. This reshaping, he holds, is not only permissible, but necessary on the basis of the various ways in which Scripture presents the New Testament message. Bultmann holds that the New Testament is heavily influenced by Gnostic ideas, especially by the redeemer myth. Since several of the New Testament documents, notably the Epistles of John, the Fourth Gospel, Colossians, and Ephesians, picked up the flavor of what Bultmann considers their own thought world, Bultmann

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<sup>2</sup>Reginald H. Fuller, The New Testament in Current Study (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962).

<sup>3</sup>"Neues Testament und Mythologie," Kerygma und Mythos, edited by Hans-Werner Bartsch (Third edition; Hamburg: Herbert Reich Evangelischer Verlag G. m. b. h., 1954), I, 15-48.



maintains that every age can validly reformulate the Gospel in contemporary terms. For this reason the definition of Gnosticism used by Bultmann is important.

The primary purpose of this thesis is to examine Rudolf Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism to gain a fuller understanding of Bultmann's use of this term as well as to gain an insight into Gnosticism as it may have affected New Testament literature. The investigation seems necessary because of the many uncertainties connected with Gnosticism and with the backgrounds of early Christianity.

Although this paper will demonstrate the difficulties connected with defining Gnosticism and related terms, a working definition is necessary for the sake of clarity. This paper adopts the definitions suggested by the recent International Colloquium on the Origins of Gnosticism, which met in the spring of 1966 in Messina. A communication on this colloquium by George MacRae<sup>4</sup> indicates that γνῶσις was defined as a "knowledge of the divine mysteries reserved for an elite." Gnosticism is classified as a second century phenomenon, characterized by the idea of a divine spark in man, which has fallen from the world of the divine into this world of birth, death, and fate, and which must be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self by reintegration to the divine world. Pregnosticism is defined as the separate thematic

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<sup>4</sup>"Gnosis in Messina," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XXVIII (July 1966), 322-333.

elements which existed separately before being assembled into Gnosticism. Protognosticism is defined as the essence of Gnosticism, found in earlier systems and in contemporary ones not included in second century Christian Gnosticism. This writer is unable to control the variation of this terminology as it occurs in the usage of other writers cited in this paper.

In the structure of this paper, Chapter II is devoted to gaining an understanding of Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism<sup>5</sup> as it is expressed in his chief writings. Chapter III lists the arguments of some of those who criticize specifically Bultmann's understanding of Gnosticism. A wide sampling is given, although the intention of this writer is not to include every criticism. Chapter IV offers this writer's evaluation of Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism, avoiding where possible repetition of what has already been said in Chapter III. Due to the complexity of the problem, Chapter V attempts to set down some guide lines and considerations which might be found meaningful in seeking a definition of Gnosticism. This chapter is necessary to crystalize the findings of this paper.

The findings of this paper may be summarized as follows: Rudolf Bultmann maintains that Gnosticism originated in the meeting of Oriental religion and Hellenic thought in the pre-Christian era. He holds that reformulation of thought continued throughout the period in which Christian theology

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<sup>5</sup>Bultmann's translators use the terms Gnosis and Gnosticism where Bultmann speaks of Die Gnosis.

developed. Bultmann holds that Christianity and Gnosticism influenced each other, especially in respect to the redeemer myth. This redeemer myth and the Gnostic world view are the chief aspects of Gnosticism in Bultmann's estimation. Criticism of Bultmann by the scholars is leveled as his unacceptable methodology of dating, and especially at the redeemer myth and the interrelationship with Christianity, which seem to have become more highly developed in the second century A.D. Bultmann's hypothetical reconstruction of old religions as well as his simple codification of the Urmensch concept into a neat package is found lacking. Bultmann is also criticized for his failure to evaluate the secondary sources at his disposal as well as for drawing conclusions on the basis of insufficient evidence in several other cases.

This writer raises several serious questions regarding the origin and the nature of Gnosticism, the central theme of Gnosticism, and its relation to Christianity.

Such criticism, coupled with recent developments in the study of Gnosticism, leads toward a definition of Gnosticism. This step of approaching a definition of Gnosticism must be taken with great care to avoid burdening and misleading a future generation into years of misdirected study. The criticism indicates that serious consideration must be given to the diverse backgrounds evident in Gnostic literature as well as to the problem of dating the material in a period of developing thought. It seems that any definition at this time is difficult due to the variations in the material usually

considered Gnostic. Finally there is a conclusion which must remain as enigmatic and as elusive as does the entire concept of Gnosticism.

## CHAPTER II

### RUDOLF BULTMANN'S CONCEPT OF GNOSTICISM

Rudolf Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism will be discussed in this chapter in two ways. First, selected writings by Bultmann will be examined in chronological order to determine if there is a chronological pattern of development in his thought. Bultmann wrote his most definitive works on Gnosticism between 1925 and 1961, with less important references later. Second, we shall summarize synthetically Bultmann's ideas on the basic characteristic of Gnostic thought, on the origin of Gnosticism, and on its relation to Christianity.

#### Chronological Survey of Bultmann's Writings

##### Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft (1925)

In Bultmann's well known article in Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft<sup>1</sup> (1925), Bultmann derives his understanding of the Gnostic redeemer myth from a variety of primary and secondary sources.<sup>2</sup> He summarizes the redeemer

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<sup>1</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandaischen und manichaischen Quellen für das Verstandnis des Johannesevangeliums," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, XXIV (1925), 100-146. This is hereafter referred to as ZNW.

<sup>2</sup>Among those consulted are the following: Mandäische Liturgien, edited by Mark Lidzbarski (Berlin: Weidmann, 1920); Ginza der Schatz oder das grosse Buch der Mandaer, edited by Mark Lidzbarski (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1925);

myth as follows:

Der auf der Erde gefangenen Seele bringt der vom Himmel kommende Gesandte Offenbarung über ihren Ursprung, ihre Heimat und die Rückkehr in diese. In irdisch-menschlichem Gewand erscheint der Gesandte, in Glorie steigt er empor. Diesem soteriologischen Mythos läuft parallel ein kosmologischer: die Gestalt des Gesandten entspricht der Gestalt des himmlischen Urmenschen, der in der Vorzeit aus der Himmelswelt in die Materie hinabstieg, von ihr überwältigt und gefangenen wurde. Indem nun die Gestalt des Gesandten an die des Urmenschen angeglichen wurde, erscheint auch der Gesandte in einer irdischen Erscheinung als gefangenen und bedrängt, und sein Emporstieg ist auch seine eigene Erlösung; er ist der erlöste Erlöser. Wiederum ist das Schicksal des Urmenschen nichts anderes als das Schicksal der einzelnen Seele; der Erlösung der Seelen der irdischen Welt, deren Entstehung und Bestand durch die Bindung der Lichtteile des Urmenschen in die chaotische Materie ermöglicht wurde. So ist denn endlich auch das Schicksal des Gesandten und der Seele ein verwandtes; ja der Gesandte ist nichts anderes als ein Abbild des Urmenschen, ein Ebenbild der Seele, die sich in ihm wiederkennt. Daher ist nicht an allen Texten sicher so entscheiden, von wem die Rede ist, vom Urmenschen, vom Gesandten oder von der Seele. Daher ist es aber auch unter Umständen möglich, Texte, die vom Urmenschen oder von der Seele handeln zu benutzen, um das Bild des Gesandten zu zeichnen, auf das es für das Verständnis der Jesusgestalt des Joh-Ev. zunächst ankommt.<sup>3</sup>

Bultmann outlines the redeemer myth as it is set forth in the Fourth Gospel and in some other literature.<sup>4</sup>

1. The redeemer is the eternal God (Gotteswesen) who was in the beginning.<sup>5</sup>

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Johannesbuch der Mandäer, edited by Mark Lidzbarski (Giessen: A. Topelmann, 1915); The Odes and Psalms of Solomon, edited by J. Rendel Harris (Cambridge: University Press, 1909); Wilhelm Bousset, Hauptprobleme der Gnosis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907); Richard Reitzenstein, Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium (Bonn: A. Marcus & E. Weber's Verlag, 1921).

<sup>3</sup>ZNW, p. 104.

<sup>4</sup>supra, p. 8, n. 2.

<sup>5</sup>ZNW, pp. 104-105.

2. The redeemer is sent by the Father.<sup>6</sup>
3. The redeemer enters the world.<sup>7</sup>
4. The redeemer is one with the Father.<sup>8</sup>
5. The Father has equipped the redeemer with full power (Vollmacht).<sup>9</sup>
6. The redeemer has life and he distributes or bestows (spendet) that life.<sup>10</sup>
7. The redeemer can lead those in the world from darkness into light.<sup>11</sup>
8. The ideas of life and death and of light and darkness correspond to ideas in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>12</sup>
9. The redeemer is without flaw or fault.<sup>13</sup>
10. He does the work which the Father has commissioned (aufgetragen) him to do.<sup>14</sup>
11. In his speeches on his revelation, the redeemer speaks about his person, ἐγὼ εἶμι .<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 105-106.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 106-107.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 109-110.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-113.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 113-114.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 114-115.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 115-117.

12. He knows his and they know him.<sup>16</sup>
13. He gathers them, for they are his property, as individuals.<sup>17</sup>
14. The powers of this world recognize the sent one as a stranger; they do not know his origin, for he has a different origin from them.<sup>18</sup>
15. The hearers remain impenitent at the preaching of the sent one.<sup>19</sup>
16. While in the world, the sent one is abandoned and hated.<sup>20</sup>
17. As he came, so he will return; as he descended, so he will ascend.<sup>21</sup>
18. After the ascent, people will seek him and will not find him.<sup>22</sup>
19. His resurrection will demonstrate the validity of his accomplishment (gerechtfertigt).<sup>23</sup>
20. The sent one prays for dismissal from his task.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 117-118.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-119.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 119-123.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 123-126.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 126-127.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 127-128.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 128-130.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 130-131.



21. The ambassador or sent one leads the redeemed; he is the redeemer.<sup>25</sup>
22. He prepares his dwelling.<sup>26</sup>
23. He indicates the way for those who are to follow; in effect, he prepares for them.<sup>27</sup>
24. He is the door.<sup>28</sup>
25. He frees the imprisoned.<sup>29</sup>
26. His journey to the heavens is the catastrophe of the cosmos.<sup>30</sup>
27. He is the judge.<sup>31</sup>
28. He is the Son of Man (Menschensohn).<sup>32</sup>

Bultmann acknowledges the possibility that the sources he uses are not as old as the Fourth Gospel; however he maintains that the myth is older than the Gospel of John.<sup>33</sup>

In evaluating the material presented, one should note the relative lack of concern by Bultmann in regard to the date of the material used for documentation. Even though Bultmann

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-132.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-133.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 133-134.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 134-135.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 135-136.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 136-138.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 138-139.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

is confident that the myths came before the formulation of the extant documents, the reader who asks just when this happened would appreciate a more developed explanation of the relation of the content of the myth to the documents.

Bultmann's Article on  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  (ca. 1933)

We next turn to Bultmann's article on  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  and related words in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> The word  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  with words related to it relates to this paper because of the importance in Gnostic thought placed on "knowing."

$\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu$  (or  $\gamma\upsilon\gamma\omega\sigma\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu$ ) denotes the intelligent comprehension of an object or matter. Although this word has an ingressive aspect in its construction, the importance of the reduplication fades into the background, and the verb means simply "to know" or "to understand."

Bultmann continues that the basic meaning of  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu$  and the specifically Greek understanding of the phenomenon of knowledge are best shown by emphasizing the distinction between  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu$  and  $\alpha\iota\sigma\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$  and  $\sigma\omicron\phi\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu$ .<sup>35</sup>  $\alpha\iota\sigma\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$  denotes perception with no necessary emphasis on the elements of understanding. This is not to imply that  $\alpha\iota\sigma\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$  implies no understanding, but it generally

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<sup>34</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, " $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited and translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c.1964, I, 689-714. Hereafter referred to as TWNT).

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 690.

denotes more unreflective and instinctive knowledge. The word *γινώσκειν* also differs from *δοξάζειν* and *δοκεῖν* which signify having an opinion on some object or matter with no guarantee that it really is as supposed. *γινώσκειν* holds to a thing as it really is, the *ὄν* or the *ἀλήθεια*. Although an opinion may be correct (*ἀληθής*), only the one who knows is certain that he grasps the *ἀλήθεια* or that he possesses *ἐπιστήμη*.

*γινώσκειν* can be used in a number of connotations. *γινώσκειν* takes place in man's dealings in the world; *γινώσκειν* may denote close acquaintance with something.<sup>36</sup> *γινώσκειν* is achieved in the acts by which a man can acquire knowledge, in seeing and hearing, in investigating and in reflecting.<sup>37</sup>

*γινώσκειν* can also mean personal acquaintance and friendship with persons.<sup>38</sup>

The chief question, however, is "which mode of knowledge primarily determines the Greek concept of knowledge."<sup>39</sup> Since *γινώσκειν* denotes knowledge of what actually is, *γινώσκειν* comes to have the sense of "to verify" (*konstatieren*). Since the Greeks held that the eye was more reliable than the ear, sight was ranked above hearing.<sup>40</sup> Soon knowledge tended to

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 691.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

become a mode of seeing. Although *γινώσκειν* took on the meaning "to receive" and "to give legal recognition," in no sense did it completely lose the basic idea of visual and objective verification.<sup>41</sup>

Bultmann holds that the term *γινώσκειν* is related to the recognition of forms and figures which can be seen. Since seeing has the characteristic of grasping and of comprehending, the truly real, which is comprehended in such *γνώσις*, is thought of as the eternal and timeless reality which is constant in all change and is seen by the *ὄμμα ψυχῆς*. The one who really sees possesses this reality and is certain that he can control as well as know. "The reality of what is known, however, is constituted by the essential content of what is known as this is appropriated in knowledge."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the knowledge of what is truly real becomes the "supreme possibility of existence, for in it [*γνώσις*] the one who knows encounters the eternal and participates in it."<sup>43</sup> *γνώσις* differs in some respects from the *βίος θεωρητικός* in that the *γνώσις* relates not merely to the elements or ideas which form the world of nature, but also to those which give form and consistency to the human *βίος* and *πόλις*, namely *ἀρετή* and *τὸ καλόν*.

Bultmann states, "The usage of Hellenism, and especially

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 692.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

of Gnosticism, is to some extent prepared by classical development."<sup>44</sup> The background of the usage in Hellenism is connected to the mystery religions, which mediated secret knowledge leading to salvation, and to magic, the knowledge of which confers supernatural powers.<sup>45</sup>

The  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  which is the goal of Hellenistic piety is characterized by the following elements:<sup>46</sup>

First,  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  means knowledge as well as the act of knowing. Earlier, Plato<sup>47</sup> had said that "the idea of the  $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\acute{\omicron}\nu$  is more lofty" than the idea of  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  or of  $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$ .<sup>48</sup> If this was the case for Plato, then Gnostic sources might easily make one additional logical step and regard God as the self-evident object of  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$ .

Second, while for the Greek  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  was cultivated, methodical activity of the  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  or  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ , the  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  of the Gnostic is a  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\sigma\mu\alpha$ , an illumination which is given by God to man. Thus it differs substantially from rational thought. God reveals himself to certain pious men. This  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  often takes the form of an ecstatic or mystical vision; to this extent, knowing is still regarded as a kind of seeing.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 692-693.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 693.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 693-696.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 693.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 694.

γνῶσις is more than mystical vision of the divine, for the term is also used of the way which leads to the vision, and of anything whose goal is θεωρία in the sense of "ecstatic mystical vision."<sup>50</sup> Thus, the γνῶσις can be possessed. Bultmann indicates that since γνῶσις can be possessed, a variety of "mythological and philosophical tradition penetrated into Gnosticism,"<sup>51</sup> causing some difficulty in distinguishing Gnosticism from philosophical speculation. "In Philo and in Plotinus the true scientific philosophy precedes mystical vision."<sup>52</sup> According to Bultmann, in consistent Gnosticism "all knowledge preparatory to vision is a gift of divine revelation imparted to the believer by παράδοσις."<sup>53</sup> At the primitive stage, the knowledge imparted to the Gnostic by sacred λόγος assures "the ascent of his soul after death."<sup>54</sup> At a higher stage regeneration takes place at the hearing of the λόγος παλιγγενεσίας, which is an efficacious mystical or magical formulation.<sup>55</sup>

Bultmann continues that "the content of the doctrine is cosmology and anthropology,"<sup>56</sup> wholly from the standpoint of

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 695.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

soteriology. To the Gnostic "all knowledge serves as knowledge of the self which is the condition of redemption and the vision of God."<sup>57</sup> Self-knowledge does not mean only reflecting and understanding one's spiritual endowment and abilities. Self-knowledge is a knowledge of the "history of the soul," which is entangled in matter.<sup>58</sup> The idea is that if one realizes that his origin is supramundane, then he will return to that origin.

Third, in bringing man into proximity with the deity,  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  invests the Gnostic with the divine nature and therefore with immortality. Bultmann concludes that the vision of truth transforms the Gnostic into a god.<sup>59</sup>

In this section Bultmann has stressed man's capabilities in using  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  as well as the positive effect on man's self. Bultmann does not state this as emphatically in his article in Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, in which article he emphasizes the importance of the redeemer.<sup>60</sup> Not to be overlooked is the long development in the use of  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  which is evident here. This development shows the difficulty in attempting to pinpoint the meaning of  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  at any specific time. Bultmann has certainly not emphasized the redeemer myth as much as he did in the previous article

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 696.

<sup>60</sup>Supra, pp. 8-13.

summarized in this chapter.<sup>61</sup>

Gnosticism in Das Evangelium des Johannes (ca. 1941)

In Das Evangelium des Johannes,<sup>62</sup> first published in 1941, Bultmann does not repeat every point made in his previous works, but builds on what he has stated earlier.

In his introductory comments,<sup>63</sup> Bultmann explains the mythological form of the  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  in John 1:1-18, which underlies the cosmological and religious-philosophical speculation; this speculation served as the roots of dualism. The  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  arose as an intermediate being (Zwischenwesens) between the transcendent God and the world, serving a cosmological and a soteriological capacity.

After repeating the redeemer myth, Bultmann continues that in Christianity the human redeemer is identified with Jesus. Bultmann argues emphatically that the redeemer myth in Christianity is not something absorbed by Gnosticism, but rather that its source is Gnosticism.<sup>64</sup> Bultmann has no difficulty in finding evidence for pre-Christian Gnosticism, which is dependent especially on Iranian and Jewish thought.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Supra, pp. 8-13.

<sup>62</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Das Evangelium des Johannes (Twelfth edition; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952; Ergänzungsheft, 1957). Hereafter referred to as Johannesevangelium.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-14.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-11.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-14.



Bultmann says that the basic homogeneity in the religious-philosophical literature in which the redeemer myth is found reveals that the formulation is pre-Christian in origin.<sup>66</sup>

Bultmann coalesces the Son of Man figure in Daniel, where it means "the Man," with the primitive, ideal man of Iranian Gnostic tradition, the *ἄνθρωπος*, who is the sum of the elect and who becomes man.<sup>67</sup> Dualism had developed to the extent that help from beyond this world was necessary for mankind. The redeemer receives his validity from his knowledge of his source and his destiny.<sup>68</sup>

Bultmann emphasizes the gulf between God and the world, which makes the descent of the *λόγος* necessary. The basis of this is pre-Christian in Bultmann's estimation.

Gnosticism in "Points of Contact and Conflict" (1946)

A more recent discussion of Gnosticism is offered by Bultmann in Essays Philosophical and Theological.<sup>69</sup> In his essay "Points of Contact and Conflict,"<sup>70</sup> Bultmann argues that the Gnostic thought presents man as not at home in the

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-14.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>69</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Essays Philosophical and Theological, translated by James C. G. Greig (New York: The Macmillan Company, c.1955).

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., pp. 133-150. Originally published as "Ankündigung und Widerspruch," Theologische Zeitschrift, II (1946), 401-418.

world, for his "self" contains something "radically different from all other existence in the world."<sup>71</sup> Bultmann holds that since in the Old Testament man and the world are viewed as God's creation, man would be viewed as at home in the world. However, Gnostic thought expresses dread of the world and of the self. Bultmann uses the terms "breath-taking dread," "captive in the world," "oppressed and terrified," and "dread of himself"<sup>72</sup> to describe the situation of man. The "self," that is the pure or inner man, is all important, for the self alone is capable of rising beyond the mundane.

As long as man is on the earth, the task of his life is to radically withdraw from the world. This withdrawal may be in the form of asceticism. However, since the Gnostic has realized his "superiority to the world," he may express his freedom in libertinism.<sup>73</sup> After coming "to know," the Gnostic may not remain neutral over against the world, for he believes that in his ecstasy he has already experienced the elevation of his worldly being.

Bultmann applies his ideas of Gnosticism to Christianity. This application is considerably more extensive than that given in Bultmann's previously cited works.<sup>74</sup> According to Bultmann, Christian teaching found a point of contact in Gnostic thought.

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 147-148.

<sup>74</sup>Supra, pp. 9-20.

Bultmann explains that the author of the Fourth Gospel utilized the Gnostic redeemer myth, as well as Gnostic thought on light and darkness and truth and falsehood. As for Paul and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, they too used Gnostic thought forms, although Bultmann does not elaborate on this.<sup>75</sup> The idea that the world as it confronts man does not reveal a gracious God was common to Gnosticism and to Christianity. Bultmann remarks that if the world represents creation, then Gnosticism deduces that the Creator can be only a power hostile to man.<sup>76</sup> In similar fashion, Christianity also regards God and man as at enmity (Rom. 5:10; 8:7; 2 Cor. 5:19). Man is under the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18-20). This enmity has its source in man's own evil will and rebellion against God. God's creation, therefore, confronts man as a destructive power.<sup>77</sup> In Gnosticism man's estrangement is traced back to his fate, and his suffering and helplessness are attributed to extraneous powers. In Christianity man's loneliness is due to his guilt and the desire of his own will.<sup>78</sup>

Redemption in Gnosticism is basically a natural process working on man's ego "merely as a side issue, instead of consisting in the transformation of the ego."<sup>79</sup> Bultmann says

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<sup>75</sup>Bultmann, Essays, pp. 147-148.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

that whereas in Christianity a man must be changed, in Gnosticism he must be enlightened. Forgiveness is not as important as a "speculative doctrine" which lets man see his "self" as a spark of light which has fallen from pre-existence, and which instructs him on the nature and destiny of this."<sup>80</sup>

While Christianity seems to borrow the doctrine of the pre-existence of the self as a spark of light from the Gnostic scheme, Christianity rejects the Gnostic idea of the withdrawal of the redeemed from the world. Redemption can come only through "forgiveness of sins which obliterates in man that which made the world become a hostile power."<sup>81</sup>

Bultmann has developed further his ideas on the state of man in the world and of the Gnostic in respect to his liberation; Bultmann has also expressed in greater detail his feelings on the dependency of Christianity on Gnostic thought. However, he says nothing regarding the origins of Gnosticism.

γυνώσκω In Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting  
(1949)

We now turn to Bultmann's Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting,<sup>82</sup> originally published in 1949. In

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., pp. 149-150.

<sup>82</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting, translated by Reginald H. Fuller (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956).

his chapter on "Gnosticism,"<sup>83</sup> Bultmann uses Gnosticism as a name to cover a "phenomenon which appears in a variety of forms" with the same fundamental structure.<sup>84</sup> Bultmann asserts that Gnosticism is a religious movement, pre-Christian and Oriental in origin. Gnosticism appropriated all sorts of "mythical and philosophical" traditions, and so is a synthetic phenomenon.<sup>85</sup> In general, it is a "redemptive religion based on dualism."<sup>86</sup> Bultmann says that since both Christianity and Gnosticism are dualistic, they have affected each other reciprocally in numerous ways; although some features of Gnostic imagery claimed a rightful place in the church, other Gnostic imagery was "not only ignored but bitterly resisted."<sup>87</sup> Gradually Christianity drew a "line of demarcation" between itself and Gnosticism.<sup>88</sup>

The Gnostic myth recounts the "fate of the soul."<sup>89</sup> This retelling of the story is essentially the same as that given in Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft.<sup>90</sup> The relation of man to the world is the same as that presented in

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 162-171.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>90</sup>ZNW, supra, pp. 8-13.

Essays Philosophical and Theological.<sup>91</sup> Man is pictured as being imprisoned and separated from God.<sup>92</sup> Bultmann also speaks of sacraments and community life.<sup>93</sup> The Gnostic has no need for a community, for his own religious expression consists of individualistic mysticism.<sup>94</sup>

Bultmann says that Gnosticism regards man as trichotomous, consisting of "body, soul, and Self."<sup>95</sup> Although "the designation for Self may vary,"<sup>96</sup> Greek speaking Gnosticism calls it  $\piνευμα$ , in a non-classical sense.  $\psiυχικός$ , "of or belonging to the soul," possesses the "pejorative significance which it bears in the New Testament."<sup>97</sup> The real self is "pre-existent," "the entity of absolute transcendence," "the postulate behind all yearning and faith."<sup>98</sup> This elaboration is applied to the Christian idea of the self, and is related to the Gnostic world view and redemption, freeing each man who grasps this from himself.<sup>99</sup>

Since the present world is unimportant, the Gnostic does

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<sup>91</sup>Supra, pp. 20-23.

<sup>92</sup>Bultmann, Primitive Christianity, p. 167.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., pp. 167-168.

not consider the self to be a member of the nation, city-state, or even of the world. All men are fundamentally endowed with the divine spark; the preaching of conversion is aimed at all. Yet there are in actuality several classes of men, the "hylic," or unspiritual, sometimes a middle class called the "psychic," those with potential in themselves, and the "pneumatic," those with the spark of light in them.<sup>100</sup> The pneumatics constitute an invisible fellowship based exclusively on their common detachment from the world. Their aim is simply to help men to achieve otherworldliness or redemption.<sup>101</sup>

This, Bultmann holds, is an individualistic type of mysticism, "in which the redemption, the ascent of the self, is anticipated in meditation and ecstasy."<sup>102</sup> Thus, Gnosticism which in the initial stages is the knowledge of man's predicament, ends up with the vision of God.

In this article Bultmann emphasizes the separation between the mundane and the supramundane. He explains his understanding of dualism further than in any of the previous articles, while maintaining a pre-Christian and Oriental background for Gnosticism.

In the chapter titled "Primitive Christianity as a Syncretistic Phenomenon,"<sup>103</sup> Bultmann elaborates on points of

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., pp. 175-179.

contact between Gnosticism and Hellenistic Christianity.

*Χριστός* became a proper name because the apocalyptic title "man" was not meaningful outside of primitive Jewish eschatology. The titles "Son of God," "Savior," and *κύριος* came into use. Christian missionary preaching proclaimed Christ and monotheism, and the Old Testament was used in instruction. The Fourth Gospel speaks of light and darkness and of truth and falsehood. Bultmann maintains that the syncretism at work is evident in the portrayal of the Christian community in

Old Testament categories as the peace of God, the true seed of Abraham, sometimes in Gnostic categories as the "body of Christ," in which individuals are incorporated by means of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>104</sup>

Bultmann has expanded his understanding of the relation of Gnosticism to Christianity in this book, making a contribution to our understanding of his concept of Gnosticism.

Bultmann's Discussion in Theology of the New Testament (1951)

In his well known Theology of the New Testament,<sup>105</sup> Bultmann repeats the point that Gnosticism did not first appear in the Christian church. Bultmann maintains the same position that he held in some of his works already cited,<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 178. Bultmann also discusses man and the relation to time, pp. 180-188; man's situation in the world, pp. 189-195; and redemption, pp. 196-208.

<sup>105</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, translated by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, Vol. I, 1951; Vol. II, 1955), I, 109-110 and 164-183.

<sup>106</sup>Johannesevangelium, pp. 10-11; Primitive Christianity, p. 162.



that Gnosticism is a redemption religion which originated in the Orient.<sup>107</sup> Gnosticism is not to be considered an "acute Hellenization of Christianity" as Harnack felt,<sup>108</sup> but rather as parallel to and "competitive to the Christian religion."<sup>109</sup> Although in both Essays Philosophical and Theological<sup>110</sup> and Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting<sup>111</sup> Bultmann says that Christianity drew on Gnostic thought, he explains his attitudes more fully in Theology of the New Testament. Bultmann makes the point that "in the Hellenistic world it was a historical necessity that the Gospel should be translated into a terminology with which that world was familiar."<sup>112</sup> Since Gnosticism and its myth subsume a variety of terms which were intelligible to many people, Gnosticism was a very serious competitor to the Christian message. Bultmann emphatically states that the essence of Gnosticism "does not lie in its syncretistic mythology but in a new understanding--new in the ancient world--of man and the world."<sup>113</sup> The mythology of Gnosticism is an expression of this understanding.

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<sup>107</sup>Bultmann, Theology, I, 109.

<sup>108</sup>Adolf Harnack, History of Dogma, translated by Neil Buchanan (New York: Russel and Russel, 1958), I, 226.

<sup>109</sup>Bultmann, Theology, I, 109-110.

<sup>110</sup>Bultmann, Essays, pp. 133-150.

<sup>111</sup>Bultmann, Primitive Christianity, p. 162.

<sup>112</sup>Bultmann, Theology, I, 164.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

Whereas Bultmann implies the importance of the world view in Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting<sup>114</sup> and in Essays Philosophical and Theological,<sup>115</sup> in the essay under consideration he definitely states that this understanding of man is the essence of Gnosticism.

The tripartite nature of man and his awareness of himself are explained in terms familiar to the reader of the foregoing material.<sup>116</sup>

Bultmann does elaborate on the relation of man to the Primeval Man. Gnosticism distinguishes between the real self, a spark of light derived from the divine world and consisting of πνεῦμα, and the ψυχή or soul, which, like the body, is a garment forced upon the real self by demonic powers.<sup>117</sup> The γνῶσις which the Gnostic grasps gives the Gnostic consciousness of his superiority over the world. The Gnostic is the "spiritual man," the "pneumatic," which places him above the mere "men of soul," "men of flesh," or "men of matter."<sup>118</sup>

Bultmann explains, "The history of the individual is in relation with that of the whole cosmos."<sup>119</sup> The individual self is a fragment of the light person who fell to bondage by

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<sup>114</sup>Bultmann, Primitive Christianity, p. 167.

<sup>115</sup>Bultmann, Essays, pp. 146-147.

<sup>116</sup>Supra, p. 25.

<sup>117</sup>Bultmann, Theology, I, 165.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., pp. 165-166.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

the demonic forces of the world; the light person is Primeval Man. The redemption of the self is only a detail of the redemption of all of the sparks of light bound here in this prison. Each spark has kinship with each other spark and with their common origin by "kinship of nature (συγγένεια)." <sup>120</sup> Individual eschatology, that is the idea that the individual spark of the self is freed at death and enters on its journey to heaven, "stands in the center of cosmic eschatology," <sup>121</sup> the teaching of the freeing of all the sparks of light and their elevation to the light world. It is at death and elevation that the individual spark is joined to the whole; these reunited sparks will eventually constitute Primeval Man.

Although Bultmann introduces new thoughts on redemption, much of his material corresponds to that contained in the Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft article. <sup>122</sup> The fresher aspects are set forth here. The light person, the "son" and "image" of the most high, sent by the highest god, comes from the light world, bringing *γνώσις*. By his teaching and the dispensing of sacraments the light person awakens the spark in those who have been made drunk or sleepy by the demonic powers. <sup>123</sup> After the light person gives the "secret

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Bultmann, ZNW, supra, pp. 8-13.

<sup>123</sup> Bultmann, Theology, I, 167.

pass-words"<sup>124</sup> which will enable them to pass by the demonic watchmen of the astral spheres, he prepares the way for the enlightened by preceding them into heaven.

The most important point here is the corporate picture of the Primeval Man, from whom all men come and to whom all Gnostics will return.

Even though Bultmann professes to know little about Gnostic congregations, he maintains that Gnosticism took concrete form in "baptizing sects"<sup>125</sup> in the region of the Jordan, which attracted certain groups of Jews. In the Near East, Gnosticism attached itself to local cults and formed syncretistic mystery congregations.<sup>126</sup> In the same manner, Gnosticism crept into Christian congregations.

At this point Bultmann expands his previous material on the relationship of Gnosticism to Christianity. In Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting<sup>127</sup> Bultmann speaks of a reciprocal relation between Gnosticism and Christianity. Bultmann has also said that Christianity drew from Gnosticism.<sup>128</sup> Bultmann's new point is that Gnosticism was not combatted as if it were a foreign element into which Christians were in danger of falling. The Gnostics, too,

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

<sup>127</sup>Bultmann, Primitive Christianity, p. 162.

<sup>128</sup>Bultmann, Johannesevangelium, pp. 10-12.

consider themselves Christians teaching Christian wisdom-- and that is the way they appear to the churches, too.... To Paul the apostles who have kindled a pneumatic-Gnostic movement in Corinth are interlopers, it is true--not, however, interlopers into the Christian Churches as a whole, but into "his" Church, over which, since it is of his own founding, he alone has authority.<sup>129</sup>

Bultmann offers evidence that the teachers may rise inside of the churches (2 Cor. 11:4,13; Rev. 2) or they may be wandering teachers (Didache 11:2; 2 John 10). The Gnostics have fallen from faith (1 Tim. 4:1; 1:6; 6:21; 2 Tim. 2:11; 3:8). Bultmann holds that Hellenistic Christianity is in the "maelstrom of the syncretistic process; the genuinely Christian element is wrestling with other elements" in this period before orthodoxy.<sup>130</sup>

*yvwois* in The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology (1957)

In his The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology,<sup>131</sup> Bultmann says that the high Greek world view "disintegrated in the philosophy or theology of the Gnostics."<sup>132</sup> The world became a prison and "the genuine self was seen as being from beyond this world."<sup>133</sup> It was in perceiving the essence of the world and of his genuine self that man realized his own freedom regarding the world; at the point of realization, man understands

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<sup>129</sup>Bultmann, Theology, I, 170-171.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>131</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), pp. 5-6.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

that he will leave the world in death and rise to his heavenly home.

The Gnostic anthropology regards man as body, soul, and celestial spark (the genuine self), but a prisoner within the body.<sup>134</sup> Gnosticism ascribes the whole of natural and psychical life to the body and soul, and there remains no positive content of the self. Man can not say what his own genuine self is and can describe himself only negatively. Gnosticism is at bottom nothing but a

proof of the fact that man is haunted by the question of his own genuine self, of his own "true existence" which he can not realize in the world of change because it [the self or existence] is not something objectively demonstrable.<sup>135</sup>

In this essay Bultmann does not mention the redeemer or the origin of Gnosticism. However, his treatment of Gnosticism in this essay is short, serving as part of a larger unit on another topic. Bultmann is more interested in the insight of Gnosticism into human existence in The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology.

γυνώσκεις in Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (ca. 1958)

In his article on "Johannesevangelium" in Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart,<sup>136</sup> Bultmann relates the Gnostic

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>136</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, "Johannesevangelium," Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, edited by Kurt Galling (Third edition; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1958), III, cols. 840-851. Hereafter referred to as RGG.

redeemer myth in terms with which the reader is already familiar.<sup>137</sup> However, Bultmann elaborates his view that in the Fourth Gospel Jesus is described in terms which are characteristic of the Gnostic redeemer. Jesus is pre-existent; Jesus is one with the Father; Jesus is the revealer of the Father; Jesus leads the blind; Jesus will return to heaven.<sup>138</sup>

There is a different stress in this article on the influence of Jewish thought on the author of the Fourth Gospel. Bultmann speaks of Philo's Alexandrian Jewish theosophy and of Jewish speculation as contributing to the thought forms of the Fourth Gospel. Bultmann also speaks of Qumran as having an influence on Christian thought.<sup>139</sup> Bultmann seems to avoid any reference to Iranian backgrounds. This may indicate a shift in Bultmann's thinking. At no other point in this study has there been an indication that Bultmann's thought on the origin of Gnosticism might be shifting toward Jewish influence.

#### Summary of Bultmann's Concept of Gnosticism

This summary of Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism encompasses three major areas, the basic characteristic of Gnosticism, the origin of Gnosticism, and the relation of Gnosticism to Christianity.

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<sup>137</sup>Bultmann, ZNW, p. 104; Theology, I, 167-168; Johannes-evangelium, pp. 10-14.

<sup>138</sup>Bultmann, RGG<sup>3</sup>, col. 847.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., cols. 846-847.

First, for Bultmann the central characteristic of Gnosticism is the new understanding of the world and of man, as he shows in Theology of the New Testament.<sup>140</sup> Bultmann repeats this in Das Evangelium des Johannes,<sup>141</sup> where there is special emphasis on the separation of God and the world. In the Essays Philosophical and Theological Bultmann uses a new expression to set forth the same truth, for man is "not at home in the world;"<sup>142</sup> man's pre-existent spark is captive.<sup>143</sup> In Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting the self is part of the supramundane.<sup>144</sup> In The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology, the world view of Gnosticism is very important, for it deals with the basic relationship of man to this world, a relationship which is bad.<sup>145</sup> There is a variation from this in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, in which "knowing" or the knowledge of the self is necessary for salvation.<sup>146</sup>

In several cases a redeemer myth is connected to the world view;<sup>147</sup> in these cases the redeemer is necessary because

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<sup>140</sup>Supra, pp. 27-30.

<sup>141</sup>Supra, pp. 19-20.

<sup>142</sup>Supra, pp. 20-21.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid.

<sup>144</sup>Supra, pp. 23-24.

<sup>145</sup>Supra, pp. 32-33.

<sup>146</sup>Supra, pp. 16-17.

<sup>147</sup>Bultmann, ZNW, supra, pp. 8-13; Johannesevangelium,



of the need to release the spark which is captive in man. The redeemer myth is not present in all of the writings.<sup>148</sup>

The absence of the redeemer in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament is surprising, but this is a philological study, primarily concerned with the development and background of the word  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$ , and not primarily concerned in the philosophical concepts connected to that term. Although The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology deals with the world view and with the question of existence, the redeemer myth is also absent from this work. No solution is offered for man's dilemma. Essays Philosophical and Theological makes no mention of a redeemer.

Therefore, the chief characteristic of Gnostic thought in Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism is the world view which is often coupled with the redeemer myth, the Gnostic way out of man's unfortunate situation.

Second, the origin of Gnosticism is important; a proper understanding of the origin of Gnosticism will aid in understanding the background which motivated Gnostic thought.

Many of Bultmann's writings cited attribute the background of Gnosticism to pre-Christian traditions.<sup>149</sup>

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supra, pp. 19-20; Primitive Christianity, supra, pp. 23-27; Theology, supra, pp. 30-31; RGG<sup>2</sup>, supra, pp. 33-34.

<sup>148</sup>TWNT, Essays Philosophical and Theological, The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology.

<sup>149</sup>Bultmann, TWNT, supra, p. 16; ZNW, supra, p. 8; Johannes-evangelium, supra, pp. 19-20; Primitive Christianity, supra, p. 24; Theology, supra, p. 28.

In certain places Bultmann does not discuss the origin of Gnosticism; this is the case in Essays Philosophical and Theological and in The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology. In these works, in which Bultmann does not discuss the origin of Gnosticism, there is evidence that a shift might be taking place in Bultmann's attitude toward the origin of Gnosticism, for the former adamant insistence regarding the origin is lacking. A shift is evident in the article in Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart.<sup>150</sup> The possibility remains open that Bultmann has quietly adjusted his position at the discoveries of contemporary scholars. Perhaps the discussion on the Dead Sea Scrolls has had an influence.<sup>151</sup> The Nag-Hammadi discovery, which is contributing much valuable information because of the early date of the manuscripts found, may also have had an influence on Bultmann.<sup>152</sup> However, the Essays Philosophical and Theological (1946), which antedates both Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting and Theology of the New Testament, also omits any reference to origins.

In summary Bultmann considers the background of Gnosticism

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<sup>150</sup> Supra, p. 34.

<sup>151</sup> The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, edited and translated by Geza Vermes (Baltimore: Penguin Press, 1962); The Scrolls and the New Testament, edited by Krister Stendahl (New York: Harper, 1957).

<sup>152</sup> Willem C. van Unnik, Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings, translated from the Dutch by Hubert H. Hoskins (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1960); The Jung Codex, edited and translated by Frank L. Cross (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1955).

to be pre-Christian and a mixture of Oriental thought with other thought systems. The failure of Bultmann to mention these origins in some of his works<sup>153</sup> ought not be taken as conclusive evidence at this time that Bultmann has shifted his position.

Third, the relation of Gnosticism to Christianity is the final point under discussion in this summary. In the Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, Bultmann is certain that Christianity depended on Gnostic thought and that the Fourth Gospel adopted the redeemer myth.<sup>154</sup> The commentary of John also presents Christianity as dependent on Gnosticism,<sup>155</sup> for the Christian message conforms to the Gnostic message, especially in the case of the redeemer, with whom Jesus is identified. Essays Philosophical and Theological present Christianity as dependent on Gnostic thought forms.<sup>156</sup> The idea of Christian dependency is expanded in Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting, where Bultmann says that the full impact of Gnosticism was made before the church separated itself from Gnostic thought.<sup>157</sup> Bultmann expands the idea of the impact of Gnosticism on Christianity in his

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<sup>153</sup>Bultmann, Essays Philosophical and Theological and The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology.

<sup>154</sup>Supra, pp. 8-13.

<sup>155</sup>Supra, pp. 19-20.

<sup>156</sup>Supra, pp. 22-23.

<sup>157</sup>Supra, p. 24.

Theology of the New Testament; in this work he says that Christianity drew freely from Gnosticism and that the two wrestled with each other.

In several instances Bultmann omits reference to the relation of Gnosticism to Christianity. In The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology and in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament the absence may be because neither of these is directed at defining Gnosticism. Therefore, the absence of a reference to the relation of Gnosticism to Christianity in these works is not considered significant at this point.

In summary, Bultmann's concept of the relation of Gnosticism to Christianity is that Christianity has derived points of its teaching from Gnostic thought. On the basis of the material cited, in which Bultmann fails to discuss the relation of Gnosticism to Christianity, no judgment can be made at this time as to the importance of the omission.

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<sup>158</sup>Supra, pp. 27-32.

### CHAPTER III

#### CRITICISM OF BULTMANN'S DEFINITION OF GNOSTICISM BY SOME CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIANS

Many contemporary scholars have written critically about Rudolf Bultmann's reconstructions of Gnosticism and of his use of it in interpreting the New Testament. To study Rudolf Bultmann without evaluating him critically would definitely place the student at a disadvantage. This chapter summarizes a number of recent critiques.<sup>1</sup>

Giovanni Miegge, a Waldensian professor of church history at Rome, writes about Bultmann's concept of Gospel and myth.<sup>2</sup> While examining Bultmann's interpretation of the New Testament and especially the Hellenistic elements in Pauline theology,<sup>3</sup> Miegge asks, "Was there a pre-Christian Gnosticism?"<sup>4</sup> Miegge points out that this question is still sub judice for some scholars. However, Miegge writes, "The Gnostic documents which we possess cannot be dated with any certainty, but are generally later than the rise of Christianity or contemporary

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<sup>1</sup>In the course of this study, a great number of scholars have been found who disagree with Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism; this chapter considers only those who criticize Bultmann directly.

<sup>2</sup>Giovanni Miegge, Gospel and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann, translated by Stephan Neill (Richmond: John Knox Press, c.1960).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-35.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

with it."<sup>5</sup> At any rate, it is not certain how closely the documents are to be connected with pre-Christian times, or how much influence Christianity might have had on the documents.<sup>6</sup> Miegge holds that

pre-Christian Gnosticism may be, in reality, nothing more than an unknown something postulated by the science of religions, one of those invisible stars the position of which astronomers determine by calculating the deviations in movements of neighbouring stars.<sup>7</sup>

Miegge first cites Bultmann's discussion in his Das Evangelium des Johannes,<sup>8</sup> where Bultmann argues that, although the description of pre-Christian Gnosticism must be worked out from documents later than the Fourth Gospel, the mythology clearly must be pre-Christian. Miegge summarizes Bultmann's position. Evidence for Bultmann's position on the Gnostic myth is gained by coalescing the figure of the Son of Man in Daniel, where Bultmann holds that it means "the Man," with the Gnostic *ὁ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, "the primitive and ideal man of the Iranian Gnostic tradition, who sums up in himself all the elect and who saves them by becoming man on their behalf."<sup>9</sup>

If we try to determine the kind of Gnosticism presumed by the Fourth Gospel, we are led by Bultmann to think that the

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Das Evangelium des Johannes (Twelfth edition; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952; Ergänzungsheft, 1957). Hereafter referred to as Johannesevangelium.

<sup>9</sup>Miegge, pp. 30-31.

speculation on the plurality of the aeons, a characteristic of the Christian Gnosticism of the second century, had not yet developed. At the same time Bultmann feels that dualism had not reached the point at this pre-Christian time at which a necessary consequence of it is the belief that the world is radically evil. For Bultmann dualism does remain "the foundation of the pre-Christian Gnosticism."<sup>10</sup>

The Gnostic myth, then, offered to the Christian faith in the early days of its development an appropriate framework of concepts and pictorial forms, and Christianity without delay adopted the Gnostic myth as that apt and ready-made channel, through which its own diffusion in the Hellenistic world could most readily be accomplished.<sup>11</sup>

Yet Christianity maintained its own character.

Christianity maintained its own controversial tension with Gnosticism, "a tension which was not always equally clear and self-conscious but was always undeniably in existence."<sup>12</sup> Christianity gives expression to this controversy with Gnosticism "when it proclaims Christ as the 'true' Savior, the 'true' life, the 'true' light; but, for purposes of its controversy, it adopts the language and the categories of the Gnostic thought."<sup>13</sup>

Miegge appreciates Bultmann's attitude, expressed in his Theology of the New Testament,<sup>14</sup> that Gnosticism is "a form

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament,

of thought which moves wholly in the realm of the natural, whereas the Gospel is understood in the categories of responsible human existence . . . ."15 The realization of this difference between Gnosticism and Christianity is recognized by Miegge as "the deepest motive which underlies the demand of Bultmann for the elimination of the mythological elements from the New Testament."<sup>16</sup> Miegge observes the tension which John and Paul felt in making the message of the Gospel intelligible to the pagan masses, "without falling into the temptation, all too readily presented by the myth, of treating all things simply as the objects of speculative thought."<sup>17</sup>

At no point in this material does Miegge imply disagreement with Bultmann's ideas on Gnosticism. Once Miegge implies that he agrees with Bultmann; Bultmann "has made a contribution of the highest possible importance to our understanding of Christian origins and to the interpretation of the New Testament."<sup>18</sup> Miegge is one contemporary scholar who does not find a basic fault in Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism; Miegge's only criticism of Bultmann is directed to a tension which Bultmann might feel in making concrete thoughts into speculative

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translated by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, Vol. I, 1951; Vol. II, 1955), I, 182-183.

<sup>15</sup>Miegge, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 61.



thoughts.<sup>19</sup>

In The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel,<sup>20</sup> Charles Herald Dodd, presently retired professor at Cambridge University, discusses the validity of Bultmann's concept of Mandaeism. In his section on Gnosticism,<sup>21</sup> Dodd does not mention Bultmann's name; however Dodd does disagree with Bultmann in the discussion of Mandaeism.<sup>22</sup> Bultmann regards Mandaeism as a Baptist sect which supposedly influenced Christianity;<sup>23</sup> according to Bultmann's treatment in Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft,<sup>24</sup> Bultmann makes no distinction between Gnosticism and Mandaeism; therefore, Dodd's criticism may be used in this paper.

Dodd summarizes a theory in two parts.

First, it is argued that the kernel of Mandaeism is a myth connected with the ancient Iranian mystery of redemption. Myth and mystery are pre-Christian, and underlie the formation of Christian doctrine, especially in its Johannine and Gnostic forms. Secondly, it is argued that the Mandaean ritual and myth were actually formulated by John the

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>20</sup>Charles H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: University Press, c.1953).

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 97-114.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 115-130; the discussion of Bultmann is limited to pp. 121-124.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 120-121.

<sup>24</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandaischen und manichaischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, XXIV (1925), 100-146. This is hereafter referred to as ZNW.

Baptist, and that the Mandaeans of the eighth and following centuries are the successors of that Baptist sect to which allusions are found in Acts xviii.24-xix.7. Christianity arose out of this Baptist sect. Its members were called Nazoraeans, a name by which the Mandaeans call themselves in their scriptures. Jesus the Nazoraeon, a disciple of John, took the name over with him into the new sect which he founded. The view of John presented in the New Testament answers to the view of Jesus presented in the Mandaean literature. In each case one of two kindred but now rival sects rebuts the claims made for the leader of the other sect.<sup>25</sup>

Advocates of this theory include Rudolf Bultmann.

Dodd summarizes Bultmann's special form of this theory.

The Fourth Gospel represents

a Christian revision of the myth current in Baptist (Nazoraeon or Mandaean) sects, in which the leading ideas are those of the originally Iranian myth in its Mandaean form, and the claim is made for Jesus that He is the divine Messenger who descends and ascends again for the salvation of men. The type of Christian thought which it represents, being very close to that of Mandaeism, and of its founder John the Baptist, is actually more primitive than that presented by the Synoptic Gospels, which are a product of Jewish reaction.<sup>26</sup>

According to Dodd's summary of Bultmann's support of this thesis, Bultmann supports his thesis with the following arguments:

First, "The polemic [in the Gospels] against the claims of John the Baptist, which have been regarded by many critics as directed against a Baptist sect" are regarded by Bultmann as an effort to establish Jesus as the divine Messenger.<sup>27</sup>

Second, there are "certain similarities of language and

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<sup>25</sup>Dodd, pp. 120-121.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

imagery between the Fourth Gospel and Mandaean literature."<sup>28</sup>

Third, there are a "whole series of statements about Jesus in the Fourth Gospel which can be paralleled with similar statements about the divine figures of Mandaeism."<sup>29</sup>

Dodd cautions that even in view of a striking list of parallels,

it cannot however be said that a simple comparison suggests that in all cases the Mandaean member of the parallel is prior to the Johannine. 'The Mandaean literature,' says Bultmann, 'is especially instructive inasmuch as in it ideas, which in the Gospel according to John come to expression in brief turns of phrase and technical expressions, are formulated into more or less picturesque, or at least explicit scenes.'<sup>30</sup>

Bultmann postulates the principle that where this is the case "priority is to be given to the Mandaean form."<sup>31</sup> Dodd says, "I cannot accept this as a solid critical principle."<sup>32</sup> Dodd refers to two examples, adduced by Bultmann, which are unconvincing. According to Dodd, Bultmann suggests that the simple allusions in the Fourth Gospel to the sending of the Son by the Father presuppose the elaborate mythical apparatus of the Mandaean idea of the Great life sending Manda d' Hayye to the lower world.<sup>33</sup> Dodd comments that Bultmann is "arguing against

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 122-123.

the natural presumption in such a case."<sup>34</sup> In the second case, "the ideas of the Good Shepherd and of the Vine are worked out in elaborate detail in the Book of John, whereas in the Fourth Gospel they are briefly touched upon."<sup>35</sup> Dodd has difficulty believing that the short form is dependent on the long form.

The force of the parallels depends on the prior establishment of a presumption that the Mandaean corpus contains writings which are likely to have been both earlier than the Fourth Gospel and known to its author. If the Mandaeans were indeed founded by John the Baptist, then this presumption is at least not wildly improbable.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, Bultmann's case depends on his showing this historical possibility! Dodd says,

Now if the Baptist stood in this intimate relation to the Mandaean religion, and if any part of its literature belongs to this time, we should expect some independent historical data about him to be preserved in it.<sup>37</sup>

This is not the case. Dodd says,

The Mandaean literature shows acquaintance only with the legends of his [the Baptist's] birth which are preserved in the Gospel according to Luke, with the fact that he practiced baptism, and with the fact that Jesus was baptized by him.<sup>38</sup>

There is no single additional fact in Mandaean writings which contributes to our historical knowledge of the Baptist. Dodd concludes that since Bultmann does not think that the Gospels

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

contain trustworthy information, Bultmann may not be bothered by this argument. Dodd comments that Bultmann admits that the Gospel passion-narratives have an historical core, whereas the Mandaeans do not know how their supposed founder met his death.<sup>39</sup> Even Josephus informs on the death of the Baptist.<sup>40</sup>

Dodd's third argument is that the beliefs about John attacked in the Fourth Gospel are not the beliefs held by the Mandaeans. "He was not the light, but was sent to bear witness about the light."<sup>41</sup> For example,

There is nothing in the Mandaean literature to show that John was identified with 'the Light,' or 'the High King of Light.' Nor does it represent John as 'Messiah.' The true rival of the false Messiah Jesus is not John but Enosh-Uthra.<sup>42</sup>

As a second illustration, Dodd mentions that Mandaean baptism is a repeated act. "The baptism of John, according to the New Testament, is a single eschatological sacrament, securing entrance into the redeemed community at the approaching judgment."<sup>43</sup>

Dodd comments,

the only evidence, outside of Mandaeism which is alleged to prove the existence of a distinct sect of followers of John the Baptist, Acts xviii.24-xix.19, has no suggestion that Apollos or the twelve men of Ephesus gave

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ant. XVIII,5.2.

<sup>41</sup>Dodd, p. 123, quoting John 1:8.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 123-124; Enosh-Uthra is the opponent of the false Messiah; he is without physical body and appears in the clouds. See Dodd, p. 125.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

up repeated baptisms in favor of the one baptism.<sup>44</sup> Dodd says, "The connection between John and the Mandaeans begins to wear thin."<sup>45</sup> The distinctive thing about Christian baptism was its solitariness, not the application of water, a practice frequent in most ancient religions.

In summary, Dodd finds fault with Bultmann's idea that the Fourth Gospel is a revision of the Baptist myth. Dodd argues that the presence of parallels does not imply in every case that the Mandaean material has priority. Normally the short form of a passage is prior to the longer form. There is little evidence to support Bultmann's idea that John the Baptist founded the Mandaean group and that the polemic in the Fourth Gospel directed against the Baptist is intended to establish Jesus as the divine Messenger.

In an essay titled "The New Testament and Gnosticism,"<sup>46</sup> Johannes Munck, a professor of New Testament exegesis at the University of Aarhus in Denmark, comments on the work of Reitzenstein. Reitzenstein

believed he had found an Iranian doctrine that regards the soul or the inner being as divine being, sent down from the world of light to the world of matter, from which it is once more released and summoned back.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Johannes Munck, "The New Testament and Gnosticism," Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation, edited by William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1962), pp. 224-238.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

Reitzenstein considered these ideas "possibly" correct and "still uncertain";<sup>48</sup> however, Munck objects to the way in which Reitzenstein's followers based their arguments on the content of Reitzenstein's books as if that content were established fact.

Munck's argument with Bultmann is that Bultmann assumes that the myth in question has been established and that Bultmann limits himself to proving that the myth "forms the basis of the Gospel of St. John."<sup>49</sup> Munck states that "if Gnosticism is to have influenced early Christianity, it must be at least contemporary with it [Christianity], but preferably older."<sup>50</sup> Bultmann's approach is entirely wrong, in Munck's estimation.

Bultmann believes that he can prove that the Gospel of St. John presupposes this redeemer myth and can only be understood in the light of it [the myth]. But no attempt has been made at a critical evaluation of the material cited, and the author does not distinguish between probable dependance, the use of the same terminus technicus in the same and in quite another, and . . . probably entirely different sense. For this reason the data so meritoriously assembled form only a kind of valuable raw material for defining concepts and have not the power of a proof, as Bultmann believed.<sup>51</sup>

Munck criticizes Bultmann for his uncritical attitude toward the use of untested material. Munck continues his article by similarly examining the work of other scholars.

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

Willem C. van Unnik, theology professor at the University of Utrecht and currently very influential in the examination of the Nag-Hammadi material, offers his estimation of Bultmann at the close of his Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings.<sup>52</sup> The general background of his discussion is the Nag-Hammadi library discovered in Egypt in 1946.

Van Unnik makes several points regarding the bearing of the Nag-Hammadi manuscripts on New Testament studies; the last point pertains to this paper.<sup>53</sup> Van Unnik writes,

In the sphere of New Testament scholarship, and more particularly of New Testament theology, much use is made in certain quarters of the concept of 'Gnosis', and that is above all the case with the school of Bultmann.<sup>54</sup>

Since Bultmann's ideas have heavily influenced New Testament theology, van Unnik observes that we can only be grateful for the additional light of Nag-Hammadi on the Gnostic phenomenon.<sup>55</sup> In this same connection, van Unnik rejoices that we no longer have to resort to "purely hypothetical reconstructions--we have knowledge of a whole mass of relevant facts."<sup>56</sup> Van Unnik comments on the changes and on the complexities of thought, saying,

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<sup>52</sup>Willem C. van Unnik, Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings, translated by Hubert H. Hoskins (London: SCM Press, 1960), pp. 89-93.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-93.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.



An understanding of the history and the growth of Gnosticism, such as now becomes possible, must make us cautious about drawing freely on very late Manichaean and Mandaean sources . . . in order to explain the New Testament.<sup>57</sup>

Van Unnik continues that when these Nag-Hammadi documents have been properly studied, "academic myth-making will be a more sober business, and some of the myths will be up for sale."<sup>58</sup>

This "critique" is in a large measure a caution against drawing conclusions too rapidly in the area of influences on the New Testament.

Gilles Quispel, professor of early church history at the University of Utrecht, in his article "The Jung Codex and its Significance,"<sup>59</sup> offers a more extensive critique of Bultmann's reconstruction. Quispel argues that the doctrine of the pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer myth, posited by Reitzenstein and adopted by Bultmann, rests on three pillars. The first pillar<sup>60</sup> is material in Iranian sources of late date concerning Gayomart.<sup>61</sup> Quispel says, "By the magic of a questionable Quellenforschung these sources are put back into the fourth

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Gilles Quispel, "The Jung Codex and its Significance," The Jung Codex, edited by Frank L. Cross (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., c.1955), pp. 35-78.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>61</sup>Gayomart, the heavenly Man, the Greek *Λόγος*. Found in Hellenistic Iranian thought. See Richard Reitzenstein, Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen (Third edition; Leipzig: Verlag von B. G. Teubner, 1927), pp. 9 and 181.

century B.C."<sup>62</sup> Quispel holds that the oldest form of the Gnostic myth is not concerned with Gayomart, but with *Σοφία* who brings forth the seven planets; this myth originates not in Persia, but in pseudo-Plato's Epinomis.

Secondly, the doctrine of the *Ἄνθρωπος*, which is used in Poimandres,<sup>63</sup> is said by Bultmann to have been borrowed from a Persian source. But Quispel holds that Erik Peterson has shown that this is really a Jewish tradition about Adam, not the Persian Gayomart.<sup>64</sup>

Thirdly, Quispel takes issue with the Urmensch idea in Manichaeism,<sup>65</sup> that is the story about Primeval Man who left the realm of light and became benumbed by darkness; this Primeval Man is recalled to consciousness and, leaving his limbs behind, returns to the realm of light. Quispel says that this idea has been taken from Mani, not from Gnostic tradition. Quispel holds that in the Jung Codex<sup>66</sup> there are no traces of the so-called "Iranian mystery of redemption" or of a "pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer."<sup>67</sup> Quispel also says that in speaking of "Perfect Man who is the All,"<sup>68</sup> the Jung Codex

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<sup>62</sup>Quispel, Jung Codex, p. 76.

<sup>63</sup>Corpus Hermeticum I.

<sup>64</sup>Quispel, Jung Codex, p. 76, citing "La Libération d'Adam de l'*Ἀνάγκη*," Revue Biblique, LV (1948), 199-214.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 76-77.

<sup>66</sup>The Nag-Hammadi MSS. at the Jung Institute, Zürich.

<sup>67</sup>Quispel, Jung Codex, p. 77.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

refers to the material reflected in the Jewish Yalkuth Shimone, paragraph 34, on Genesis,<sup>69</sup> which tells how the perfect man received γνῶσις to himself when redemption was preached, and "he returned with haste to his unity, to the place whence he had arisen, to the place whence he had come."<sup>70</sup> His limbs were left behind. Therefore Quispel says, "Manichaean Primal Man was borrowed not from the Persian tradition but from the Gnostic tradition."<sup>71</sup>

Quispel maintains that Gnosticism derives from Christianity; it is from Christianity that "the conception of the redemption and the figure of the Redeemer were taken into Gnosticism."<sup>72</sup> Quispel holds that a "pre-Christian redeemer and an Iranian mystery of redemption probably never existed."<sup>73</sup> Pre-Christian Gnosticism in so far as it is pre-Christian

goes back to heterodox Jewish conceptions, e. g. regarding Adam and the Name to a pre-Asiatic syncretism in general. In its origins Gnosis is Jewish-Near-Eastern occultism, Oriental mysticism.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Yalkuth Shimone is a midrashic thesaurus to the Bible which arranges certain halakkic and haggadic passages of the Talmud and midrashic works according to Biblical order. This arranging is attributed to R. Simeon Ha-Darshan (13th century).

<sup>70</sup>Quispel, Jung Codex, p. 77; more on the Jung Codex may be found in Gilles Quispel, "Neue Funde zur Valentinianischen Gnosis," Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte, VI (1954), 289-305.

<sup>71</sup>Quispel, Jung Codex, pp. 77-78.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

Quispel concludes that "the history of the church is the Christianization of Greek thought and Eastern mysticism on the basis of the Gospel."<sup>75</sup>

In summary, Quispel rejects Bultmann's ideas on the source of the redeemer myth. Quispel maintains that the background of Christian thought lies in Judaism rather than in Persian thought.<sup>76</sup>

Carsten Colpe, contemporary German theologian, comments on Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism in the course of his article on "Gnosis I. Religionsgeschichtliche," in Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart.<sup>77</sup> Colpe defines  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  in the narrow sense as follows:

Mit G. im engeren Sinne bezeichnet man eine religiöse Bewegung der Spätantike, die nicht mehr als die jeweils kontinuierliche Fortsetzung der in den Mittelmeerländern, in Mesopotamien und Iran originären Religionen verstanden werden kann, sondern ihnen allen gegenüber etwas im zentralen religiösen Impuls neues darstellt.<sup>78</sup>

Colpe says that the human mind conceives of many things, including God, in the abstract.<sup>79</sup> This "abstracting" is one reason that many natural and historical phenomena were expressed

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Carsten Colpe, "Gnosis I. Religionsgeschichtliche," Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (Third edition; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1958), II, cols. 1648-1652.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., col. 1649.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

in speculative terms that relate to theories of hypostases such as stars, cosmos,  $\sigma\tau\omicron\iota\chi\epsilon\iota\delta\alpha$ , animals, spirits, demons, and angels. Thus, Gnostic teaching is always strong in cosmology, astrology, and pneumatology.

In the first Christian century there was a revival of certain archaic structures of thought. About this Colpe remarks:

Denn zur G. gehört auch der Wunsch nach Legitimation durch das Uralte, das man in griechischen und orientalischen Urkunden--sowie in Buchstaben- und Zahlensymbolik wiederzufinden suchte.<sup>80</sup>

Secret instruction was given to attain to higher and higher degrees of knowledge and to be strengthened through sacraments, enabling the Gnostic to enter the spirit world after death.<sup>81</sup>

Colpe continues that from the very varied Gnostic teachings, certain basic conceptions can be abstracted. The soteriological impulse contained in  $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  comes to man as a soul, better called the kernel or self. An example of this is the Urmensch, a kernel or self who is also first life, abstracted from the universe and its powers.<sup>82</sup>

The central theological concept (Theologumenon) is the depravity (Verworfenheit) of the self. The world and the body are material substance to which the man is bound. Light shining in the world enlightens (erleuchtet) the true self, causing

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., cols. 1649-1650.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., col. 1650.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

freedom to come to the self.<sup>83</sup>

Colpe speaks of the redeemer myth as follows:

Heir ist der eigentliche Erlöser (zT mit Hypostasen neben sich) eine gegenüber dem gefallenem Selbst hypostatisch verselbständigte fremde Person und mit ihm nur noch durch Konsubstantialität verbunden.<sup>84</sup>

Through an awakening call (Ruf) the redeemer summonses the self (Selbst) of mankind and brings the self to a simultaneous recognition (gleichzeitigen Erkenntnis) of itself and of God. Redemption is realized by an ethical process. The Gnostic system is thought of as an expression of this call; the recognition of redemption is a freeing from the fate. Redemption is also the elevation of man to duty (Vergottung) for life or the soul's journey to heaven after death. The descent, existence, and redemption of mankind are classified together in the Gnostic system, giving rise to the modern formulation "redeemed redeemer."<sup>85</sup>

Sie [the redeemed redeemer] kommt erst in der Architektonik sehr entwickelter g.ner Systeme zustande, in der Gottheiten die als Erlöser der "Seele" auftreten, in einer früheren Phase des kosmogonischen Prozesses selbst erlöst wurden oder an seinem Ende zugleich mit der "Seele" wieder emporgefahren und damit erlöst sind.<sup>86</sup>

After listing the chief proponents of the various attitudes toward Gnosticism in its relation to Christianity and world religions, Colpe observes that it is impossible to attain

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., col. 1651.

a proper understanding or classification of all of the elements.<sup>87</sup> Although there was a great transfer of ideas in Samaria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and other countries with many alterations going on in all forms of thought, the redeemer myth in Gnosticism is unintelligible without a docetically interpreted Christ.<sup>88</sup> Partly independently, partly by contact, and partly by opposition to Christian thought, Gnosticism existed alongside of the disjointed Gnosticizing of Jewish baptism sects, Egyptian and Hellenistic thought, and many other forms of thought which sprang up, for example Poimandres, Hermetic thought, the Attis myth, and the teaching of the so-called Chaldaean oracles. Gnostic thought eventually reached its peak and its termination in Manichaeism.

Although Colpe disagrees with Bultmann on several points, Colpe's chief criticism of Bultmann is that Bultmann favors a pre-Christian Gnosticism. Colpe says that the docetically interpreted Christ served as the focal point form which all redeemer thought was formulated. Colpe's polemic is heightened when one realizes that in this same edition of Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Bultmann wrote the article on "Johannesevangelium," in which Bultmann advocates precisely the opposite stance from that taken by Colpe.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., col. 1652.

<sup>89</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, "Johannesevangelium," Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, edited by Kurt Galling (Third edition; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1958), III, cols. 840-851.

Colpe discusses Bultmann in his Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule.<sup>90</sup> Colpe appreciates the work of the religionsgeschichtliche Schule;<sup>91</sup> however, Colpe says that the religionsgeschichtliche Schule has made some questionable amalgamations.<sup>92</sup>

Regarding the redeemed redeemer, Colpe says:

So halte ich die Formel vom erlösten Erlöser zwar für ein logische unangreifbares und heuristisch gelegentlich nützliches Interpretament, aber nicht für eine hermeneutisch ergiebige und im letzten sachgemasse Kategorie.<sup>93</sup>

Further in the book he says, "Doch ist zu beachten, dass wir auch da, wo wir einen salvator salvandus finden, noch nicht unbedingt einen Erlösenmythus vor uns haben."<sup>94</sup>

Colpe urges caution in using Gnostic material and in making assumptions and undemonstrated conclusions. He criticizes Jonas' use of the redeemed redeemer<sup>95</sup> and Schlier for finding the redeemed redeemer in Ignatius.<sup>96</sup> Colpe holds that the elements of the myths ought not be taken out of context;<sup>97</sup> he also cautions against combining all Gnostic evidence

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<sup>90</sup>Carsten Colpe, Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, c.1961).

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., pp. 171-172.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 191.



to form a single historical development, for Gnosticism is not necessarily a linear movement, but it may have emerged in different times and at different places.<sup>98</sup>

However, in reference to Bultmann, Colpe says regarding the redeemer myth:

Ein bedeutsames Hindernis bei dem Unternehmen, Herkunft der Erlösergestalten und Bedeutung des Mythos zu ermitteln, scheint mir das beständige Verweisen auf eben jene Vorstellung zu sein, von der man sich die Aufklärung des ganzen Sachverhalts erhofft: die Verstellung vom "Gesandten". Es ist hier nicht damit getan, dass man Belege für diesen Begriff häuft; denn er reicht nicht zu. Sondern es kommt darauf an festzustellen, ob ein irdischer Mensch oder ein transzendenter Erlöser gesandt wird, ob ein inspirierende geistige Potenz oder ein göttlicher Erzeuger ihn entsendet, und ob die Sendung an die Mächte des Kosmos, an die Menschen oder an die Höllenbewohner ergeht.<sup>99</sup>

Bultmann's acceptance of pre-Christian Gnosticism<sup>100</sup> is difficult for Colpe to accept, for Colpe holds that material which is not necessarily pre-Christian is shifted to the pre-Christian time.<sup>101</sup> Colpe says that Gnosticism can be concerned both with Daseinshaltung and with erlösende Gnosis, with and without the redeemer myth.<sup>102</sup>

In conclusion, Colpe calls for more discussion on these topics before any definite conclusions are drawn. Colpe argues with Bultmann that the Gnostic places God outside of the world

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., pp. 57-65 and 199.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., pp. 199-200.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

and that life on earth is to be denigrated for a life of  
 γυναικας.

Wilbert F. Howard, professor of New Testament in England, writes in The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation<sup>103</sup> on Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism. In Howard's estimation Bultmann and Walter Bauer were strongly influenced by Reitzenstein's researches into the Iranian redemption mystery. The redemption belief, in turn, had been strongly influenced by Lidzbarski's translations into German of the three sacred books of the Mandaeans.<sup>104</sup> These books

attempted to unite the phraseology and the conceptions which are common to Johannine, Ignatian, Syrian, and Egyptian mysticism by postulating a common origin in Gnostic myths and cults which arose in Persia and spread westwards,

influencing Palestinian and Syrian thought.<sup>105</sup>

Howard criticizes Bultmann for his misuse of John 1:1-18 and for the way he "ransacks the Mandaean books for parallels to thoughts and phrases in John," arriving at "the conclusion that the Baptist's teaching was strongly influenced by Gnostic ideas."<sup>106</sup> Bultmann attempts to show that Jesus and John were akin in teaching and that "Johannine Christianity represents an older type than the Synoptic, for, though John is later

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<sup>103</sup>Wilbert F. Howard, The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation, edited by C. K. Barrett (Fourth edition; London: The Epworth Press, 1955), pp. 92-94.

<sup>104</sup>supra, pp. 8-9.

<sup>105</sup>Howard, Fourth Gospel, p. 93.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid.

than" the Synoptists, "they have been more influenced by the Christianity that kept closer to orthodox Judaism."<sup>107</sup>

Howard refers to an article which he wrote and which appeared in Christliche Welt.<sup>108</sup> Howard says, "The older attempts at source analysis have been discredited." A more thorough "stylish examination of the alleged strata" of the Fourth Gospel is necessary.<sup>109</sup> The Gospel of John should be compared with the First Epistle. Secondly,

the point of view of the Evangelist is to be explained from the tradition, not of Greek philosophy, but of Hellenistic mysticism, always remembering that this amalgam contains many mythological speculations from the East.<sup>110</sup>

Thirdly,

the "Word" belongs ultimately to an Oriental cosmological and soteriological mythos, the influence of which appears in the Christian Gnosis, in the Pauline anthropology, and in the eschatology of the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>111</sup>

Howard argues that the "Mandaean sect . . . probably started in Syria."<sup>112</sup> This may account for some of the similarities which Bultmann finds between the Mandaeans and the Fourth Gospel, for Bultmann places the writings of the Fourth Gospel in Syria. Last, Howard says,

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 94, citing "Das Johannesevangelium in der neuesten Forschung," Christliche Welt, XL (Juni 1927), 502-511.

<sup>109</sup>Howard, Fourth Gospel, p. 94.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

The Gospel of John itself is no mythology; it only employs with sovereign certainty the thought-forms of a mythos, just as it uses the forms of the older evangelic tradition to set forth its conception of the revelation of God in Jesus.<sup>113</sup>

Howard certainly does feel that Gnostic thought originated in the forms of Hellenistic mysticism and Oriental cosmological and soteriological myths; Howard agrees with Bultmann on several minor points, but finds that the Fourth Gospel was adopting a relevant terminology rather than using mythical formulations. In this connection, Howard says that the Mandaean sect probably started in Syria, where Bultmann places the origin of the Gospel.<sup>114</sup>

Perhaps the most learned criticism of Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism is that presented by Hans-Martin Schenke in his book Der Gott "Mensch" in der Gnosis.<sup>115</sup> Schenke's criticism is aimed at the explanation of the origin of the idea of the church as the body of Christ which is offered by Heinrich Schlier and Ernst Käsemann. Schenke holds that the attitude of Schlier and Käsemann is based on the misconception that there is a unified Gnostic *Ἐυθροππος* myth.<sup>116</sup> Schlier and Käsemann are students of Bultmann; all of these men depend

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.; C. K. Barrett, editor of the fourth edition, adds sections summarizing without comment Bultmann's redeemer myth; see pp. 171, 172, 250-258.

<sup>115</sup>Der Gott "Mensch" in der Gnosis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, c.1962).

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

heavily on Reitzenstein's theories. Schenke says that a re-examination of Reitzenstein's work is necessary,<sup>117</sup> for the entire religionsgeschichtliche Schule stands or falls on the presupposition of the fragmented ἄνθρωπος myth.<sup>118</sup>

Schenke examines the idea of the Gott "Mensch" in the materials available from the Nag-Hammadi documents.<sup>119</sup> An examination is valid at this time, Schenke holds, even though all of the material is not available.

In examining the Gott "Mensch" concept, Schenke considers the evidence contained in the Apocryphon of John, The Gospel of Thomas, Pistis Sophia, the titleless work from Nag-Hammadi regarding the origin of the world, The Substance of the Archons, Sophia of Jesus Christ, certain Valentinian writings, The Gospel of Philip, The Second Book of Jehu, Naassene sermons, Poimandres, and certain Mandaean and Manichaeian writings.<sup>120</sup>

Schenke<sup>121</sup> finds two types of Gott "Mensch" teachings in this literature. The first type is that of the Apocryphon of John, which teaches that God is the Urmensch. The earthly Urmensch was created by the Archontes according to the image of God. The image of the divine Urmensch is the divine and

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-68.

essential characteristic of earthly Urmensch.<sup>122</sup>

The second type of Gott "Mensch" teaching is found in the documents listed above, with the exception of the Apocryphon of John. The characteristic mark separating this type from the first is that in earthly man, a heavenly man exists, a light power, in the image of the highest God and formed as Urmensch, but connecting man with the supramundane world.<sup>123</sup> The first type of teaching of the Gott "Mensch" seems to know two Urmenschen: God and the ancestor (Stammvater) or great father of earthly man.<sup>124</sup> The second type of teaching seems to recognize three Urmenschen: God, the heavenly Urmensch, and the Stammvater of earthly men.<sup>125</sup>

After establishing this systematization, Schenke shows that they run together.<sup>126</sup> Schenke indicates that the neat distinction is all too simple, for the Mensch of the Apocryphon of John, created in the image of God, is not the earthly Adam.<sup>127</sup> The form created by the various powers must be given a body, leading us to view the first created image as a soul (Körperseele) of humanity rather than a human being; the first

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., pp. 65-66.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

created image is distinct from a light soul (Lichtseele).<sup>128</sup> This picture of the nature of man is similar throughout the Nag-Hammadi documents. Further, in both systems the soul comes from above the earthly. This soul is created in the image of God.<sup>129</sup> The soul, which has its source in the supra-mundane power of Σοφία, is called Urmensch. This soul is the true, the inner man. In Apocryphon of John the soul comes from above, but not directly to man; the soul comes by an unwanted son of Σοφία, Jaldabaoth, and from him to men.<sup>130</sup>

Both types, Schenke says, go back to Gnostic speculation on the nature of Ⲁⲓⲛⲁⲓ - ⲉⲓⲁⲓⲛ in Genesis 1:26-27,<sup>131</sup> for man in Genesis 1:26-27 can be taken as the earthly Adam, while the similarity of humanity with God himself according to the Gnostic idea moves into (bezieht) the inner fragment.<sup>132</sup> Both cases were produced by pre-Christian or contemporary Judaism, or perhaps even by Samaritan Gnosticism.<sup>133</sup>

In summarizing his findings, Schenke states that there are several classes of divine-human or human-divine gods set

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<sup>128</sup>Ibid., pp. 65-66.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., pp. 72-93; through a complicated process and study of Gnostic literature Schenke demonstrates that the source of the Gnostic myth regarding the God-man is connected to an allegorical interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., pp. 69-70.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

forth in available ancient literature.<sup>134</sup> Bousset and Reitzenstein have classified all of these together under the heading Gott "Mensch", and Bultmann and his school follow Reitzenstein and Bousset. Schenke recognizes that the sources of the various figures are different and that each figure must be treated separately. Schenke distinguishes three types.

The first type is that of the God of the universe, set forth in two major forms: (a) that of the macroanthropos, in which the world is God and is thought of as a gigantic man; and (b) that in which the world began or originated from part of a dead god or giant. Man is understood as a microcosmos in the latter case.<sup>135</sup>

The second type is that of the first man and the king of paradise or the idea of the ideal Urkönig. An earthly man is given lordly authority to rule over the heavenly earth; at the completion of this task, the man is taken to heaven.<sup>136</sup>

The third type is the Gnostic God-man idea present in two forms: (a) The highest God by the name of Mensch is the original image (Urbild) of the earthly human, who through this image of God has a share in the essence (Wesen) of God; (b) A divine being, who has the image of the highest God, by the name of Mensch, attains a similar name (man) through

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid.



a fall into earthly humanity, by which earthly humanity takes part in God's being.<sup>137</sup>

Schenke holds that these forms experienced mutual influence on each other.<sup>138</sup> In Manichaeism the first type was fused with the third; in Judaism the first and the second intermingled in the form of the Great Adam.<sup>139</sup> The idea of the Son of Man came from the second of these. This Son of Man idea produced a mixture of the second and the third in later Gnosticism. To the Gnostic the Menschensohn was the same as the Son of Man. Mensch was the name of the highest God and the Son of Man was the son of the highest God.<sup>140</sup>

Schenke concludes that the form of the Gott "Mensch" idea points in every instance to a background in Gnostic speculation on Genesis 1:26-27.<sup>141</sup> Manichaeism has not entered the picture, but has served as a catalyst around which the many thought images centered. From these sprung the Manichaean concept of the redeemed redeemer.

Although Schenke concludes by criticizing Schlier's and Käsemann's concept of the source of the body of Christ,<sup>142</sup> Schenke points out that the entire religionsgeschichtliche

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., pp. 155-156.

conception of Schlier and of Käsemann stands or falls on the assumption of the Gnostic ἄνθρωπος myth.<sup>143</sup> Schenke holds that he has successfully demonstrated that the Gott "Mensch" idea is much more complicated and from a different source than first thought. Its base is in the Old Testament rather than in Iranian mystery thought, which had not developed to the extent at which it is found in Manichaeism. Bultmann's connection to Schlier and Käsemann<sup>144</sup> places him under the indictment.

Robert McL. Wilson takes issue with Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism in The Gnostic Problem.<sup>145</sup> Wilson says that Bultmann is wrong when he says that the essence of Gnosticism lies in a new understanding of man and of the world.<sup>146</sup> Wilson asks, "At what point does this new understanding first appear?"<sup>147</sup> Wilson also takes issue with Bultmann's view of Gnosticism as stated in Bultmann's Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting.<sup>148</sup> Here Bultmann says that neo-Platonism is Gnostic.<sup>149</sup> Wilson finds that Bultmann defines the essence of Gnosticism

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-3.

<sup>145</sup>The Gnostic Problem (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., Limited, c.1958), pp. 64-96.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 67, citing Bultmann, Theology, I, 165.

<sup>147</sup>Wilson, Gnostic Problem, p. 67.

<sup>148</sup>Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting, translated by Reginald H. Fuller (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956), p. 163.

<sup>149</sup>Wilson, Gnostic Problem, p. 67.

further, for "Gnosticism is not only a simple syncretism nor is it Greek philosophy."<sup>150</sup> Wilson faults Bultmann for using the term Gnosticism too broadly. Though there was much "Gnosticizing thought in the early years of the Christian era,"<sup>151</sup> Wilson prefers not to describe this Gnosticizing as Gnostic in the full sense of the term. Wilson prefers a narrower definition, but one broad enough to encompass Philo, Mandaeism, and Manichaeism. Such a definition would reserve the term Gnostic "as a label for a large and somewhat amorphous group of religious systems described by Irenaeus and Hippolytus in their works against Heresy, and similar systems from other sources."<sup>152</sup> Wilson discusses Gnostic origins and the relation to Christianity, using arguments which are totally undocumented, undemonstrated, and disputable.<sup>153</sup>

Wilson criticizes Bultmann for saying that Paul interpreted the death of Christ in terms of Gnostic myth.<sup>154</sup> Bultmann does "not seem to consider whether this 'Gnostic myth' in fact existed in the time of Paul."<sup>155</sup> To say that Christianity borrowed the ideas and terminology of Gnosticism to describe

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<sup>150</sup>Wilson, Gnostic Problem, p. 67.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-84.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., p. 68, citing Charles H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: University Press, 1960), p. 97.

<sup>153</sup>Wilson, Gnostic Problem, pp. 67-68.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

man's situation in the world is not a sound procedure, for Wilson prefers to say that Gnosticism borrowed the thought forms of Christianity; these forms were not Gnostic when Paul used them.<sup>156</sup>

In another article,<sup>157</sup> Wilson appreciates Bultmann's idea that early Christianity was caught in the maelstrom of a syncretistic process, in which maelstrom the genuinely Christian elements were "wrestling" with other elements.<sup>158</sup> The desire to communicate the Gospel in terms acceptable and comprehensible to the contemporary world caused the early Christians to draw from the vocabulary and thought world of their environment.<sup>159</sup> Wilson finds Bultmann on much less certain grounds in claiming that Gnosticism has a pre-Christian, Oriental background.<sup>160</sup> Wilson accuses Bultmann of identifying Gnosticism with the mystery religions.<sup>161</sup> Wilson holds that the ideas of the mystery cults formed one element in the development of the Gnostic theories; however, Wilson questions whether the mystery religions had gained such widespread influence in pre-Christian times as they seemed to

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid.

<sup>157</sup>Robert McL. Wilson, "Gnostic Origins Again," Vigiliae Christianae, XI (1957), 93-110.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid.

have attained in the second century.<sup>162</sup>

Alan Richardson criticizes Bultmann in his An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament.<sup>163</sup> Richardson criticizes Bultmann for holding that "Johannine thought starts from the Hellenistic Gnostic conception of knowledge, not that of the OT . . ." <sup>164</sup> While Bultmann maintains this view of knowledge because often in Johannine thought "knowing" is equated with "seeing" in Greek fashion, Richardson says that Bultmann disregards the fact that the vocabulary of "seeing" is part of the universal human religious language, common to all ages and places. The Old Testament abounds with such imagery, and Richardson accuses Bultmann of manufacturing evidence out of nothing.<sup>165</sup>

Richardson comments on Bultmann's ideas on the heavenly Man.<sup>166</sup> Bultmann holds that the New Testament teaching on the Son of Man has been infected by Gnostic speculations on the "heavenly Man." Richardson summarizes Bultmann as follows. A heavenly light being is cast from his celestial realm because he was vanquished in combat or because of his folly. He falls to earth and the original unity of his personality

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<sup>162</sup>Ibid., pp. 95-96.

<sup>163</sup>An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1958).

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., pp. 141-144.

is shattered into myriad pieces, which are the human selves. These become imprisoned in the lower regions (the world) in evil matter (human bodies). The pieces or selves are subject to the demonic rulers of this world and can be liberated only by the destruction of the demonic kingdom. Men, really fragments of the Man, forget their heavenly origin. The Gnostic redeemer, also a light-bearer, comes from heaven, imparting  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  to set men free. The redeemer is called "Son" or image of the most high God in heaven. He gives sacraments to purify men of their ignorance and he teaches men the secret passwords to aid the soul in the journey above. While on earth the heavenly Man is disguised in human form to escape recognition by the demonic rulers of the world. Hellenistic Christianity is viewed by Bultmann as permeated by Gnostic motifs, especially the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians and the Fourth Gospel.

Richardson opposes Bultmann with three arguments.<sup>167</sup> First, Richardson maintains that the literature used by Bultmann in reconstructing the Gnostic myth of the heavenly  $\alpha\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\omicron\varsigma$  is a century or more after the Fourth Gospel in date and is borrowed from Christian sources. The only first century documentation used by Bultmann is the New Testament. This leaves a significant manuscript gap; the crucial period which either demonstrates or disallows Bultmann's idea is adumbrated. Richardson says that "there is no evidence for

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<sup>167</sup>Ibid., pp. 142-143.

the existence of 'the Gnostic myth' in the first century A.D."<sup>168</sup>

Secondly,

the Pauline (including Colossians-Ephesians) and the Johannine conceptions of the Son of Man as the body of Christ or the perfected unity of the disciples of Christ . . . are . . . legitimate expositions of what the original teaching of Jesus had already contained, while the teaching of Jesus concerning the Son of Man derives . . . from his profound meditation on OT themes.<sup>169</sup>

The doctrine of the New Testament can be explained without recourse to an hypothesis, for where no independent evidence exists. Richardson says that we ought to apply Occam's razor, entia non sunt multiplicanda.<sup>170</sup>

Thirdly, there is

no reason to question that Paul and John, like other Christian thinkers and teachers in a missionary situation, would strive to solve 'the problem of communication' by using language and thought-forms which their audiences or readers would understand.<sup>171</sup>

Richardson admits that opinions are likely to vary on the question of degree, but that he sees a difference "between using language of Hellenism and syncretistically enlarging it or adulterating the kerugma with it."<sup>172</sup> There is a vast difference between the Gnostic redeemer of the Poimandres and the historical Son of Man in the Gospels, who had no place

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<sup>168</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

to lay his head.

Richardson quotes Theo Preiss:

The difference can be summed up very briefly: in the Gnostic myth Man is the divine principle substantially and eternally identical with the sum of the souls of men scattered but predetermined to salvation. In the thought of Jesus the Son of Man freely identifies himself with each of the wretched ones by an act of substitution and identification, and he will gather them together at the last day . . . . It is essential that the Son of Man, that is, Man, is not identified with humanity as a whole-- Jesus is unfamiliar with this Stoic concept--but with each man. Thus it is not at all a question of an identity of substance between primal Man and the totality of his scattered members but of a sovereign act of self-identification.<sup>173</sup>

Richardson disagrees with Bultmann on three points, saying that the first century is lacking in documentation for Bultmann's theories, that the doctrines of the New Testament can be explained from the Old Testament literature, and finally that how much Paul and John utilized contemporary thought forms is a matter of dispute, but Christianity was not changed.

Ernst Percy<sup>174</sup> studies the apparent resemblances between the theological conceptions of the Johannine writings and the Mandaean literature. He establishes quite convincingly that these conceptions of light and darkness, truth and falsehood, the redeemer and redemption possess different shades of meaning in each system. In the Johannine system light describes

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<sup>173</sup>Ibid., pp. 143-144, citing Theo Preiss, Life in Christ, translated by Harald Knight (London: SCM Press, 1954), p. 53.

<sup>174</sup>Ernst Percy, Untersuchungen über den Ursprung der Johanneischen Theologie (Lund: Gleerupska Universitetsbokhandeln, 1939). Percy deals with numerous adherents of the religionsgeschichtliche Schule; those sections of Percy which deal with Bultmann are set forth here.



the ethical and spiritual quality of the divine nature as it exists in God himself or as it is communicated to the disciple. In Mandaeism light is primarily the "quasi-physical" base from which the divine nature or the soul of the believer is composed. Mandaeism is more fully developed than Johannine thought. Percy criticizes Bultmann for not distinguishing between cosmological and Johannine dualism.<sup>175</sup>

Throughout the book Percy shows that the cosmological and metaphysical ideas of Gnosticism are much more highly developed than are the cosmological and metaphysical ideas of Johannine literature. Percy finds that the picture of redeemer forms descending from heaven is not as clear as Bultmann has made it. Bultmann is criticized for oversimplifying.<sup>176</sup>

While John is viewed as being within the structure of New Testament thought, Bultmann is wrong for oversimplifying the relation of the Fourth Gospel to later thought, which did not exist in that form in John's time.

When discussing the source of the redeemer in Mandaeism and the Fourth Gospel, Bultmann is not criticized by Percy.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., pp. 105-118.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., pp. 147-193.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., pp. 237-299.

## CHAPTER IV

### ADDITIONAL CRITICISM OF BULTMANN

This chapter presents the writer's criticism of Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism. This critique agrees with much of the material contained in the criticism given in Chapter III of this paper; however, in the estimation of this writer, a need exists for some additional criticisms. Three areas will be considered: the origin of Gnosticism, the central theme of Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism, and the relation of Gnosticism to Christianity. These three areas have been selected because they are major areas in Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism, and they are important in giving us a foundation from which to move toward a definition of Gnosticism. A problem is reflected in every point; however a chief problem is that Gnosticism flourished in an age of flexibility and is surrounded by questions still unanswered.

#### The Origin of Gnosticism

The origin of Gnosticism is much disputed, as even the cursory reader of the numerous publications of Gnosticism will discover. Bultmann says that he has developed much information on Gnosticism from pre-Christian Mandaean and Manichaeian material with the addition of other Gnostic documents, especially the Jewish Wisdom literature and the Odes of Solomon.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und

In another place Bultmann says that the origins of Gnosticism were Oriental.<sup>2</sup> Bultmann is following the research of Richard Reitzenstein in describing Gnostic origins this way.<sup>3</sup>

There are certain problems connected with the view of Gnostic origins. One problem is when is it first permissible to speak of "Gnosticism" as such? Is the use of this expression acceptable if not applied to a second century phenomenon? When investigating the origins of Gnosticism, is it safe to use that particular term to describe background movements? In considering the backgrounds of Gnosticism, the student confronts a process beginning with Alexander the Great, characterized by the injection of Greek thought into every culture in the then known world. After many years of interchanging ideas and after people and philosophies of life met one another changes took place. The result was that any number of cultures contained aspects of many other cultures.<sup>4</sup> The situation currently holds that a case can be made for various backgrounds of Gnosticism,<sup>5</sup> although some of the arguments

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manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, XXIV (1925), 103-104. Hereafter referred to as ZNW.

<sup>2</sup>Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting, translated by Reginald H. Fuller (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956), pp. 162-163.

<sup>3</sup>Bultmann, ZNW, p. 139.

<sup>4</sup>Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion (Second revised edition; Boston: Beacon Press, c.1963), pp. 3-27.

<sup>5</sup>Infra, pp. 105-106.

are not always persuasive.

At no point does Bultmann discuss at any length the date of Gnosticism. In his Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft article Bultmann speaks of a pre-Christian Gnosticism.<sup>6</sup> Apparently the reader is to be satisfied with Bultmann's references to the works of Reitzenstein and Bousset; even though the sources listed<sup>7</sup> are admittedly more recent than the Fourth Gospel, Bultmann argues that the myths are older than the Gospel of John. The problem for many scholars is that there is an information gap, creating uncertainty as to the level of development attained by the myths at any given time before the myths were written and handed down. Much criticism has been leveled at Bultmann for his view of Gnostic origins.<sup>8</sup> The manuscript evidence in Bultmann's Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft<sup>9</sup> article as well as the material in his Das Evangelium des Johannes<sup>10</sup> to document his thesis makes clear that what is used as documentation for literary dependency often leaves the reader with serious doubts regarding the validity of the presentation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Bultmann, ZNW, pp. 139-141.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>8</sup>Supra, pp. 40-41, 45-49, 50-51, 52-54, 57-58, 61-63, 69-70.

<sup>9</sup>Bultmann, ZNW, pp. 104-138.

<sup>10</sup>Das Evangelium des Johannes, (Twelfth edition; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952; Ergänzungsheft, 1957).

<sup>11</sup>Supra, pp. 40-44 and 46.

In Der Evangelium des Johannes<sup>12</sup> Bultmann depends heavily on a small number of documents. He cites the Odes of Solomon, Corpus Hermeticum, Mandaean literature, the Acts of Thomas, and Clement of Alexandria. If Bultmann is bold enough to date Gnosticism in the pre-Christian period, then the burden of demonstrating a pre-Christian origin of these documents and the authors he cites rests on him. Bultmann says that the documents do have pre-Christian content, although the documents are not necessarily pre-Christian.<sup>13</sup> No reference is made by Bultmann to any article which would aid the reader in understanding the background of the documents. In none of his writings does Bultmann give the student reason to believe that he has critically examined his documentation. The lack of scholarly argument for the dating of the contents makes Bultmann's own lack of interest in the matter more striking.

Robert M. Grant discusses the diversity of material contained in the Odes of Solomon,<sup>14</sup> which show evidence of Jewish, Christian, and pagan influence.<sup>15</sup> The odes avoid the concrete and the particular, adding to the difficulty of dating and of understanding them. Although Grant says that the fourth ode can be dated as early as the late first century, he has great

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<sup>12</sup>Bultmann, Johannesevangelium, pp. 10-14.

<sup>13</sup>Bultmann, ZNW, p. 146.

<sup>14</sup>"The Odes of Solomon and the Church of Antioch," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXIII (1944), 363-377.

<sup>15</sup>Infra, pp. 81-82.

doubts about the date of the rest.<sup>16</sup> J. Rendell Harris dates the odes in the middle of the first century A.D. and discusses their varied content.<sup>17</sup> The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church<sup>18</sup> dates the odes in the first or second century as possibly a Christian adaptation of a Jewish work. Friedrich Spitta maintains the position for Jewish origin with a Christian redaction.<sup>19</sup> With increasing favor the odes were viewed as a hymn from the second century.<sup>20</sup>

The odes show a variety of possible backgrounds, and there is difficulty in making a precise statement about their origin. Some of the odes could be Jewish.<sup>21</sup> Other odes could be Christian.<sup>22</sup> Still another ode might be Jewish with Gnostic influence.<sup>23</sup> It is possible that still another ode might be

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<sup>16</sup>Grant, The Odes of Solomon, p. 369.

<sup>17</sup>The Odes and the Psalms of Solomon (Cambridge: University Press, 1909), pp. 1 and 2-17.

<sup>18</sup>Frank L. Cross, editor. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), col. 1269.

<sup>19</sup>"Zum Verständnis der Oden Salomos," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, XI (1910), 193-203, 259-290.

<sup>20</sup>Hermann Gunkel, "Die Oden Salomos," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, XI (1910), 291-298. For the interested reader a fine collection of bibliographic material is available by Walter Bauer, "The Odes of Solomon," New Testament Apocrypha, edited by Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher; translated by A. J. B. Higgins et alii (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), II, 808-810.

<sup>21</sup>Odes 1, 29, 30.

<sup>22</sup>Odes 2, 26, 39, 42.

<sup>23</sup>Ode 21.

Gnostic.<sup>24</sup> The odes appear to be an amalgamation of apparently disjointed fragments, perhaps edited over a long period of time. While Bultmann may be correct in finding Gnostic influences at work,<sup>25</sup> this survey has shown some of the problems connected with saying that the odes are early Gnostic and that they influenced Christianity to any degree. The contents of these documents may represent the thoughts of some Christians, but no absolute conclusion can be drawn at this point.

The Corpus Hermeticum<sup>26</sup> is a collection of eighteen Greek tracts. For the most part the tracts show little coherence, combining various religious and philosophical teachings.<sup>27</sup> The date of origin of the whole, in van Moorsel's estimation, is complicated.<sup>28</sup> He advises dating the whole around 230 A.D. and leaving open the possibility of dating the individual parts much earlier. Frank L. Cross dates the content between the middle of the first century and the end of the third century.<sup>29</sup> Walter Scott doubts that any of the Hermetica were

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<sup>24</sup>Ode 34.

<sup>25</sup>Bultmann, Johannesevangelium, pp. 10-14; ZNW, p. 104.

<sup>26</sup>Gerhard van Moorsel, The Mysteries of Hermes Trismegistus (Utrecht: Drukkerij en Uitgeverij, 1955), pp. 9-11 observes that the expression Hermetica should be used to include both the Corpus Hermeticum and Asclepius.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>29</sup>Cross, Oxford Dictionary, col. 631.

written as early as the second century, although some materials were accessible to readers as early as 207-213 A.D.<sup>30</sup> Richard Reitzenstein reports that theological literature under the name of Hermes Trismegistus, the name of the chief character in Corpus Hermeticum, was circulating at the beginning of the second century A.D.<sup>31</sup> Several scholars avoid dating Corpus Hermeticum.<sup>32</sup> It is possible that some of the material contained in Corpus Hermeticum was available in some form to the first century Christian.

The Mandaean literature, in C. H. Dodd's opinion, can be dated no earlier than the third century A.D.<sup>33</sup> William R. Schoedel cites Ethyl S. Drower, who says that Mandaicism may have existed before the Christian era.<sup>34</sup> William F. Albright says that Mandaean literature is not pre-fifth century.<sup>35</sup> Wilfred L. Knox argues in a fine study that the

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<sup>30</sup>Walter Scott, Hermetica (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), Vol. I, 8-10.

<sup>31</sup>Poimandres (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von B. G. Teubner, 1904), p. 208.

<sup>32</sup>Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, pp. 147-148; Charles H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: University Press, c.1953); Karl Prumm, Religionsgeschichtliches Handbuch für den Raum der altchristlichen Umwelt (Rom: Päpstliches Bibelinstitut, 1954), pp. 537-539.

<sup>33</sup>Dodd, pp. 127-130.

<sup>34</sup>William R. Schoedel, "The Rediscovery of Gnosis," Interpretation, XVI (1962), 387-401, referring to Ethyl S. Drower, The Secret Adam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. xv.

<sup>35</sup>The Bible after Twenty Years of Archaeology (1932-1952) (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1954), pp. 540-541, 548.



attempts to read into the Mandaean literature a pre-Christian system of Gnosticism from which Christianity has derived those features which resemble Mandaean tenets appears to be quite untenable.<sup>36</sup> Knox says that even if someone could demonstrate that the Mandaean system has early affinities with Judaism, it would by no means follow that the Mandaeans influenced Judaism or Christianity. Eduard Schweizer, in his doctoral thesis Ego Eimi,<sup>37</sup> signed by Bultmann, makes the point that the Mandaean literature ought to be dated in the eighth century.<sup>38</sup>

One difficulty in the survey above is that there does not seem to be agreement about what is significant, the manuscript, the date of the first writing of the information, or the development of the thoughts. For this paper, the earliest strata of thought is most significant.

Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, died 273 A.D. Although the influence of Manichaeism is late, Manichaeism did use earlier thoughts.<sup>39</sup> William F. Albright shows that the Mandaean

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<sup>36</sup>St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles (Cambridge: University Press, 1939), pp. 212-219.

<sup>37</sup>Ego Eimi (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939), p. 46.

<sup>38</sup>For bibliographic information here see Schoedel, passim; Cross, Oxford Dictionary, col. 848; Ethyl S. Drower, The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans (Leiden: E. J. Brill, c.1939) and The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962).

<sup>39</sup>Cross, Oxford Dictionary, cols. 848-849; Johannes Quasten, Patrology (Westminster: The Newmann Press, 1951-1962), III, 356-357.

system is both older and younger than the Manichaean system.<sup>40</sup> Albright also refers to Sève-Soderbergh, who shows how a Manichaean hymn could be dependent on an older Mandaean hymn.<sup>41</sup> Geo Widengren has written several notable works which will assist in understanding.<sup>42</sup>

The remainder of the most important literature cited by Bultmann, The Acts of Thomas and Clement of Alexandria (150-215), do not present evidence for pre-Christian formulation of material,<sup>43</sup> although the thoughts later brought together

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<sup>40</sup>From Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 282.

<sup>41</sup>William F. Albright, "Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of St. John," The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), p. 154, referring to T. Sève-Soderbergh, Studies in the Coptic-Manichaean Psalm Book (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1949), pp. 156-166.

<sup>42</sup>Geo Widengren, Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism (Lund: Uppsala Universitets Arsskrift, 1946); and Mani and Manichaeism, translated by Charles Kessler (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1961).

<sup>43</sup>The Acts of Thomas, composed in Syriac, are not dated by Montague R. James, The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) nor by Edgar Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha, edited by William Schneemelcher, translated by A. J. B. Higgins et alii (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, Vol. I, 1963; Vol. II, 1965); Albertus F. J. Klijn, editor, The Acts of Thomas (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), pp. 52-53 says that Tatian's influence is evident and indicates a third century date. The Acts of Thomas is not dated by Quasten, I, 139-140. Cross, Oxford Dictionary, col. 1351, dates the acts in the third century. Geo Widengren, "Der iranische Hintergrund der Gnosis," Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte, IV (1952), 97-114 shows how geographical and political hints place the Hymn of the Pearl before 226 A.D. Bibliographic information is available in Cross, Oxford Dictionary, col. 1351; Hennecke-Schneemelcher, II, 425-426; and Quasten, II, 139-140. For Clement see Cross, Oxford Dictionary, col. 300 and Quasten, II, 536.

may have come from an earlier time, as Bultmann recognizes.<sup>44</sup> The Philo references may be contemporaneous with or earlier than the origins of Christianity.<sup>45</sup>

The difficulties in dating both the manuscripts and the content of the documents are serious enough to warrant the attention of anyone who reads Bultmann's writings. If certain thoughts are presented as having had an influence on the thought world and the content of the New Testament, then care has to be taken to show that the New Testament does not antedate the thoughts. Care must also be taken to show that the thought was alive and influential in the area in which it could influence a given New Testament writing. Until more definite information is available for dating the content of the manuscripts, and until greater effort is made to show the influence of the content on Christianity, judgment should be withheld. The chief criticism of Bultmann is that the evidence is not as certain as he has made it appear.

However, the matter is not as simple as this. An example of the involved situation of working with first century literature is available from Christianity. Christianity can produce only a handful of documents from the second century to demonstrate the existence of, say, the Pauline writings; however, Christians do not hesitate to say that these are later copies

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<sup>44</sup>Bultmann, ZNW, p. 145.

<sup>45</sup>Dodd, pp. 54-73 discusses the place of Philo in relation to John. Cross, Oxford Dictionary, cols. 1065-1066 includes a fine bibliography.

of much earlier documents dated through the latter half of the first century. In another case, there is no question that the parables, miracles, epistles, and what have you come from an age earlier than the age of the earliest manuscript found. If Christians make these statements about their own sacred documents, then Christians must allow for the possibility which Bultmann claims, that the myths are earlier than both the formulation and the manuscripts used in scholarly research.

The difficulty lies in the fact that in the case of the myths Bultmann asks that we admit to a greater time gap between the date of the first formulation and the date of the manuscripts available. This point is crucial in distinguishing the ways in which Christians and Bultmann view the materials in the manuscripts.

Another point is that Bultmann goes too far in representing the content of Gnosticism as hard and fixed. For instance, in reading Bultmann, one could gain the impression that the redeemer myth is easily located in fixed form. However, in Hans Jonas' The Gnostic Religion<sup>46</sup> the redeemer myth is hardly mentioned. Robert M. Grant, too, is cautious with the redeemer myth, finding no descending redeemers.<sup>47</sup> Gnostic thought was not static. The content changed in the first and in the second century; different movements affected Gnostic

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<sup>46</sup>Jonas, The Gnostic Religion.

<sup>47</sup>Gnosticism and Early Christianity (Revised edition; New York: Harper and Row, c.1966), pp. 61-66.

thought throughout the ages.

Gnostic documents present the reader with several different types of material. There seems to be no one uniform set of ideas that may be singled out as purely Gnostic. Gnosticism is a type of thought which manifests itself in different ways in different groups.<sup>48</sup> The difficulty is partly incurred by applying twentieth century terminology to a much earlier phenomenon. Grant, for instance, states that Gnosticism is characterized by one element which binds all systems together, the view held by Jewish apocalyptic that the world is bad and under the control of evil and ignorance; disheartened apocalyptic is the motivating force behind all Gnostic thought to Grant.<sup>49</sup> The exchange of ideas is evident in nearly every aspect of Gnostic thought, as implied above.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps Irenaeus was on somewhat safer ground in calling Gnosticism a many headed hydra.<sup>51</sup>

Although the question of God is fundamental and redemption is central to many aspects of Gnostic thought, one must be careful in branding Gnosticism a religion. Such a categorization would sever Gnosticism from ancient philosophy, much of which was concerned with God.

The problem confronting those who work in Gnostic thought

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 103-104.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 34 and 36-37.

<sup>50</sup>Supra, pp. 1-2 and 78.

<sup>51</sup>Adv. Haer.I.28.1; 30.15.

are manifold, and simple conclusions will have to be reevaluated later. In addition, when all the materials from Nag-Hammadi are released, much early information should be available for study. Even the currently available texts have been beneficial in many respects, for the mid-1940 discovery of documents dating from the second century is of vast significance for the progress of scholarly understanding. The few Nag-Hammadi documents available at present<sup>52</sup> have contributed much to the understanding of Gnostic thought, especially in Egypt. There can be little doubt that Bultmann's conclusions will not go unquestioned.

The bulk of Bultmann's writings on Gnosticism were written before the availability of the Nag-Hammadi manuscripts. Bultmann could not have gained much from this fresh material. One can only wonder how much Bultmann might have adjusted his opinions if material such as the Qumran scrolls had been available two decades earlier than they were. Of course, Bultmann does handle some aspects of Gnosticism differently in his later works.<sup>53</sup>

#### The Central Theme of Gnosticism

The central theme of Gnosticism in Bultmann's thought is

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<sup>52</sup>Apocryphon of John, Apocryphon of James, Gospel of Truth, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, Acts of Peter; see Willem C. van Unnik, Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings, translated by Hubert H. Hoskins (London: SCM Press, c.1960).

<sup>53</sup>Supra, pp. 35-39.

another point to be considered. The difficulty of viewing the content of Gnosticism as hard and fixed, as Bultmann does, was mentioned above.<sup>54</sup> Although there is one central theme in Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism, as this section will show, Bultmann has two poles around which his concept of Gnosticism centers.

The first pole, the concept of the redeemer myth, is set forth clearly in several places,<sup>55</sup> and it is treated again and again by Bultmann. When explaining the redeemer myth, Bultmann draws his evidence from many sources which appear at different times. The manner in which Bultmann approaches the redeemer myth is not entirely sound, and it is certainly not the most desirable way to attain a conclusion which will be readily accepted. The late date for the sources has been discussed, and the conclusions have been questioned.<sup>56</sup> Since there is no extant account of the redeemer myth, a point of great embarrassment to the advocates of the myth, the validity of the myth is seriously undermined.

The second pole of Bultmann's central theme of Gnosticism is the new understanding of man and of the world, not the syncretistic mythology of Gnosticism. The mythology is held to be an expression of the understanding of the world.<sup>57</sup> This

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<sup>54</sup>Supra, pp. 71-72 and 87-88.

<sup>55</sup>Supra, pp. 8-13, 19-20, 23-27, 27-30, and 34.

<sup>56</sup>Supra, pp. 77-87.

<sup>57</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament,

understanding becomes the official center point of Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism.

If this second pole is correctly understood as incorporating the way out of the prison of the world, then there is no argument with Bultmann on this point. However, even in the light of a highly developed concept of man's lost condition in the world, Bultmann does not always relate the way out of man's bad situation.<sup>58</sup> This seems incongruous with Gnostic literature, which speaks of the relation of the redeemed to the world; yet it is the redeemed who are freed from the world.

#### The Relation of Gnosticism to Christianity

Bultmann deserves criticism for his attitude on the relation of Gnosticism to Christianity. Three types of possible influence are considered here; first, possible Gnostic influence on Christianity is considered; second, possible reciprocal influence is considered; third, possible Christian influence on Gnosticism is considered.

Bultmann's concept of Gnostic influence on Christianity is a prime example of undocumented statements.<sup>59</sup> The difficulty lies in the lack of material presented for the reader's evaluation. This lack of material is understandable to a

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translated by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, Vol. I, 1951; Vol. II, 1955), I, 165.

<sup>58</sup>Supra, p. 36.

<sup>59</sup>Supra, pp. 38-39, citing Bultmann, Theology, ZNW, and Johannesevangelium.



certain extent; anyone working on Gnostic literature is aware of the vast gap between the time that Gnosticism flourished and the present, causing the current lacuna in manuscript evidence. The attitude of the religionsgeschichtliche Schule seems to be that because of this lacuna in evidence, reconstruction, even if on partial evidence, is necessary for progress and, therefore, valid. Although this argument is certainly plausible, a difficulty arises when persons who deal with the reconstructions fail to remain suspicious of them, keeping in mind that a conclusion is no stronger than the weakest point of its documentation.

In speaking of pre-Christian Gnosticism, it is not enough to show that this or that item of a Gnostic system has a parallel in the first century A.D. or even in an earlier age. The question really is whether or not we find in pre-Christian times the total teaching of the redeemer who comes to give saving knowledge to fragments of the divine which are held prisoners in an alien world. The validity of any reconstruction of the redeemer myth decreases in relation to the continued non-existence of more significant evidence. It seems that no New Testament writing presents the Gnostic message in clear form. If there was an influence by Gnosticism on Christianity, it is certainly possible that Christianity, as part of a syncretistic, flexible, milieu, addressed itself to the needs of the times in meaningful terminology. Whether we can call Gnostic the thoughts which Christianity possibly picked

up is another question.<sup>60</sup>

The case for showing the direct influence of Gnosticism on Christianity remains to be demonstrated. Those who make claims for Gnostic influence on Christianity bear the burden of demonstrating the influence acceptably.

Secondly, Bultmann says that there was a reciprocal influence between Gnosticism and Christianity.<sup>61</sup> He claims that Christianity influenced Gnostic thought which in turn influenced Christian thought.<sup>62</sup> Little is known about the process with which we are dealing. Both Gnostic thought and first century Christianity conceivably utilized thought content from the contemporary world. Perhaps Christianity was more fluid in this early age than Christians have normally thought. Similarly Gnostic thought can not really be shown to consist of any particular content throughout its development.

A few examples of possible reciprocal influence between Christianity and Gnosticism are given for the reader's examination.

The first example of possible reciprocal influence is from the Acts of Thomas, possibly an early third century work.<sup>63</sup> Man has body, soul, and spirit (chapter 94). The soul is incorruptible while the body is corruptible (chapters 78, 95,

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<sup>60</sup>Infra, pp. 109-116.

<sup>61</sup>Bultmann, Theology, I, 164-165.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>63</sup>Klijn, The Acts of Thomas, p. 53.

37By, 30Gr). On several occasions Jesus changes into Thomas and Thomas into Jesus (chapters 54, 57, 151). Satan did not recognize Jesus because of a disguise (chapter 45). Antipathy to sex and children is evident (chapters 12 and 85). The eventual wedding with the incorruptible bridegroom is to be awaited (chapters 14, 124, 135). The world and mortal things are corrupted absolutely (chapter 31).

A second series of examples is taken from The Gospel of Philip.<sup>64</sup> The text divisions are those by Hans-Martin Schenke as produced by Wilson. The father and the son are mixed (12); the mother bears a feminine Holy Spirit (17); death is not the wages of sin, but the separation of the sexes (71 and 78); docetism is taught (72); deliverance is through knowledge (110). The attitude toward the resurrection represents that which is condemned in the Pastorals (21 and 90).

The strange sould of some of the examples given reveals ideas which were being coupled with Jesus and the figures of the Godhead, but which were not to become lasting aspects of Christianity. The possibility remains that in the two documents examined we have a better example of pagan thought than of Christian thought.

When documenting reciprocal influence, the date of the material is important, for as Christianity grew stronger, the probability of its being an influence on Gnostic thought is greater. In the earlier years there would seem to be greater

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<sup>64</sup>Robert McL. Wilson, The Gospel of Philip (New York: Harper & Row, c.1962).

likelihood that Christianity was influenced by other thought.<sup>65</sup>

A third possibility seems largely to have been ignored by Bultmann; Christianity, expressed in Hellenistic thought forms and rising in a syncretistic culture, might have influenced other religions. This influence would have caused some Christian teachings to be added to the pagan thoughts.

An example of this is the Apocryphon of John,<sup>66</sup> which contains references to Jesus. Neither Jesus, nor Yahweh, nor Elohim is in a primary position. Yahweh and Elohim are added on to a much larger system of archons and other supramundane creatures.<sup>67</sup> The importance of Jesus is minimal. Though he is the storyteller, his role is incidental to the message of the story.<sup>68</sup>

Robert M. Grant also maintains that Christianity might have had an influence on other thought.

Indeed, in the early centuries of our era we can discover only three [ascending redeemers]: Jesus, Simon Magus, and Menander. It is extraordinarily difficult to believe that the stories of Simon and Menander are not based on the story of Jesus.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism is in need of a revision. Any manuscripts which become available should be

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<sup>65</sup>Samuel Laeuchli, The Language of Faith (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1962), p. 17.

<sup>66</sup>Apocryphon Johannes, translated by Søren Giverson (Copenhagen: Prostant apud Munksgaard, 1963).

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., plate 72.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., plates 48 and 73-80, where Jesus is mentioned.

<sup>69</sup>Grant, Gnosticism and Early Christianity, p. 66.

examined to ascertain their importance to the study of the backgrounds of Gnosticism. The recent increase in archaeological findings makes likely a greater understanding of the background of Gnosticism and of Christianity, providing us with data on which to base future scholarly formulations. These formulations, hopefully, will not repeat the errors of the past.

## CHAPTER V

### TOWARD A DEFINITION OF GNOSTICISM

The lack of certainty about what constitutes Gnosticism is sufficient cause for world scholarship to strive for agreement on a working definition of Gnosticism. Menahem Mansoor in an unpublished paper stated:

It is the present writer's good fortune that it is not within his domain here to attempt to define Gnosticism; since it is his firm belief, at this stage of study, that this is tantamount to attempting the impossible.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter presents some considerations which might bring scholarship closer to a definition.<sup>2</sup> Several of the guidelines set down in this chapter have been recommended by the International Colloquium on the Origins of Gnosticism recently held at the University of Messina.<sup>3</sup>

This was the first such colloquium held. The chief purpose of the conference was to discuss methodology and terminology in the study of Gnosticism. This conference was notable in that it brought together scholars in comparative religion

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<sup>1</sup>Menahem Mansoor, The Nature of Gnosticism in Qumran (Unpublished paper, delivered at the International Colloquium on the Origins of Gnosticism, Messina, April 1966, spirit duplicated copy), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Robert M. Grant, Gnosticism and Early Christianity (Revised edition; New York: Harper & Row, c.1959), pp. 1-38; also Robert P. Casey, "The Study of Gnosticism," The Journal of Theological Studies, XXXVI (1935), 45-60. These works present various definitions of Gnosticism.

<sup>3</sup>See the summary account by George MacRae, "Gnosis in Messina," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XXVIII (1966), 322-333.

as well as scholars in Biblical and early church history.

The diversity of opinion regarding the origin and the nature of Gnosticism reveals the enigmatic nature of the topic. Three areas will be discussed in this chapter to give some direction to those seeking a definition of Gnosticism. First the origin of Gnosticism will be considered; secondly, the background of Gnosticism will be considered; thirdly, the difficulties connected with a definition of terms will be cited.

#### The Origin of Gnosticism

The problem of dating Gnosticism is a rather complex situation, as evident from the previous summaries.<sup>4</sup>

Was there a pre-Christian Gnosticism? The question is sub judice to some scholars. At the conference on Gnosticism Hans Jonas<sup>5</sup> indicated that the question of pre-Christian Gnosticism is overrated in importance. Jonas maintained the important point was that Gnosticism was roughly contemporaneous with the infancy of Christianity and there were some points of contact, although basically Gnosticism was different and independent from Christianity; from the start there was "vigorous interpenetration" of the two.<sup>6</sup> Scholars still are looking for a pre-Christian or a pre-Gnostic document to

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<sup>4</sup>Supra, pp. 36-38. See also Chapter III passim.

<sup>5</sup>MacRae, p. 325.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

settle this conclusively.

An important question was raised on the relationship of Judaism to Gnosticism. Nag-Hammadi, it is remembered, highlights the Old Testament and late Jewish elements. Helmer Ringgren of Uppsala and Menahem Mansoor of Wisconsin delivered papers on the relation of Qumran to Gnosticism.<sup>7</sup> Both agree that the Qumran sectarians were not Gnostics. However, they did hold that the doctrine of the two spirits was due to the influence of Iranian teaching. Yet, there are in the Old Testament certain presuppositions from which dualism could have developed.

The relation of Judaism to Gnosticism was further examined, especially the use of the Genesis story of Adam in Gnosticism.<sup>8</sup> The possibility of a revolt within Judaism was not ruled out, Jonas said that Gnosticism originated in "close vicinity" and in partial reaction to Judaism.<sup>9</sup> Robert M. Grant<sup>10</sup> said that Gnosticism could have come from fringe Judaism more readily than from mainstream Judaism. Grant's paper, in French, stressed the possibility of Jewish apocalyptic elements being transformed into anti-cosmic dualistic Gnosticism within heterodox Judaism. After examining intermediary beings in late Judaism, Grant concluded that there is ground for continuity

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.



between Gnosticism and Judaism, provided that some outside stimulus is allowed. Such a stimulus could have been the events of A.D. 70. There was some resistance to attributing any considerable role to Platonism and Neo-Platonism in Gnostic origins.

Jean Danielou<sup>11</sup> progressed further along the road of Jewish origins, viewing Gnosticism as a revolt within Judaism, followed by a borrowing from Christianity. There was disagreement on this point by Professor F. S. Ridolfini of Rome and Hans-Joachim Schoeps of Erlangen, who regarded second century Gnosticism as partly a pagan movement, borrowing from Christianity and from Judaism.<sup>12</sup>

K. Schubert<sup>13</sup> maintained that Gnosticism could not be derived from Judaism, but that there was a movement within Judaism, from Qumran through apocalyptic to mysticism, which can properly be called a Jewish *γνῶσις*.

MacRae notes that at this point no conclusion could be drawn; the most important thing is that more information of a responsible nature is made available for consumption by scholars. Some speculation was made that a non-anti-Jewish Gnosticism will be found; at the same time there was a feeling of the inadequacy in explaining the Jewish element in Gnosticism as mere borrowing from Judaism on the part of the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 328-329.

non-Jews.

There was very limited acceptance of the notion that Gnosticism is a Christian heresy.<sup>14</sup> Although Mlle. Simone Petrement of Paris argued for viewing Gnosticism as a Christian heresy, she was not convincing.<sup>15</sup> Gnosticism is profoundly recognized as non-Christian in essence; however, it does not follow that Gnosticism is essentially pre-Christian.<sup>16</sup> Some of those present at the conference maintained that there was a need to avoid the danger of denying Gnosticism's non-Christian origin in an effort to show that Gnosticism is not pre-Christian in origin.<sup>17</sup>

C. J. Bleeker and L. Kakosy examined the possible debt of Gnosticism to Egypt.<sup>18</sup> These men perceived a fairly limited influence of Egyptian ideas on Gnostic systems, especially in later works such as Pistis Sophia; at the same time a number of men failed to see any Egyptian influence. The colloquium maintained that a distinction should be made between Egyptian influence and Hellenistic influence found in Alexandria. In this connection, M. Simon of Strassbourg said that Philo could not be considered Gnostic despite some similarities between his thought and Gnosticism. Dr. Zandee gave

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

Hellenistic Judaism of Alexandria a prominent influence in the evolution of Gnosticism.<sup>19</sup>

The importance of the colloquium on Gnosticism is evident to the reader, for some of the finest scholars in the world dealt with the most gripping problems of Gnostic studies. The arguments for a contemporaneous rise with Christianity ought not be overlooked. Perhaps Christianity and Gnosticism arose together from the same milieu. If the Gnostic myth offered to Christianity an appropriate framework of concepts and pictures, Christianity might have adopted Gnostic language as a ready made channel through which its own diffusion throughout the Hellenistic world might be speeded. The questions which arise from this possibility are basic and meaningful to future studies of Gnosticism and Christianity. To what extent did Christianity maintain its own character? To what extent did Christianity influence Gnostic thought? Can scholars demonstrate that the faith maintained a tension with Gnostic thought while existing in a syncretistic milieu?

The idea of an origination of Gnosticism contemporaneous with or even inextricably woven together with that of Christianity is a possibility in the estimation of some scholars. Bultmann says that where Christian preaching remained true to its Old Testament and Jewish roots there are differences between it and Gnosticism.<sup>20</sup> Walter Schmithals, in view of

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Theology of the New Testament, translated by Kendrick

his thesis that pre-Christian Gnosticism existed in Corinth and that in writing to the Corinthians Paul completely missed the problem on every occasion, admits that Paul reveals little understanding of the Gnostic myth.<sup>21</sup>

There seems to be scholarly confusion at this time on the amount of Gnostic influence on Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Van Unnik makes several points indicating the significance of the Nag-Hammadi material.<sup>23</sup> The Nag-Hammadi works enable scholars to enter into the world of the second century, the world of the New Testament canon. Since much remains to be learned about this century, scholars ought to learn much from Nag-Hammadi.

Perhaps as some of the dust settles there will be adequate time and information to consider the date and the relation of Gnosticism to Christianity adequately.

#### The Background of Gnosticism

There is a twofold problem for those who wish to examine the background of Gnosticism. The first problem is literary; much information about Gnosticism is available from sources opposed to Gnosticism. Such a source might be subjective

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Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 167.

<sup>21</sup>Walter Schmithals, Die Gnosis in Korinth (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), p. 52, n. 1; pp. 73, 121, 124, 161, n. 2; p. 176.

<sup>22</sup>Supra, pp. 38-39, 91-96, Chapter III, passim.

<sup>23</sup>Willem C. van Unnik, Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings, translated by Hubert H. Hoskins (London: SCM Press, 1960), pp. 89-90.

or misinformed. Much of the information about Gnosticism is written by Gnostics; in such cases what may be taken as accepted Gnostic thought may be the product of an avant-garde literary individual or group whose work is extant. Finally, if the source of information on Gnosticism is neutral, the author may be misinformed or have only a partial understanding of what he is writing.

Secondly, the problem is historical; an evolution of thought is evident, but the process of that thought is hidden and the understanding of the twentieth century man may be only partial.

If twentieth century man is to understand Gnosticism and its background, he will need much more information, preferably primary information. Twentieth century scholars will also have to move slowly in formulating a concept of Gnosticism on the basis of original documents, for only as progress in understanding is made and more strange pieces fall into the places where they really belong will our partial understanding of Gnosticism become complete.

When dealing with the origin of Gnosticism, scholars often seem to find that the wide diversity of raw material available is too broad to manage. The various systems include ideas from a diversity of Jewish, Greek, Babylonian, and Christian religions. For instance, while some Gnostics scorn the world, others love the world. Some systems have names derived from their founders, such as the Valentinians, the Marcionites, and the Basilidians; others are named by their place of origin,

such as the Περσικοί ;<sup>24</sup> still others are named by nationality, as the Phrygians. While some Gnostics are named for an activity, such as the Ἐγκρατῖται or continent ones,<sup>25</sup> others are named for their doctrine, as are the Docetists. Some Gnostics are named for the object of their worship, as the Cainites and the Ophites; others are named for their immoral practices, as the Ἐντυχίτες. There is certainly no obvious bond of union here.<sup>26</sup>

Gilles Quispel points out that to call Gnosticism either Christian or non-Christian is not sufficient, for there are several different variations in both Christianity and in Gnosticism.<sup>27</sup> Robert McL. Wilson notes the extremes represented in Gnosticism.<sup>28</sup> Wilson holds that a precursor of Gnosticism in the narrow sense is Philo; he includes certain Jewish groups of more or less heterodox character, possibly also

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<sup>24</sup>See Jean Doresse, The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics, translated by Philip Mairé (New York: The Viking Press, c.1960), p. 50, n. 123. Doresse says that this name indicated those who could pass beyond corruption.

<sup>25</sup>If they were Gnostics at all. See Gilles Quispel, "Gnosticism and the New Testament," The Bible in Modern Scholarship, James P. Hyatt editor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, c.1965), pp. 254-257. See also his definition of Gnostic, pp. 257-260.

<sup>26</sup>The differences are stressed by Hans Leisegang, Die Gnosis (Fourth edition; Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, c. 1955), pp. 5-8.

<sup>27</sup>Gnosis als Weltreligion (Zürich: Origo Verlag, c.1951), pp. 3-4.

<sup>28</sup>"Gnostic Origins," Vigiliae Christianae, XI (1955), 193-211.

the Essenes.<sup>29</sup> Wilson recognizes in Mandaeism and Manichaeism the other extreme in which so called Gnostic influences are present. Between these he places the Gnosticism opposed by Irenaeus and Hippolytus, which flourished in the second century A.D. and the pagan Gnosticism of the Hermetica. Other scholars have claimed Hellenistic, Babylonian, Egyptian, and Iranian origins as well as every possible combination of these with Jewish and Christian elements.<sup>30</sup> Each theory of origin appears to have some claims to support because of the syncretistic nature of the time and because of the variety of groups which have been classified as Gnostic.<sup>31</sup>

This diversity is not surprising in the light of the variegated environment during and before the appearance of Christianity. The entire Near East appears to have contributed to the thoughts contained in Gnosticism. Various scholars have studied the backgrounds. Gershom G. Scholem holds that Gnosticism was influenced by first century Pharasaic circles.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>See Hans-Joachim Schoeps, "Das gnostische Judentum in den Dead Sea Scrolls," Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte, VI (1954), 276-279; Bo Reicke, "Traces of Gnosticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls?," New Testament Studies, I (1954-1955), 137-144. Reicke warns against the temptation to find elaborate Gnosticism in the scrolls.

<sup>30</sup>Carsten Colpe gives a list of the various attitudes held by scholars in "Gnosis I. Religionsgeschichtliche," Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, edited by Kurt Galling (Third edition; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1958), II, cols. 1648-1652.

<sup>31</sup>Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion (Second revised edition; Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 33-34.

<sup>32</sup>Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, c.1960), pp. 1-3.

Gilles Quispel maintains that Gnosticism has a Jewish background.<sup>33</sup> Hans Leisegang views Gnosticism as a mosaic, the product of spiritual change.<sup>34</sup> All of the ancient writers considered Gnosticism to have originated in Jewish influence on Christianity.<sup>35</sup> Robert M. Grant views Gnosticism as a result of disheartened apocalyptic hope,<sup>36</sup> which contributed to the rise of new expressions; this originated in Samaria.<sup>37</sup> Many view Gnosticism as pagan,<sup>38</sup> while others consider it a Christian heresy.<sup>39</sup>

How is such a diversity of opinion possible? Apparently there was a tremendous flux in thought patterns caused by the interchange of cultures taking place following the conquests of Alexander up to the second century A.D.<sup>40</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup>"Der gnostische Anthropos und die jüdische Tradition," Eranos-Jahrbuch, XXIII (1953), 204.

<sup>34</sup>Leisegang, pp. 5-8.

<sup>35</sup>Jean Danielou, The Theology of Jewish Christianity, translated by John A. Baker (Chicago: The Henry Regnery Company, c.1965), p. 69.

<sup>36</sup>Gnosticism and Early Christianity, pp. 27-38.

<sup>37</sup>"The Earliest Christian Gnosticism," Church History, XXII (1953), 81-98.

<sup>38</sup>Schoeps, Scrolls, pp. 276-279; Robert McL. Wilson, The Gnostic Problem (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., c.1958), pp. 68-70; Schmithals, passim.

<sup>39</sup>Walter Bauer, Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei in ältesten Christentum (Second edition; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1964), I, 240-242.

<sup>40</sup>Emil Schürer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, translated by John Macpherson et alii (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1885), especially Vol. I; Victor



popularization of high Greek philosophy and thought had made it adoptable and adaptable in other cultures as a vehicle for expanding thought; this application to other cultures allowed Greek thought to exercise vast influence in all corners of the Greco-Roman and Near-Eastern world. In the case of the Israelites, certainly, the captivity in Babylon caused a change in their entire approach to religion. This change resulted in the rise of new practices and in a change in many old ones. Other influences entered.<sup>41</sup> The Greek occupation had religious implications which unleashed forces in all cultures. There seems to have been a continuous cross fertilization of theological and philosophical ideas. Gnosticism emerged from this continually changing milieu.

The diverse background and the difficulty of determining the source or direction of Gnostic thought is illustrated by the diversity of views on the nature of Gnosticism held by leading scholars. At this point the background of Gnosticism is not able to be narrowed beyond that view which holds that Gnosticism developed in a Hellenistic, syncretistic milieu and that Gnosticism contains elements of many different backgrounds.

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Tcherikover, Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews, translated by S. Appelbaum (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959).

<sup>41</sup>Paul Wendland, Die hellenistisch-römische Kultur in ihren Beziehungen zu Judentum und Christentum (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1912).

## Definition of Terms

Progress might be made in defining Gnosticism and the peripheral aspects which concern scholars if scholars would agree on the definition of terms used when speaking of Gnosticism. The recent International Colloquium on the Origins of Gnosticism at Messina set down some guide lines for attaining such a definition. According to a report on this conference,<sup>42</sup> some scholars present sensed a lack of precision in the use of the terms  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  and Gnosticism, which caused obscurity in the field of Gnostic studies. Little objection was raised to the definition offered by a Dr. Arai of Tokyo, who maintained that  $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  has three characteristics, material dualism, self knowledge as a means of salvation, and a revealer or redeemer. Arai said that related systems should be called Gnosticism.<sup>43</sup>

One of the difficulties which the colloquium faced is that Gnosticism is a modern term, a product of Western thought, which often is inclined to over-systematize by placing diverse materials into simplified categories. More objectivity would be reached if everything found in the early centuries of the Christian era were not categorized as Gnostic.<sup>44</sup> The expression Gnostic and Gnosticism could be clarified by limiting

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<sup>42</sup>MacRae, pp. 322-333.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 328-329.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

the scope of the material described by them; this clarification would give these words more precise meaning and impact.

The possibility remains, the conference observed, that scholars have misunderstood the nature of ancient religion and its social position. Our minds seem much more prone to organization than were Eastern minds. Two thousand years have removed us far from the tension felt by the people of the age of Gnostic influence. The possibility of misunderstanding is great. Robert McL. Wilson brings out this point in his article on "Gnostic Origins."<sup>45</sup> Wilson says that even though scholars may see in a certain writing a seed of what appeared later as part of a full blown system, scholars must be cautious about attributing to the seed the form of the full grown plant. For instance, even though Justin Martyr showed characteristics of what was later condemned as Arianism, it is not correct to call Justin Martyr an Arian, for he lived before Arianism arose. In a similar respect it is erroneous to brand Philo a Gnostic or to consider Heraclitus and the Stoics Christian because of their use of the *λόγος*. Similarity of language does not mean similarity of meaning; scholars must consider not only the words used, but their context and usage. The fact that twentieth century man uses existential terminology in communicating does not mean that he is an existentialist, even though he may appear as one to a later generation. The terminology used by one generation or age ought not be

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<sup>45</sup>"Gnostic Origins," pp. 193-211.

understood as carrying the freight of the future. A thought or a set of terms normally develops over a period of several generations; when working with a fully developed concept, care must be taken not to read into earlier writings content which had not developed to the extent that it did later.

In defining Gnosticism, scholars ought to note carefully the problems connected with a syncretism such as the one in which Gnosticism flourished. William D. Davies<sup>46</sup> suggests that there is evidence that Judaism was invaded by Hellenic terminology which modified Judaism's essential nature. The change expressed itself in a number of ways. One expression of the pressure of Hellenic terminology on Jewish thought may be the way in which the Jewish names for God are added to Greek systems.<sup>47</sup> Another sign of the interchange may be the attaching of Hellenistic thoughts to Christian systems.<sup>48</sup> The change may show itself as a mixture of various kinds of thoughts, as in the case of the Odes of Solomon.<sup>49</sup> Although

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<sup>46</sup>"Knowledge in the Dead Sea Scrolls," Harvard Theological Review, XLVI (1953), 113-139.

<sup>47</sup>Apocryphon Johannis, translated by Søren Giverson (Copenhagen: Prostant apud Munksgaard, 1963), plate 72.

<sup>48</sup>The Gospel of Philip, translated by Robert McL. Wilson (New York: Harper & Row, c.1962); para. 15 presents Christ as spiritual bread; para. 17 says that not even the Spirit could have made Mary conceive; para. 32 says that Mary is mother, sister, and spouse of Jesus; para. 110, deliverance is through knowledge; Albertus F. J. Klijn, editor, The Acts of Thomas (Leiden: E. J. Brill, c.1962); chapter 45 tells that the devil did not recognize Jesus; chapter 12 shows antipathy to sex and children.

<sup>49</sup>Supra, pp. 80-82.

the possibilities for examples has been far from exhausted, the point is that exchange is evident.

The mixing up was of such a nature that, Bultmann says, early Christianity expressed its controversy with Gnostic thought by proclaiming Christ as the true savior, true light, and true life.<sup>50</sup>

When working with a syncretism, the contemporary scholar can not overlook the possibility that "borrowing" ideas and applications which were meaningful was not any more impossible or impractical at the time of Paul and John than it is today. A speaker wants to be heard. If the message of the Gospel was to be heard by the contemporary world, Paul and John might easily have adopted the inadequate categories of current thought, and, we might add, certainly they would have been inclined to as men of their own age.<sup>51</sup>

A second point to remember when examining the syncretistic background of Gnosticism is that our knowledge can be only partial. The most important work done on Gnosticism has been done in the last few decades. Archaeological contributions from the ancient East are for the first time presenting fresh evidence for evaluation. Yet our knowledge remains only partial. Even all of the Qumran materials, as well as the

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<sup>50</sup>Bultmann, Theology, I, 173.

<sup>51</sup>The involved state of thought is demonstrated by Gilles Quispel, "The Jung Codex and its Significance," The Jung Codex, edited by Frank L. Cross (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd, 1955), pp. 61-78, which shows the complicated relation of the various cultures to one another.

Nag-Hammadi materials, are still not available for general use. For this reason there are indications that the future of the study of Gnosticism looks promising.

Another problem in working with the syncretistic background of Gnosticism is one already hinted at, our distance from this entire milieu. The period of the milieu of Gnosticism is perhaps four to five hundred years long, with many generations of people living in this time. This length of time gives rise to numerous changes in thought patterns. The two thousand year time difference between the rise of Gnosticism and the present increase the difficulty, for there is a problem in understanding the world view and the expression of the Gnostic.

This time gap causes a problem in interpreting the documents from another age. There seems to be two fundamentally different methods of procedure which might be followed. The interpreter might interpret each individual text against the background of the civilization in question and in accordance with everything known about it. In this method the interpreter tries to understand what the author meant in his own day and in his own terminology. On the other hand, each text can be considered isolated from its cultural setting and be interpreted against the background of the investigator's own civilization and in accord with it. This latter method is the least laborious and sometimes the best that can be done. However, this latter method is likely to be less dependable, for the interpreter working in ancient texts is likely to overlook

the possibility that the early author had something in mind different from the interpretation. This method ignores the milieu of the material under consideration and is certainly undesirable from this point of view.

In the course of two thousand years, a new phenomenon has appeared on earth, Western industrial man, with different fears, a different world view, and a different sense of needs. For Western man to attempt to understand the Gnostic or the pre-Gnostic could prove very difficult, increasing the possibility of misunderstanding.

Due to the flexible milieu of Gnosticism and the vast uncertainties connected with the partial availability of materials and the near impossibility of dating with accuracy the myths, there seems to be valid reason for avoiding any definition of Gnosticism which might narrow the field unnecessarily. Care must be taken to avoid materials which ought not be included. Although a group may show some Gnostic characteristics, before any group is classified as Gnostic, it ought to be thoroughly examined. Gnosticism seems to be an atmosphere, not a system; as an atmosphere Gnosticism could have affected to some degree all religions and philosophies of the time.

At the recent International Colloquium on the Origins of Gnosticism at the University of Messina, a committee was appointed to draw up a tentative document offering a definition of *γνῶσις* and Gnosticism. *γνῶσις* was defined as

"knowledge of the divine mysteries reserved for an elite."<sup>52</sup> Gnosticism, classified as a second century phenomenon, was characterized by the idea of a divine spark in man, fallen from the divine world into this world of birth, death, and fate, which must be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self and reinstated into the divine world.<sup>53</sup> The statement further distinguished between pre-Gnosticism and proto-Gnosticism for those who wish to discuss the background of second century Gnosticism. Pre-Gnosticism was viewed as the various thematic elements which existed separately before being assembled into Gnosticism; the elements were not absolutely Gnostic in themselves.<sup>54</sup> The elements might include Judaism, Christian thought, and Egyptian and Mesopotamian ideas. Proto-Gnosticism was viewed as the essence of Gnosticism found in earlier systems and in contemporary ones not included in second century Christian Gnosticism; here belong Iranian, Indo-Iranian, Platonic, and Orphic ideas.<sup>55</sup> The term dualism was reserved for those doctrines in which the dichotomy of principles was the foundation of the existence of what is contained in the world.<sup>56</sup> MacRae's communication has certainly been helpful in understanding the attitude of the colloquium toward Gnosticism.

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<sup>52</sup>MacRae, p. 331.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.



If it can be said that there are broad characteristics of Gnosticism, the following might be considered. Gnosticism has a strongly dualistic world view; it also pictures the world as foreign to men; further, some men contain fragments from the realm of light, which can be liberated to attain supra-mundane existence.

#### Reassessment Necessary

On the basis of the problems involved, it seems necessary to call for a reassessment of Gnosticism. No single tradition is yet known which is adequate to account for all of the phenomena which occur in Gnosticism.

Perhaps it would be well for scholars to forget the term Gnosticism for a generation or two and to use the expression "syncretism," which implies an environment, not a movement. This term does not definitely anticipate the specifically Gnostic, but merely describes an observed phenomenon as a single expression of the mixing from which Gnosticism derives its vitality.

Another important factor in calling for a total reassessment is the material found at Nag-Hammadi. It would be completely wrong to think that this material gives only an addition, though very considerable, to the information which we possess already, or that it merely fills a number of gaps. Nag-Hammadi seems to be better understood as an abundance of new material which makes absolutely necessary a fresh study.

The study of *γνῶσις* is beginning again and the present

should help to remove all sweeping statements and cause scholars to realize that every statement on Gnosticism is tentative and may need revision in a short time.

This paper has attempted to delineate Reitzenstein's concept of Gnosticism and some contemporary criticisms of it. In considering Reitzenstein's ideas on Gnosticism, it was evident that Reitzenstein considers Gnosticism to be pre-Christian and Oriental in origin, with an influence upon Christianity. According to Reitzenstein the central characteristic of Gnosticism is its radical view of the world, which places the world in a negative context.

Serious objections by contemporary scholars were raised to this view of Gnosticism. Especially susceptible to criticism were Reitzenstein's understanding of the origin of Gnosticism, its relation to Christianity, and the way in which he handled the Gnostic solution to the negative world view, the redeemer myth.

There is evidence that more information is needed on every point before Gnosticism can be adequately evaluated and appreciated. Lack of understanding of the origin of Gnosticism and of its influence on Christianity are problems today. There is evidence that the influence of the milieu of Gnosticism may have had a much greater influence on Christianity than any would admit; however, the uncertainty connected to making a precise definition of this matter is too great to warrant a definite conclusion. The attempt to move toward a definition

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to delineate Bultmann's concept of Gnosticism and some contemporary criticism of it. In considering Bultmann's ideas on Gnosticism, it was evident that Bultmann considers Gnosticism to be pre-Christian and Oriental in origin, with an influence upon Christianity. According to Bultmann the central characteristic of Gnosticism is its radical view of the world, which places the world in a negative context.

Serious objections by contemporary scholars were raised to this view of Gnosticism. Especially susceptible to criticism were Bultmann's understanding of the origin of Gnosticism, its relation to Christianity, and the way in which he handled the Gnostic solution to the negative world view, the redeemer myth.

There is evidence that more information is needed on every point before Gnosticism can be adequately evaluated and understood. Lack of understanding of the origin of Gnosticism and of its influence on Christianity are problems today. There is evidence that the influence of the milieu of Gnosticism has had a much greater influence on Christianity than many would admit; however, the uncertainty connected to making a precise definition on this matter is too great to warrant a definite conclusion. The attempt to move toward a definition

of Gnosticism is one way to summarize the problems confronting scholars. Not only the diverse backgrounds but also the flexibility of thought in the milieu of Gnosticism are points of difficulty. Evidence is available which leads us to believe that the process of interchange of ideas affected Gnostic thought and Christianity.

The International Colloquium on the Origins of Gnosticism is highly significant for future progress, for this conference was a cooperative attempt to understand Gnosticism.

There is a need for more information and insight into the milieu of the entire Hellenistic period. The advent of more primary Gnostic sources should have a positive effect.

Thus, a total reevaluation is necessary. Although for the present Gnosticism remains as arcane and as undefineable as it has appeared in this paper, the study of Gnosticism belongs to the future.

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