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Gnosis und Gnostizismus: ein Forschungsbericht

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34 (1969) 121-175; 181-231; 358-361; 36 (1971) 1-61; 89-124;
37 (1972) 289-360; Fortsetzung folgt.

Werner Foerster

Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts

I. Patristic Evidence

Oxford: ~~Clarendon~~ Clarendon Press, 1972.

Geroge MacRae, 'Gnosticism', New Catholic Encyclopedia

R. McL. Wilson BP 48 W 75 c (g)

The Gnostic Problem

A Study of the Relations between Hellenistic Judaism and the
Gnostic Heresy

London: Mowbray, 1958, 1964

pp. 180 182f 184 186 190

G L Prestige God and the Fathers London SPCK 1952

From Introduction to Foerster's Gnosis

Gnosis means knowledge, but it not a methodically developed knowledge ~~xxx~~ as in science or philosophy, and it is not everyday common sense knowledge.

Gnosis is basically one ~~and~~ and it is acquired in one act

PS Cl, Recogn III 35 7: Simon says 'It is true that in those sciences ~~wh~~ which are generally practised anyone who has not learned does not possess knowledge, but in matters of gnosis a man has learned as soon as he has heard."

Poim 4: 'And immediately, at one stroke, everything became clear to me.'

In Xtian gnostic writings it is often said that one sentence from the Old or New Testament, from Homer, from any other poet, is sufficient, rightly understood, for Gnosis. In the Megale Apophasis, Hipp VI 10 2; 15 2; 16 1; elsewhere Hipp V 7 19; 8 7; 9 10; 21 12; 27 4.

In the gnostic writings we find no laborious working out of the gnostic insights, no gradual drawing near to the truth. In general the gnostics take no account of philosophy; and when they do so it is with a clear rejection at least of the priority of philosophy. Cf Sophia Jesu Christi pp 80 4 - 181 17; Cl Al Strom VI 6= #53 3-5

Gnostics seek to impart religious knowledge and therefore renounces any rational foundation. Gnosis is not a philosophy.

2

It is not properly a mystical experience. The gnostic is interested, not in experiencing, but in obtaining a proper comprehension of himself, the world, and God. So it readily speaks of a learning.

The central factor in Gnosis is the 'call.' It reaches man neither in rational thought nor in an experience that eliminates thought. Man has a special manner of reception in his 'I'. He feels himself addressed and answers the call. He feels himself addressed by something within him though admittedly that something is entombed. It is nothing new but rather the old that needs to be called to mind. It is like a note sounded in the distance which strikes an echoing chord in the heart. Hence a single act can suffice for k gnosis.

Gnosis 2 3

2

As there is something peculiar to Gnosis in the manner of its acquisition, so too there must be something peculiar to it in its thinking. This has often been misunderstood as a blend of East and West, Orient and Occident, and the emphasis has been laid now on one constituent now on another. But all these efforts have not led to a satisfactory result. Foerster elects to follow another path. Just as the essence of Gnosis can be grasped in a single act, so the totality of Gnosis can be comprehended in a single image. This is the image of 'gold in mud.'

What does this mean?

It distinguishes the gold and what surrounds it.

What answers the call (the 'I', the 'self', ~~me~~ or whatever we wish to ~~name~~ name it) is something quite different from what surrounds it.

The ~~me~~ mud is the world. First of all, it is the body which with its sensual desires drags man down and holds the 'I' in thrall.

3

'Within you is a noble slave, to whom you owe his freedom.'

In Mandeism one often hears of the stinking body.

In Tractate VII of the Corpus hermeticum one reads:

First you must rend the garment which you wear, the fabric of ignorance, the foundation of wickedness, the fetter of corruption, the black wall, the living death, the visible corpse, the grave which you carry with you, the robber that is in you."

From its hostility to the body Gnosticism drew opposed conclusions: some praised asceticism, celibacy, encratism; others libertinism; as the flesh is of no account so the sins of the flesh are of no account; indeed, unless you commit all possible sins you will have be reincarnated again

Hostility to the body is only part of a far larger theme: hostility to the world. Gnostic has no appreciation for the beauty ~~of~~ of the earth. The whole world lies in wickedness not only because it is dominated by the power of sense but also because it is subject to Fate

Fate at that time was enshrined in the seven planets and the twelve signs of the Zodiac; so 'seven' and 'twelve' are marked

- 4 are marked in a special way as the power of evil which enslaves mankind

According to many ~~gnostics~~ gnostics 'demons' also rule over and in the world, and frequently the figure of the devil appears.

These powers of evil are ~~not~~ individual evils in a fundamentally good world.

They are expression of a view that the whole world, the entire cosmos in the ancient sense, is what gnostic means by mud when he speaks of gold in mud.

There is indeed the view that the cosmos can be used as an indication of a divine world, but even then it is doomed to extinction with all that is in it.

The wickedness of the world is found in the transitory character of all that is in it.

Reincarnation is a special cause of terror

Death also, the necessity of dying without ~~prospect~~ prospect of a better life is another.

time which rushes on and the inconstancy ~~of~~ of all things ^{ar} alarming
The division of mankind into men and women belongs to this world and the gnostic would transcend it

Gold in mud means that the 'I' or 'Self' is something other than the world. This other ultimately is God or as Gnosis puts it, the ultimate ground of being.

This ground lies beyond our powers of perception or understanding
It cannot be reached by philosophy, wisdom, rational thought
God is spoken of in negative terms: the unknown Father, the unknown God; he is ineffable, unspeakable; even such negations can be rejected, for somehow they define God.
Again the prefix 'fore' is used: God is the fore-father, the fore -beginning.

- 5 So God and world stand apart and in opposition
They are opposed either because they are two original realities that are antagonist to each other or because the world results from a Fall from God

So even if originally ~~there~~ there is only one entity, still there remains a dualism of considerable severity.

When ~~one~~ one speaks of the gold in man, one means that there is to man something that pertains to the divine sphere.

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The image of gold is chosen because it allows the gold to be gold. The divine in man remains divine even though it is entombed in the body and in this world

Some gnostics think that the divine element in man will perish if it is not formed, purified, but if it is formed then necessarily it will ~~exist~~ be one and the same as the undreated and unlimited power.

Generally what is said is that he who possesses the divine element will of necessity enter into the other-worldly sphere of the divine

If as also happens the 'soul' is taken to be an entity intermediate between body and spirit, it has no part in the destiny of the divine element and must obtain for itself by its good deeds a lower salvation

In any case the 'self', the core in man, the soul or spirit, cannot be created by any kind of effort on the part of man; it is there or it is not present at all. The decisive thing is not something man must do; he has it; or better, he is it. Hence men by nature are saved or by nature they are lost.

6 Faith for a gnostic is not freedom but existence.

Gnostic systems are ever varied answers to the question how did the essentially good self come into an essentially evil world.

Good God and Fall; originally two distinct principles, one good and one evil; originally three distinct principles; in any case the divine in man must find its way back to the good God.

The 'self' of itself cannot move towards the divine world. It is lost in forgetfulness, in drunkenness, taken captive, etc. It cannot be helped by a hostile world. The awakening can come only from the Pleroma (opposite ? kenoma). It comes as a call, which breaks through man's forgetfulness of himself, makes an end of his stupefaction, ends his imprisonment. The call is necessary, but the response is a single act, and that single act is gnosis.

While the call is the decisive event, it is not the final redemption. However much he may glory in his immortality and his heritage of eternal life, he remains fettered to the body.

Only death and separation from the body makes the 'self' free for that space which is no space but the sphere of light. Strictly speaking even death does not ~~px~~ bring it about, but only the end of the world, in which matter is destroyed and the gnostic enters into the ~~xxxx~~ sphere of light. An anticipation of this state occasionally occurs in a mystic experience, but this is exceptional. The mystic does not experience; ~~ja~~ he knows.

A final point. The gnostic is not called as an isolated person. It may be that only one in a thousand or two in ten thousand ~~xxx~~ hear the call. But at any rate these unite into a community. The gnostics do not exist as individuals but gather around one who has received the call, as in most Xtian sects which are named after the founder or in Manicheism.

This man has the fundamental ~~x~~revelation. As in Valentinus who saw a little child, asked him who he was, was told he was the Logos. Hipp VI 42 2. This revelation is then developed into a myth or system; around this myth or system there gather like minded people

The myths and systems are varied. They stand in strained relations to one another. Each group maintains that it alone exactly knows the redeeming call of the Redeemer. The others know it only in part.

However, while the gnostics in this world feel they are a people divided, they look forward to their complete unity in the future sphere of light. All together they will go into the Pleroma. Only then can the world come ~~x~~ to its end, when it is annihilated by fire, or remains here below a burnt out heap of ashes, powerless and ~~x~~ dead, or even continues in free from aspiration or desire

With the end of the world all tensions are removed: the expansive stream of time; the limiting character of individuality; the tension of the sexes. But there is no uniform gnostic doctrine on the final stage of affairs.

Gnosis 7

9

The main points of Gnosis are:

1. Between this world and the God incomprehensible to our thought, the 'primal cause', there is an irreconcilable antagonism
2. The 'self' or 'I' of the gnostic his 'spirit' or 'soul', is unalterably divine
3. This 'I' has fallen into this world, has been imprisoned and anaethetized by it, and cannot free itself from it.
4. Only a divine call from the world of light looses the bonds of captivity.
5. Only at the end of the world does the divine element in man return again to its home.

Read in Foerster The Book Baruch chapter 4 pp 52 ff. Hipp V 26 f

Read in Wilson, The Gnostic Problem, chapter 7, Judaism and Gnosticism
The Gnostic Demiurge plays a part analogous to that of Satan in Jewish and Xtian theology p. 190

The Book Baruch

Hipp Refut V 26-1 to 27-5 Gnosis pp 52 ff.

26 1: This man (Justin) says: There were three unbegotten powers of the all, two male and one female. Of the male, the one is called the 'Good', he alone being so called, knowing all things in advance; the second, 'father of all things created,' without foreknowledge.... The female power is without foreknowledge, irascible, of double mind and double body, in all respects resembling the one in the fable of Herodotus: down to the groin a young woman, but a serpent below, as Justin says.

26 2: This maiden is called 'Eden' and 'Israel.' These he says are the powers, roots, and springs of all things, from which the things that are came into being; and there was nothing else.

When the father saw that half woman Eden, since he was without foreknowledge, he came to a desire for her. Now this father, he says, is called Elohim. Eden was no less desirous for Elohim, and the desire brought them together in heart-felt love.

26 3: From such a union the father begot for himself from Eden twelve angels. Now the names of the paternal angels are these:

Michael, Amen, Baruch, Gabriel, Esaddaios...

26 4: And the names of the maternal angels are these: Babel, Achamothe, Naas, Bel, Belias, Satan, Sael, Adonaios, Kavithan, Pharamaaoth, Karkamenos, Lathen.

26 5: Of these twenty four angels the patriarchal assist the father and do everything according to his will, and the matriarchal their mother Eden. The company of all these angels together, he says, is the Paradise of which Moses says: 'God planted a paradise in Eden toward the east (Gen 2 8), that is, in front of Eden, that Eden might forever see the paradise, that is, the angels.'

26 6: The angels of this paradise are allegorically called trees, and the tree of life is the third of the patriarchal angels, Baruch; but the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2 9) is the third of maternal angels, Naas. For so he (Justin) wants to interpret the words of Moses, saying: Moses spoke them in veiled language because not all can comprehend the truth.

26 7: When the paradise had come into being out of the mutual good pleasure of Elohim and Eden, then the angels of Elohim

The Book Baruch 2

took of the finest earth - that is, not of the animal part of Eden, but from the human and civilized regions of the x earth above the groin - and made man. From the animal parts, he says, the beasts and other living creatures came into being.

26 8: They made man, then, as a symbol of their unity and love, and set ~~him~~ in him their powers, Eden the soul, and Elohim the Spirit. And he becomes, as it were, a seal and love-token and eternal symbol of the marriage of Eden and Elohim: the man Adam.

26 9: In the same way he says, Eve came into being, as Moses wrote, an image and symbol , a seal of eden to be preserved forever.

In the same way there also was set in Eve, the image, a soul from Eden and a spirit from Elohim, and commandments were given to them: Increase and multiply and inherit the earth (Gen 1 28), that is, Eden. For thus he will have it to be written.