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1918.

599TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, CENTRAL BUILDINGS,
WESTMINSTER, ON MONDAY, APRIL 15TH, 1918,
AT 4.30 P.M.

THE REV. H. J. R. MARSTON, M.A., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed.

The HON. SECRETARY announced the election as Associates of the Rev. Dr. M. G. Kyle and Edward P. Vining, Esq., LL.D.

The rules regulating the discussion following the papers were read; and in the absence of the Rev. Dr. MacCulloch the Chairman requested the Secretary to read the Canon's paper on "The Gnostic Conception of the Cross."

THE Gnostic CONCEPTION OF THE CROSS. By Canon J. A. MACCULLOCH, D.D., Rector of S. Saviour's, Bridge of Allan.

IN its original form Gnosticism may be described as an extra-Christian, and doubtless also a pre-Christian, religious syncretism, which aimed at enlightening men through esoteric means and ritual. Later, its prominent teachers laid hold of Christian doctrines, especially those relating to the Person of Christ, adapting these freely to their own views, and thus presenting a misleading likeness to Christianity. A preliminary sketch of their Christology is essential to our purpose.

I.

All material substance was regarded as evil. With this, some elements of the Divine world had become intermixed. In some men—Gnostics, elect, *πνευματικοί*, there is a spark of this Divine element. In most men there is only a gross material nature impossible of redemption and doomed to perish. Some Gnostics admitted a third element in man or a third class of men. This was the psychic element, and men who possessed it might rise or fall. These were ordinary Christians; unless there was also in them the Divine spark they never could be

Gnostics. The great purpose of redemption was the freeing of the Divine element from the gross matter with which it had been mingled, so that the Gnostic might be free from, and rise superior to, the material body. All bodily substance being evil, a true Incarnation was an impossibility in Gnostic belief. The Gnostic Christ was originally a pagan Saviour or Deliverer. When this original pagan Deliverer was identified with the Christ of the Church, the Gnostic evaded Incarnation in different ways. He made his Christ dualistic, possessing a true body with which the Divine Æon Christ was temporarily associated, usually from the moment of baptism until just before the Crucifixion. Or the solution was docetic, and that in two separate ways: (a) The body was not material but psychical or dispensational, so that it might appear visible, tangible, and capable of suffering, yet in a different manner from a true human body. It was specially formed in the higher region, and was born of the Virgin, though not of her substance. With it the Æon Christ was united. Or (b) the bodily form in which the Divine Christ appeared was purely phantasmal and had no material substance.

Similarly, since the Crucifixion, on which the Church based her atonement doctrine, was an historic fact, the Gnostics skilfully evaded the idea of suffering being attributed to a Divine Being by these means also. They also assumed that the Crucifixion was the result of the hostility of the Demiurge to Christ.

In the first of these views the bodily Jesus suffered, but His sufferings were a mere episode and had no atoning value; since the Æon Christ had forsaken Jesus. This was the view of Cerinthus, and of certain Ophite groups.

In the second view, that entertained by Valentinus, the psychic, dispensational body, after being deserted by the Æon Soter, suffered crucifixion, but in a non-human, non-bodily sense. This suffering was in no sense redemptive, but, as we shall see, a symbol of certain heavenly events.*

In the third view, the body being purely phantasmal, though it was extended on the Cross, could not really suffer. This was the theory of Simon Magus, of Marcion, to some extent, and, in a curious form, of Basilides, or rather of some of his followers, as reported by Irenæus. According to them, Jesus caused His appearance to be borne by Simon of Cyrene, who was therefore crucified for Him, Jesus Himself taking Simon's form

* Irenæus, *Adv. Hæreses* (ed. Massuet) i, 7, 1; iii, 16, 1.

and deriding His persecutors. "For being an incorporeal power and the Mind of the unborn Father, He transfigured Himself as He pleased." Hence it is unnecessary to confess Him Who was crucified, and he who does so is still a slave to the powers of the world.*

The system of Basilides himself, as described by Hippolytus, differs radically from this, and must be considered by itself. Jesus was purely human, with a real body, as well as a psychic and a pneumatic part, corresponding to the three grades of existence in Basilides' system. No Æon descended on Him, for ascent, not descent, is the law of the universe. But enlightenment passes from the highest to the lowest spheres, as naphtha is lit by a flame, and thus it reached Jesus. His sufferings were real, not apparent, but not on account of sin committed by Him. He suffered "as the child which seems not to have sinned would suffer."† The three grades of existence were now separated from each other by His death. Jesus was the first-fruits of this separation. His bodily nature was resolved into formlessness, while the higher elements were restored to their respective spheres at Christ's Ascension. This process is repeated in all spiritual men or Gnostics in their ascent to the Father. This view is nearer the Catholic atonement doctrine than that of other Gnostics, though differing from it still in essential points.‡

A true atonement doctrine was unnecessary to the Gnostic, really because of his peculiar views regarding matter and spirit, views reproduced in the popular Christian Science of to-day, which has been accepted so eagerly by people inexperienced in either Christian doctrine or Christian practice. Matter was evil; spirit was good—a spark of the Divine. Though entangled in matter, it could not be tainted with evil, but yet was alienated from the higher powers, an exile from its true sphere. All that was necessary for its recovery was the knowledge (*γνώσις*) of how freedom from matter was to be obtained, of how man could rise superior to it even in this life, and discard it finally at death. That knowledge, enlightenment, or illumination was the work of the Saviour, but not in any real sense because of His Crucifixion. The Gnostic redemption lay elsewhere: the Cross was a stumbling-block which, in allying itself with the

* Irenæus, *Adv. Haer.*, i, 24, 4.

† Clement, *Stromateis*, iv, 12.

‡ Hippolytus, *Refut. omn. haer.*, vii, 14.

Christian scheme, Gnosticism required to evade, as has just been seen. That knowledge was conveyed to the Gnostic by esoteric means, acquaintance with spiritual mysteries supposed to have been revealed secretly by Christ, or through a mystical experience. The Gnostic's superiority to matter was gained by sacraments, initiations, and other rites.

Enlightenment, or Gnosis, as the esoteric revelation of mysteries hid from ordinary men, is well seen in the Gnostic *Acts of Thomas*. In these *Acts* God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are called "hidden," and the apostle reveals them and their mysteries. Christ is the "hidden Rest" or the "hidden Light," and there is a "hidden mystery" of the oil used in initiation. How remote is all this from the New Testament idea of Christ as the Light enlightening all men!

The conception of enlightenment or of mysteries revealed by Christ secretly to the apostles, usually after the Resurrection, is extensively shown in the Coptic *Book of the Saviour* and similar works. The Gnostic view of the universe is detailed by Christ. He explains the meaning and purpose of mystic sacraments, which bring the soul into the light of lights; He also gives them the mysteries by which the ascending soul may pass through the gates of the spheres, the seals and master-words by which the Archons may be confounded.*

Further, Christ's revelation delivered men from the slavery of Fate—in practice the bondage to the power of the planetary Archons or World-rulers, including or additional to the Demiurge, or God of the world of matter. The escape was brought about by the knowledge of magic formulæ, charms, and sacraments imparted by the Saviour, as has just been seen. These were to be used by the soul on its ascent through the heavens of the Archons to the Pleroma after death.†

This Gnosis was impossible for men of the material type; only the Gnostic, the *πνευματικός*, was destined to it. Psychical men might or might not reach a certain salvation, but they could never obtain Gnosis with all the rich destiny which attended on it.

* See these works in K. Schmidt, *Kopt.-gnost. Schriften*, Leipzig, 1905, and in G. R. S. Mead, *Pistis Sophia, a Coptic Gnostic Gospel*, London, 1896.

† See W. Anz, *Zur Frage nach dem Ursprung des Gnostizismus*, in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, xv, 4, Leipzig, 1897.

II.

A truly suffering Saviour was not admissible, and the Cross was explained away, either as a symbol of events, or rather personages, in the higher world, whose actions were the counterpart of man's redemption on earth—redemption in both cases being spiritual enlightenment. The Cross, transferred to the heavenly sphere, was then a person who enlightened. In this world man was cast headlong into matter: the Crucifixion reversed this position, since the head was upward. Hence it could be used as a symbol of the process of enlightenment, and the Gnostic in accepting the enlightenment could be said to have ascended the Cross and to have reverted to his true position—upright, and the Left no longer usurping the place of the Right; Left symbolizing matter, the Demiurge, all that was earthy; Right the spirit, the heavenly—symbolism probably borrowed from Pythagoreanism. This is curiously illustrated by a passage in the *Travels of Peter*, who was crucified head downwards. Peter says that the first man sank his being in the earth, and even in birth we are all brought forth as if poured into the earth, so that Right is Left and Left is Right. This is also represented by his position on the Cross, whereas Christ, by His position, made these present things into the Left, and what appeared to be the Left into the Right, into eternal things, and Below into Above. "In exaltation of the Right, He has changed all the signs into their proper nature, considering as good those thought not good, and those which men thought malign as most benign. Whence in a mystery the Lord hath said, 'If ye make not the Right like as the Left, and the Left like as the Right, Above as Below, Before as Behind, ye shall not know God's Kingdom.' This saying have I made manifest in myself, my brothers; this is the way in which your eyes behold me hanging. It is the way of the first man. . . . The Word is symbolized by that straight stem on which I hang The cross-piece is thought to figure forth that Human Nature which suffered the fault of change in the first man, but by the help of God and man then received again its real mind. Right in the centre joining twain in one is set the nail of discipline, conversion, and repentance."

Documents and passages such as this, either originating in Gnostic circles or full of Gnostic ideas, probably circulated among the orthodox also, with these ideas so far adapted to Catholic thought. Something of that seems apparent in the work

just cited, though the Gnostic phraseology and conceptions are still evident. It was always possible to interpret such phraseology from a Catholic point of view, but as used by Gnostics it was purely symbolic of enlightenment. The Gnostics, in fact, exhausted language in praise of the Cross, while at the same time robbing it of all its value.

III.

The Crucifixion as a symbol of heavenly events is best considered in the light of the teaching of Valentinus and of his school. But first we may premise that, as the heavenly Æon, who unites artificially with the human Jesus, in most of the Gnostic systems, is rooted in the mythology of the pre-Christian Gnosticism and the religions from which it was formed, so Christ and the Cross of the Christian scheme are further subjected to a mythologizing process both in heaven and on earth.

In the Valentinian system the Æon Sophia, as a result of her "fall," *i.e.*, her passionate desire for union with or understanding of the unsearchable God, or in her desire to emulate His power of self-generation, was in danger of absorption into His absolute essence, when the Æon Horos, who prevents such an absorption, induced her to lay aside her design (personified as a female, Ἐνθύμησις), as well as her "passion." By him she was purified and established, and her Enthumesis with its passion—an amorphous yet spiritual being—was led outside the Pleroma. This is a primary fall and redemption in the heavenly sphere.* Horos is also called Stauros (Cross), Lytrotēs (Redeemer), etc., and was produced by the Father by means of the Æon Monogenēs, who now produces Christ and Holy Spirit. Christ instructed all the Æons with respect to the Father and Himself, and in pity for Enthumesis (also called Achamoth or the Lower Sophia) outside the Pleroma, extended Himself through and beyond Stauros, the boundary of the Pleroma, and imparted form to her. Then He withdrew, leaving "the odour of immortality" with

* Irenæus, i, 1, 2. Cf. Mansel, *Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries*. p. 182: "The emanation of the relative from the Absolute, of the many from the One, though it be but the manifestation of God Himself, under various attributes, is regarded in some sort as a Fall, typical of the lower Fall which gave existence to the material world; and the recognition of the real unity and indifference of these various manifestations, as in some sort a redemption, typical of the redemption of the lower world."

her. She strained herself to discover him, but Horos prevented her further progress by uttering the mystic name Iao. Now began her passion, from which she was saved by another Æon, Christ or Soter, sent forth to her aid by the Higher Christ. This Lower Christ afterwards descended on the earthly, phantasmal Christ at His baptism, forsaking Him before the Crucifixion. The phantasmal Christ suffered in order that Achamoth might exhibit through Him a type of the Christ above, viz., of Him who isolated himself from the Pleroma by extending Himself through Stauros for her aid. "For," says Irenæus, "they say that all these transactions were counterparts of what took place above."*

In this sentence we obtain a clue to the problem of these three personalities, Stauros or Horos, the Higher Christ, and the Lower Christ. If Horos, according to one reading, is the product of all the Æons, so also is the Lower Christ. All three perform a work of redemption, while their functions and various names have much in common. In the same way the mystic Cross, in a fragment of the *Acts of John*, has many names. Thus it can hardly be doubted that the Æon Stauros is also the two-fold Christ, while in the system as reported by Epiphanius there is but one Saviour, called Horos, Soter, and Christ.† The three beings are reduplications of one redeeming spirit, just as those redeemed in the heavenly sphere—the upper and the lower Sophia, are duplicates. Having redeemed them, Stauros or Christ proceeds to redeem men on earth. Horos and Stauros, in Valentinian thought, symbolized two important elements in the redemptive process, Horos that of separating, i.e., separating all admixture from each form of existence; Stauros that of supporting, i.e., supporting every existence thus purified. But the two functions were in fact interchangeable. Horos as Stauros supported Sophia; as Horos he separated her Enthumesis from her. Similarly Christ, while supporting and giving form to Achamoth, separated her passion from her.

Thus in the Valentinian system, though the idea of emanation as in some sense a "fall," followed by some kind of enlightenment, may have been a non-Christian philosophic idea, the terminology applied to it is derived from the Cross. On the other hand, redemption as mere Gnosis or enlightenment takes the place of the Christian redemption. The Cross had to be accepted, but it became a symbol of, and gave a name to, a Divine Person, who,

* Irenæus, i. 1, ff.

† Epiphanius, *Contra Hæreses*, xxxi. 4.

in heaven, enlightens Divine Æons who have fallen. Theodotus says: "The Cross is a symbol of the boundary (Horos) of the Pleroma, for it separates the faithful from the unfaithful, as Horos separated the Cosmos from the Pleroma."* The Cross to the Gnostic symbolized Divine events, and was a badge of his own enlightenment. Redemption in Heaven and on earth was enlightenment and nothing more. The Crucifixion was thus a mystery expressing the great enlightenment, as is seen from a formula of benediction in the *Acts of Philip*—"The mystery of Him Who hung in the midst of heaven and earth be with you." This may at once refer to Christ as crucified or to Horos-Stauros as one standing between the Pleroma and the lower world. So, too, in Gnostic baptismal and anointing formulæ, both being acts of initiation producing enlightenment, there is a reference to the enlightening mystery of the Cross, *i.e.*, to Christ the Enlightener, of whom the Cross is the mystery form—"Holy oil which was given us for unction, and hidden mystery of the Cross which is seen through it." †

IV.

The Valentinians made the Redeemer Himself Stauros (Cross), but there is evidence that most of the Gnostics mystically identified Christ with the Cross, whether the actual Cross or a phantasmal, mystic one, which was now Himself, now a kind of double of Him.

This is illustrated from some curious passages in the Apocryphal Acts and other documents, which, though probably circulating among Catholics, bear clear traces of Gnostic ideas. First may be cited a passage from the *Encomiasta Anonyma* on S. Andrew: "Rejoicing I come to thee, O life-giving Cross, which I know as my own. I recognize thy mystery, because thou art planted in the world to establish the unstable. Thy head stretches to heaven to point out the heavenly Logos. . . . Thy middle points are as hands stretched out to right, and left to put to flight the opposing power of the evil one and to gather the dispersed together. Thy lower part is fastened in the earth . . . that those lying under the earth, and held fast there, may be brought up and united to the heavenly. . . . Thou who led back the worthy to God through knowledge (*ἐπίγνωσις*), and

* *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, § 42.

† W. Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of Apostles*, ii, 258.

called back those in sins through repentance, disdain not henceforth to receive me also." * Souls are here to be restored to the Pleroma by the Cross, not by an atonement but by knowledge, and the Cross is figured as of an immense size.

In the Fragment of the *Acts of John*, Christ, the heavenly Æon who left the body on the Cross, appears to John in a cave on the Mount of Olives, and shows him a cross of light about which is a great multitude, with one form and likeness, and on it another multitude not having one form, and above the Cross the Lord Himself, not having any shape but only a voice. Christ says: "This Cross is sometimes called the Word by Me for your sakes, sometimes Jesus, or Christ, or Door, or Way, or Bread, or Seed, or Resurrection, or Son, or Father, or Spirit, or Life, or Truth, or Faith, or Grace. It is called these as towards men, but in itself it is the marking off of all things, the firm necessity of those things that were fixed and were unsettled. . . . This is not the Cross of wood which thou wilt see when thou hast descended, nor am I He that is upon the Cross. . . . The multitude of one aspect about the Cross is the lower Nature. Those on the Cross, if they have not one form, it is because not yet hath every limb of Him that came down been gathered together. But when the upper nature shall be taken up, and the race which is repairing to Me in obedience to My voice, then that which as yet hears Me not shall become as thou art . . . above them of the world, even as I am now. . . . Nothing of the things which they will say of Me have I suffered." †

Here the actual Cross is robbed of all significance and is a mere symbol of a mystery cross—Stauros or Horos separating and establishing. The Cross is one with the Redeemer Who is only a Voice. The symbolism of the arms and head of the Cross is much the same as in the *Encomiasta Anonyma*. On either side are the forces of evil whom it puts to flight. The head in one case reaches to heaven and points out the Logos; in the other case the Logos is above it. The interpretation of the multitude on the Cross as meaning that not yet has every limb of Him Who came down been gathered together, is suggestive. Christ and this multitude (the Πνευματικοί) are one, just as Christ and Cross are one. The Spiritual, the Gnostics, are really parts of the

* R. A. Lipsius, *Die Apokryphen Apostelgeschichten*, Braunschweig, 1883-90, i, 596.

† *Acta Johannis*, ed. Zahn, Erlangen, 1880, p. 221.

Divine, lost in the world, but now to be restored. Christ is not complete till all are brought together and established in Him, the Stauros, Who purifies and sustains. According to the *Acts of Thomas*, Christ overthrows the Demiurge and collects all of one nature with Himself into one place.

The same thought underlies the formula used by the ascending soul to the Archons in the Gospel of Philip: "I have gathered together my limbs which were scattered abroad."* Probably the soul identifies itself with Christ Who gathers together His elect. But in both cases there would appear to be some influence from the Egyptian myth of the gathering together of the scattered members of Osiris, and to the mystery in which his various aspects as dead, dismembered, and reconstructed was shown.† It is well known that in Egyptian theology the soul of the dead is constantly identified with Osiris. More and more do we find how great was the influence of Egyptian religion and myth upon both Gnosticism and popular Christianity in the early centuries.

In the *Gospel of Peter* the resurrection is seen by the soldiers in the following manner: "They see coming forth from the tomb three men, and the two supporting the One, and a Cross following them. And of the two the head reached to heaven, but the head of Him that was led by them overpassed the heavens. And they heard a voice from the heavens, saying, 'Hast Thou preached to them that slept?' And an answer was heard from the Cross, 'Yea.'" Here the Cross is a duplicate of Christ, and answers for Him respecting the mission in Hades.‡

A similar reduplication occurs in the *Acts of Philip*. Philip caused the earth to swallow his pagan opponents. As they descend to Hades they confess the Crucified, and say, "Behold the Cross illumines us," and pray Christ to manifest Himself to them. Christ appears and upbraids Philip; then with His hand He marks a Cross in the air, coming down from above, even

* Epiphanius, xxvi, 13.

† See J. G. Frazer, *Attis, Adonis, and Osiris*, p. 259.

‡ The great size of Christ corresponds to that of the Cross reaching to heaven in the *Encomiasta Anonyma* (cited above) and in the *Acts of Philip* (see below). In the *Wanderings of the Apostles*, Christ is said to have appeared in various forms, sometimes very large, so that at times his head reached even to heaven. Cf. *Shepherd of Hermas, Simil.*, ix, 6, 1, Christ is so tall that He surpassed the tower in height. In the *Passio Perpetuae*, § 10, Christ is a Man of marvellous greatness, so as to overpass the top of the amphitheatre. In the opinion of the Rabbins, Adam before the Fall had a vast stature.

to the abyss, full of light and in the form of a ladder. On this luminous Cross the multitude ascend from the abyss.*

Another reduplication is found in the *Acts of Matthew*. When his coffin was cast into the sea by the pagan king, the Bishop Plato saw Matthew standing on the waters, with two men in shining garments, and in front of them a beautiful boy (viz., Christ in that form). Out of the sea rose a Cross, at the end of which was the coffin with the body of Matthew, which the boy carried to the palace.†

The oneness of Christ and the Cross is still more evident in the account of the translation of the body of S. Philip, in which a shining Cross is seen beside his glorified form. Some Athenian philosophers carried it to Hierapolis, guided by Jesus in the form of Philip. They found the city gate closed, but one of them appealed to the Cross to open it. This was done, and at the same time the city was lit with light from the Cross. The people rushed out, and heard a voice bidding them look to the right, where they see a Cross reaching to heaven, and bidding them come to it and be enlightened. A shining form, that of Philip, was seen beside the Cross, which was now taken upwards. As it went, it cried to Philip, "Behold the place of thy rest, until I come in the glory of My Father and awake thee."‡ Again, in the *Acts of Xantippe* she sees on the wall a Cross of light through which appears a beautiful youth, and under Him a path of light on which He walks. Then he takes the form of S. Paul and raises her up.§ This change of form (and also of stature) on the part of Christ, or sometimes of His Apostles, is one of the most curious episodes of Christian apocryphal literature. It originated in the Docetic views of the Gnostics: "For since He was an incorporeal form, He transformed Himself just as He pleased," according to the Basilideans.|| As the heavenly Æon Christ assumed a different form in each of the heavens through which He descended to earth, it is not surprising that on earth similar transformations take place. This also throws light upon this conception which we are now studying, that the Cross is a double

* *Acta Apost. Apoc.*, ed. Lipsius and Bonnet, ii, 2, 64.

† *The Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, and Apocalypses*, Edinburgh, 1870, p. 385.

‡ *Texts and Studies*, Cambridge, ii, 3, 158 f.

§ *Ibid.*, ii, 3, 68.

|| *Irenæus*, i, 19, 2.

of Christ. The luminosity of the Cross is, of course, a symbol of the enlightenment which Christ gives to the Gnostic.

Such ideas as these may also have been current in popular Christianity, where also arose a great reverence for the Cross as a holy mystery. In a Coptic fragment the star in the east appears in the form of a wheel, its figure being like a Cross sending forth flashes of light. Letters are written upon the Cross: "This is Jesus, the Son of God." * In another fragment, part of a sermon on the festival of the Cross, ascribed to S. Cyril, the Cross is said to have been buried in the tomb of Christ after His resurrection. Rufus, son of Cleopas, was buried near by, and his father mourned, saying that Jesus could have raised him up had He been alive. At that moment the Cross comes forth from the tomb, rests on the grave of Rufus, who is restored to life, while Cleopas is cured of disease in the feet.† The Gnostic view of Christ and His Cross as doubles may have influenced Christian art, in which, when the Trinity was to be represented, a Cross without the crucified Saviour is placed beside the Father and the Holy Spirit. "In Christian iconography Christ is actually present under the form and semblance of the Cross."‡

In connexion with the passage cited from the *Gospel of Peter*, in which Christ after His resurrection is followed by the Cross, which speaks in His name, it is worth noting that in one Latin version of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, at the request of the saints Christ sets up His Cross in Hades, and leaves it there as a sign of victory and that the lords of Hades might not retain any whom he had absolved. Again, in the curious *Narrative of Joseph of Arimathea*, the penitent robber goes to Paradise with the undefiled Cross shining like lightning. Later, he reappeared on earth with Christ, and was "like a king in great power, having on him the Cross." In the Greek *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the robber was seen at the gate of Paradise with the Cross on his shoulder; and the flaming sword, seeing the Cross, opened the gate to him. Here, the Cross, if not a double of Christ, is invested with all His power.

* *Texts and Studies*, Cambridge, "Coptic Apocryphal Gospels," iv, 2, 165.

† *Ibid.*, iv, 2, 185.

‡ A. N. Didron, *Christian Iconography*, 1886, i, 369.

V.

Another curious doctrine of the Cross connected it with the Tree of Life, or with an oil-tree in Paradise, and so with the use of oil in baptismal and initiatory ceremonies. This was not exclusively Gnostic, but it fitted in with Gnostic ideas. The source of the doctrine of the Oil Tree must be sought in Jewish tradition, which apparently still regarded the Paradise from which Adam was exiled as lying on the confines of the world, or as existing in one of the heavens, perhaps in the belief that men had been ejected from a Paradise in heaven to this earth. In that Paradise was still the Tree of Life. In the Slavonic version of the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, the Tree grows in Paradise in the third heaven, and God rests on it when He comes there. Four streams—of honey, milk, wine, and oil—flow from its roots. There is also an olive-tree, always distilling oil.* In the Ethiopian version of the *Book of Enoch*, the marvels of the tree are fully described, and its fruit is to be given to the righteous after the judgment.† These are Jewish notions, as we see from 4 Ezra viii, 52: "For unto you is Paradise opened and the Tree of Life is planted"; but they also occur in the *Apocalypse*, where the Tree of Life grows in the Paradise of God, its leaves for the healing of the nations, itself a reward for the righteous.‡ Christian apocryphal literature followed this tradition, and the presence of this glorious tree in Paradise is constantly asserted in the visions of the Other-world.§ A curious tradition is that found in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, where Adam bids Seth go to the gates of Paradise, and beg oil from the Tree of Mercy to anoint him in his sickness. But this cannot be given him till 5500 years have passed, when Christ will anoint both Adam and all believers with this oil of His mercy, and Adam will be led into Paradise to the tree.|| There is an obvious reference here to the use of oil in baptism, and to the current tradition of a mystic connection of the oil with the Tree. In the *Clementine Recognitions*, the Son of God is said to be called Christ because he was anointed with oil from the Tree of Life, and He now anoints with similar

* Ed. R. H. Charles and W. R. Morfill, Oxford, 1896, viii, 1 f.

† Ed. R. H. Charles, Oxford, 1893, ch. 24, 25.

‡ *Apoc.*, ii, 7, xxii, 2, 14, 19.

§ See my *Early Christian Visions of the Other World*, *passim*.

|| A similar tradition is found in the *Apocalypse of Moses*, and in *Vita Adae*, 36 f.

oil all who inherit His kingdom. Aaron and others were anointed with chrism after the pattern of the spiritual ointment; if then the temporal grace had such efficacy, how potent was that ointment extracted by God from a branch of the Tree of Life! With this eternal ointment made by God Adam was anointed.*

These are pseudo-mystical ideas, but in Gnostic circles the oil used at initiations was connected with the Tree of Life. In the formula of the Ophites, the candidate said, "I have been anointed with white ointment from the Tree of Life."† But now the Gnostics connected the Tree of Paradise distilling oil with the Cross, the duplicate of Christ. This is seen from the prayers at the anointing in the *Acts of Thomas*: "Beautiful fruit, more beautiful than all other fruit; . . . most compassionate, Power of the Tree with which men clothe themselves and thus conquer their foes. Thou Who crownest the victors and offerest them the symbol of joy! Thou Who hast proclaimed to men their salvation! . . . O Jesu, may its conquering force dwell in this oil, as also dwelt its force on the Tree related to it."‡ Tree and Cross are mystically related, and the oil drops from both. The strength of Christ is invited to descend on the oil as He or it dwelt on the Cross. This is more clearly seen in another formula in the same *Acts*: "Holy oil, given us for unction; hidden mystery in which the Cross is revealed to us."§ Some Gnostics regard the anointing at initiation as itself the redemption, the oil being a type of that sweet odour which is above all things.|| There may also be some reference to these ideas in the citations of Hippolytus from the account of the initiation of the Naassenes: "In the third gate we celebrate the mystery, and are anointed with the unspeakable chrism."¶ Just before this, he has referred to enlightenment as equivalent to a blind man's receiving sight, and seeing a Paradise with every kind of tree, and water coming from them, while from the same water the olive draws its oil, the vine the wine, and so forth.

The oil of initiation, with all its enlightening and supporting power, comes from the Tree of Paradise, which is also the Tree

* *Clem. Recog.*, i, 45, 47.

† Origen, *Contra Celsum*, vi, 27. In the system of the Gnostic Justin the angels created by Elohim and Edem are allegorically the Trees of the Garden of Eden, Hippolytus, *Refut. omn. Haer.*, v, 21.

‡ *Acts of Thomas*, § 157.

§ *Ibid.*, § 121.

|| Irenæus, i, 21, 3, 4.

¶ Hippolytus, *Refut. omn. Haer.*, v, 4.

of the Cross ; in other words, Christ Himself, Who is called the Tree of Life in the *Acts of Matthew*.^{*} Its powers may be compared with those of the immortal food of the Zoroastrian heaven, the holy oil of the blessed, as described in the *Avesta*.[†] Celsus, perhaps quite properly, reported these Gnostic views when he said that the Gnostic writings refer to a Tree of Life and a resurrection of the flesh by means of the Tree, "because I imagine their Teacher was nailed to a Cross," although Origen says that he mistook the symbolical expression : "through the Tree came death and through the Tree comes life, because death was in Adam and life in Christ."[‡] Celsus was perhaps quoting from some Gnostic document in which Christ was identified with the Tree of the Cross, the Tree of Life. Orthodox writers could indeed use the same ideas, though doubtless in a less realistic manner. Hippolytus, *e.g.*, says that the Tree of Life is Christ, because He has brought forth fruits of knowledge and virtue like a tree, whereof they that eat receive eternal life, and shall enjoy the Tree of Life in Paradise with Adam and all the righteous.[§] Gnostic and Catholic spoke much the same language, though their purpose was different.

The symbolic identity of the Tree of Life, the Cross, and Christ, held by the Gnostics, was connected with a legend which was widespread in the Middle Ages. Seth planted on Adam's grave a branch of the Tree of Life. A beam of this tree was thrown by Solomon into the Pool of Bethesda, which now had healing powers. At the time of the Passion this beam floated up and from it the Cross was made, the relics of it afterwards performing innumerable miracles. This story is given in full detail in the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, so popular in the Middle Ages.

VI.

Out of their extreme veneration for the Cross, the Gnostics shared with the Catholics the custom of using the sign of the

* A. S. Lewis, *Mythological Acts of the Apostles*, p. 105.

† L. H. Mills, *Avesta Eschatology*, p. 30.

‡ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, vi, 34.

§ Hippolytus, *Comm. on Proverbs*, in Mai, *Bib. nova Patrum*, vii, 2, 71. Cf. S. Ignatius, *ad Ephes.* 17, "For this cause did the Lord suffer the ointment to be poured on His head, that He might breathe the breath of immortality into His Church."

Cross, whether in particular rites such as baptism and anointing, or in daily life as a protective sign, and it is not impossible that they may have given a greater impulse to its use as a mere magical charm among orthodox Christians. Tertullian, from the orthodox side, already refers early in the third century to the common use of the sign as efficacious against demons and as a general protective power: "At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, in all the ordinary acts of daily life, we trace the sign upon the forehead." * In the Apocryphal Acts there are copious references to its use, which are in most cases witnesses to the Gnostic custom. Demons who saw the invisible "seal" made in baptism on the forehead were afraid and would not approach. In the Syriac *History of John*, the apostle says: "I will sign for you with His Cross, the sign of life, and I will place a seal on your foreheads. that when the devil sees that they are the asylum of the Lord, he may flee." † When demons are near, the apostles and others "seal their faces," and they flee away.‡ Or demoniacs are signed with the Cross to expel the invading demons.§ The sign was also used before any important undertaking, especially in the performance of a miracle. S. John made the sign over a dead boy.|| S. Thomas signs the young man who had killed his mistress, before sending him to raise her again.¶ Thecla made the sign before ascending the pile of faggots on which she was to suffer martyrdom.** S. John sealed himself all over his body before his death; this was done also by S. Matthew on rising at dawn, and by a Christian maiden of Corinth, rescued by a pious youth from a house of ill-fame whence she had been consigned by a pagan judge—"signing herself entirely with the mystery of the Cross." †† Gates flew open when marked with the sacred sign, or when the Cross itself was appealed to.‡‡ Storms

* Tertullian, *De Corona Militis*, 3, cf. *Adv. Marcionem*, iii, 18.

† W. Wright, *Apocr. Acts of the Apostles*, 1871, ii, 37.

‡ Lipsius and Bonnet, *op. cit.*, ii, 1, 107.

§ R. A. Lipsius, *Die Apokryphen Apostelgeschichten*, i, 619; Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

|| Lewis, p. 44.

¶ *The Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, and Apocalypses*, Edinburgh, 1870, p. 418.

** Lipsius and Bonnet, i, 250.

†† *Ibid.*, ii, 1, 215, Lewis, p. 171; *Apocr. Gospels, Acts, etc.*, p. 377; Palladius, *Hist. Laus.*, cxlix.

‡‡ Lipsius, *op. cit.*, i, 583; *Acts of Philip in Texts and Studies*, ii, 3, § 2.

were calmed by the same sign, and even a dog bound by a chain had its bonds loosed when the sign was made over it.*

In the *Gospel of Nicodemus* Christ signs Adam and all the others rescued from Hades with a Cross on their foreheads, and the two sons of Simeon, who narrate the story of Christ's descent, made the sign on their faces (or, in the Latin version, on their tongues) before beginning.

The use of crosses of wood is also referred to in these Apocryphal writings. In the *History of John* we learn how he wore such a Cross round his neck. Occasionally he brought it out and kissed it, or with it he signed the congregation, saying: "I have made this Cross a bulwark for you, that Satan may not come and assemble his demons, and make sleep enter into you or heedlessness of mind." This Cross was found on his body at death, and from it fiery tongues broke forth, when the pagan onlookers would touch it, and burned their hands.† He had also a Cross which he planted in the ground before him at Ephesus.‡ He also set up a Cross and lit the lamps with it.§ The *Acts of Xantippe* tell how she made a Cross of wood, and in the same *Acts* the servants of the man to whom Polyxena was entrusted went forth to meet the hosts who came against them, saying: "Let us go forth to meet them, raising the sign of the Cross." "Then raising the precious Cross they went forth, about thirty men, and slew five thousand." The Coptic *Legend of Bartholomew* describes how the apostle took three vines, and fastened them in the form of a Cross to a tree, when they gave forth valuable fruit.

Orthodox Christians had to defend themselves against the pagan taunt that they worshipped the Cross as an idol. Minucius Felix expressly denies such a worship. There is little doubt, however, that something very like such a worship, and certainly invocation of the Cross, was practised by Gnostics, as appears from passages in the Apocryphal Acts. S. Matthew is said by his persecutors to have called upon Christ and to have invoked His Cross, and so to have put out the fires kindled for his martyrdom. While this might be a pagan misunderstanding, other passages show that such an invocation was a usual practice

* Lipsius and Bonnet, ii, 2, 92; Lewis, p. 21.

† Lipsius, *op. cit.*, i, 437.

‡ Lewis, p. 157.

§ Wright, ii, 32.

with Gnostics. In the *Acts and Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Andrew*, the apostle cries before being fastened to the Cross: "Rejoice, O Cross, which has been consecrated by the body of Christ and adorned by His limbs as if with pearls. Assuredly before my Lord went up on thee, thou hadst much earthly fear; but now, invested with heavenly longing, thou art set up according to my prayer. . . . O good Cross, which hast received comeliness and beauty from the limbs of the Lord; O much longed for, and earnestly desired, and fervently sought after, and already prepared beforehand for my soul longing for thee, take me away from men, and restore me to my Master, in order that through thee He may accept me, who through thee hast redeemed me."*

In this passage the Cross upon which the apostle is to suffer appears to be identified with that of Christ Himself. If it might be susceptible of an orthodox interpretation, or if it has been toned down to more orthodox methods of thought, it is obviously of Gnostic origin. A more or less parallel passage in the *Encomiasta Anonyma* of the same apostle—a document already cited in another connexion, shows the Gnostic method of invocation and the Gnostic conception of the Cross quite distinctly: "O Cross, ingenious implement of the salvation wrought for men by the Highest! O Cross, unvanquished trophy of the victory of Christ over the enemy! O Cross, life-bringing wood, planted in the earth, but the fruit treasured up in heaven! O venerable Cross, sweet object, sweet name, O adorable Cross, which has carried the Master, the true vine, as a cluster, and hast borne the robber as fruit, faith blossoming through confession. Thou who led back the worthy to God through knowledge (*ἐπίγνωσις*), and called back those in sins through repentance, disdain not henceforth to receive me also! But how long do I loiter saying these things and delay to let myself be fastened to the Cross, that I may be made living through it and discharge gloriously the death debt through it! Therefore, come, ministers of my joy and servants of the proconsul, fulfil the will of both, and bind the lamb to the tree, bringing the Form [*i.e.*, the flesh] to the Demiurge, and the soul to the Giver."†

The Gnostic conceptions of the Cross as a double of Christ, of salvation as knowledge, and of matter and spirit, as well as

* *Apocr. Gospels, Acts, and Revelations*, p. 341 f.

† Lipsius, *op. cit.*, i, 596.

the symbolic glorification of the Cross, are all to be found in this remarkable passage.

Among the orthodox the use of the sign of the Cross was general at a comparatively early period, both in public ritual—Baptism, Confirmation, etc.—as well as in private custom, covering the whole field of human life and action.* The sign was believed to be an effective remedy against demons and diseases, and many phrases, whether used literally or metaphorically, show a growing reverence for the Cross. It was a “trophy against demons,” “a healer of diseases,” “a purifier of leprosies,” “a victory over the devil,” “a destroyer of altars,” “a demolisher of temples.” The sacred symbol was seen everywhere in nature and in art—in the human face, in a ship with sails, in a hammer; and it was discovered in certain passages of the Old Testament through the method of allegorical interpretation.† S. Ignatius speaks curiously of Christians as stones prepared by the Father for His temple, drawn up on high by the Cross of Christ as by an engine, the Holy Ghost being the rope to which they are attached.‡ How soon actual crosses began to be used is uncertain, but Cassian, towards the end of the fourth century, ridicules certain monks who carried wooden crosses around their necks, as a literal “taking up the Cross and following Christ.”§ A portable Cross, found in a Christian tomb at Rome, bears the inscription, “The Cross is life to me; death, O enemy, to thee.” More and more, however, the Cross tended to be regarded in a superstitious way, and many miracles were attributed to the use of the sign of the Cross by saints. This increasing superstitious veneration of the Cross was no doubt natural where the spiritual values of Christianity were but dimly understood, but there can hardly be any doubt that here both Gnostic belief and practice exercised a strong influence upon popular Christianity. The popularity of the Apocryphal Acts, in which this veneration is so marked, among Christian readers, suggests one means by which this influence might be exerted.

* Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, xiii, 36.

† Cf. *Ep. of Barnabas*, 8, 9, 12; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 97; *Apology*, i, 55.

‡ Ignatius, *Ad Ephes.*, 9.

§ Cassian, *Collat.*, viii, 3.

VII.

To conclude. Unexpected as the Gnostic reverence for the Cross may be, because of their idea that Jesus Christ was in no sense a real human being, and that He could not possibly suffer, the explanation of it is found in the fact of its identification with Christ. Metaphorical though this might be, it easily passed over into a real identification. It is found again in the fact that the Cross symbolized the "redemption" of heavenly beings in a higher sphere by the heavenly *Stauros* or Saviour. They were separated from the state into which they had fallen. Hence the Cross symbolized a cosmic process of redemption, a restoration of all to their proper spheres, begun in the highest regions, reproduced on earth, and consummated once more in the highest when all the spiritual were restored to the *Pleroma*. It is found also in the fact that the Cross was made a symbol of that esoteric enlightenment or *Gnosis*, so dear to the Gnostics, and in which their conception of redemption is to be looked for. Stretched on the Cross, the human Jesus, deserted by the heavenly *Æon*, or the phantasmal Christ, symbolized once more by his upright position the ascent to the *Pleroma*, and by His outstretched arms the restoration of things to their proper states—Left to Right, Right to Left. Historical fact and reality, which at first sight might appear the veriest stumbling-block to the Gnostic, was thus evaded through symbolism, and a whole new series of values was given to what, for the Christian, possessed values of a quite different kind. The Cross of Christ was made of none effect in the Christian sense, by the Gnostics, but they found in a fact which they could not evade new effects which suited their own outlook upon the universe, once that fact was robbed of all its reality. In view of modern tendencies of the same kind, we learn from this the need of a constant appeal to the historic facts of our faith, as facts, as well as to the eternal realities which lie behind them.

DISCUSSION.

Prof. H. LANGHORNE ORCHARD, M.A., B.Sc., moved a vote of thanks to the author for an able and scholarly Paper. He said:—

In his opening sentence the author speaks of Gnosticism as extra-Christian and pre-Christian. He might have added that it is also anti-Christian. It was not for nothing that St. Paul warned Timothy

against the "oppositions of false-named *Gnosis*." It was not for nothing that St. John wrote that the spirit which denies that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" is not of God, but is the spirit of *Anti-Christ*.

Although not devoid of beauty, and possessing a certain allure-ment, Gnosticism is one of the most poisonous heresies that has attacked the life of Christianity. Affirming that all Matter is evil; that Redemption, or Freedom, is freedom from the Body; that God has not been "manifest in the flesh"; that Christ has never suffered for us and borne our sins in His Own body on the tree; this subtle heresy is rooted in threefold error—error philosophical and moral. There are misconceptions regarding *God*, regarding *Sin*, regarding *Matter*. It is taught that God did not create all things, that man's body was not created and given to him by God, but by the Demiurge, an enemy of God; that a Divine Being cannot suffer. Since inseparably connected with matter, and therefore with the body, Sin was regarded rather as a misfortune than as a spiritual offence and disobedience to God. Matter, being an evil, sinful thing, was supposed to be endowed with free-will, since Sin consists in disobedience to some command of God, and disobedience postulates free-will.

In the Gnostic conception of the Cross, the mental process appears to have consisted in erecting a suggestive emblem into a representative symbol, and then identifying this imaginary representation with the real Person. The Cross of Christ was an emblem suggestive of Him, lifted up between heaven and earth as Mediator between God, the Holy, and man, the sinful; as made a curse for us because made sin for us, since "cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." Then, afterwards, the Cross was viewed as representing Him, not in this aspect only, but completely and altogether, in every one of His offices. Finally, it came to be identified with Him, and received the honour and praise due to Him Who was slain, and redeemed us to God by His Blood. We shall agree with the author that "we learn from this the need of a constant appeal to the historic facts of our faith, as facts," and to bow all undisciplined imaginations before the Word of God.

Mr. M. L. ROUSE, B.A., B.L., in seconding the vote of thanks, said: I would pay tribute to the intense labour of research and analysis

that it must have cost to produce a full and clear handling of so recondite a subject. The lecturer is probably right in his inference that the Gnostic idea of Christ's gathering His limbs together on the Cross is derived from the Egyptian myth of Osiris ; and, in keeping with the Egyptian element in Gnosticism, I have seen at the British Museum a Gnostic gem consisting of Christ's haloed face carved on the back of a beetle. As the Egyptian beetle rolls together the ball of earth in which it has laid its egg, so, it was supposed, had a beetle once rolled together the ball of the sun ; and hence Egyptian kings called themselves Sun-Beetles—Aa-khepru-Ra, Men-kheper-Ra, and the like : Christ was put on the same level by these dreamers.

The CHAIRMAN, in closing the discussion, said that, while fully agreeing with the proposal to thank the lecturer very cordially for his research and labour, he doubted how far it was worth while to go so fully into what he might call the pathology of Christianity. Gnosticism was a system so wholly void of reason, method, and aim, that it defied real analysis, and led us only farther and farther into the mire and the dark.

Was such a farrago of capricious and arbitrary notions really worth serious and prolonged study? The Cross was beyond all dispute the core and centre of vital Christianity. It was more than an emblem : it was a symbol of the last realities of the Gospel. The Gnostic vagaries about the Cross were merely idle and irrelevant fancies, without power or purpose. It was remarkable that St. Paul, the great exponent of the Cross, did not even mention the Cross or crucifixion in the greatest of all his epistles—that to the Romans.

The resolution was cordially carried.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION.

Rev. D. M. MCINTYRE, of Glasgow, wrote :—

The Gnostic identification of the Cross with Christ may be due to the fact that from a very early period a cross (rectangular, usually, with equal arms), representing a star, was the symbol of Deity. According to Professor Sayce, the cross appears in Ancient Chaldea, on cylinders of the Kassite dynasty, evidently the ideogram for divinity. And Sir Arthur Evans writes with reference to a small marble cross which he found in a central place in the shrine of the Cretan goddess-mother : " It must be borne in mind that the equal-

limbed Eastern cross retains the symbolic form of the primitive star sign, as we see it attached to the service of the Minoan divinities."

This identification throws light on many passages of Scripture. Balaam, the prophet from Mesopotamia, for example, speaks of the Coming One: "There shall come forth a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel." More than a thousand years later, wise men from the East came to worship the infant Christ, saying, "We have seen His star in the East." And in the Apocalypse our Lord, foretelling His return as King, testifies: "I am the bright, the morning star." Again, In Ezek. ix, 4, the "mark" spoken of is "tav," the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet, which, in the ancient script, was a cross. In the Apocalypse there is a cluster of texts, evidently based upon this vision of Ezekiel, which speak of the seal of the living God, which is itself the Name of God (vii, 3; ix, 4; xiv, 1; etc.)

The Gnostic appellation of the Cross—"Horos," boundary—may recall the landmarks and waymarks which were put under the direct care of the Deity, and were, no doubt, often stamped with His name or symbol; just as the Celtic missionaries were accustomed to write, α , ω (*alpha* and *omega*) on the menhirs and dolmens of paganism.