

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GNOSTICISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
THE "PISTIS SOPHIA".

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The Christianity of the primitive Christian community had characteristics which might have formed the starting point of a development which would, humanly speaking, have resulted in the religion of the early disciples of Jesus becoming a mere Jewish sect, had not the essential universality of the religion of Jesus been brought to explicit recognition by the attention necessarily given to the question of the relation of the Gentiles to the new gospel. The Christian religion was brought into existence in a Jewish environment; its first adherents appropriated it on the soil of Judaism; they came to it with a Jewish apperception, and assimilated it to some extent with what was already familiar to them, not only in the Old Testament scriptures, but also in the current Rabbinical interpretation of those scriptures. Hence, we find, as was to be expected, that the members of the first Christian community were Christians without ceasing to be Jews. They retained at first various ritual observances of Judaism; their apologetic was thoroughly Judaic and such as would not appeal to a Gentile with nearly the same force as to a Jew, and to a very great extent Jewish concepts still ruled their thought. The first marked attempt, so far as we know, to eliminate the distinctively Jewish element and to liberate the universal Christian religion from the bonds of a narrow national sectionalism, was that made by the first martyr, Stephen. In this worthy undertaking he was succeeded by the man who

had compassed his death for this very thing—the Apostle Paul. Paul's universalizing evangelism stirred up the more Judaistically inclined in the primitive church, and before many years there was recognizable a distinct group of Judaizing Christians, pronounced in their opposition to Paul and zealous in their efforts to frustrate his designs.

In the post-apostolic period we find the Judaistic party represented chiefly in Ebionism, and, in strong contrast with this "right wing" a "left wing" of *Gnosticism*. Instead of the exclusively Judaic apologetic and distinctively Judaic elements, this movement was characterized by features more Hellenic and cosmopolitan. Indeed, it carried the universalizing tendency to the extreme of a syncretism in which much that was essential and distinctive in Christianity suffered eclipse. The Greek and Oriental apperception was allowed to dominate the Christian consciousness to such an extent that the resulting product was less truly Christian than the Judaistic Ebionism. While a part of the content of Christianity persisted in the Gnostic system, elements were given a place there which were not only antagonistic to and incompatible with Judaism, but with essential Christianity as well.

It is not meant by this that the Gnostic endeavor was totally unjustifiable. It seems probable that it originated in the attempt on the part of Gentile converts to Christianity to substitute for the exclusively Judaic apologetic, or to add as a supplement to it, an apologetic which would be less foreign to their way of thinking. On this theory, then, it was guided in the first instance by a decidedly religious and even Christian interest. But, as has happened so often since, what began as an apologetic for an accepted content was allowed to unduly modify that content and add new content, and what was originally governed by a practical, religious interest came more and more to be ruled by a speculative or intellectual interest.

That a movement finally so foreign to the Christian religion in its purity and simplicity should be recognized by the main body of contemporary Christians as having even relative justification was, of course, not to be expected. Until comparatively recently we were dependent for our knowledge of Gnosticism almost entirely upon statements of its bitter adversaries. Naturally enough there is in these representations little sign of any attempt to set forth sympathetically the main contentions of the Gnostics. Irenaeus\* speaks of their "lying words", calls them "evil seducers" and "hypocrites", and talks of their "superciliousness". Warning against their abyss of madness and blasphemy", and the "wickedness of their error", he explains this by the fact that "they gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures". While admitting that some are "more moderate and reasonable" than others, he says there are those among them who are "fierce, terrible, and irrational", and characterized by "idle loquaciousness". Tertullian† draws out an extended comparison between the Gnostics and scorpions, saying they are "hot to strike, penetrate, kill", and recommends that one "smite with a curse" these "little beasts which trouble our sect". He denies all purity of motive to Valentinus, saying that he "had expected to become a bishop", but, being disappointed, "he broke with the church of the true faith", and, inflamed with the desire of revenge, he applied himself with all his might to exterminate the truth, and finding the clue of a certain old opinion, he marked out a path for himself with the subtlety of a serpent". Hippolytus‡ takes pains to show that "Valentinus is a Pythagorean and Platonist, not a Christian", and that Basilides framed his heresy from the doctrines of Aristotle. The Basilidians, "laying hold on this borrowed and furtively derived tenet from the Peripatetic, play upon the folly

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\*Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, pp. 315, 336, 339, 407, 439 440.

†Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 505, 633, 634.

‡Ibid., Vol. V, pp. 86, 100, 108.

of those who herd together with them." *Eusebius*\* declares that they "boasted of preparations of love potions, and of tutelary and dream exciting demons, and other similar magic rites", and says that they "taught that the basest deeds should be perpetrated by those that would arrive at perfection in the mysteries, or rather that would reach the extent of their abominations". These passages being representative of the attitude of their opponents, it would seem the wiser course in seeking to learn the significance of Gnosticism in the development of Christian theology, to discover the motivation and inner character of the movement from the one chief document which has come down to us from the Gnostics themselves, and to use the notices occurring in the Fathers in a secondary way only, as supplementary and interpretative.

The document referred to is commonly known as the "Pistis Sophia", and was preserved for many centuries in a Coptic translation from the Greek original. Harnack puts its date as certainly between 140 and 302 A. D. G. R. S. Mead advances the opinion that it is a work of Valentinus. It certainly accords reasonably well with the notices of the Valentinian doctrine of Sophia as set forth in an external and rather unintelligent fashion by Irenaeus, as caricatured and held up to ridicule by Tertullian, and as presented with some degree of fairness and insight by Hippolytus. Of the document as we now have it, about nine-tenths consist of the two books of the "Pistis Sophia" proper, the remaining one-tenth being made up of fragments from the "Books of the Savior". The work is in the form of dialogues between the glorified Savior and his disciples, Mary Magdalene being the chief questioner. Jesus is represented as having spent eleven years with his disciples after his resurrection from the dead, instructing them. One day in the twelfth year, while Jesus was teaching them on the Mount

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\*Ecc. Hist. Bk. IV, Ch. 8.

of Olives, he became lost to view in an ineffable radiance of light that stretched from heaven to earth. The next day, thirty hours later, the Master descended to his disciples in infinite light, far more brilliant than that in which he had ascended. He is now the glorified Christ, and as such he comes back to reveal all mysteries, first of all to the twelve. He tells them of his entrance into the firmament and the first and second spheres and the aeons, and of how the powers of all these spheres and aeons were amazed at his shining vesture and fell down and worshipped him. Having traversed the first twelve aeons, he came to the thirteenth aeon, and entering in he found Pistis Sophia below the thirteenth aeon, solitary and disconsolate, "because she had not been brought into the thirteenth aeon, her proper region in the height".\*

This brings us to the central and most interesting point in the book, viz., the relation of Pistis Sophia to the Savior. The general narrative is concerning the fall of Pistis Sophia and her rescue by Christ, the Savior. The key to the meaning of the narrative seems to be contained in the name "Pistis Sophia—*Faith—Wisdom*. There seems to be considerable reason for regarding it as a translation into objective, cosmological—mythological terms of what the Gnostics with their intellectualistic bent took to be the characteristic facts of Christian experience, or, in Harnack's phrase, as the "total transformation of all ethical into cosmological problems".† One is struck with the similarity between the attitude of Pistis Sophia towards the Savior, Christ, and that of the disciples, especially Mary Magdalene towards Jesus as depicted in the work before us. That such a resemblance may have been had in mind by the Gnostics seems probable from the statement of Irenaeus to the effect that they maintained "that that girl of twelve years old, the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, to whom the Lord approached and raised her from the dead, was a type of

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\*Pistis Sophia (Mead's transl.) p. 42.

†Hist. of Dogma., Vol. I, Ch. IV, sec. 2.

Achamoth (elsewhere identified with Sophia\*) to whom their Christ, by extending himself, imparted shape, and whom he led anew to the perception of that light which had forsaken her".† The same reference to the relation of the disciple to Jesus, but interpreted now as no mere external relationship, but as involving an inner, spiritual experience, is brought out in the declaration in the Pistis Sophia that the repentance there portrayed is "the type for the race that shall be engendered",‡ and in the statement of Hippolytus that Valentinus asserted that "Christ came down from within the Pleroma for the salvation of the spirit who had erred. This spirit (according to the Valentinians) resides in our inner man; and they say that this *inner man* obtains salvation on account of this *indwelling spirit*."|| These references, together with the name "Faith-Wisdom" and the general tone of the book suggest as a working hypothesis the view that the original intention was *to set forth as having universal significance that which had been experienced individually in the consciousness of redemption through Christ.*

That the religio-psychological soon gave way to the cosmo-mythological, even as the religious and apologetic interest (if we are right in suggesting that such was at first dominant) gave way to a speculative and non-apologetic interest,\*\* is supported by the statement of Irenaeus that, according to another account, Sophia, having "suffered passion apart from her consort, Theletos", "brought forth an amorphous substance such as her female nature enabled her to produce".†† This seems to have been related to the generation of the Demiurge and the production of matter. Tertullian also gives a similar alternative interpretation of the fall of Sophia, and says that she was finally "checked in her illicit courses and purified from all evils and strengthened and

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\*Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, p. 320.

†Ibid., p. 327.

‡Pistis Sophia, p. 64.

||Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. V, p. 144.

\*\*V. Harnack, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. IV, sec. 4.

††Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, p. 317.

restored to the conjugal state".\* Of all this, however, there is nothing at all in the Gnostic document, the "Pistis Sophia".

An interesting sidelight on the speculative interest involved as well as on the manner of construction of the work before us, is found in the allegorical interpretation of Scripture so freely employed. The "repentances" and songs of praise of Pistis Sophia and even considerable portions of the narrative are Gnostic adaptations of certain of the Psalms of David and the "Odes of Solomon", and even in the quotation of the scriptural writings as utterances of which the true significance is now supposed to be set forth for the first time, there is a careful elimination of all appearances of anthropomorphism, such as would be distasteful to the Gnostic. For example, the words of Psalm 109, "Hold not thy peace," addressed to God, are changed in the quotation to "Hold not my mouth from praise."† As examples of the allegorical interpretation the following may be cited: The "mire" mentioned in Psalm 69 is interpreted to mean "evil thoughts"‡ "I am as a pelican in the wilderness," etc., occurring in Psalm 102, is made to mean, "I am become as a mere daemon, dwelling in matter ;I am become like the counterfeit of the spirit, which is in a material body, in which is no light-power."|| The statement, "Thou shalt not be afraid of the arrow that flieth", etc. (Ps. 91), is made to refer to the "light-power like an arrow" which the Arrogant One sent forth against Sophia, but which she was encouraged not to fear when the Savior came to her rescue.\*\* The words, "If ye will not turn he will whet his sword" (Ps. 7), are made to refer to the rebuke of Pistis Sophia against the powers pursuing her, "If ye turn not back, the light will prepare his power . . . .

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\*Ibid., Vol. III, p. 509.

†Pistis Sophia, p. 106.

‡Ibid., pp. 62, 67.

||Ibid., pp. 66, 62-8.

\*\*Ibid., pp. 140, 185, 188.

and take away all that is light in you".\* The most remarkable case of all is the interpretation, or rather multiple interpretations, of the passage, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other". The first of each pair of terms is said by Mary to refer to the "first mystery" and the second to the Master, Christ. Mary, the mother of Jesus, tells the story of the phantom spirit which embraced the child Jesus and became united with him, and makes this the interpretation of the passage. Mary Magdalene again interprets "mercy" and "righteousness" as referring to the "spirit of divinity" and "spirit of light" which came upon Jesus at his baptism. Mary, the mother of Jesus, again says the "mercy" refers to Jesus and the "truth" to John the Baptist, both of whom met at the meeting of Mary with Elizabeth. Finally John suggests that "mercy" and "righteousness" refer to Christ, and "truth" and "peace" to the power of Sabaoth implanted in him.† The story of Pistis Sophia thus appears, in its *details* at least, to have been constructed by means of an allegorical interpretation of scriptural passages. The *main outlines*, however, may have resulted from the syncretizing and speculating of successive Gnostic thinkers.

In bringing out the chief phases of the myth of Pistis Sophia, it may be interesting to attempt to brace the relics of the religious and specifically Christian truths which ought to lie at its basis if our hypothesis as to its construction be correct. Pistis Sophia is introduced to us in a fallen and miserable condition. She is represented as having gazed into the height and desiring to go there, but this she was unable to do unaided. For her attempt the Arrogant One hated her, inasmuch as she had tried to go to the light above him. He therefore emanated lion-faced and other material emanations to lie in wait for her and make her gaze below at his light-

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\*Ibid., pp. 176, 174.

†Ibid., pp. 118, 118, 120, 122, 125.



power. Doing this, she thought she saw the same light which had attracted her before, and she went out from her own region, that of the thirteenth aeon, into that of the twelve aeons. Thereupon the lion-faced power swallowed her light and left her depleted of power and mourning her folly.\* May not this be fundamentally a representation of the intellectualistic, Gnostic way of apprehending the fall? The aspiration of wisdom for a divinely revealed knowledge of God is for the time being turned aside, and, through the arrogance of intellectual pride, wisdom is led to follow a false light. This results in being pursued by doubts and negations. Thus what is intended to be *faith-wisdom*, an apprehension depending on revelation, becomes involved in sin through error and ignorance. If this be a legitimate interpretation, it means that Irenaeus missed the mark entirely when he said, "How can it be regarded as otherwise than absurd that they affirm this Sophia (Wisdom) to have been involved in ignorance and degeneracy and passion? For these things are alien and contrary to wisdom, nor can they ever be qualities belonging to it. For whenever there is a want of foresight, . . . there wisdom does not exist."† If, however, the view be that wisdom can be true to itself only when it is *faith-wisdom*, depending on revelation, then the difficulty which Irenaeus feels is largely gone. It is perhaps significant, too, that the designation *Pistis Sophia* is not used after the light in her was swallowed up by the emanations from the Arrogant One until she again cries out unto the Light of lights. In any case the intellectualistic apprehension is manifest throughout, and the religious element seems quite as pervasive.

The same is true of the sequel. In the thirteen "repentances" the spirit of true contrition is present, mingled with a growing trust in the "Light of lights". I have done it in foolishness", cries the repentant Sophia, but

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\*Ibid., pp. 44-6.

†Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, p. 363.

later she says, "Thou, O Light, art my Savior; save me from this chaos." "I have placed my heart on thee, O Light; save me by thy gnosis."\*

The redemption of Sophia is by Christ, the Savior, but he, too, is intellectually and gnostically conceived. He is given a very exalted position, however. Mary says to him, " 'Tis thou who hast given us in our minds a mind of light; thou hast given us the highest perception and conception. There is no one in the world of men, there is no one in the height of the aeons who can give out the revelation of the words on which we make our questionings, save thee alone who knowest all and art perfect in all. . . . Thou hast given unto us the science of the height."† In reciting the story of the rescue of Pistis Sophia, Jesus says, "I was of an intellectual nature. . . . I was not arrogant like the lion-faced, but full of compassion toward her."‡ Again he says, "I am the gnosis of the pleroma."||

The redemption being by revelation intellectualistically conceived, it is naturally gradual and a matter of stages or degrees. After the seventh repentance of Sophia, the Savior "conducted her to a region slightly less confined in choas". After the ninth repentance, "the first mystery heard her", and "I was sent", Jesus says, "by commandment, . . . and led her out of choas in that she had repented and trusted in the light, and endured great tribulation and perils". Then after the thirteenth repentance, and after several attacks on the part of the lion-faced power, the Savior "caused the light-power to form a crown of light upon her head in order that the emanations of the Arrogant One should not prevail against her". Then, to continue in the words of Jesus, "I and the power which issued from me and the soul I took from Sabaoth went out as a stream of light. . . . I gave the light-stream to Gabriel and Michael and made

\**Pistis Sophia*, pp. 46, 261, 60, 84.

†*Ibid.*, p. 186.

‡*Ibid.*, p. 97.

||*Ibid.*, p. 262.

them descend into chaos to rescue Pistis Sophia, and take her light-powers from the emanations of the Arrogant One and give them to her." Then Gabriel and Michael led the light-stream over the material body of Pistis Sophia and infused into it all the light-powers which had been taken from her, till her material body became shining throughout. Then was Pistis Sophia "tabernacled in the midst of light and the emanations of the Arrogant One collapsed and could do no harm to her, because she had trusted in the light". Then Jesus led Pistis Sophia forth from chaos, and after several songs of praise on her part, he led her "to a region below the thirteenth aeon and gave her a new mystery . . . . and a song of light that the rulers of the aeons should not prevail against her". Then Jesus passed into the light and ceased to busy himself with her. After this Pistis Sophia was plagued by two emanations of drakness (doubts? or sins?) from Adamas. Then she cried to the Savior and he took her and "led her into the thirteenth aeon, shining most exceedingly". Then they passed into the region of the four and twentieth invisible, and when Pistis Sophia saw her fellow-invisibles, she rejoiced and sang a song of light unto them.\* If we regard the first stage as that of enlightenment, the stage of the material body being permeated with light may possibly correspond to regeneration, and the final entry into the heights either to the attainment of true Gnostic insight and maturity, or else, perhaps, to the entrance into heaven.

The double light-rays combined into one, streaming from above and from Christ, and effecting the transformation of Pistis Sophia, remind one of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son. This suggestion is borne out by the parallel passage in Hippolytus. "Nous and Aletheia projected Christ and the Holy Spirit for the restoration of Form and the destruction of the abortion". Inasmuch as it was "not

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\*Ibid., pp. 82, 96, 112, 127, 128, 133, 139, 164, 169, 170, 177.

possible nor equitable that Christ and the Holy Spirit should remain outside of the Pleroma, therefore Christ turned away, and the Holy Spirit, from her".\*

Very prominent throughout the book are the mysteries, of which baptism seems to be one. In her thirteenth repentance Sophia prays, "Save me, O Light, by thy great mystery. Pardon me my transgression in thy remission. Give unto me thy baptism; remit my sins and purify me from my transgression." Concerning "the mystery of baptism which remitteth sins", Jesus says that it burns up the sins imprinted on the soul by the counterfeit of the Spirit, and separates between the spiritual counterfeit and the destiny and the body on the one hand, and the soul and the power on the other.† "The mysteries are for all men", but the exhortation is given, "Cease not to seek day and night till ye find the purifying mysteries which shall cleanse you and transform you into pure light that ye may enter into the height and inherit the light of my kingdom." That these mysteries were thought of as possessing a sort of magical virtue is evident from the declaration, "If the mystery is uttered over the head of a man on the point of departure from the body, even of him who hath not received the mystery of light, he shall not be judged or punished because of the great mystery of the ineffable which is in him." The mysteries of light are to be given to those who have made the renunciation (*v. infra*). They are to be given even to sinners, if they repent. In the case of repentance, however, "only higher mysteries than those already received can remit sins". One of the most remarkable uses made of the mysteries was to save the soul of the uninitiated after death. Directions were given to "celebrate the one and only mystery of the ineffable, and say, 'Nay the soul of the one I think of be taken out of these torments and brought to the virgin of light.'" The mystery will save,

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\**Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Vol. V, pp. 86, 87.

†*Pistis Sophia*, pp. 108, 200.

it is declared, even those who have no more chance of re-birth.\*

The ethical requirements of the Gnostics, at least as set forth in the "Pistis Sophia", are sufficient to lead one to discount somewhat the charges brought against them on this ground by some of their contemporaries. Those who were to receive the mysteries were to renounce the whole world, and all murmuring, superstition, spells, calumny, false witness, boasting and pride, gluttony, garrulity, evil caresses, avarice, loves of the world, robbery, evil words, wickedness, pitilessness, wrath, reviling, pillage, slandering, quarrelling, villainy, sloth, adultery, murder, hardness of heart, impurity, atheism, blasphemy and error.† They were to be diligent, loving to men, gentle, peacemakers, compassionate, ministering to the poor and sick and afflicted, loving unto God, and righteous.‡ This high and (we may well say) Christian standard was given an ascetic interpretation. They were bidden, "Preach to the whole human race, 'Renounce the whole world and all its associations, that ye may not add fresh matter to the matter which is already in you.' "||

The promised result of the performance of the mysteries and of this ascetic morality was the enjoyment of that gnosis on which we have seen laid such continual emphasis. The mystery of the ineffable, which they may receive who renounce the whole world and submit to the divinity, comprehends why there is darkness and why there is light, why there is sin and why there are baptisms and mysteries, why there are tears and why there is laughter, why there is fire of punishment and why there are seals of light to escape it, why there is death and why there is life, why there are beasts of burden and why there are birds, why there is brass and why there is iron and steel, why there is frost and why there is dew, why there is west wind and why there is east wind, why

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\*Ibid., pp. 251, 260, 297, 299, 314, 326, 327.

†Ibid., pp. 254, seq.

‡Ibid., pp. 259, seq.

||Ibid., p. 249.

there are emanations of light and why there are twelve saviors, why there are three gates and why there are nine guardians, etc., etc.\* It is interesting to note that in the list are included natural science objects, questions of theodicy, and entities of gnostic mythological speculation. For the gnostic all is knowable.

The eschatology of the gnostics had its characteristic variations from that which was generally accepted in the church. The millennium was appropriated with the usual re-interpretation. "I shall reign," says Jesus, "over all the emanations of light one thousand years". Those who have been good gnostics will have great honor in heaven, for all who do Christ's mysteries "shall be first in the kingdom of heaven before all gods save those in the aeons"; "he who receives the mystery of the ineffable is higher than all angels and archangels and invisibles. He is a man in the world, but a king in the light. This refers primarily to Jesus himself, but he says to his disciples, "Ye are all angels, archangels, gods and lords, rulers, invisibles". "Ye, because of all your tribulations and repourings into different bodies, are pure light, exceeding refined. Ye shall enter into the height, and shall be kings in the kingdom of light."† Future punishment is partly in a transcendent sphere, partly on earth in a reincarnate existence. "The soul of the righteous who has not received the mysteries shall be tormented by the fires of chaos only a short space." "The workmen of wrath" are "ever in the judgments, seizing the souls" of men, and bearing witness of all sins. There are dungeons and torments and degrees of fires reserved for the sinner. There are different punishments for different sins. For some the soul will be frozen, for others it will be scourged with whips of smoke and cast into boiling seas of fire, etc. The uninitiated who have committed few sins will be reincarnated. The patriarches also, with the exception of the most eminent, will have to be

\*Ibid., pp. 207, sqq.

†Ibid., pp. 242, 95, 226, 228, 247, 250.

reincarnated that they may receive the saving mysteries. The fate of the initiated who sin is worse than that of the uninitiated. To be sure, they may, if they repent sincerely, be given the mysteries each time from the beginning, but if they die unrepentant, they shall not pass back into transmigration, and so shall have no future field of action. They shall be cast into outer darkness. They shall perish and be non-existent for the eternity.\*

In all this the heathen element is conspicuous. The emanation theory, the emphasis on light as opposed to darkness, the abhorrence of matter, the mythological background, the doctrine of reincarnation, the penalty of annihilation, these and other elements are easily traceable to a pagan origin. The most noticeable of such elements, however, is the assimilation of pagan polytheism in the hierarchy of powers subordinate to the first mystery, the Light of lights. Among these regents are mentioned by name the Greek divinities, Kronos, Hermes, Ares, Aphrodite and Zeus.†

In attempting to form an estimate of Gnosticism, we can perhaps do no better than begin with the words of Origen: "There necessarily originated heresies . . . through the earnest desire of many literary men to become acquainted with the doctrines of Christianity."‡ In connection with the Gnostic movement in particular, Neander's words seem to be acute and just. "It was necessary when Christianity entered into the spiritual life that out of it should grow the craving to arrive at some clear consciousness of the connection between the truths communicated by revelation and the already existing mental possessions of mankind, as also of the internal harmony existing within the sphere of Christian truth itself as an organic whole. But wherever such a craving, instead of being met and satisfied, must be violently oppressed, the one-sided tendency of Gnosis

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\*Ibid., pp. 261-2, 268, 320 sqq., 382 sqq., 356, 316, 265, 307.

†Ibid., p. 362.

‡Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. IV, p. 469.

found in this some ground of justification. An exclusively theoretical tendency opposed itself to an exclusively practical one, and the deficiency of the latter tended to introduce the former.\*

Less sympathetic, and, we are inclined to think, less just, is the estimate of Harnack. He says, "The Gnostic systems represent the acute secularizing of Christianity, with the rejection of the Old Testament, while the Catholic system, on the other hand, represents a gradual process of the same kind with the conservation of the Old Testament. . . . Gnosticism, which is just Hellenism, has in Catholicism obtained half a victory. . . . In their totality they (the Gnostics) form the Greek society with a Christian name."† This seems unfair to the Gnostics, at least to those of the type of the author of the "Pistis Sophia", and still more unfair to the old Catholic theologians. We would prefer to say that in both movements there was an attempt, in the interests of Christian faith, to avoid the subjectivism which would arise if the Greek mind were left with nothing but a Jewish apologetic. We would not expect Harnack to be satisfied with any result of such an attempt, inasmuch as, in common with all Ritschlians, he seeks to justify a procedure which finally rests, or tries to rest, in subjectivism. This cannot long satisfy, however, for it belongs to the very genius of the Christian faith to demand that what has been internally appropriated shall be shown to be objectively valid. In the attempt described above, then, we would say that the Gnostic result failed to satisfy the Christian consciousness, while the Catholic attempt was relatively successful in its theological development because it followed in general the procedure which must, we think, be the permanent method of Christian theology. That is, after the preliminary stage of becoming acquainted with the facts with regard to Christ and the Christian life, in theology proper there seems to

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\*Ch. Hist., Vol. I, p. 307.

†Op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 226-7.



be three stages: first, the pre-metaphysical or dogmatic stage, in which expression is given in propositional form to the fundamental affirmations of the Christian consciousness (i. e., that consciousness in which faith in Christ as the manifestation of God is the determining factor), and in which stage the scriptural norm is of prime importance, and the consciousness of the Christian community also valuable for guidance; second, the metaphysical stage, in which by careful thought these affirmations are sought to be brought into systematic unity with each other and with the facts of science and history; and third, the post-metaphysical stage, in which these affirmations, after having been satisfactorily mediated and harmonized are again taken up and used in the stimulation and regulation of the Christian life. The Gnostics, however, failed from a two-fold cause. They failed in the pre-metaphysical stage (which, in their case, was exceedingly attenuated) by not recognizing sufficiently the essential affirmations of the Christian on the basis of his faith in Christ. Perhaps some slight measure of excuse may be allowed them in this connection in view of the fact that they were pioneers and that the New Testament canon was not yet definitely constituted and the "rule of faith" not yet time-honored. They failed also in the metaphysical stage, however, inasmuch as their metaphysics was utterly unscientific. It was, so far as the scientific interest was concerned, little more than an uncontrolled speculation. It was pure hypothesis, altogether unverified and unverifiable. On the whole, then, the Gnostic development is comparable to the speculative theology of the neo-Hegelians of our day. Of course, the pre-metaphysical and metaphysical stages being so much at fault, the post-metaphysical stage could not be satisfactory, as was proved by the indignant repudiation of Gnosticism by the Christian community.

And yet the Gnostics—some of them at least—were at heart, we believe, sincere Christians. They were de-

voted disciples of the Christ. They could say with enthusiasm, "O Master, we know freely, surely, plainly that thou hast brought the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom of light."\* This was their confession of faith.

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\*Pistis Sophia, p. 867.