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# THE FIGHT OF THE Gnostic MAN FROM A HERMENEUTICAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE Gnostic TEXTS OF THE NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY

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## Abstract

Gnosticism was a syncretic and existentialist phenomenon of the end of antiquity, which had a universalist character that integrated into its structure mystical, Babylonian, Egyptian, Judaic and Christian elements. The generating nucleus of Gnostic thinking, whose key component is dualism, the opposition of two irreconcilable principles, has its origin in human consciousness, which, through special knowledge perceives itself as divorced from the world, whose solidarity it rejects as something alien. This paper seeks to address the question of 'unde malum', which starts from a process that oscillates dramatically between the *Suffering of Death*, as a catabatic experience of the birth of the man fallen, who is thrown into the eternity of the death of the matter of Darkness, and the *Death of Suffering* as a mystical, anabatic experience of the return of the man fallen into the darkness of death to eternal life in the light of the Pleroma through a spiritual death. Gnosticism attempts to provide a rational solution to the problem of evil, by giving a rational answer to a religious problem and by radically rationalising Christian revelation. That is, it attempts to change Christian revelation according to its understanding of the workings of the human mind, which it claims thinks in binary categories, following the rule of exclusion, of the type 'or/or', to the detriment of the Church's antinomic thinking of the type 'and/and'.

*Keywords:* salvation, soul, Sophia, Demiurgos, Kenoma

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## 1. Introduction

For Christianity, *the fall* and *the suffering* that followed are the result of the sin of disobedience and of man's breaking the dialogue with divinity, which is equivalent to the disorientation and weakening of man's capacity of listen attentively (John 5.27). For Gnostic thinking, the fall and resultant suffering are only the result of 'a crisis in divinity', manifested by the coming into existence of the eons of Ignorance, Incognisance or Oblivion, which make man forget where he came from. In other words, persons no longer want to understand the mysterious unity of the creation of the world through the message of revelation,

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but instead want to understand the world only from a rationalistic perspective, reduced to the values of binary thinking of the type 'or/or'. Humans seek to become 'little creators' of a utopian world, like our parent, Adam, who no longer wanted to do and to be what God the Creator tells him (that is, immortal), but chooses for *himself* what he wants to be. This is the source of the inclination to internalising the fall: the failure to assume culpability and the mission to participate through His deeds to salvation.

This failure facilitates in a tragic way not only the irresponsibility of an ontological and docetist indolence, but also the movement of the cursor of the history of mankind on the axis of time 'between the Suffering of Death and the Death of Suffering', through a passage from the pseudo-morphoses of new utopian ideas, to the spiritual, alienated pato-morphoses of man in the world.

In this paper, I submit this inclination to theological analysis, which is visible in the liberty of knowledge, starting with a few texts from the *Nag Hammadi Library*.

## **2. The hermeneutical and existential perspective on the suffering of death as terminus point *a quo***

In its universal syncretic combination of oriental mythologies, soteriological doctrines, Iranian theology, traditional Judaic Rabbinic occult elements and elements of Christian eschatology, Gnostic doctrine, through images and metaphors [1], transmits a complex and original teaching in close connection with great existential questions. It seeks to address questions, such as those of Theodotos: "Who are we?", "Where are we?", "Where are we going?", "What is generation?", "What is regeneration?" Similar questions are contained in logia 18 of the *Gospel of Thomas* [2] (here the disciples ask Jesus: "Tell us, how will our end come?" Jesus answers: "Have you found the beginning, then, that you are looking for the end? You see the end will be where the beginning is. Congratulations to the one who stands at the beginning: that one will know the end and will not taste death"). Such questions highlight the preoccupations of the Gnostic to know himself and who or what he really is in this world. They examine man's origins, beginning with an initiation or revelation that is received as a secret gift from above and reserved to an elite [3].

A Gnostic text, the revelation of the angel Joel regarding an initiate named Allogenes presents a good example of this way of thinking, which eventually allows the Gnostic to unite or reintegrate in divinity: "Joel told me: 'we cannot all hear these words. You were endowed by the father of the Whole with a great power..., so that you discover what is difficult to understand, knowing what is unknown to the majority, so that you rise again to the One that is yours... I go back to myself, contemplating the Light around me and the good that was in me. I become God, said Allogenes.'" [2, XI, 3, 52, 10-12]

The elaboration of answers in this context starts from an existential analysis that deals concretely with the Gnostic man's identity crisis when faced with "the manifestation of the Error/Mistake" [4], which formed his own matter

in the void without knowledge of the Truth, thereby “producing fear and oblivion in order to seduce the ones in the middle and to make them the prisoners of these”, by experimenting the political and economic compositions, as well as the social and religious structures, of two empires: Roman and Persian.

A first observation the Gnostic man makes is that his existence is different from that of others. He experiences life, time and the world as a *prison* of the soul [2, II, 5-12]. Gnostics compare this isolation of the soul to a terrifying nightmare, “a delirium or a permanent state of drunkenness” with destabilizing origins in the *Kenoma* of the matter, a state which ends in “the true gnosis”, the equivalent of an *awakening* that calls to the life above. The image of the world is that of an infernal prison with the material body as an enemy: “you have to tear here and there the tunic you are wearing, the texture of ignorance, the basis of wickedness, the chain of corruption, the dark prison, the living death, the sensitive body, the tomb you carry in yourself...”.

In the theatre of the world, which his eyes reveal to his frightened soul, the Gnostic realises that from the earth to the stars [5], from the black holes in the curtain of the night to the bad organisation of the world [6], from the body, which is besieged by the almost unbearable desires of passions, his *intelligence, soul and spirit* are opposed to base physical matter. Such feelings are the creations of this world, excrescences or foreign substances that make it suffer. His effort to live a daily moral life through wisdom is useless, because everywhere one must face cruel laws that oblige you to kill or be killed. He lives in a world of confusions [2, I, 29, 1-30]. This state of confusion will end when he arises and chases away ignorance. Persons are differentiated by the way they know the Father: the slumberous remain in ignorance; those who arise come back to the Father [2, I, 29, 1-30]. In other words, living in this imperfect world means being “a dead man, because our existence here has the state of the dead ones” [Theodot 22, 2].

In such conditions, the Gnostic has to come into prominence to survive and to escape from this ‘foreign land’, as well as to discover the source of his fall. That is why, in stringent logic, he wonders: ‘What is the source of evil?’ (*Unde malum?*). Simple meditation on this questions makes life’s uselessness disappear, as if in a bad dream, when it is denounced: “If you had meditated upon the world – says Jesus – how long it had existed before your fall and how long it will still remain after you, you should admit that your life amounted to one day, and your suffering to an hour” [2, I, 2].

To understand the cause of man and his ignorance in the world, the Gnostic appeals to a great variety of mythical images, borrowed from the cosmogonies of the ancient Orient and Platonism. The Gnostic believes that it is impossible for the real God, the Principle of Perfection that is identified with the image of the Absolute Good, to have wished to create this opaque and ugly world. The Creator or the Demiurgos of this imperfect and gloomy world cannot be the Good God; at most, it must have been one of His caricatures [7], because, through the laws he imposes, he obliges man to remain in the bonds of slavery,

foolish desires, suffering and death. However, the Gnostic knows that this situation is irreversible and that his destiny is to reintegrate into the light. Through gnosis, man engages in a process of salvation that allows his soul to find the Pleroma that he should have never left.

In these conditions, Gnostic mythology aims at facilitating understanding of cosmic dualism, which is part of the liberating gnosis. If the creation of the material (imperfect) world could take place despite God's perfection and invariability, this was only possible because of a dramatic breach in the divine itself. In order to explain this crisis, the gnostic "will bring a suit" against God, introducing, with the help of neoplatonic emanationism and Egyptian genealogies, the idea of a multiplicity in the divine [7]. The principle of the primordial One differentiates in an initial dyad in which the second term is often its own thinking (Enoia/Nous), out of which emanates a harmonious development of the twin eons (*syzigeia*). This harmonious manifestation represents Pleroma, the world of Light. However, this is the place where the Fall occurred, engendering the creation of the world. The cause is an Eon situated at the *limit* of Pleroma, which is also called *Sophia*. Through an unconscious wish to know and imitate the Father of Beginnings, she will wish to create in turn, but without the help of the twin Eon. Thus, she engenders matter, but also a monstrous abortion, maddened by elation and full of wickedness, that she soon drops [8]. However, this creation possesses an element of the spiritual power of his mother (Sophia) as well as from her light. In other texts, this demiurge is identified with the God of the Old Testament. In the Gnostic vision, the genesis of the world is explained through an exegesis in significant contrast to that of the Holy Fathers. This demiurge, called Yaldabaoth (the Son of Chaos) [8, p. 121], appropriates all the numbers and powers that evokes the God of the Judeans. Considering himself the only God, he cries: "I am God and there is no other except me" [2, VI, 3]. He tries his powers as the Father of Pleroma's creation in the world of Kenoma's creation, the world of matter. First, he creates the archontes, who are evil powers and who will assist him in the second act of creation: that of Adam, the first man. The seven archontes and Yaldabaoth model Adam's soul first, into which every one of them breathes a specific substance of generation. Adam receives a soul of bone, a soul of flesh, a soul of skin and a soul of blood [2, II, 1, 3, 1]. However, this creature cannot stand; Adam crawls, thereby proving the failure of the very ones who created him. Touched by this unfinished creation, Sophia convinces Yaldabaoth to breathe into Adam a little of the light spirit. The demiurge thus loses his power, while Adam receives it. As Adam 'comes to life', he becomes aware of what he is and especially of what he was. Thereafter, Yaldabaoth, aware of Adam's superiority, has only one goal: to kill the Spirit of Adam. He lays a scheme. The first phase involves creating the human body, whose very weight should choke Adam. Not more than 365 angels, subjects of the Great Archont or Yaldabaoth, are involved in this act of creation, each contributing a part. Afterwards, a tetrad of archontes add passions to Adam's body: pleasure, desire, pain and fear, all combining with the four elements of the primordial substance: earth, water, fire and wind,

resulting in the worst in the world of material creation. From this moment, Adam is under the dominion of matter and in the shadow of death. He exists in the ignorance of darkness and desire, in the abyss of assembling a body that the deceitful archontes imposed on him as a 'chain of oblivion' and made him mortal [2, II, 21, 4-13].

Subsequently, the archontes place Adam in paradise in front of the Tree of the Knowledge of the Good and Evil. In this first phase of the scheme of creation, the gift of Adam's life will mean only the gift of 'suffering of death'. From this moment, the archontes and Yaldabaoth plan a delusion that does not miss any aspect of life on earth. The aim is to seduce man through any means, especially through the weapon of sexuality. This will soon dominate not only man, but the whole cosmos. The matrix of nature, fecundated by the sperm of demons, will be the *theatre* of humanity's dramatic play. Sexuality consolidates the heavy chains of Adam and Eve, through the seduction provided by the first of the seven archontes, "who teaches Adam and Eve to eat the corrupt procreation of pleasure" [2, II, 1, 22, 12-15]. This is the beginning of the multiplication of the human race [1, I, 24, 26-33]. Human beings lose their moral reference, operating an inversion in the ladder of values and transforming reality in a lie and a lie in reality. That is why Adam mistakes ignorance for true knowledge; actually, it is only the illusion of the universe around him. The cold fire of darkness thus becomes a *counterfeit* of the light that warms. In the book of Thomas Athlete, we are told that this fire of darkness "is deceit", because it gives people an illusion of truth and it makes them prisoners of a dark kindness [2, II, 7, 40, 21-24]. This illusion of the counterfeit – *antinomon pnevma* – leads the Gnostic to madness: "laugh and enjoy in the laughs of joy...you do not understand that you are in darkness and death. Well, the fire will exalt you, your heart is astray...and the poison and the blows of your enemy are sweet for you. Darkness appears to you as light." [2, II 2, 7, 143, 23-31]

In a similar way, the teachings of Silvanus assert: "man pursues the darkness mistaking it for Light, drinks stale water, convinced it is clean. He did not recognise the deceit of the Enemy who presented himself as friend." [2, VII.4, 88, 30-35] The procedure through which counterfeit replaced the truth is described in the *Gospel of Philip*, starting with the Pseudo-Names the archontes used in order to build the Empire of matter: "The names given to earthly things are deceitful, because they digress the thoughts from what is true to what is false. The archontes wanted to deceive man, because they saw he was related to the ones who are really good. Therefore, they took the names of those who are good and gave them to the ones that are not: through the names, man is deceived...They wanted to annihilate man's liberty and make him a slave forever." [2, II, 3, 53, 24-26, 19-31] The archontes would not be limited to imprisoning Adam in a material body. For their detention system to be perfect, they create destiny – *heimarmene* – and invented time. Destiny scans the days, months and years of the slavery of the human race. Such an oppressive fatality will be the result of an act of adultery committed by the archontes, starting from the mechanisms of beginning time and space: "he is the source of suffering, the

gods, the angels and the demons and all the generations have mingled with him to this day. From the destiny derives the whole injustice, the whole violence, the whole blasphemy and the chain of oblivion and ignorance, just as any order, the great sins and a great fear. Thus, creation became *blind* so that people can no longer know God who is in heaven.” [2, II, 1, 28, 21-29] Hence, the finality of the scheme of the archontes.

### **3. The hermeneutical and existential perspective on the death of suffering as a point *terminus ad quem***

Out of this mythical image comes one of the foundations of Gnostic thinking: time and history are counterfeits of the Demiurge and have no value, since they are not part of the economy of salvation. The Good God did not create the material world. His intervention in history has as its unique goal to help man escape from the impasse he is in: “to disintegrate history into pieces and reveal it as an imposture” [9]. Thus, there is a great difference between Christian and Gnostic thinking. For Christians, history has a soteriological value; it is the time of preparation for Christ’s coming and for salvation.

In the Gnostic texts, the fate of Adam, who is imprisoned in matter, is the fate of each soul [1, p. 83]. The Gnostic authors describe in many texts the tragic adventures of the soul in this world. As in a novel with a subliminal message, the author transmits to the reader the central idea concerning life: contempt for the world and rediscovery of the spark-spirit buried in the matter of death. In the novel, *The Exegesis of the Soul*, [2, II, 6], the intrigue develops by narrating the *adventures* of the soul: “When he fell in the body and came into this life, he failed in the midst of a mob of rascals, unabashed people, who passed him through their hands and bemired him” [2, II.VI,1,27, 25-29]. For Gnostics, the fall of the soul into material life is equivalent to a long sexual slavery in the prison of the body. Raped by the deceitful archontes, man will give himself to prostitution. Tainted unions will result in abnormal children, who will bear in them the seal of adultery. The result of this corruption of the soul is the oblivion of its celestial origins and, as a result, *ignorance* will become a way of being. Blinded by the matter of his body, he knows only the limits of the cell where he is incarcerated. There is yet hope for salvation: the awareness of the fall, resulting in repentance. The soul cries for the Father in heaven, and He answers this call by sending him the mate soul, incarnated in a nuptial prince.

A similar situation is to be found in the *Hymn of the Pearl*, an allegorical poem preserved in the *Acts of Thomas* [1, p. 85]. Here, the soul acquires the characteristics of a young prince, who is entrusted with a dangerous mission by his father: to go to the lands of the West to bring a pearl guarded by a dragon. The pearl, in allegorical language, represents *the bright spark* buried in the darkness of the matter and kept in captivity by the archontes. The journey is a real nightmare for the prince. The Egyptians/archontes cheat him by offering him food and drink which make him fall into a deep sleep. The slavery of the soul is illustrated by the fall ‘into sleep’ or into ‘drunkenness’. Getting out of

this state of lethargy comes through a call from above – a letter, which has the power to awake his conscience. Transformed into a wing, the letter becomes an awakening word: ‘The sound of your voice awoke me and I got up from sleep’.

A Saviour is sent from above to bring the soul close to God. This is embodied by the twin/mate spirit. Knowledge is presented through nuptial metaphors, such as those depicted in the *Treatise on the Exegesis of Soul* and the *Hymn of the Pearl*. In the first text, the soul and the spirit are reunited as husband and wife in a recaptured unity of the Divine Pleroma. In *Hymn of the Pearl* there is a doubling of the characters. The young prince is, on the one hand, the soul that goes down into the world and, on the other hand, the Spirit from above come to free the pearl. Falling under the blow of the archontes of evil, the prince will need a Saviour, who is the spiritual double of the fallen soul.

The Gnostic theme of *Salvator Salvatus* is delineated here. The Saviour descends on earth for the salvation of people, assuming their destiny in a Docetist way for a while. The Gnostic saviour acts, not in the sense of Christian Christology, but in order to liberate the bright parts of the light which went astray into matter. The body that the Saviour of the Light assumes is nothing but a temporary mask that helps him escape, unnoticed from the eyes of the cosmic powers. (His deceit is a form of response to the deceit of the archontes.)

In the Gnostic texts, the knowledge through salvation is not only immediate, global and illuminating, but it is also an answer without hesitation to the call of the Saviour: “the one who possesses gnosis is a being from heaven. If he is called, he hears, answers and looks towards the one that calls him, in order to rise back to him... the one who possesses gnosis knows where he comes from and where he will go” [2, I, 22, 2-15]. In the same way, according to logia 3 in the *Gospel of Thomas*, gnosis consists not only in knowing oneself, (“when you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But, if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty”) [9, 6, p. 21]). Also through the attachment to the Saviour, according to the Apocryphon of James: “Become zealous about the Word. For the Word’s first condition is faith; the second is love; the third is works. Now from these comes life. For the Word is like a grain of wheat. When someone sowed it, he believed in it; and when it sprouted, he loved it, because he looked forward to many grains in the place of one; and when he worked it, he was saved, because he prepared it for food.” [2, I, 2] This text, reminiscent of Matthew 13 and Mark 10 shows us that gnosis does not prevent a certain practice of the mysteries/sacraments – types and images that allow the accession to truth – and of the practical techniques of salvation [10]. As we find out in the *Gospel of Philip*: “Truth did not come into the world naked, but it came in types (typos) and images (eycon). The world will not receive truth in any other way. There is a rebirth and an image of rebirth... the image must enter through the image into the truth: this is the restoration (apocatastasis)” [2, II, 3].

Conquering knowledge, the soul is ready to rise again to its celestial homeland, but the heavens of matter ruled by archontes interpose themselves between the world of Kenoma and that of Pleroma, vengeful angels and officers

calling the soul to account. To overcome these obstacles that hinder its return, the soul appeals to a scheme: the use of the quasi-magical power of words: passage words, incantations, formulas, and the power of the sign of the seals, a free passage permit at whose sight the archontes retreat. The soul acquires this knowledge through the Saviour who was saved and who, in the Christian texts is Jesus Christ – Jesus Patibilis (Jesus the Suffering). He teaches his disciples to escape the world of matter through a model to follow when crossing the spheres.

These teachings are real textbooks of behaviour, such as the *First Apocalypse of John* [2, V, 3, 33, 2, 24]. In other texts, such as *Panarion*, Epiphany of Salamina describes the words the Gnostic will utter, denying through the new words of power affiliation to the kingdom of archontes. The formulas act as protective shields. Finally, in the book *Great Treatise* we find advice and techniques provided by Jesus in order to pass from one heaven to another, from Kenoma to the Pleroma of Light, and where there are even graphical descriptions of the spheres the soul encounters in its ascension. The rise of the soul reproduces in two ways the journey to salvation [11, V, 10, 2]. In many texts, the celestial journey of the soul to light starts with practical knowledge. In certain sects, rituals were performed on the dying with the aim to combine with the theoretical gnosis. However, the latter predominates. For example, in the description of the deathbed ceremony of Marcosians, Saint Irinaeus mentions that these ceremonies vary from one group to another, existing “as many redemptions as mystagoges” [12, I, 21, 2]. The ceremony unfolded in two moments: “Others again redeem the dying, even to the hour of death, putting oil and water upon their heads. Then they uttered certain invocations, the result being immediate: the dying becomes invisible to the archontes. Before his death, the Gnostic will have to utter one more formula, which had been communicated to him previously: ‘I am a son, from the Pre-existing Father and I am a son of the Pre-existing. I came to see everything...and go back to the place I came from’” [12, I, 21, 5]. Through these keywords, the initiated one flees from the power of the archontes, but his journey is not finished. He abandons the body to matter and rises higher towards the invisible spaces, to the angels surrounding the Demiurge, telling them: “I know myself and I know where I am from” [11, I, 21, 5]. Intimidated by the incorruptible wisdom of the Father, who is to be found in the attitude of the initiated, the archontes, troubled through a last argument to hold the soul in matter, make a connection to the origins of their mother’s line, telling him that they resemble him. The Gnostic will refuse this last dialogue of “the counterfeits of the bonds to the chains of nature”, reintegrating in the Pleroma under the form of a personified spirit. The souls which did not know how to reach knowledge and cross the world of the material spheres will be reincarnated in other bodies until the end of the world.

As we have shown, Gnostic thinking functions through a fundamental antinomy of the concepts down-earth and up-heaven. Around these poles there is a whole network of terms, which attribute negative epithets to the down pole and positive ones to the other. The fundamental opposition is that between ignorance

and knowledge, completed by the antonyms: Truth-Lie, Beautiful-Ugly, Good-Evil, etc.

To illustrate the positivity of the celestial world and salvation, Gnostics had to find a powerful symbol to illustrate this victory of light over darkness, of spirit over matter. This symbol is found in the *act of Marriage* and in a rich suite of metaphors surrounding nuptial mysticism. Being a symbol rich in images, it allows many allegorical interpretations, in which the love of the married couple is treated in various levels. The final purpose of marriage is to present, through a recapitulative symbol, Pleroma in its integral nature. It has the following characteristics:

- (1) It is the symbol of knowledge (remembering his origins, the soul recognizes his wife, whose features he had forgotten at the moment of falling from his parents' home [2, II, VI, 132, 21-25]).
- (2) It is the symbol of truth (opposing the cunning and deceit of the inferior world, embodied by the deceiving unions with the archontes) [2, II, VI, 138, 8].
- (3) It is the symbol of liberty, destined not to the slaves of the body but to the free people, who recognise the Truth, as it is affirmed in the *Gospel of Philip* [2, II, 3, 84, 8-11].
- (4) It is the symbol of peace and rest; the soul is not engaging in prostitution or chasing lovers [2, I, VII, 2, 35, 8-11].
- (5) It is the symbol of joy, marking the end of the soul's painful peregrinations [2, VII, 2, 66, 34-67, 11].
- (6) It is the symbol of the inner beauty that adorns the soul in bridal clothes [2, VI, 2, 32, 2-8].
- (7) It is the symbol of chastity, being spiritual and opposing the tainted unions of the world of the matter [2, II.3, 82, 4-10]. This marriage provides the soul children who will live "in the living spirit" [2, II, 6, 134, 1-4].

Allegorically speaking, these represent the eternal ideas or divine paradigms. This marriage is a replica of the "primordial union" of the Pleroma, before the fall in the Kenoma of the matter [2, II, 6, 133, 4-9]. Through their union, man and woman become one again; there is no longer a man or a woman, but a single being. Terrestrial sexuality, which bonded man to matter, is annihilated through celestial marriage, the mystical androgynous unity. The androgynous union remedies the separation between the sexes, which appeared at the moment of the fall of the feminine element in matter, which eventually involved death. In the *Gospel of Philip*, the union between Adam and Eve in Paradise symbolises a special state of knowledge and life. It is knowledge of good and evil that attracts them towards ignorance and death: "When Eve was still with Adam, death did not exist. When she was separated from him, death came into being. If he enters again and attains his former self, death will be no more." [2, II, 3, 68, 22-26; 1, II, 3, 70, 9-12]. According to the author of the *Gospel of Philip*, Christ is the one who will eliminate this separation: "Because of this, Christ came to repair the separation, which was from the beginning, and again unite the two, and to give life to those who died as a result of the

separation, and unite them” [2, II, 3, 70, 9-17]. Thus, the long journey of Gnostic man to salvation ends between ‘the suffering of death and the death of suffering’. Man’s union with woman and woman’s union with man, where each finds himself or herself as duality in unity, will open the gates of knowledge and the entrance to the Kingdom of light [2, II, 2; Epiphany, Panarion 26, 3,1; Irinaeus, Against Heresies, I, 13, 13].

In this mysticism of identification, where one becomes the other and the opposite, where the subject and the object coincide, all the contrasts and polarities which characterised the world of Kenoma will be eliminated, *coincidentia oppositorum*, rendering the final image of a Unity in which the one who knows will become the one who is known, and who enters the Kingdom of Light. As we find in the *Gospel of Thomas* (logia 22): “When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female... then you will enter [the kingdom]” [2, II, 2].

#### **4. Conclusions**

In this study, I delineated the tragic attempt of the Gnostic to escape the vicious, alienating circle of the *Suffering of Death*, but also of the *Death of Suffering*, starting from a few existential questions that were the object of various Gnostic writers. The elaboration of these answers started from knowledge situated at the border between philosophy and religion in an attempt to offer rational answers to man’s fundamental questions, which, eventually, are solved in a mythological register. This knowledge of the ultimate realities, unknowable in themselves, such as the concepts of God and soul, defined in the categories of philosophy and religion, is a paradox that ultimately shows the essence and character of the sacred and secret doctrine communicated to ‘the chosen man’ through a charismatic channel. The main revelation of this Gnostic knowledge is the existence of an original and absolute duality, which governs God’s relations to the world and man’s relation to the world.

Extramundane, absolute, and transcendent, the Gnostic God is accessible only in terms of a negative, apophatic knowledge. The material world is governed by malefic deities bearing different Eonic names. Gnostic anthropology, as man occupies a central place in Gnostic thinking, reflects the same fundamental dualism and state of conflict: man is a dual reality, both mundane and extramundane, a mixture of light and darkness, of good and evil, belonging to this world through his body and soul, but carrying inside him “Pneuma or Nous”, the divine spark fallen into the matter. Gnostic knowledge is destined to him. This knowledge is a doctrine of salvation, which reveals to man the dualist essence of the world and of his own condition, but also indicates the way of re-acquiring his former condition.

Although in its premises the Gnostic system appears extremely coherent and logical, in reality, it is only the result of intellectual speculation of a dialectic type. It is the result of a radical attempt to rationalise Christian revelation and to adapt it to the mechanisms of the mind, which thinks in binary categories, following the rule of exclusion, of the type *or/or*. In these conditions, the monotheist idea of an Almighty and Good God enters a crisis, not only as a necessity of answering the issue ‘unde malum?’, but especially in order to give a purely rational answer to this question. Orthodox Christianity asks man to make an ascetic effort to go beyond the rationality of one’s fallen being, in order to be able to rise to God’s knowledge (epectasis). The ‘gnosis with a false name’ tries to bring God down and explain Him within the limits of the human mind. Its dualistic rationality falls into the irrational and absurd, into a nihilist and destructive attitude towards existence. Hans Jonas congratulated the Gnostics, affirming that they were ‘the first speculative theologians’. However, from a Christian perspective, reversing the equation terms, one may say that when theology becomes speculative, when it loses contact with the reality of God’s Incarnated Word, it degrades itself away from the dogmatic intelligence of authentic Christian revelation and of the Church, as it was formulated in the Holy Scripture and explained in the Tradition of the Holy Fathers.

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