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The Nag Hammadi Library: A Mormon Perspective

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The Nag Hammadi Library: A Mormon Perspective

S. Kent Brown

In 1946 or 1947, it is reported, an Egyptian camel driver named Mohammad Ali discovered a cache of early Christian texts in Upper Egypt, now known as the Nag Hammadi library.¹ Written in Coptic on papyrus leaves, this collection of texts includes fifty-two separate works which were originally bound in twelve or thirteen leather-covered codices.² Unlike the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were gathered by a Jewish sect, these documents were collected by Christians. And while the texts are not all demonstrably Christian in origin,³ this notable library consists largely of heretofore unknown writings preserved by Christians who both stood apart from the early Catholic church and yet at the same time claimed to possess the true gospel.⁴ Since antiquity, these Christians and certain of their teachings have been known from long and venomous treatises written against

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them and their doctrines by early Church apologists who portrayed them as heretics and perverters of God's word.⁵ Now that we possess a substantial collection of their literary remains in the Nag Hammadi corpus, a new assessment of these so-called heretics and their relation to early Christianity has been called for.⁶

INTERPRETATIONS OF EARLY CHRISTIAN HISTORY

The approach to the historical interpretation of the early Christian church which has dominated almost all serious investigations has been that of Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea in the early fourth century, the first to attempt to write a history of the Christian church covering the period from Jesus' time to his own.⁷ His basic view was that the mainline church had enjoyed a continuous, unbroken historical succession from the Apostles, whereas the heretics had formed splinter groups deviating from the church's ongoing, inherited repository of true doctrine.⁸ Remarkably, this Eusebian concept of early Christian history persisted until 1934, when this idea was seriously challenged by Walter Bauer, a German scholar who had investigated the early church by geographical regions.⁹ After focusing on organization, order of services, types of sacraments and ordinances, and various doctrines, Bauer concluded that Christianity differed significantly from one location to another. For him, Eusebius's view of a unified, monolithic church could not be taken seriously in light of the earliest regionalized evidence.¹⁰

Even today, the question remains whether Bauer's challenge to the old way of viewing early Christian history has ever really been met. To be sure, it inspired studies which took issue with his views. But his basic thesis that the early church did not constitute a unified entity after the deaths of the Apostles still stands.¹¹ For our purposes, the Nag Hammadi texts reinforce this impression by claiming that Jesus and his disciples had taught doctrines and practiced ordinances which the budding Catholic church came to reject or deny.¹²

DATING AND AUTHENTICITY

Before we turn to an examination of teachings found in this literature, it is important to discuss the inevitable question whether these texts constitute reliable historical and doctrinal accounts which go back to the personalities featured in the documents. For, on the one hand, a few texts deal tantalizingly with prominent figures from the Old Testament—such as Adam and Melchizedek—while, on the other, many deal with Jesus and his disciples. The solution, I suggest, is largely one of dating.

What we possess in the Nag Hammadi library are copies produced in the second half of the fourth century A.D.¹³ Beyond this, it is possible by various means to demonstrate that some texts, or parts thereof, were originally composed at least as early as the second century A.D.¹⁴ This period, of course, is a good deal closer to the era of Jesus than the fourth-century copies found near Nag Hammadi. But, obviously, we are taken back neither to the time of the earliest church nor to an even earlier period required for those texts attributed to Old Testament personalities such as Adam and Seth. And this observation dictates that we use caution. To be sure, second-century literature will contain doctrines and accounts which go back to the age of Jesus himself. However, overlays of tradition will doubtless have been added to the earlier stories and teachings.

From the point of view of the restored gospel, Latter-day Saints can usually justify a rather straightforward method of identifying doctrines and teachings which derive not only from Jesus' era but more notably from the earlier period of the patriarchs and prophets. This procedure consists in isolating those elements which harmonize with the basic teachings of the restored gospel. But while this method of identifying parallels between LDS beliefs and those mirrored in ancient literatures has its attractions, one must still employ considerable caution when treating the issue of what may have genuinely come from Jesus and his followers and what may not. Why? Because good reasons exist to believe that some of the teachings in the Nag Hammadi texts which resonate with Latter-day Saint doctrines are indeed old and authentic, but that some are not.¹⁵ Moreover, some

teachings alien to LDS theology exhibit evidence of coming from the earliest literary strata of various texts. And that naturally presents a problem because of the great difficulty of tracing in such literature the origins of ideas which were embedded in a work by later editorial hands.¹⁶ Further, in a particular document we may see ideas standing side by side which, on the one hand, are very similar to Latter-day Saint notions and, on the other, diverge strikingly.¹⁷ Because of this situation, attempts to establish authenticity on the basis of LDS parallels in such apocryphal literature should be tempered and evidence carefully weighed.

THE CHARACTER OF THE LIBRARY

Let us note briefly the nature of the texts preserved at Nag Hammadi.¹⁸ This collection has been characterized generally as gnostic in content. What this means is that the library exhibits influences from a widely but loosely held point of view whose basic tenet was that salvation came by knowing. As one might expect, the Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*—or a derivative thereof—was frequently employed in our documents. In the minds of ancient authors who inclined toward gnosticism, the word for knowledge came to have specific meaning: *gnosis* consisted of a kind of knowledge which could save a person.¹⁹ But this knowledge was to be kept secret, not to be given to the uninitiated or the untrustworthy.²⁰ Only those of proven faithfulness were to be entrusted with these special, sacred secrets. Thus, in the view of Christian gnostics, Jesus came as the great revealer of heavenly secrets which he then taught to his disciples.²¹ In turn, they passed them to others who were worthy.²² This view of Jesus emphasized his role as a teacher and, correspondingly, diminished the stress on his suffering and dying for sins.²³ One must bear in mind this concept when approaching the Nag Hammadi collection.

PARALLELS TO LDS THEOLOGY

At this juncture, I propose to bring forward a number of notions appearing in these texts which are virtually unique to a

Mormon point of view. After dealing with such parallels, I shall then discuss ideas in this literature that will appear very strange indeed to a Latter-day Saint.

One of the most prominent doctrines concerned the premortal existence of all souls. In the Apocryphon of James from Codex I, Jesus is quoted as saying to Peter and James, “Verily I say unto you, had I been sent to those who listen to me, and had I spoken with them, I would never have come down to earth.”²⁴ According to the same text, while speaking of the extent of the two disciples’ sufferings, he said, “If you consider how long the world existed (before) you fell (into it) and how long it will exist after you, you will find that your life is a single day and your sufferings a single hour.”²⁵ In addition to these pointers to the world of premortal spirits, we find the following statement attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas: “The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a child seven days old about the place of life, and he will live.”²⁶ The obvious sense of this passage is that the child who has not yet been circumcised on the eighth day has retained his impression of the “place of life.” And this situation has allowed the old man to come and inquire. In contrast, we recall the Christian view which came to hold that, except for Jesus and the Holy Spirit, God was alone from the beginning,²⁷ and also that all creation—including people—was created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing.²⁸

A notion related to that of the premortal existence taught that creation was the activity of many gods. In fact, the gnostic picture grew rather complex. The divinities were seen to live in a number of heavens—numbered variously up to 365, depending largely on the metaphysical foundations of the system which enumerated them.²⁹ Each heaven was thought to operate according to its special laws, and each performed a specific function in the overall scenario. In addition to many heavens and deities, we find the notion that female deities and other notables played roles in their respective celestial abodes.³⁰ In contradistinction, the traditional Christian view had it that but one heaven was inhabited by God, accompanied only by his Son and the Holy Spirit. Those who composed and transmitted the Nag Hammadi texts held no such belief.

In the view of some of our documents, it was knowledge of such celestial truths which Adam had possessed before he came to the earth and which were subsequently removed from his consciousness.³¹ This loss of celestial knowledge became the basis for the gnostic salvation drama: because it was lost, it had to be restored. Thus, when Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil they recovered what had been lost and, now being able to see the world for what it was, set about to escape the influence of its vengeful god.³² According to the Apocalypse of Adam, moreover, Adam's recovery of the knowledge of both his premortal existence and what was to happen in future ages of the earth was to play a significant role for him and his posterity. Such information, it was claimed, Adam learned from three messengers who revealed to him the history of the world from beginning to end.³³ Adam then transmitted those secrets to his son Seth, who was said to transmit them to "his seed," that is, only to worthy initiates.³⁴ What we meet here, then, is the interesting concept that truths about the universe, its origin, and its destiny, as well as those concerning humankind, were possessed from the beginning. The gospel plan was not revealed for the first time by Jesus. It had, in fact, been known at the very outset.³⁵

It is additionally rather clear from these texts that knowledge of beginnings and endings was not transmitted simply by discussion; it was also passed on by ritual teaching. This method of instructing by ceremony was plainly visible in the ancient Near East,³⁶ and the Nag Hammadi texts show traces of such. For instance, one notes the strictly dialogue character of the Gospel of Thomas. It is a rather simple step to suggest that the dialogue may well have been memorized by one or more participants and then recited in front of a live audience as a means of teaching. Examples could be multiplied.³⁷

Naturally, when we touch the issue of ceremonies and rites, one cannot avoid glaring parallels to LDS ordinances in this library. The most influential text in this regard remains the Gospel of Philip. The author of this document noted that there were five main rituals performed within the Christian community which he knew, and whose origins were said to go back to the

time of Jesus and the Apostles:³⁸ baptism, anointing, eucharist, redemption, and that of the bridal chamber.³⁹ Of the five, that which remains least understood is the one called redemption; one knows little of what the ritual consisted of or its purpose.⁴⁰ Of course, baptism and the eucharist are known from the early church and the New Testament.⁴¹ And we can understand their basic functions. However, the anointing and marriage ceremonies invite further discussion.

It has been suggested that Philip's rite of anointing may have merely represented the anointing of the Holy Spirit which followed baptism.⁴² As a matter of fact, however, its closest parallels appear in the anointing scenes in which Aaron and his sons received their priesthood rights to officiate at the altars of Israel.⁴³ Thus, I incline to understand the anointing mentioned in Philip as literal rather than figurative or spiritual. For in one passage the text affirms that "because of the anointing (*chrism*) we are known as Christians."⁴⁴ There is an obvious play here on the Greek word for anointing (*chrism*), which is related to the name of Christ (*christos*) and the appellation Christian (*christianos*).⁴⁵

Concerning marriage, it is clear both from the Gospel of Philip and from other sources that this concept stood at the center of religious life in communities which produced some texts of this library. The fact that the bridal chamber was seen as the place of the crowning ordinance in Philip is evidence enough.⁴⁶ Interestingly, other documents in the library spiritualized the concept of marriage to the point that it referred principally to the spiritual union of the soul with God.⁴⁷ But there is enough solid material in both the Gospel of Philip and the Second Treatise of the Great Seth to demonstrate that marriage was also believed to be an earthly ordinance with heavenly consequences.⁴⁸ According to Philip, because of its special quality, it was available only to virgins and freedmen, that is to say, only to the worthy,⁴⁹ and was to be preceded by washing and anointing.⁵⁰ Moreover, the bridal chamber was said to stand in the heart of the temple. For, according to Philip, the places of worship in Jerusalem included the holy place, the holier place, and the holy of holies,⁵¹ underscoring the progressive hallowedness of the temple edifice itself as

one moved from outside its walls to its most sacred center, the holy of holies.⁵² Then we read that “the holy of holies [holy ones] is the bridal chamber”⁵³ and that it is “superior” to the others.⁵⁴ The place was so sacred, in fact, that the Father anointed Christ there and gave him power over all things.⁵⁵ The marriage solemnized there was solemnized for eternity⁵⁶ and was deemed an earthly ordinance only.⁵⁷ The bridal chamber, it is further said, was hidden from the world by the veil of the temple as were the secrets of creation celebrated there.⁵⁸ Such observations lead to the conclusion that, because of their prominent place in several treatises from Hag Hammadi, ordinances connected with the temple—even though highly stereotyped—received special attention because of their obvious link to the sacred.

In returning to an earlier theme, we note that because the gospel message was known from the beginning (according to these texts), it was a foregone conclusion that the early patriarchs had possessed the same.⁵⁹ In this literature, the patriarchs were more than mere possessors and transmitters of the gospel’s message. They were said to have played important roles in their premortal existences.⁶⁰ For instance, Adam was known as a premortal great one who associated with “holy men of the great light,” “men of the Father.”⁶¹ In fact, Adam was believed to have descended as a son from the Father, and it was this heritage which Seth received.⁶² While Adam was the founder of the covenant race, it was Seth and his successors who perpetuated the covenant people and who came to be known as “the seed of the great Seth” or “the great, incorruptible, immovable race of the great, mighty men of the great Seth.”⁶³ We are told also that Seth had sat in the premortal council and had proposed the plan accepted joyously by all. As a consequence, he was sent to execute that plan.⁶⁴ Naturally, a counter-plan was proposed and a war in heaven ensued in which both Adam and his son Seth played prominent roles.⁶⁵ In his earthly function, on the other hand, Seth came to reveal secrets about the heavens and the future which he had learned both from his father and from revelation.⁶⁶ In fact, he authored a book which was hidden in order to come forth in the latter days, a work reportedly containing the secrets of the universe which Seth and the covenant people had

known and revered from the beginning.⁶⁷ Among other things, Seth was said to have predicted the Apostasy,⁶⁸ a theme which plays a significant role in the Nag Hammadi literature. And it is to this topic that I now wish to turn.

It is important to observe that the expected apostasy was not to come about by mere accident or neglect. On the contrary, it would be due to conscious acts. A term appearing often in the Nag Hammadi documents is the Greek word *planē*, which can be translated in its passive sense as “error” or “mistake” or, in its more active sense, “deception.” Because of a number of clues in these texts, I choose to translate this term as deception: what were being described in most instances were willful acts of distortion, not mere developments.⁶⁹ The problems of deceitfulness and apostasy, noted above in our documents, existed from the days of Adam and were expected to continue at least until the days of the true revealer.⁷⁰ In other texts where Jesus was reported to speak about this deception, he clearly expected an age to begin—already in the days of his Apostles—which would introduce a reign of deceit and untruth.⁷¹ For instance, whenever the Nag Hammadi texts cited Jesus’ predictions of apostasy, the Apostles frequently responded in despair.⁷² Specifically, Peter was upset by the idea of an apostasy, despairing the durability of God’s kingdom.⁷³ In one passage, Jesus reassured Peter that in fact a subsequent restoration would be made. The day would come, Jesus said according to the Apocalypse of Peter, when “the deception will be pulled out by its roots.” It would be then, Jesus continued, that the age of righteousness would be renewed and the power of the deception would be broken so that the light of truth could once again be seen by seekers of such.⁷⁴ In this particular instance, Jesus insisted both that the period of apostasy was to be limited and that God would not allow it to continue indefinitely. In sum, it is a rather plain apostasy-restoration scheme that one can see.⁷⁵

It is worth noting here that several in the early church—in addition to the Apostles⁷⁶—felt that things were not right. The most notable example may have been Hegesippus, a second-century Christian apologist who wrote five books, only fragments of which remain. He tried to prove (1) that the Christian

church was currently everywhere the same and (2) that the church of his day was identical to the church established by the Apostles. But in the end, he hinted that his efforts remained unsuccessful. In a famous passage, quoted by Eusebius in his history, Hegesippus finally admitted that

they used to call the church a virgin: for she had not yet been corrupted by vain teachings. But Thebuthis, because he was not made bishop [of Jerusalem], began secretly to corrupt her from the seven sects among the people, to which he himself belonged; from which came Simon (whence the Simonians) and Cleobius (whence the Cleobians) and Dositheus (whence the Dositheans) and Gorthaeus (whence the Goratheni) and the Masbotheans. Springing from these, the Menandrianists and Marcianists and Carpocratians and Valentinians and Basilidians and Saturnilians, each by themselves and each in different ways, introduced their own peculiar opinions. From these sprang false Christs, false prophets, false apostles, those who divided the unity of the church by injurious words against God and against his Christ.⁷⁷

The church had lost her purity, fragmented by dissenting parties because, as Hegesippus noted, the era of the Apostles had passed and jealousies had arisen within the church's leadership. As we have seen, one of the clearest pictures of the deteriorating church, following the disappearance of apostolic influence, was portrayed in the Nag Hammadi texts.

TEACHINGS WITHOUT LDS PARALLELS

What I have so far noted finds obvious similarities in Latter-day Saint teachings. But mixed with these doctrines from the Coptic texts are a number of concepts which do not mesh. What shall we say to this? Let us deal with ramifications of the question in the following way.

As a preface, one must note that the gnostic view of the Bible turned the Christian understanding upside down. In the view of many Nag Hammadi texts, for example, the created order—which included the earth, animals, and humans—was considered to be evil.⁷⁸ Additionally, the creator god—specifically the god of the Jews—was believed to be a lower or fallen deity who could do no more than dispense justice at best and antagonize the cove-

nant people at worst.⁷⁹ While it was he who met Adam in the Garden of Eden and there gave him commandments, the true, living father dwelt in a realm above that of Jehovah, the god of this world, and remained unknown to this lower deity.⁸⁰ Further, in this view it was the role of Jesus and the prophets to reveal the higher, sublime, celestial realm to those trapped within earthly bodies so that they could come to know the real father.⁸¹ Not only were the prophets and Jesus said to reveal him, but they also enlightened true believers concerning the means of escaping this world and the power of its god.⁸² Turning to specific interpretations of the Old Testament, one observes that the serpent in the garden was seen to be a truly good creature attempting to assist Adam and Eve out of the predicament into which they had been placed by the crafty Jewish god.⁸³ In addition, it was held that when Jehovah caused the flood upon the earth, he was actually trying to destroy the race of righteous men descended from Seth. According to some gnostic sources, Noah was simply a henchman of the ignorant Jewish god. Moreover, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were really the righteous people of their age. For it was allegedly because of jealousy that the lower deity of the Old Testament had tried to destroy these cities and their people.⁸⁴ In addition, Moses and many of the prophets came under criticism in this literature for being spokesmen of the lower god.⁸⁵ Thus, it is clear that this sort of view of the Bible constitutes a theological flip-flop when compared with LDS notions, as well as those of other Christians, an obviously important point to keep in mind.

As a corollary of such theological inversion, there exists in many of the texts a radical dualism which saw God as distantly removed from the created order. In this type of system, evil was seen to have an existence of its own, constituting an ever-present challenge to the divine way of doing things.⁸⁶ And because the higher God had been far away from this sphere of existence, creation was thought to be a product of wickedness or, at best, mistakes.⁸⁷

It was from this concept that the companion notion arose that matter is evil. This devaluation of matter implied that human bodies formed prisons and that one's greatest task was to escape. Creation, on this view, had proceeded from the work of the lowly

demiurge, or creator god, who was unaware of the higher, divine father. Only by escaping one's body and thereby the power of this lower deity was one enabled to return to the celestial realms.⁸⁸ During the return itself, the soul had to pass through a succession of gates guarded by watchmen. And it was only by successfully passing these watchmen that one finally attained freedom in the divine realms above.⁸⁹ Naturally, special knowledge was required of each soul, since the watchmen at each station asked questions which could be answered only if one had been taught the gnostic secrets. For the *gnosis* or special knowledge consisted not only in understanding the origin, nature, and destiny of the universe, but also in knowing specifically how to escape this world, including the proper replies to the questioning watchmen who guarded the path back to the eternal father.⁹⁰

A natural corollary of all this was the tendency to deny the physical resurrection. Interestingly, it was apparently unequivocally affirmed in only one text in the Nag Hammadi library, that of Melchizedek.⁹¹ In others which discuss the resurrection, it was either denied or the issue was not clearly resolved.⁹² Such concepts derived from viewing the body as evil and depraved. Gnostic thinkers, believing that our souls had originally fallen from the divine world only to be captured in bodies during mortal life, thus had no reason to maintain that our divine spirits were to be reentombed within body-prisons through a bodily revivification. Once again, consequently, the focus on Jesus did not rest on his redeeming resurrection and return to life, but rather on his role as a revealer, a teacher of the hidden truths which equipped the soul to escape this world.

Concerning Jesus, there was more. Not only was he seen almost exclusively as a revealer, but he—as deity—was widely believed to have neither suffered nor died. Two basic approaches were adopted by the ancient Christians who were embarrassed at the thought of a deity having both to participate in the crass, material world and to die like a mortal. Such views are termed *docetism* and *adoptionism*. The docetic view of Jesus had its roots in a basically Hellenistic interpretation of the New Testament. The term derives from the Greek infinitive *dokein*, which

means “to seem.” Fundamentally, it held that Jesus only seemed to suffer and die, whereas in reality he did not. Jesus neither perspired nor slept nor grew tired; he only seemed to experience such. In fact, on this view, he was not born of Mary; it only seemed so.⁹³ In the Coptic texts, for example, such a view was plainly laid out in the Apocalypse of Peter from Codex VII. This document claimed to report a conversation between Jesus and Peter that occurred shortly before Jesus’ arrest. During the conversation, Peter was shown in a vision what would shortly happen to Jesus. In the vision, Jesus was first taken to the place of crucifixion. Then, just as Jesus was to be secured to the cross, he escaped from his captors by becoming invisible while a substitute was nailed to the wood in his stead. Now standing above the cross and the hateful mob, the invisible Christ began to laugh.⁹⁴ By this account, Jesus was incapable of suffering because he was a deity. And using his divine powers, he had escaped before he could be nailed to the cross. Thus Jesus only seemed to die; in actuality he did not.

Adoptionism, on the other hand, consisted in the doctrine that when the human Jesus was baptized the heavenly divine Savior descended upon this good man and adopted him as the Messiah. This divine power that came down from the Father—called Christ in this view—continued with the man Jesus for the duration of his ministry. But when Jesus came to suffer at life’s end, the divine Christ withdrew and the human Jesus went alone to the cross.⁹⁵ Both of these views—docetism with its illusory Savior and adoptionism with its heavenly Christ and human Jesus—are foreign to LDS theology, which insists that Jesus as himself suffered and died and that by dying he brought about the redemption of all mankind.

SUMMARY

In sum, it is for reasons like the above that I personally proceed cautiously when dealing with the Nag Hammadi library. I do not mean to imply that the texts are not worth careful study. On the contrary, they are, for there is much in them that is uplifting and informative. Moreover, one must acknowledge that the

works in the collection were written largely in the spirit of scriptural composition. And this element speaks well of the library. But the significant presence of elements which have a very strange ring obliges one to exercise caution about where one places one's enthusiastic support. Further, as noted near the outset, the problems of establishing authenticity, owing to the continuing difficulties of both dating these documents and separating earlier literary materials from later accretions within the texts themselves, require one to agree that "there are many things contained therein that are true, and . . . there are many things contained therein that are not true, which are interpolations by the hands of men" (D&C 91:1–2). What I suggest, therefore, is that any affirmation of their worth as something akin to scripture must be tempered and qualified.

Notes

1. Jean Doresse and Henri-Charles Puech announced the discovery to the scholarly community on 8 February 1948 at a meeting of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres: see "Nouveaux écrits gnostiques découverts en Egypte," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'année 1948*, pp. 87–95. Jean Doresse told the story as he later reconstructed it in *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics*, vol. 1 (New York: Viking, 1960), pp. 116–36 (translation from the French edition, *Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Égypte, I: Introduction aux écrits gnostiques coptes découverts à Khénoboskion* [Paris: Librairie Plon, 1958]). More recently, James M. Robinson has sought to paste together events of the discovery and its aftermath in *The Nag Hammadi Library* (hereafter abbreviated *NHL*) (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 21–24; in *Biblical Archaeologist* 42 (Fall 1979): 206–24; and in *Introduction, The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), pp. 3–11.

2. There certainly existed twelve bound codices or books plus, perchance, a thirteenth. Additionally, the discoverer's mother may have burned at least one book while heating tea. See J. M. Robinson, "Introduction to the Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices," brochure (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), p. 3; *Biblical Archaeologist* 42 (Fall 1979):214; "Preface to Codices XI, XII, and XIII," *Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Codices XI, XII, and XIII* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. xii–xvii; and *Introduction, The*

Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), pp. 3–5.

3. The excerpt in Codex VI from Plato's Republic, book IX (588B–589B), is obviously pre-Christian. The Apocalypse of Adam, by contrast, is generally viewed as having a Jewish origin. See G. W. MacRae, "Adam, Apocalypse of," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), pp. 9–10; *NHL*, p. 256; "The Coptic Gnostic Apocalypse of Adam," *Heythrop Journal* 6 (1965):27–35.

4. "For the Father anointed the Son, and the Son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us" (Gospel of Philip, Saying 95). See also the inferential phrase in Saying 47 of the same text: "The Apostles who were before us . . ." (*NHL*, pp. 144, 137). Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons at the end of the second century, implied while writing against gnostics that the outsiders could not distinguish between the "orthodox" and those with gnostic proclivities (Against Heresies, I.Pref.2). See also Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), pp. 149–77, and Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), pp. xix, xxii–xxiii, xxxv–xxxvi, 7, 10–11, 21–24, 31–32.

5. Irenaeus opened his long, five-book treatise by referring to "certain men [who] have set the truth aside" and who "falsify the oracles of God and prove themselves evil interpreters of the good word of revelation" (Against Heresies, I.Pref.1). This was the stance adopted by other anti-heretical writers of the second and third centuries such as Serapion of Antioch and Hippolytus of Rome (for a summary, see Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 1 [Utrecht: Spectrum Publishers, 1966], pp. 278–313, and vol. 2 [1964], pp. 166–70). By contrast, the orthodox church was said to possess "one and the same faith throughout the whole world" (Irenaeus, Ag. Her., I.10.3).

6. Consult, for example, Pagels, pp. xviii–xix, xxxv–xxxvi.

7. Eusebius himself said: "I am the first to venture on such a project and to set out on what is indeed a lonely and untrodden path" (Ecclesiastical History I.1.3; translation from G. A. Williamson, *Eusebius: The History of the Church* [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965], p. 32). Incidentally, Eusebius was both a close personal friend of the Roman emperor Constantine and a major force at the council which formulated the Nicene Creed in A.D. 325.

8. One major issue, mentioned by Eusebius at the beginning of his work, focused on the legitimate succession from the Apostles: "The chief matters to be dealt with in this work are the following: The lines of succession from the holy apostles, and the periods that have elapsed

from our Savior's time to our own" (Eccl. Hist. I.1.1). The second issue concerned tradition, that is, the true teaching that had reportedly been handed down within the church since the era of the Apostles. On this point, Eusebius turned to Hegesippus, a writer from Samaria who wrote in the latter half of the second century. Of him Eusebius said, "In five short books, written in the simplest style, he gave an authentic account of the apostolic preaching" (Eccl. Hist., IV.8.2). Hegesippus had obtained his information in the following way: "When traveling as far as Rome [from Samaria] he mixed with a number of bishops and found the same doctrine among them all" (Eccl. Hist., IV.22.1). In fact, Hegesippus was quoted as saying, "In every line of bishops and in every city things accord with the preaching of the Law, the Prophets, and the Lord" (Eccl. Hist., IV.22.3 [translations from Williamson, pp. 31, 161, 181]).

9. W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971; translated from the 2nd German edition of *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1964]; the first edition appeared in 1934).

10. "Perhaps—I repeat, perhaps—certain manifestations of Christian life that the authors of the church renounce as 'heresies' originally had not been such at all, but, at least here and there, were the only form of the new religion—that is, for those regions they were simply 'Christianity.' The possibility also exists that their adherents constituted the majority, and that they looked down with hatred and scorn on the orthodox, who for them were the false believers." (Ibid., p. xxii.)

11. Bauer's chief opposition came from H. E. W. Turner (*The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations Between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* [London: Mowbray, 1954]) and C. H. Roberts (*Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* [London: The British Academy, 1979]). See Pagels, pp. xxx–xxxI.

12. At issue, too, is the means by which "heretics" received and communicated their doctrinal views. For them, special revelation from the risen Lord formed the chief vehicle, while the "orthodox" clung to the view that Jesus taught all that was necessary for life and salvation during his mortal ministry. See Pagels, pp. 3–27, for a summary of such competing views on the resurrection.

13. Evidence is summarized by Robinson, "Introduction to the Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices," pp. 4–5; *NHL*, pp. 15–16.

14. There exists, for example, a long Valentinian formulary quoted both in the First Apocalypse of James (33.11–35.19 [*NHL*, p. 246]) and by Irenaeus, who wrote his anti-heretical work before the end of the

second century (in *Ag. Her.*, I.21.5). Hence, we know that this segment of the First Apocalypse dates certainly as early as A.D. 150. In another instance, it is widely held that the Apocalypse of Adam dates from the second century A.D., or possibly even from the first (G. MacRae, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supp. Vol., p. 9). Others have argued that some materials embedded in the Gospel of Thomas may go back almost to the days of Jesus himself; see, for instance, Stevan Davies, "Thomas—The Fourth Synoptic Gospel," *Biblical Archaeologist* 46 (Winter 1983): 6–9, 12–14.

15. For example, in an unpublished dissertation written at Brown University, I have argued (convincingly, I believe) that the Apocryphon of James consisted of an original central section (2.7–15.5 [*NHL*, pp. 30–36]) plus a beginning and an ending that were added by a later hand (1.1–2.7; 15.28–16.11 [*NHL*, pp. 29f., 36]), as well as a short section belonging to the original document that was reworked by the later editor (15.5–28 [*NHL*, p. 36]). Two major themes of the original segment find parallels in LDS doctrine: apostasy of the early church and the premortal life of spirits. Within the obviously later sections, however, the following intriguing notions occur: affirmation of Jesus' post-resurrection ministry, mention that all the Apostles wrote accounts of Jesus' teaching, and a clear inference of multiple heavens.

16. In Codex II, the related texts dealing with the Creation—"On the Origin of the World" and "Hypostasis of the Archons"—detail the notions of many deities, multiple heavens, premortal existence, and the idea that "there are many kingdoms; for there is no space in which there is no kingdom; and there is no kingdom in which there is no space" (D&C 88:37). But coupled with these distinctively LDS concepts is a view of the biblical world which turns things upside down: the serpent is the hero of the scene in the Garden of Eden, and Jehovah is portrayed as a dunce (*NHL*, pp. 152–79 [see below for further discussion]).

17. In the first part of the Apocalypse of Peter from Codex VII, there appears a rather neat apostasy-restoration scheme. But in the later section that recounts Peter's vision of the Crucifixion we encounter a docetic view of the Savior which has him suddenly becoming invisible, escaping his captors, and laughing at their ignorance while they unwittingly nail a substitute to the cross (*NHL*, pp. 340–45); more below.

18. The authorship of the library naturally is diverse. There are works attributed to one or another of Jesus' disciples (Gospel of Thomas, Apocalypse of Peter, etc.) as well as to Old Testament figures (Apocalypse of Adam, The Three Steles of Seth, etc.). Additionally, we find several texts linked to non-biblical personalities (Sentences of Sextus, The Thought of Norea, etc.) as well as theological treatises for whom authors remained unassigned (The Testimony of Truth, The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth, On the Origin of the World, etc.).

19. The content sought to teach one's true place in the grand eternal scheme as well as giving specific directions as to how the soul was to make its way back to the celestial realms after death. For a summary, see Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 2d ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 34–37, 42–47; and Pagels, pp. xix–xx. See further below.

20. One thinks of the paradigmatic oaths reportedly administered by the risen Jesus to the disciples—a scene repeated with numerous variations—not to tell what he was about to reveal to them. See, for instance, The Second Book of Jeu, 100.7–101.14, edited by Carl Schmidt and translated by Violet MacDermot in *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*, Nag Hammadi Studies XIII (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), pp. 128–31. See also Melchizedek, 14.9–15 (*NHL*, p. 402).

21. Compare Jesus' statements to James and Peter as reported in the Apocryphon of James, 8.33–36: "I have commanded you to follow me and I have taught you the answer before the Authorities [= *archons*]; and 9.18–23: "Hear the word, understand the knowledge [= *gnosis*], love life and no one will persecute you nor will anyone oppress you, other than yourselves" (*NHL*, p. 33). It has been pointed out that what the disciples were said to have learned concerned specifically salvific secrets; so M. Malinine et al., eds., *Epistula Iacobi Apocrypha* (Zürich: Rascher Verlag, 1968), pp. 60–62.

22. The pattern of succession is preserved in the Gospel of Philip, 74.16–18: "The Father anointed the Son, and the Son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us" (*NHL*, p. 144). Consult the enlightening discussions on succession and transmission among gnostics by Manfred Hornschuh ("The Apostles as Bearers of the Tradition," *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, vol. 2 [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965], pp. 74–87) and Hans von Campenhausen (*Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, pp. 149–77); also Pagels, pp. 10–11, 22.

23. Gnostic texts regularly underplay the significance of the Crucifixion; in Codex V, for instance, the First Apocalypse of James—reportedly describing a scene just before Jesus' arrest and death—reduced it to the following brief notice: "The Lord said farewell to him [James] and fulfilled what was fitting" (30.11–13 [*NHL*, p. 245]).

24. Apocryphon of James, 10.15–20 (*NHL*, p. 33). Compare 5.29–30: "For the good ones will not come into the world" (*NHL*, p. 31; translation is that in Malinine et al., p. 119). On the basis of the few passages cited here and in the succeeding notes, one might urge that the doctrine of the premortal existence of souls was not widespread among those who revered these texts. But we do not see such only in the Apoc-

ryphon of James and the Gospel of Thomas. It is also plainly visible in the so-called Sethian texts. For references, see notes 16, 60, 61, 62, and 66.

25. The Apocryphon of James, 5.23–29 (*NHL*, p. 31). I follow here G. C. Stead's illuminating remarks in his review of M. Malinine et al., in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, new series, 31 (1970): 483–85.

26. Gospel of Thomas, Saying 4 (*NHL*, p. 118). See the comments of Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman in *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (London: Collins, 1960), pp. 117–18, which miss the obvious point, suggesting instead that because of the unusual source of learning—from an infant—the meaning must be that the place of life can be known only by a revelation granted to one who has become as a little child.

27. Near the end of the second century, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, affirmed of God that “of His own free will He created all things, since He is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things, and Himself commanding all things into existence” (Against Heresies, II.1.1; compare I.22.1 and II.2.4). Origen, the third-century theologian from Alexandria, taught that all souls had a premortal life. This doctrine, along with others espoused by Origen, were condemned officially at the Second Council of Constantinople, held in A.D. 553. There is good reason to believe that the Anathemas of the Emperor Justinian against Origen's doctrines—which included in the opening Anathema the following: “Whoever says or thinks that human souls pre-existed, i.e., that they had previously been spirits and holy powers . . . shall be anathema” (cursed)—were drawn up in A.D. 543 or 544, several years before the council. See Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 4 (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), pp. 245, 347–49; also Philip Hughes, *The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils, 325–1870* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 117–18. The English text of the Anathemas against Origen's teachings can be found in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, volume editor Henry R. Percival (reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 318, 320. For the idea of premortal existence in Greek and Jewish sources, see David Winston, “Preexistence in Hellenic, Judaic and Mormon Sources,” *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center, 1978), pp. 13–35.

28. “The rule of truth which we hold is, that there is one God Almighty, who made all things by His Word, and fashioned and formed, out of that which had no existence, all things which exist”

(Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I.22.1). The earliest reference in Jewish writings to such a concept appeared in 2 Maccabees 7:28 of the Old Testament Apocrypha. See the note on 2 Baruch 21:4 in R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 493. Compare A. F. J. Klijn's translation of the latter passage in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), p. 628. One can still find modern affirmations of such a notion, even in light of clear scientific evidence to the contrary; so, for instance: "The Hebrew phrase, 'in the beginning' [Gen. 1:1], seems to indicate an absolute beginning to the exclusion of any pre-existing matter on which God might work" (article "Creation" in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Monsignor H. Francis Davis et al., vol. 2 [London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967]), p. 138.

29. Seven heavens is a very common conception: see *On the Origin of the World*, 104.13–35 (*NHL*, pp. 165–66), and the discussion of such in Johannes Hehn, *Siebenzahl und Sabbat bei den Babyloniern und im Alten Testament* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1907; reprinted 1968 by Zentralantiquariat der DDR), pp. 6–16, 19–34; also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I.30.5. The notions of seven, three, and ten heavens in Jewish thought are cited with references by Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1953), pp. 9–11. For a concept of 72 heavens, see the discussion in the *editio princeps* of *On the Origin of the World* in Alexander Böhlig and Pahor Labib, *Die koptisch-gnostische Schrift ohne Titel aus Codex II von Nag Hammadi* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1962), pp. 20–22, 52–53 (the page numbers of the text in Böhlig's edition differ from the currently accepted enumeration: subtract 48 from Böhlig's numbers); compare 105.12–16 (*NHL*, p. 166). The number 365 is also known from the teachings of Basilides of Alexandria; see Irenaeus, *Ag. Her.*, I.24.3–5, 7.

30. For instance, this is especially true in the treatise *On the Origin of the World*, where we meet Pistis and Sophia Zoe (e.g., 98.11–23; 103.32–104.35 [*NHL*, pp. 162, 165–66]); see the remarks in Böhlig, pp. 38, 51.

31. So in the fragmentary opening of the *Apocalypse of Adam*, 64.1–65.30. Consult translations in *NHL*, pp. 256–57; Werner Foerster, *Gnosis*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 15–16; Stephen E. Robinson, "The *Apocalypse of Adam*," *BYU Studies* 17 (Winter 1977): 143 and discussion on pp. 141–42; and Charlesworth, p. 712.

32. *On the Origin of the World*, 118.24–121.13 (*NHL*, pp. 174–75), and *Hypostasis of the Archons*, 89.31–90.19 (*NHL*, p. 155).

33. Apocalypse of Adam, 65.25–67.21 (*NHL*, p. 257); also Foerster, pp. 16–17; Robinson, pp. 143–44; and Charlesworth, pp. 712–13.

34. Apocalypse of Adam, 85.19–30 (*NHL*, p. 264); also Foerster, p. 23; Robinson, p. 153; and Charlesworth, pp. 718–19. Such a concept, already observed in note 20, was widespread.

35. See Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), pp. 115–17, 243–46; *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), pp. 24–26, 66–67, 210–16. For a contrary view responding to early claims made for the Dead Sea Scrolls and arguing for the uniqueness of Jesus and his message, see Cardinal Jean Daniélou's *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity* (Baltimore, Md.: Helicon Press, 1958), pp. 22–24, 30–36, 51–69.

36. Theodor H. Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East* (reprint ed., New York: Gordian Press, 1975), pp. 12–106. For examples—from both the Near East and elsewhere—of ceremony reciting what was done from the beginning, see Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), pp. 21–27, and Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp. 414–28.

37. The sayings in the Gospel of Thomas show clear evidence of having been arranged in order by “catchwords” which allowed for easier memory. While one might conclude from this observation that the presence of such merely demonstrates that this work enjoyed a period of oral transmission before being written down (compare James M. Robinson, “LOGOI SOPHON: On the Gattung of Q,” in J. M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971], pp. 71–113), it is just as likely that these mnemonic devices assisted those who were memorizing such a dialogue for ceremonial teaching. Though fragmentary, The Dialogue of the Savior (*NHL*, pp. 230–38) exhibits similar traits. See the observations of Pheme Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 19–20, 26–36.

38. See note 22 for references.

39. “The Lord [did] everything in a mystery, a baptism and a chrism [= anointing] and a eucharist and a redemption and a bridal chamber” (Gospel of Philip, 67.27–30 [*NHL*, p. 140]). In Philip's view, the bridal chamber, where the marriage takes place, is the same as the holy of holies: 69.24–25 (*NHL*, p. 142).

40. Jacques E. Ménard, *L'Évangile selon Philippe* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1967), p. 28, suggested that the “redemption” is an exclusively

Valentinian rite practiced among the Marcosians (Irenaeus, *Ag. Her.*, I.21.5). Seeing it as a sacrament of the last rites, he called it “un viatique qui assure l’entrée du Plérôme” and noted that it was administered with oil.

41. The eucharist—in LDS terminology, the sacrament—is also known as the Lord’s Supper. For references, see the Topical Guide published in the back of the recent LDS edition of the Bible (1979), pp. 441–42.

42. Ménard, pp. 27, 213; on the other hand, Robert McLachlan Wilson (*The Gospel of Philip* [New York: Harper and Row, 1962], pp. 19–20, 137–38, 158) admitted connections in Philip between anointing with oil and anointing by the Spirit. For a general overview, see G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, 2d ed. (London: SPCK, 1976), pp. 215–22.

43. Exodus 30:23–33; 40:12–15; Leviticus 8:6–30; and references in Wilson, pp. 154–55. The connection of water and anointing oil (or “fire”) with garments and the purificatory power ascribed to the water and oil all point to the scene in which Moses washed and anointed Aaron and his sons when conferring upon them the priesthood and the attendant priestly garments (*Gospel of Philip*, 57:19–24, 27–28; *NHL*, p. 135). See Wilson’s comments, pp. 90–91, as well as those of Ménard, pp. 143–45.

44. *Gospel of Philip*, 75.12–16 (*NHL*, p. 144). Earlier in the text (67.9–27), the anointing “of the fulness of power” was connected with receiving the truth through “types and images” and with becoming a Christ.

45. Observed by many; compare Wilson, pp. 19–20, 158.

46. Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley’s important study, “A Cult-Mystery in the Gospel of Philip” (*Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 [1980]: 569–81), argues both for the literalness of the ordinance performed in the bridal chamber and for its absolute centrality.

47. See the tractate *The Exegesis on the Soul* from Codex V (*NHL*, pp. 180–87), where the fallen soul is, after salvation, united with the Father in spiritual marriage. Compare “the bridal chamber of the heavens” and the “spiritual wedding” in the tractate *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* from Codex VII (57.7–27 and 65.33–67.19 [*NHL*, pp. 333, 336–37]). In the *Tripartite Tractate*, the bridal chamber is said to be “the love of God the Father” (138.9–11 [*NHL*, p. 97]). According to the *Gospel of Thomas*, Saying 75, only “the solitary . . . will enter the bridal chamber” (*NHL*, p. 126). The *Dialogue of the Savior* associates the bridal chamber with the reception of the heavenly garment (138.16–20 [*NHL*, p. 235]).

48. In the Sethian text, mention of “the height” to which the “Son of Majesty” was brought for the wedding may suggest an earthly sanctuary situated on a prominently elevated spot where the heavenly marriage was celebrated (57.7–16 [*NHL*, p. 333]).

49. Gospel of Philip, 69.1–4 (*NHL*, p. 141); Wilson, pp. 136–37; Ménard, pp. 192–93.

50. Implied in the language of 69.4–14 (*NHL*, p. 141), which precedes and is connected to the discussions on the places of worship and on the bridal chamber (69.14–37 [*NHL*, p. 142]).

51. 69.14–22 (*NHL*, p. 42); Wilson, pp. 139–41; Ménard, p. 192, asserts that Philip presents a description of the celestial or ideal temple. Compare 84.21–85.29 (*NHL*, pp. 150–51).

52. In Philip’s view, baptism and—apparently—the redemption correspond to the holy and holier places (69.22–24 [*NHL*, p. 142]). A break in the text which affects line 23 obscures whether the Coptic term for redemption was written there; both Wilson (p. 140) and Ménard (p. 195) accept “redemption” as the original reading, now lost.

53. 69.24–25; 84.22–23; compare 85.19–21 (*NHL*, pp. 142, 150.)

54. 69.27–28 (*NHL*, p. 142).

55. 74.12–22 (*NHL*, p. 144); consult Wilson, p. 20, and Ménard, pp. 212–14.

56. “Those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated” (70.19–20 [*NHL*, p. 142]); see Wilson, pp. 142–43, and Ménard, pp. 198–99.

57. “The union is in the world,” 76.6—Wilson’s translation (p. 52), since that in *NHL*, p. 145, is misleadingly inaccurate. Because of the Coptic tense—the second present—the sense is: “It is in this world that the union is [made].” See also 86.6–7 (*NHL*, p. 151).

58. 84.21–85.21 (*NHL*, p. 150); Wilson, pp. 191–92; Ménard, p. 240.

59. Several documents are linked to patriarchal figures by their titles: In Codex V, the Apocalypse of Adam; in Codex VII, the Paraphrase of Shem, the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, the Three Steles of Seth; and the Codex IX, Melchizedek. The full list appears in several publications: see *NHL*, pp. xiii–xv, and *Biblical Archaeologist* 42 (Fall 1979): 205. The term *Patriarch*, of course, refers to figures mentioned in the biblical text prior to and including Jacob, son of Isaac.

60. Concerning Adam, his premortal experience was apparently spent with Eve; see the Apocalypse of Adam, 64.9–12 (*NHL*, pp. 256–67; other translations of this text, noted previously, can be consulted *ad loc.* in Charlesworth, pp. 712–19; Foerster, pp. 13–23;

and S. E. Robinson, pp. 143–53). The heavenly “Light-Adam,” who eventually became the human Adam, was said to be involved in the early stages of the Creation (On the Origin of the World, 111.29–112.26 [*NHL*, p. 170]) and was said to have been born in heaven—known as Adamas there—before creation began (Gospel of the Egyptians, III,49.1–12 [*NHL*, p. 198]). The “incorruptible man Adamas” was also pictured as giving praise to the Father in a premortal scene (Gospel of the Egyptians, III,50.10–20 [*NHL*, p. 199]). The coming of Adam and Eve into the world caused them to forget their past and to emerge in this world in a state of ignorance (Apocalypse of Adam, 64.24–30; 65.9–15; and Hypostasis of the Archons, 89.3–7 [*NHL*, pp. 256–57, 154]). For general references to the doctrine of the preexistence of souls, see note 27 above.

61. Gospel of the Egyptians, III,50.12–14; 51.3 (*NHL*, p. 199).

62. Adam’s heavenly origin is detailed in the Gospel of the Egyptians, III,49.5–22 (*NHL*, pp. 198–99). “The Manifestation . . . gave birth to the four great lights . . . and the great incorruptible Seth, the son of the incorruptible man Adamas” (Gospel of the Egyptians, III,51.16–21 [*NHL*, p. 199]).

63. See the Gospel of the Egyptians, III,51.5–17; 54.8–9; 59.12–15; 60.25–61.1 (*NHL*, pp. 199–200, 202). The race of Seth was “like the sun” (59.25–60.2 [*NHL*, p. 202]), and its presence on earth induced the god of this world to cause both the flood and continuous persecutions (61.1–22 [*NHL*, pp. 202–3]). With divine protection, the covenant people were to persist from beginning to end [62.13–63.9 [*NHL*, p. 203]]. Concerning the miraculous preservation of the chosen race, see the Apocalypse of Adam, 69.19–24 and 75.17–28 (*NHL*, pp. 258, 259). Among the covenants preserved by this people are marriage for eternity and the enthronement of the righteous (Second Treatise of the Great Seth, 57.7–58.13 [*NHL*, p. 333]).

64. According to the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, it was Seth who proposed gathering a council, then spelled out a plan “to the whole multitude of the multitudinous assembly” which was received with rejoicing by “the whole house of the Father of Truth.” As a result, Seth was sent “to reveal the glory [of the Father] to [his] kindred and [his] fellow spirits” (50.1–24 [*NHL*, p. 330]).

65. Compare the words of Seth, found in the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, about his struggle in the heavenly battle (54.14–55.15 [*NHL*, pp. 331–32]). In the following passage, in fact, Seth is portrayed as the prototype of Jesus (55.15–56.4 [*NHL*, p. 332]). Mention of the celestial rebellion also occurs in the treatise On the Origin of the World, 102.26–34 [*NHL*, p. 164]).

66. “I [Seth] came forth to reveal the glory to my kindred and my fellow spirits” (Second Treatise of the Great Seth, 50.22–24; compare

the end of the Apocalypse of Adam, 85.19–29 [*NHL*, pp. 330, 264]. Moreover, Seth was said to have learned the fate of his descendants while still in his premortal state (Gospel of the Egyptians, III,61.1–22 [*NHL*, pp. 202–3]) like Adam did from the three messengers (Apocalypse of Adam, 65.26–66.8; also 67.14–27 [*NHL*, pp. 257–58]). Notably, according to the Apocalypse of Adam, Eve also served as a revealer in the garden when she “taught me [Adam] a word of knowledge of the eternal God” (64.12–14 [*NHL*, p. 257]); her revelatory role was further underscored in *On the Origin of the World*, 113.21–114.15 and 115.31–116.8 (*NHL*, pp. 170–72), where she is called “the instructor.” Among things said to be revealed in these texts is the nature or quality of the Father: he is called “the Man” (Second Treatise of the Great Seth, 52.36; in the Gospel of the Egyptians, III,59.3, the same title appears but may refer to Adam [*NHL*, pp. 331, 202]), “the Man of the Greatness” (Second Treatise of the Great Seth, 53.3–5 [*NHL*, p. 331]), and “the Man of Truth” (Second Treatise of the Great Seth, 53.17 [*ibid.*]); also “Man,” “First Man,” and “Immortal Man” in the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, 103.22–104.9, 105.5, 109.5, 112.7, etc. (*NHL*, pp. 216, 217, 222, 223). Compare the titles “Man of Holiness” and “Man of Counsel” in *Moses* 6:57 and 7:35, the former name having been revealed to Adam, father of Seth.

67. Gospel of the Egyptians, III,68.1–69.5: “This is the book which the Great Seth wrote, and placed in high mountains . . . in order that, at the end of the times and the eras . . . it may come forth and reveal this incorruptible, holy race of the great savior.” (*NHL*, p. 205). Compare the Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth, where the message was to be inscribed on “steles of turquoise in hieroglyphic characters” (61.18–63.14 [*NHL*, pp. 296–97]). In a differing account, it was reported that the heavenly secrets were not to be written in a book. Instead, they were to be brought by angels and inscribed “upon a rock of truth” (so Apocalypse of Adam, 85.1–31 [*NHL*, pp. 263–64]).

68. In addition to his predictions of persecution (so Second Treatise of the Great Seth, 59.19–60.3 [*NHL*, pp. 333–34]), Seth also revealed a coming apostasy which, following the Crucifixion, would be “an imitation” and consist of “a doctrine of a dead man and lies” (60.13–61.24 [*NHL*, p. 334]). According to the Apocalypse of Adam, even the name of the true revealer would be used deceptively (77.18–27 [*NHL*, p. 260]).

69. See, for example, two telling passages in the Second Treatise of the Great Seth (59.19–61.28 and 62.14–19 [*NHL*, pp. 333–35]): volition, not simple chance occurrence, is underscored when the texts speak of those with authority (61.12; compare 61.25–26) who will be motivated by hate (59.32; 60.33; compare 62.18–19), who will use imitation (60.20; compare 59.25–26) and lies (60.23) to bring about slavery (60.27; 61.4, 22, 24), who are led by worldly cares (60.28; 61.7)

and employ jealousy (61.5) and fear (60.27; 61.6, 23) to bring divisions (62.14–19) and to lead others astray (61.18). This is not a picture of gradual decline from right toward wrong but of consciously orchestrated rebellion against the truth and its adherents.

70. On the one hand, the work of error or deception—portrayed as having personal characteristics—would always oppose the work of the Father, thereby setting the stage for testing mortals (Gospel of Truth, 17.10–37 [*NHL*, p. 38]). On the other, the deception would close off paths to the truth by altering even names, calling good evil and vice versa (Gospel of Philip, 53.23–35; 54.5–31 [*NHL*, pp. 132–33]); see Wilson’s remarks, pp. 75, 77.

71. According to the Apocryphon of James, the first element to disappear was to be the gift of prophecy, already fading at the death of John the Baptist (6.21–7.1 [*NHL*, p. 32]). Compare the Savior’s words reported in the Book of Thomas the Contender: “Woe to you, godless ones, who have no hope, who rely on things [prophecies?] that will not happen” (143.8–10 [*NHL*, p. 193]). It was Peter whom Jesus was said to urge, “Therefore be strong until the imitation of the righteousness . . . comes” (71.22–23; translation by S. Kent Brown and C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Apocalypse of Peter: Introduction and Translation,” *BYU Studies* 15 [Winter 1975]: 139; compare *NHL*, p. 340).

72. The picture of the Apostles’ future, like that sketched in the New Testament, is always bleak and gloomy; see, for instance, the Apocryphon of James (4.22–5.21) and the Letter of Peter to Philip (138.17–27), where suffering is prophesied for them (*NHL*, pp. 31, 397). According to the Apocalypse of Peter, those who were to succeed the Apostles would “blaspheme the truth while also speaking an evil word” (74.10–28 [Brown and Griggs, pp. 140–41, and *NHL*, p. 341]).

73. Peter’s readiness to give up in the face of a troublesome future was to be seen in his response to Jesus’ predictions documented in the Apocryphon of James (13.26–36 [*NHL*, p. 35] and the Apocalypse of Peter (79.33–80.7 [Brown and Griggs, p. 143, and *NHL*, p. 343]); compare John 21.1–3.

74. Apocalypse of Peter, 80.8–21 (Brown and Griggs, pp. 143–44, and *NHL*, p. 343).

75. James Brashler, in an unpublished dissertation entitled “The Coptic Apocalypse of Peter: A Genre Analysis and Interpretation” (Claremont Graduate School, Calif., 1977), pp. 235–37, has noted the same thing. In fact, according to the Apocalypse of Peter, 78.3–6, the righteous race was not to find the truth until the Second Coming. Moreover, the deception was to arise from human pride (76.27–77.3) among those who themselves turned away and then led others astray (73.23–74.10), becoming messengers of deception (77.22–78.2). It was

the Apostles' successors in the Church—bishops and deacons (79.21–32) as well as those who lived the solitary life (78.30–79.21)—who were the perpetrators of troubles (Brown and Griggs, pp. 137, 143, and *NHL*, pp. 341–43).

76. Compare, for example, the implication in Jesus' words in Matthew 24:9–12, 24, that in the future false leaders would arise *inside* the Church; also, Acts 20:29–30 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12. Extremely difficult conditions within the Church are reflected in 1 and 2 John, as well as in the letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2–3).

77. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV.22.4–6. Translation is that by Hugh Jackson Lawlor and John Ernest Leonard Oulton, *Eusebius, The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine*, vol. 1 (London: SPCK, 1954), p. 128.

78. See, for instance, the Gospel of Truth, 17.10–20 (*NHL*, p. 38); the Apocryphon of John, II,9.25–10.7 (*NHL*, pp. 103–4); Hypostasis of the Archons, 87.4–88.10 (*NHL*, pp. 153–54); On the Origin of the World, 98.11–100.10 (*NHL*, pp. 162–63); the Gospel of the Egyptians, III,56.22–59.1, though largely fragmentary, repeats the basic account of the evil origin of the created order (*NHL*, p. 201); and the Apocalypse of Adam, 65.19–25 (*NHL*, p. 257).

79. Often referred to as the demiurge; also see the Hypostasis of the Archons, 86.27–32 (*NHL*, p. 153); the Sophia of Jesus Christ, where he is called “the Almighty” (106.24–107.11 [*NHL*, pp. 219–20]); and the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, 64.1–65.1 (*NHL*, pp. 335–36). Helpful discussion can also be found in H. Jonas, pp. 141–43, 188–94.

80. The god of this earth is consistently described as “ignorant.” See, for example, the Gospel of Truth, 17.29–37 (*NHL*, p. 38); Apocryphon of John, II,10.7–11.22 (*NHL*, pp. 104–5); in the plural form, called “Rulers” or “Authorities” in the Hypostasis of the Archons, 88.19–89.3, and in singular, “the chief Ruler,” 90.19, etc. (*NHL*, pp. 154–55); On the Origin of the World, 102.35–103.28 and 112.27–29 (*NHL*, pp. 165, 170); Gospel of the Egyptians, III,58.23–59.9 (*NHL*, pp. 201–2); the Paraphrase of Shem, 2.10–36 (*NHL*, pp. 309–10); compare the Apocalypse of Adam, 66.25–67.14 (*NHL*, p. 257). Consult also H. Jonas, pp. 194–97, 200–203, and Irenaeus, *Ag. Her.*, I.5.1–6.

81. For instance, the Gospel of Thomas, Saying 88: “Jesus said, ‘The angels and prophets will come to you and give to you those things you (already) have’ ” (*NHL*, p. 127); “The perfect Savior said, ‘I came from the Boundless One so that I might tell you all things’ ” (Sophia of Jesus Christ, 96.18–21 [*NHL*, p. 211]). In another vein, “these are the ones who are taken captive by the First Father [= lower deity]

according to lot, and thus they were shut up in the prisons of the molded bodies” (On the Origin of the World, 114.20–23 [*NHL*, p. 171]).

82. The seriousness of the situation is visible in various passages in which it becomes clear that only a knowledge of secret words and symbols will allow one successfully to flee: Gospel of the Egyptians, III,63.13–17 (*NHL*, p. 203); First Apocalypse of James, 27.14–29.3 and 33.5–20 (*NHL*, pp. 244, 246 [the latter response is paralleled by one reported first by Irenaeus, *Ag. Her.*, I.21.5, and then by Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 36.3.2–6]); Paul was thus permitted to ascend through the heavens in the Apocalypse of Paul, 22.13–23.28 (*NHL*, p. 241). Consult Jonas, pp. 44–46, 80–86, 167–68.

83. Hypostasis of the Archons, calling the serpent “the Instructor,” 89.31–90.12 (*NHL*, p. 155; Eve was “the instructor” according to On the Origin of the World [references in note 66 above]); compare the Apocryphon of John, II,22.9–18 (*NHL*, p. 111); Testimony of Truth, 45.31–47.4 (*NHL*, pp. 411–12); also Jonas, pp. 92–94.

84. See the Gospel of the Egyptians, III,60.9–61.22 (*NHL*, pp. 202–3); Apocalypse of Adam, 69.2–76.7 (*NHL*, pp. 258–60); and the Paraphrase of Shem, 28.5–29.29 (*NHL*, pp. 320–21).

85. Compare the Gospel of Thomas, Sayings 52 and 85 (*NHL*, pp. 124, 127), and the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, 62.27–64.1 (*NHL*, p. 335), where important Old Testament personalities such as Adam and Moses were denigrated. See the further critique in the Apocryphon of John, II,13.18–21; 22.22–23.4; 29.6–12 (*NHL*, pp. 106, 111, 114).

86. “Ignorance of the Father brought about anguish and terror. And the anguish grew solid like a fog so that no one was able to see. For this reason deception became powerful” (Gospel of Truth, 17.10–15 [*NHL*, p. 38]); see Jonas, pp. 52–54.

87. In addition to the reference cited in note 78, see the Sophia of Jesus Christ, 114.12–119.2 (*NHL*, p. 225); Paraphrase of Shem, 19.26–23.6 (*NHL*, pp. 317–18); Second Treatise of the Great Seth, 68.28–69.19 (*NHL*, p. 337); for Valentinian views, consult Jonas, pp. 181–90.

88. Embodiment was often compared to being clothed in “temporary garments” that one shed at death (Dialogue of the Savior, 143.15–23 [*NHL*, p. 237]); consult Jonas, p. 56.

89. According to the Apocryphon of James, 8.30–36, Jesus reportedly said to Peter and James the Just: “And many times have I said to you (disciples) all together, and also to you alone, James, have I

said, be saved! And I have commanded you (sing.) to follow me, and I have taught you what to say before the archons" (*NHL*, p. 33); additional references in note 82 above.

90. The Second Book of Jeu (Schmidt and MacDermot) reported alleged instructions of the risen Jesus to the twelve disciples and their female partners as to what one's soul was to say and do at each gate as it ascended to the celestial heights.

91. Melchizedek, 15.5–10 and—a very fragmentary passage—25.7–10 (*NHL*, pp. 402, 403).

92. The Treatise on the Resurrection (*NHL*, pp. 50–53) can be understood as either affirming or denying bodily resurrection. See further Pagels, pp. 3–27, and the Sophia of Jesus Christ, 91.10–12 (*NHL*, pp. 207–8).

93. See the article "Docetism" and accompanying bibliography in Frank Leslie Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 413. In the New Testament, John was already struggling against such a view: see, for instance, 1 John 4:2–3 and 2 John 7. Irenaeus wrote that those who believed such "deny that He assumed anything material [into his nature], since indeed matter [in this view] is incapable of salvation" (*Ag. Her.*, I.6.1). John Knox (article "Docetism" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al., vol. 1 [Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1962], p. 860) argued that Docetism and Adoptionism actually grew out of the same conceptual framework, although such a notion is not fully self-evident. See also Harnack 1:260–61.

94. The Apocalypse of Peter, 80.23–83.10 (Brown and Griggs, pp. 144–45, and *NHL*, pp. 343–44).

95. Article "Adoptionism" in Cross and Livingstone, pp. 18–19, plus accompanying bibliography. Of this christology, Irenaeus wrote that "there descended upon him (= Jesus) in the form of a dove at the time of his baptism, that Savior who belonged to the Pleroma (= celestial realm)" (*Ag. Her.*, I.7.2). The earliest reference to such a notion, though not fully adoptionistic, appeared in a fragment of the Gospel of Ebionites (likely early second century A.D.) preserved by Epiphanius in his *Panarion* (30.13.7–8; translated as fragment 4 by Philipp Vielhauer in "Jewish Christian Gospels," *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Hennecke and Schneemelcher, 1:157–58). See Harnack 1:259–61.