

Thomassen's own words, "as soon as the act of the candidate, by being ritualized, becomes the bearer of a symbolic meaning that enables it to be identified with the redemptive act-event of the Savior [α] then, as a result, the roles of agent and patient, Savior and saved necessarily become inverted. The agent of the baptismal act, the baptismal candidate, is also *symbolically* represented as the recipient of salvation in the notion of the baptized Savior" (TSS 140). The telos of the Valentinian ritual is, thus, to annul the difference between the transcendent model and its earthly re-enactors, to cause an ontological transfiguration within the active agent who becomes passively related to the Redeemer, and finally, to eliminate the inferior corporeality, the cosmic division, and the deleterious passion of empirical existence.

The key conclusion of TSS is that the movement of Valentinians or "the spiritual seed", albeit not centered around its founder as an historical individual, possessed continuity, coherence, and specificity. It is a "particular branch of ancient Christianity" (TSS 5), and can be understood in accordance with two chief principles: a) soteriology implies a mutual participation which is ultimately related to b) the transcendent process that "proceeds from [the radically transcendent] oneness via [the meta-cosmic and worldly] plurality to [the soteriologically restored] unity" (TSS 189). The book is an indispensable tool not only in the field of Gnostic studies, but also to the history of early Christianity and its incipient theology. Thomassen brilliantly succeeds in articulating the underlying intelligibility and systematic character of Valentinian schools while meticulously approaching the tremendous historical complexity and the divergent origins of this unique religious phenomenon.

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Gerard P. LUTTIKHUIZEN, *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006, xviii, 210 p. ISBN 90 04 14510 9.

Luttikhuisen's *Gnostic Revisions* (GR) pleads against the hypothesis that Gnosticism has had essentially Judaic roots. Against Mastrocinque and Smith, Luttikhuisen argues that Gnostic myths and Scriptures are exclusively tied to the historical emergence of Christianity. More specifically, in the particular case of Gnostics, "we are dealing with non-Jewish intellectuals with a background in Hellenistic schools of thought who evaluated biblical and other non-Gnostic traditions in the light of their own religio-philosophical world view" (GR 10). While arising from another background and basing their worldviews on different sources than those of other early Christians, Gnostics continued to see in Jesus a messenger of the fully transcendent God. However, Luttikhuisen nuances, in being guided by Greek-Hellenistic modes of thinking, these mythopoeists opposed other Christian groups in lieu of the revelatory value of the Old Testament, and especially regarding the relation between the biblical God and the absolute Other as made manifest or known by and through Christ.

Christianity's orthodox beliefs, chiefly those tackling the problem of Jesus's suffering and death, issued from controversies among early Christians about the person and the mission of the Savior. Precisely because the status, role, and value of the Old Testament have constituted the object of such divisive disputes, Luttikhuisen tries to advocate the *Christian* character of Gnosticism. For him, the "demiurgical-Gnostic" writings, albeit critical and revisionary in nature, are part and parcel of intra-Christian debates about the appropriate interpretation of Jewish Scriptures. Moreover, Gnostics, on Luttikhuisen's estimation, deployed biblical stories and categories in order to demonstrate: a) the inferiority of the demiurgical God, Yahweh, and b) the ignorance and superficiality of those fellow Christians who literally believed in the Old Testament and who continued to worship or obey its supposedly absolute deity (GR 11, 28). The second hypothesis is later revisited by the author, who maintains that, although they used earlier texts such as Genesis, the Prophets, or the Jesus traditions, Gnostic teachers thoroughly adapted them for their specific religious goals; thus, initially they might have integrated scriptural sources into their protological and soteriological myths without a decidedly polemical attitude. But eventually, these free and creative adaptations brought Gnostics into conflict with orthodox Christians (GR 162).

The opening chapters of the book focus on the critical Gnostic hermeneutics of Genesis stories from the Valentinian text, *The Apocryphon of John* (GR 17-107). Luttikhuisen commences by describing the complex historical context of these incisive interpretations of Genesis. He remarks that in the second century C.E., unsympathetic approaches to ancient Scriptures were a common practice, a fact which also led to incredibly varied opinions about the content and hidden meaning of Christ's revelation. The main problem was, as we've already said, how to relate the Old Testament to the new Christian soteriological framework. At stake was the true identity of the biblical creator in light of Christ's advent, preaching, suffering, and death.

Luttikhuisen approaches as well the intricate subject of the philosophical roots of *The Apocryphon of John*. His contention is that the mythical arguments of this scripture combine a form of Platonism with some distinctly Aristotelian tenets. The author notices two different directions found in pre-Plotinian Platonism. According to one of them, the divine was not considered a self-contained, self-sufficient entity but rather a God who reflected himself actively into the world through intermediate levels of reality. Furthermore, as Plato argues in his *Timaeus*, the transcendent creator is fundamentally good, reveals himself through providence, and is ultimately cognizable. Therefore, the intermediary Demiurge is just a mere function of this absolute divinity.

The other pre-Plotinian approach emphasized the Platonic epistemological dualism (as voiced in *Phaedo*) which opposed the transitory realm of worldliness and corporeality to the absolute quality of eternal patterns. Transcendent ideas were accessible solely to the invisible soul of humans. Here, the bodily realm is evaluated as a prison, a cave, or a tomb for the soul, a view imparted from the Orphic anthropological doctrine. However, for Luttikhuisen, Aristotle interiorized this dualism and held that the separation was not between the body and the incorporeal self, but rather between the soul (the vital principal of life in general) and the *nous* which represented humans' imperishable "divine

spark.” Indeed, Luttikhuizen bases his reading on a tradition of Late Antiquity according to which Aristotle taught that the human soul shared an ethereal substance with the celestial gods. The same idea reemerges in *The Apocryphon of John* where the soul-body of humans is created out of the archontic rulers.

The picture of Aristotelian theology offered in GR is, indeed, objectionable. The commentator holds that Aristotle has altered Plato’s cosmology and disconnected the supramundane God from the rule over the world. More specifically, the Stagirite proposed a view of the supreme deity as disengaged from any material activity, and thus as not directly related to the motions and changes within the physical world. This very notion of a meta-cosmic God who has no interference with the lower realms enabled Gnostics (together with their forerunners in Hellenistic schools of philosophy) to combine an unconditional devotion to the fully transcendent God or to the Invisible Spirit with an utterly negative evaluation of the demiurge as depicted in the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, Gnostics imported Aristotle’s understanding of human nature which includes an unmixed divine element, the *nous*. The latter is received directly from the transcendent God and represents a universal potential in need of awakening and development. Thirdly, Gnostics were attracted by the Aristotelian idea of a human soul-body compound of the same substance with the sub-lunar deities which, in Gnosticism, appeared as the cosmic wicked or ignorant rulers.

In the fourth chapter (GR 44-58), Luttikhuizen discusses the narrative scheme of Gnostic myth as presented in *The Apocryphon of John*. Here, humanity embodies, as it were, the battle field for metaphysical beings. Humans are endowed with a spiritual core originating in the ultimate Father himself, which is perpetually wanted by the demiurgical God Yaldabaoth. Together with his own allies, he prompts human beings to forget their divine roots and to live as mere sensory beings. In view of this, Yaldabaoth imprisons the exceptional creatures in a world of despair and distress, thus preventing them from actualizing their holy potential and from returning home. With an evilness and ferocity surpassing all apocalyptic portrayals of Satan (whether Jewish or Christian), the low(ly) supralunar entities in *The Apocryphon of John* incite to sin and are ultimately responsible for all the sufferings and mishaps of this world.

When addressing the complex picture of Gnostic theology, Luttikhuizen stresses the fully transcendent nature of God, who is believed to precede and be elevated above any form of being. Running the danger of contradicting himself, the author asserts that this view was inspired by Plato – rather than Aristotle (as previously suggested) – and decisively informed by the biblical term “the-One-who-is” (GR 112). Regarding soteriology, GR is meant as an attack against a deterministic understanding of Gnosticism. For support, Luttikhuizen remarks that the Nag Hammadi writings start from the basic need for an external redemption. The inherent spirituality of humans is not sufficient for salvation. Deliverance is determined on the one hand, by the grace of divine call, and on the other, by the decision to actualize and develop one’s sacred capacity. Only those who respond positively to the transcendent summons will be able to flee from evil. All others will fall into forgetfulness and be damned. In this sense, Luttikhuizen argues, the Gnostic Scriptures manifest a preference for a strict asceticism, a decisive

valuation of ethical behavior, while inciting the enlightened to spread the true God's revelation throughout the world.

A substantial part of the book is spent on a careful examination of the particularity of Gnostic anthropology. The author holds that the latter was articulated by the rewriting of three Genesis stories: the creation of humans, the paradise myth, and the flood narrative (GR 59-107). Before anything else, Luttikhuizen warns us that the Gnostics were not the only ones to adopt critical stances toward biblical texts, especially toward writings which assigned anthropomorphic qualities to God. Pagan philosophers, early Christians, and even some Jewish exegetes took offence at the inadequate attitudes, statements, and indictments of YHWH. Second, Luttikhuizen reminds us that initially, pneuma, the divine element in humans, is fully separated from its trans-celestial homeland. Consequently, it is bound to live in an alien environment which is under the sway of wicked planetary powers. Based on the awareness of this pneumatic content within the inner self, some Gnostic texts (such as *The Apocryphon of John*) divided humanity in three classes: the spirituals who enjoy the possession of the transcendent element descended from the hyper-cosmic world; the psychicals whose souls are made out of the same ethereal substance as the seven cosmic powers; and finally, the somatics who remain imprisoned forever in the realm of the body with all its degrading instincts, passions, and perishability.

As to anthropogony, *The Apocryphon of John* assumes that remnants of light coming from the divine Mother still dwell in Adam. The Demiurge continually attempts to empty the primordial man of this pure element and to regain it for himself. Accordingly, the ignorant deity creates Eve in order to lure light out of Adam. Nevertheless, he manages instead to give birth to Adam's spiritual consort, who in fact, disseminates the authentic revelation. Here, the rejection of the biblical report of Eve's creation out of Adam's body is straightforward enough. For Gnostics, the traditional myth of Eve's birth errs because, if true, it would turn her into a purely fleshy being; in reality, she is, without Yaldabaoth's awareness, the one who awakens man's capacity for knowledge and salvation. (Luttikhuizen also remarks that there is, yet, a negative implication of Eve's occurrence: the division of the light-substance in Adam and a progressive dispersion of spirit in the cosmic world.)

The closing chapters of GR approach the Gnostic interpretations of early Christian texts about the teaching, afflictions, and death of Jesus. Here we are offered an analysis of the docetic speculations found in *The Apocalypse of Peter*, *The Treatise of Seth*, and *The Acts of John* in lieu of the Savior's earthly appearance (GR 130-51). The conclusion is that the tragic event of crucifixion represents an accommodation or "a material representation adapted to the [poor] comprehension of the multitude [of immature Christians]" (GR 151). The author elaborates as well on the influence of the Johannine Gospel and terminology on some Gnostic writings. The epilogue, which critically targets the past and present reception of Gnosticism, is followed by an appendix about the role of baptism in the life of Mani, the founding father of Manichaeism. Except the slight inconsistencies vis-à-vis the (Greek) philosophical origins of the understanding of God as wholly transcendent to this world, and besides the inadequate thesis concerning the completely non-Jewish character of Gnosticism, Luttikhuizen's

work proves to be an important contribution to the study of Gnostic Christianity and to the early intellectual history of Christian orthodoxy.

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Attilio MASTROCINQUE, *From Jewish Magic to Gnosticism*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005, xv, 246 p. ISBN 3-16-148555-6.

Carl B. SMITH II, *No Longer Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins*, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004, xvii, 317 p. ISBN 1-56563-944-8.

Attilio Mastrocinque belongs to the substantial group of religion scholars who see Gnosticism primarily as a Jewish phenomenon. In his most recent work, *From Jewish Magic to Gnosticism* (henceforth FJMG), he aims at tackling three major topics: 1) the fertile interaction between Hellenistic Jews and the astrological speculations of Chaldeans; 2) the religious profile of Jewish “heretical” Magi, as reflected especially in the papyri, gems, and other archeological discoveries; 3) a detailed study of the symbolism of serpent as deployed by those Hellenized Hebrews who practiced magic in close correlation with the Egyptian and Mesopotamian religions. Continuous references and comparative considerations are made to Gnostic circles and their incorporation of these motifs. Essentially, Mastrocinque argues that a significant part of magical thinking during the Imperial Age has developed around two specific religious movements, Gnosis (called “heretical Hebraism”) and Mithraism (or “heretical Zoroastrism”) (FJMG 7).

The argument in FJMG concerning astrology gets under way from the wide influence of Mesopotamian wisdom on the Eastern religious thought that was eventually assimilated by the Cabbalah and Gnosticism (FJMG 105). Beginning with the rulership of Sennacherib (705–681 BC) and Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 BC), the number of Babylonian Jews who have been exposed to astrological speculations and magical mind patterns must have been significantly high as long as a) in the 4th century BC, the indigenous Greek intellectuals were also studying Chaldean science; and b) with respect to Jesus’s birth, Matthew’s Gospel recounts a visit of Magi astrologers who, on Mastrocinque’s estimation, were Chaldean Jews. Furthermore, whereas the Greek Chaldeans preserved their Homeric-Platonic cultural background, the Jewish Chaldeans remained faithful to the biblical heritage. That Chaldean mathematical and astrological knowledge became available to these Hellenistic Jews is also confirmed, notwithstanding negatively, by the first Book of Enoch, Daniel’s writings, and the book of Jubilees. In fact, the early Roman Empire knew a great flourishing of Judaic astrological literature, and, surely enough, many Gnostic treatises could be seen as continuation of this (FJMG 58, 132-33).

Mastrocinque’s discussion of magic and its rapports with Judaic Hellenism and Christian Gnosis is, indeed, very laborious. I am going to