

Gnosticism

GNOSTICISM (from the Greek word for "knowledge") is the name generally applied to that spiritual movement existing side by side with genuine Christianity, as it gradually crystallized into the old Catholic Church, which may roughly be defined as a distinct religious syncretism bearing the strong impress of Christian influences.

1. The term "Gnosis" ("knowledge") first appears in a technical sense in First Timothy 6:20. It seems to have at first been applied exclusively, or at any rate principally, to a particular tendency within the movement as a whole, that is, to those sections of Gnostics otherwise generally known as Ophites or Naasseni. Clement of Alexandria applied the term as a philosophical inquiry in conversation with Jesus Christ. But in Irenaeus the term has already come to designate the whole movement in the manner of a cultic religious movement. The latter first came into prominence in the opening decades of the second century A.D., but is certainly older; it reached its height in the second third of the same century, and began to wane according to the historical record about the third century, and from the second half of the third century onwards was replaced by the closely-related and more powerful Manichaean movement. Offshoots of it, however, continued on into the fourth and fifth

centuries. Epiphanius still had the opportunity of making personal acquaintance with Gnostic sects.

2. Of the actual writings of the Gnostics, which were extraordinarily numerous, very little has survived; they were sacrificed to the destructive zeal of their ecclesiastical opponents. Numerous fragments and extracts from Gnostic writings are to be found in the works of the Fathers who attacked Gnosticism. Among the most valuable of all are the long extracts in the fifth and sixth books of the *Philosophumena* of Hippolytus. One of the most important of these fragments is the letter of Ptolemaeus to Flora, preserved by Epiphanius. Gnostic fragments are certainly also preserved for us in the Acts of Thomas. Here we should especially mention the beautiful and much-discussed Song of the Pearl, or Song of the Soul, which is generally, though without absolute clear proof, attributed to the Gnostic Bardesanes. Generally, also much Gnostic matter is contained in the apocryphal histories of the Apostles. To the school of Bardesanes belongs the "Book of the Laws of the Lands," which does not, however, contribute much to our knowledge of Gnosticism. Finally, we should mention in this connexion the text on which are based the pseudo-Clementine Homilies and Recognitions (beginning of the third century). It is, of course, already permeated with the Catholic spirit, but has drawn so largely upon sources of a Judaeo-Christian Gnostic character that it comes to a great extent within the category of sources for Gnosticism. Complete original Gnostic works have unfortunately survived to us only from the period of the

decadence of Gnosticism. Of these we should mention the comprehensive work called the Pistis-Sophia, probably belonging to the second half of the third century. Further, the Coptic-Gnostic texts of the Codex Brucianus, which, contrary to the opinion of their editor and translator, the present writer believes to represent in their existing form, a still later period and a still more advanced stage in the decadence of Gnosticism. For other and older Coptic-Gnostic texts, in one of which is contained the source of Irenaeus's treatises on the Barbelognostics, but which have unfortunately not yet been made completely accessible. The recent discovery of the Nag Hammadi library provides far deeper insight into ancient gnostic beliefs per their own writings.

On the whole, then, for an exposition of Gnosticism we are thrown back upon the polemical writings of the Fathers in their controversy with heresy. The most ancient of these is Justin, who wrote a Syntagma against all heresies (circa A.D.150), and also, probably, a special polemic against Marcion. Both these writings are lost. He was followed by Irenaeus, who, especially in the first book of his treatise *Adversus haereses* (circa A.D. 180), gives a detailed account of the Gnostic heresies. He founds his work upon that of his master Justin, but adds from his own knowledge among many other things, notably the detailed account of Valentinianism at the beginning of the book. On Irenaeus, and probably also on Justin, Hippolytus drew for his *Syntagma* (beginning of the third century), a work which is also lost, but can, with great certainty, be reconstructed from three

recensions of it: in the Panarion of Epiphanius (after A.D. 374), in Philaster of Brescia, *Adversus haereses*, and the Pseudo-Tertullian, *Liber adversus omnes haereses*. A second work of Hippolytus is preserved in the so-called *Philosophumena* which survives under the name of Origen. Here Hippolytus gave a second exposition supplemented by fresh Gnostic original sources with which he had become acquainted in the meanwhile. These sources quoted in Hippolytus have lately met with very unfavorable criticisms. The opinion has been advanced that Hippolytus has here fallen a victim to the mystification of a forger. The truth of the matter must be that Hippolytus probably made use of a collection of Gnostic texts, put together by a Gnostic, in which were already represented various secondary developments of the genuine Gnostic schools. It is also possible that the compiler has himself attempted here and there to harmonize to a certain extent the various Gnostic doctrines, yet in no case is this collection of sources given by Hippolytus to be passed over; it should rather be considered as important evidence for the beginnings of the decay of Gnosticism. Very noteworthy references to Gnosticism are also to be found scattered up and down the *Stromata* of Clement of Alexandria, who himself self-identified as a "gnostic" in the alternatively Christian and philosophical sense of open-minded philosopher and discoverer of all truth in Christ Jesus, the superlative Teacher. Especially important are the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, the author of which is certainly Clement, which are verbally extracted from Gnostic writings, and have almost the value of original sources. The writings of Origen also contain a wealth of

material. In the first place should be mentioned the treatise *Contra Celsum*, in which the expositions of Gnosticism by both Origen and Celsus are of interest. Of Tertullian's works should be mentioned: *De praescriptione haereticorum*, especially *Adversus Marcionem*, *Adversus Hermogenem*, and finally *Adversus Valentinianos* (entirely founded on Irenaeus). Here must also be mentioned the dialogue of Adamantius with the Gnostics, *De recta in deum fide* (beginning of fourth century). Among the followers of Hippolytus, Epiphanius in his *Panarion* gives much independent and valuable information from his own knowledge of contemporary Gnosticism. But Theodoret of Cyrus (circa A.D. 450) is already entirely dependent on previous works and has nothing new to add. With the fourth century both Gnosticism and the polemical literature directed against it die out.

3. If we wish to grasp the peculiar character of the great Gnostic movement, we must take care not to be led astray by the catchword "Gnosis." It is a mistake to regard the Gnostics as pre-eminently the representatives of intellect among Christians, and Gnosticism as an intellectual tendency chiefly concerned with philosophical speculation, the reconciliation of religion with philosophy and theology. It is true that when Gnosticism was at its height it numbered amongst its followers both theologians and men of science, but that is not its main characteristic. Among the majority of the followers of the movement "Gnosis" was understood not as meaning "knowledge" or "understanding," in our sense of the word, but "revelation."

These little Gnostic sects and groups all lived in the conviction that they possessed a secret and mysterious knowledge, in no way accessible to those outside, which was not to be proved or propagated, but believed in by the initiated, and anxiously guarded as a secret. This knowledge of theirs was not based on reflection, on scientific inquiry and proof, but on revelation. It was derived directly from the times of primitive Christianity; from the Savior himself and his disciples and friends, with whom they claimed to be connected by a secret tradition, or else from later prophets, of whom many sects boasted. It was laid down in wonderful mystic writings, which were in the possession of the various circles (Liechtenhahn, *Die Offenbarung im Gnosticismus*, 1901).

In short, Gnosticism, in all its various sections, its form and its character, falls under the great category of mystic religions, which were so characteristic of the religious life of decadent antiquity. In Gnosticism as in the other mystic religions we find the same contrast of the initiated and the uninitiated, the same loose organization, the same kind of petty sectarianism and mystery-mongering. All alike boast a mystic revelation and a deeply-veiled wisdom. As in many mystical religions, so in Gnosticism, the ultimate object is individual salvation, the assurance of a fortunate destiny for the soul after death. As in the others, so in this the central object of worship is a redeemer-deity who has already trodden the difficult way which the faithful have to follow. And finally, as in all mystical religions, so here too, holy rites and formulas, acts of initiation and

consecration, all those things which we call sacraments, play a very prominent part. The Gnostic religion is full of such sacraments. In the accounts of the “Fathers” we find less about them; yet here Irenaeus’ account of the Marcosians is of the highest significance. Much more material is to be found in the original Gnostic writings, especially in the Pistis-Sophia and the two books of Ieu, and again in the Excerpta ex Theodoto, the Acts of Thomas, and here and there also in the pseudo-Clementine writings. Above all we can see from the original sources of the Mandaean religion, which also represents a branch of Gnosticism, how great a part the sacraments played in the Gnostic sects (Brandt, Mandäische Religion, page 96). Everywhere we are met with the most varied forms of holy rites—the various baptisms, by water, by fire, by the spirit, the baptism for protection against demons, anointing with oil, sealing and stigmatizing, piercing the ears, leading into the bridal chamber, partaking of holy food and drink. Finally, sacred formulas, names and symbols are of the highest importance among the Gnostic sects. We constantly meet with the idea that the soul, on leaving the body, finds its path to the highest heaven opposed by the deities and demons of the lower realms of heaven, and only when it is in possession of the names of these demons, and can repeat the proper holy formula, or is prepared with the right symbol, or has been anointed with the holy oil, finds its way unhindered to the heavenly home. Hence the Gnostic must above all things learn the names of the demons, and equip himself with the sacred formulas and symbols, in order to be certain of a good destiny after death. The

exposition of the system of the Ophites given by Celsus, and, in connection with Celsus, by Origen, is particularly instructive on this point. The two “Coptic Ieu” books unfold an immense system of names and symbols. This system again was simplified, and as the supreme secret was taught in a single name or a single formula, by means of which the happy possessor was able to penetrate through all the spaces of heaven (such as the name “Caulacau” among the Basilidians). It was taught that even the redeemer-god, when he once descended on to this earth, to rise from it again, availed himself of these names and formulas on his descent and ascent through the world of demons. Traces of ideas of this kind are to be met with almost everywhere. They have been most carefully collected by Anz (Ursprung des Gnosticismus) who would see in them the central doctrine of Gnosticism.

4. All these investigations point clearly to the fact that Gnosticism belongs to the group of mystical religions. We must now proceed to define more exactly the peculiar and distinctive character of the Gnostic system. The basis of the Gnostic religion and world-philosophy lies in a decided Oriental dualism. In sharp contrast are opposed the two worlds of the good and of the evil, the divine world and the material world ὕλη, the worlds of light and of darkness. In many systems there seems to be no attempt to derive the one world from the other. The true Basilides, perhaps also Saturnil, Marcion, and a part of his disciples, Bardesanes and others, were frankly dualists. In the case of other systems, owing to the inexactness of our

information, we are unable to decide; the later systems of Mandaeism and Manichaeism, so closely related to Gnosticism, are also based upon a decided dualism. And even when there is an attempt at reconciliation, it is still quite clear how strong was the original dualism which has to be overcome. Thus, the Gnostic systems make great use of the idea of a fall of the Deity himself; by the fall of the Godhead into the world of matter, this matter, previously insensible, is animated into life and activity, and then arise the powers, both partly and wholly hostile, who hold sway over this world. Such figures of fallen divinities, sinking down into the world of matter are those of Sophia (that is, Ahamoth) among the Gnostics (Ophites) in the narrower sense of the word, the Simonians (the figure of Helena), the Barbelognostics, and in the system of the Pistis-Sophia or the Primal Man, among the Naasseni and the sect, related to them, as described by Hippolytus. A further weakening of the dualism is indicated when, in the systems of the Valentinian school, the fall of Sophia takes place within the godhead, and Sophia, inflamed with love, plunges into the Bythos, the highest divinity, and when the attempt is thus made genetically to derive the lower world from the sufferings and passions of fallen divinity. Another attempt at reconciliation is set forth in the so-called "system of emanations" in which it is assumed that from the supreme divinity emanated a somewhat lesser world, from this world a second, and so on, until the divine element (of life) became so far weakened and attenuated, that the genesis of a partly, or even wholly, evil world appears both possible and comprehensible. A system of emanations of this kind, in its

purest form, is set forth in the expositions coming from the school of Basilides, which are handed down by Irenaeus, while the propositions which are set forth in the *Philosophumena* of Hippolytus as being doctrines of Basilides represent a still closer approach to a monistic philosophy. Occasionally, too, there is an attempt to establish at any rate a threefold division of the world, and to assume between the worlds of light and darkness a middle world connecting the two; this is clearest among the Sethiani mentioned by Hippolytus. Quite peculiar in this connection are the accounts in Books 19 and 20 of the *Clementine Homilies*. After a preliminary examination of all possible different attempts at a solution of the problem of evil, the attempt is here made to represent the devil as an instrument of God. Christ and the devil are the two hands of God, Christ the right hand, and the devil the left, the devil having power over this world-epoch and Christ over the next. The devil here assumes very much the characteristics of the punishing and just God of the Old Testament, and the prospect is even held out of his ultimate pardon. All these efforts at reconciliation show how clearly the problem of evil was realized in these Gnostic and half-Gnostic sects, and how deeply they meditated on the subject; it was not altogether without reason that in the ranks of its opponents Gnosticism was judged to have arisen out of the question, we be from what part of the world?

This dualism had not its origin in Hellenic soil, neither is it related to that dualism which to a certain extent existed also in late Greek religion. For the lower and imperfect world, which in

that system too is conceived and assumed, is the nebulous world of the non-existent and the formless, which is the necessary accompaniment of that which exists, as shadow is of light.

In Gnosticism, on the contrary, the world of evil is full of active energy and hostile powers. It is an Oriental (Iranian) dualism which here finds expression, though in one point, it is true, the mark of Greek influence is quite clear. When Gnosticism recognizes in this corporeal and material world the true seat of evil, consistently treating the bodily existence of mankind as essentially evil and the separation of the spiritual from the corporeal being as the object of salvation, this is an outcome of the contrast in Greek dualism between spirit and matter, soul and body. For in Oriental dualism it is within this material world that the good and evil powers are at war, and this world beneath the stars is by no means conceived as entirely subject to the influence of evil. Gnosticism has combined the two, the Greek opposition between spirit and matter, and the sharp Zoroastrian dualism, which, where the Greek mind conceived of a higher and a lower world, saw instead two hostile worlds, standing in contrast to each other like light and darkness. And out of the combination of these two dualisms arose the teaching of Gnosticism, with its thoroughgoing pessimism and fundamental asceticism.

Another characteristic feature of the Gnostic conception of the universe is the rôle played in almost all Gnostic systems by the seven world-creating powers. There are indeed certain

exceptions; for instance, in the systems of the Valentinian schools there is the figure of the one Demiurge who takes the place of the Seven. But how widespread was the idea of seven powers, who created this lower material world and rule over it, has been clearly proved, especially by the systematic examination of the subject by Anz (*Ursprung des Gnosticismus*). These Seven, then, are in most systems half-evil, half-hostile powers; they are frequently characterized as “angels,” and are reckoned as the last and lowest emanations of the Godhead; below them—and frequently considered as derived from them—comes the world of the actually devilish powers. On the other hand, among the speculations of the Mandaeans, we find a different and perhaps more primitive conception of the Seven, according to which they, together with their mother Namrus (Rūhā) and their father (Ur), belong entirely to the world of darkness. They and their family are looked upon as captives of the god of light who pardons them, sets them on chariots of light, and appoints them as rulers of the world. In the Manichaean system it is related how the helper of the Primal Man, the spirit of life, captured the evil archontes, and fastened them to the firmament, or according to another account, flayed them, and formed the firmament from their skin, and this conception is closely related to the other, though in this tradition the number (seven) of the archontes is lost. Similarly, the last book of the *Pistis-Sophia* contains the myth of the capture of the rebellious archontes, whose leaders here appear as five in number. There can scarcely be any doubt as to the

origin of these seven (five) powers; they are the seven planetary divinities, the sun, moon and five planets.

In the Mandaean speculations the Seven are introduced with the Babylonian names of the planets. The connection of the Seven with the planets is also clearly established by the expositions of Celsus and Origen and similarly by the above-quoted passage in the Pistis-Sophia, where the archontes, who are here mentioned as five, are identified with the five planets (excluding the sun and moon). This collective grouping of the seven (five) planetary divinities is derived from the late Babylonian religion, which can definitely be indicated as the home of these ideas. And if in the old sources it is only the first beginnings of this development that can be traced, we must assume that at a later period the Babylonian religion centered in the adoration of the seven planetary deities. Very instructive in this connection is the later (Arabian) account of the religion of the Mesopotamian Sabaeans. The religion of the Sabaeans, evidently a later offshoot from the stock of the old Babylonian religion, actually consists in the cult of the seven planets. But this reference to Babylonian religion does not solve the problem which is here in question. For in the Babylonian religion the planetary constellations are reckoned as the supreme deities. And here the question arises, how it came about that in the Gnostic systems the Seven appear as subordinate, half-daemonic powers, or even completely as powers of darkness. This can only be explained on the assumption that some religion hostile to, and stronger than the Babylonian, has superimposed itself upon this, and has degraded

its principal deities into daemons. Which religion can this have been? We are at first inclined to think of Christianity itself, but it is certainly most improbable that at the time of the rise of Christianity the Babylonian teaching about the seven planet-deities governing the world should have played so great a part throughout all Syria, Asia Minor and Egypt, that the most varying sections of syncretic Christianity should over and over again adopt this doctrine and work it up into their system. It is far more probable that the combination which we meet with in Gnosticism is older than Christianity, and was found already in existence by Christianity and its sects. We must also reject the theory that this degradation of the planetary deities into daemons is due to the influence of Hebrew monotheism, for almost all the Gnostic sects take up a definitely hostile attitude towards the Jewish religion, and almost always the highest divinity among the Seven is actually the creator-God of the Old Testament. There remains, then, only one religion which can be used as an explanation, namely the Persian, which in fact fulfils all the necessary conditions. The Persian religion was at an early period brought into contact with the Babylonian, through the triumphant progress of Persian culture towards the West; at the time of Alexander the Great it was already the prevailing religion in the Babylonian plain. It was characterized by a main belief, tending towards monotheism, in the Light-deity Ahura Mazda and his satellites, who appear in contrast with him as powers of the nature of archangels.

A combination of the Babylonian with the Persian religion could only be effected by the degradation of the Babylonian deities into half-divine, half-daemonic beings, infinitely remote from the supreme God of light and of heaven, or even into powers of darkness. Even the characteristic dualism of Gnosticism has already proved to be in part of Iranian origin; and now it becomes clear how from that mingling of late Greek and Persian dualism the idea could arise that these seven half-daemonic powers are the creators or rulers of this material world, which is separated infinitely from the light-world of the good God. Definite confirmation of this conjecture is afforded us by later sources of the Iranian religion, in which we likewise meet with the characteristic fundamental doctrine of Gnosticism. Thus, the Bundahishn is able to inform us that in the primeval strife of Satan against the light-world, seven hostile powers were captured and set as constellations in the heavens, where they are guarded by good star-powers and prevented from doing harm. Five of the evil powers are the planets, while here the sun and moon are of course not reckoned among the evil powers—for the obvious reason that in the Persian official religion they invariably appear as good divinities (see similar ideas in the Arabic treatise on Persian religion Ulema-i-Islam). These Persian fancies can hardly be borrowed from the Christian Gnostic systems, their definiteness and much more strongly dualistic character recalling the exposition of the Mandaean (and Manichaeic) system, are proofs to the contrary. They are derived from the same period in which the underlying idea of the Gnostic systems also originated, namely, the time at which the

ideas of the Persian and Babylonian religions came into contact, the remarkable results of which have thus partly found their way into the official documents of Parsiism.

With this fundamental doctrine of Gnosticism is connected, as Anz has shown in his book which we have so often quoted, a side of their religious practices to which we have already alluded. Gnosticism is to a great extent dominated by the idea that it is above all and in the highest degree important for the Gnostic's soul to be enabled to find its way back through the lower worlds and spheres of heaven ruled by the Seven to the kingdom of light of the supreme deity of heaven. Hence, a principal item in their religious practice consisted in communications about the being, nature and names of the Seven (or of any other hostile daemons barring the way to heaven), the formulas with which they must be addressed, and the symbols which must be shown to them. But names, symbols and formulas are not efficacious by themselves: the Gnostic must lead a life having no part in the lower world ruled by these spirits, and by his knowledge he must raise himself above them to the God of the world of light. Throughout this mystic religious world, it was above all the influence of the late Greek religion derived from Plato that also continued to operate; it is filled with the echo of the song, the first note of which was sounded by the Platonists, about the heavenly home of the soul and the homeward journey of the wise to the higher world of light.

But the form in which the whole is set forth is Oriental, and it must be carefully noted that the Mithras mysteries, so closely connected with the Persian religion, are acquainted with this doctrine of the ascent of the soul through the planetary spheres (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Book 6, 22).

5. We cannot here undertake to set forth and explain in detail all the complex varieties of the Gnostic systems; but it will be useful to take a nearer view of certain principal figures which have had an influence upon at least one series of Gnostic systems, and to examine their origins in the history of religion. In almost all systems an important part is played by the Great Mother who appears under the most varied forms (as Great Mother of the Gods). At an early period, and notably in the older systems of the Ophites (a fairly exact account of which has been preserved for us by Epiphanius and Hippolytus), among the Gnostics in the narrower sense of the word, the Archontici, the Sethites (there are also traces among the Naasseni), the goddess is the most prominent figure in the light-world, elevated above the gods, and is thereby the great mother of the faithful. The sect of the Barbelognostics takes its name from the female figure of the Barbelo. But Gnostic speculation gives various accounts of the descent or fall of this goddess of heaven. Thus, the "Helena" of the Simoniani descends to this world in order by means of her beauty to provoke to sensual passion and mutual strife the angels who rule the world, and thus again to deprive them of the powers of light, stolen from heaven, by means of which they rule over the world. She is then held captive by them in extreme

degradation. Similar ideas are to be found among the “Gnostics” of Epiphanius. The kindred idea of the light-maiden, who, by exciting the sensual passions of the rulers, takes from them those powers of light which still remain to them, has also a central place in the Manichaean scheme of salvation. The light-maiden also plays a prominent part in the Pistis-Sophia. With this figure of the mother-goddess who descends into the lower world seems to be closely connected the idea of the fallen Sophia, which is so widespread among the Gnostic systems. This Sophia then is certainly no longer the dominating figure of the light-world, she is a lower aeon at the extreme limit of the world of light, who sinks down into matter (Barbelognostics, the anonymous Gnostic of Irenaeus, Bardesanes, Pistis-Sophia), or turns in presumptuous love towards the supreme God, and thus brings the Fall into the world of the aeons (Valentinians). This Sophia then appears as the mother of the “seven” gods (see above).

The origin of this figure is not far to seek. It is certainly not derived from the Persian religious system, to the spirit of which it is entirely opposed. Neither would it be correct to identify her entirely with the great goddess Ishtar of the old Babylonian religion. But there can hardly be any doubt that the figure of the great mother-goddess or goddess of heaven, who was worshipped throughout Asia under various forms and names (Astarte, Beltis, Atargatis, Cybele, the Syrian Aphrodite), was likely the prototype of the deity of the Gnostics, as similarly Artemis of Ephesus whom Saint Paul preached against, and not,

for instance, the Wisdom of Solomon and "Wisdom" in the Book of Proverbs in the Bible's Old Testament and apocrypha per alternative conjecture. The character of the great goddess of heaven is still in many places fairly exactly preserved in the Gnostic speculations. Hence, we are able to understand how the Gnostic god, the Sophia, appears as the mother of the Hebdomas. The great goddess of heaven is thereby the mother of the stars. Particularly instructive in this connection is the fact that in those very sects, the goddess has a special role, as unbridled prostitution appears as a distinct and essential part of the cult (see the accounts of particular branches of the Gnostics, Nicolaitans, Philionites, and Borborites). The meaning of this cult is, of course, reinterpreted in the Gnostic sense: by this unbridled prostitution the Gnostic sects desired to prevent the sexual propagation of mankind, the origin of all evil. But the connection is clear, and hence it also explained the curious Gnostic myth mentioned above, namely that the light-maiden by appearing to the archontes, the lower powers of this world, inflames them to sexual lusts, in order to take from them that share of light which they have stolen from the upper world. This is a Gnostic interpretation of the various myths of the great mother-goddess's many loves and love-adventures with other gods and heroes. And when the pagan legend of the Syrian Astarte tells how she lived for ten years in Tyre as a prostitute, this directly recalls the Gnostic myth of how Simon found Helena in a brothel in Tyre (Epiphanius, Ancoratus, chapter 104). From the same group of myths must be derived the idea of the goddess who descends to the under-world, and is there taken

prisoner against her will by the lower powers; the direct prototype of this myth is to be found, such as in Ishtar's journey to Hades. And finally, just as the mother-goddess of southwestern Asia stands in particularly intimate connection with the youthful god of spring (Tammuz, Adonis, Attis), so we ought perhaps to compare here as a parallel the relation of Sophia with the Soter in certain Gnostic systems.

Another characteristic figure of Gnosticism is that of the Primal Man. In many systems, certainly, it has already been forced quite into the background. But on closer examination we can clearly see that it has a wide influence on Gnosticism. Thus, in the system of the Naasseni (see Hippolytus, *Philosophumena*), and in certain related sects there enumerated, the Primal Man has a central and predominant position. Again, in the text on which are based the Clementine literature, as in the closely related system of the Ebionites per Epiphanius, we meet with the man who existed before the world, the prophet who goes through the world in various forms, and finally reveals himself in Christ. Among the Barbelognostics, the Primal Man (Adamas, homo perfectus et verus) and Gnosis appear as a pair of aeons, occupying a prominent place in the whole series. In the Valentinian systems the pair of aeons, Anthropos and Ekklesia, occupy the third or fourth place within the *Oydoás*, but incidentally we learn that with some representatives of this school the Anthropos took a still more prominent place (likely first or second). And even in the *Pistis-Sophia* the Primal Man "Ieu" is frequently alluded to as the King of the Luminaries (see

the index to C. Schmidt's translation). We also meet with speculations of this kind about man in the circles of non-Christian Gnosis. Thus, in the Poimandres of Hermes man is the most prominent figure in the speculation; numerous pagan and half-pagan parallels (the "Gnostics" of Plotinus, Zosimus, Bitys) have been collected by Reitzenstein in his work Poimandres (pages 81-116). Reitzenstein has shown that very probably the system of the Naasseni described by Hippolytus was originally derived from purely pagan circles, which are probably connected in some way with the mysteries of the Attis cult. The figure in the Mandaean system most closely corresponding to the Primal Man, though this figure also actually occurs in another part of the system (vide the figure of Adakas Mana) is that of Mandā d'hayyē (the pair of aeons, Adamas and Gnosis, among the Barbelognostics, per Irenaeus). Finally, in the Manichaean system, as is well known, the Primal Man again assumes the predominant place.

This figure of the Primal Man can particularly be compared with that of the Gnostic Sophia. Wherever this figure has not become quite obscure, it represents that divine power which, whether simply owing to a fall, or as the hero who makes war on, and is partly vanquished by darkness, descends into the darkness of the material world, and with whose descent begins the great drama of the world's development. From this power are derived those portions of light existing and held prisoner in this lower world. And as he has raised himself again out of the material world, or has been set free by higher powers, so shall also the

members of the Primal Man, the portions of light still imprisoned in matter, be set free.

The question of the derivation of the myth of the Primal Man is still one of the unsolved problems of religious history. It is worthy of notice that according to the old Persian myth also, the development of the world begins with the slaying of the primal man Gayomart by Angra-Mainyu (Ahriman); further, that the Primal Man ("son of man" as man) also plays a part in Jewish apocalyptic literature (of psuedo-Daniel, Enoch, and Ezra), whence this figure passes into the Gospels; and again, that the dogma of Christ's descent into hell is directly connected with this myth. But these parallels do not carry us much further. Even the Persian myth is entirely obscure, and has hitherto defied interpretation. It is certainly true that in some way an essential part in the formation of the myth has been played by the sun-god, who daily descends into darkness, to rise from it again victoriously. But how to explain the combination of the figure of the sun-god with that of the Primal Man is an unsolved riddle. The meaning of this figure in the Gnostic speculations is, however, clear. It answers the question: how did the portions of light to be found in this lower world, among which certainly belong the souls of the Gnostics, enter into it?

A parallel myth to that of the Primal Man are the accounts to be found in most of the Gnostic systems of the creation of the first man. In all these accounts the idea is expressed that so far as his body is concerned man is the work of the angels who created the

world. So Saturnil relates that a brilliant vision appeared from above to the world-creating angels; they were unable to hold it fast, but formed man after its image. And as the man thus formed was unable to move, but could only crawl like a worm, the supreme Power put into him a spark of life, and man came into existence. Imaginations of the same sort are also to be found, namely, in the genuine fragments of Valentinus, the Gnostics of Irenaeus, the Mandaeans, and the Manichaeans. The Naasseni (Hippolytus, *Philosophumena*, verse 7) expressly characterize the myth as Chaldean (vide the passage from Zosimus, in Reitzenstein's *Poimandres*, page 104). Clearly then the question which the myth of the Primal Man is intended to answer in relation to the whole universe is answered in relation to the nature of man by this account of the coming into being of the first man, which may, moreover, have been influenced by the account in the Old Testament. That question is: how does it happen that in this inferior body of man, fallen a prey to corruption, there dwells a higher spark of the divine Being, or in other words, how are we to explain the double nature of man?

6. Of all the fundamental ideas of Gnosticism of which we have so far treated, it can with some certainty be assumed that they were in existence before the rise of Christianity and the influence of Christian ideas on the development of Gnosticism. The main question with which we have now to deal is that of whether the dominant figure of the Savior in Gnosticism is of specifically Christian derivation, or whether this can also be explained apart from the assumption of Christian influence. And

here it must be premised that, intimately as the conception of salvation is bound up with the Gnostic religion, the idea of salvation accomplished in a definite historical moment to a certain extent remained foreign to it. Indeed, nearly all the Christian Gnostic systems clearly exhibit the great difficulty with which they had to contend in order to reconcile the idea of an historical redeemer, actually occurring in the form of a definite person, with their conceptions of salvation. In Gnosticism salvation always lies at the root of all existence and all history. The fundamental conception varies greatly. At one time the Primal Man, who sank down into matter, has freed himself and risen out of it again, and like him his members will rise out of darkness into the light (Poimandres); at another time the Primal Man who was conquered by the powers of darkness has been saved by the powers of light, and thus too all his race will be saved (Manichaeism); at another time the fallen Sophia is purified by her passions and sorrows and has found her Syzygos, the Soter, and wedded him, and thus all the souls of the Gnostics who still languish in matter will become the brides of the angels of the Soter (Valentinus). In fact, salvation, as conceived in Gnosticism, is always a myth, a history of bygone events, an allegory or figure, but not an historical event. And this decision is not affected by the fact that in certain Gnostic sects figured historical personages such as Simon Magus and Menander. The Gnostic ideas of salvation were in the later schools and sects transferred to these persons whom we must consider as rather obscure charlatans and miracle-mongers, just as in other cases they were transferred to the person of Christ.

The “Helena” of the Simonian system was certainly not an historical but a mythical figure. This explains the laborious and artificial way in which the person of Jesus is connected in many Gnostic systems with the original Gnostic conception of redemption. In this patchwork the joins are everywhere still clearly to be recognized. Thus, in the Valentinian system, the myth of the fallen Sophia and the Soter, of their ultimate union, their marriage and their 70 sons has absolutely nothing to do with the Christian conceptions of salvation. The subject is here that of a high goddess of heaven (she has 70 sons) whose friend and lover finds her in the misery of deepest degradation, frees her, and bears her home as his bride. To this myth the idea of salvation through the earthly Christ can only be attached with difficulty. And it was openly maintained that the Soter only existed for the Gnostic, the Savior Jesus who appeared on earth only for the “Psychicus”.

7. Thus the essential part of most of the conceptions of what we call Gnosticism was already in existence and fully developed before the rise of Christianity. But the fundamental ideas of Gnosticism and of early Christianity had a kind of magnetic attraction for each other. What drew these two forces together was the energy exerted by the universal idea of salvation in both systems. Christian Gnosticism actually introduced only one new figure into the already existing Gnostic theories, namely that of the historical Savior Jesus Christ. This figure afforded, as it were, a new point of crystallization for the existing Gnostic ideas, which now grouped themselves round this point in all

their manifold diversity. Thus, there came into the fluctuating mass a strong movement and formative impulse, and the individual systems and sects sprang up like mushrooms from this soil.

It must now be our task to make plain the position of Gnosticism within the Christian religion, and its significance for the development of the latter. Above all the Gnostics represented and developed the distinctly anti-Jewish tendency in Christianity. Paul was the apostle whom they revered, and his spiritual influence on them is quite unmistakable. The Gnostic Marcion has been rightly characterized as a direct disciple of Paul. Paul's battle against the law and the narrow national conception of Christianity found a willing following in a movement, the syncretic origin of which directed it towards a universal religion. St Paul's ideas were here developed to their extremest consequences, and in an entirely one-sided fashion such as was far from being in his intention. In nearly all the Gnostic systems the doctrine of the seven world-creating spirits is given an anti-Jewish tendency, the god of the Jews and of the Old Testament appearing as the highest of the seven. The demiurge of the Valentinians always clearly bears the features of the Old Testament creator-God.

The Old Testament was absolutely rejected by most of the Gnostics. Even the so-called Judaeo-Christian Gnostics (Cerinthus), the Ebionite (Essenian) sect of the Pseudo-Clementine writings (the Elkesaites), take up an inconsistent

attitude towards Jewish antiquity and the Old Testament. In this respect the opposition to Gnosticism led to a reactionary movement. If the growing Christian Church, in quite a different fashion from Paul, laid stress on the literal authority of the Old Testament, interpreted, it is true, allegorically; if it took up a much more friendly and definite attitude towards the Old Testament, and gave wider scope to the legal conception of religion, this must be in part ascribed to the involuntary reaction upon it of Gnosticism.

The attitude of Gnosticism to the Old Testament and to the creator-God proclaimed in it had its deeper roots, as we have already seen, in the dualism by which it was dominated. With this dualism and the recognition of the worthlessness and absolutely vicious nature of the material world is combined a decided spiritualism. The conception of a resurrection of the body, of a further existence for the body after death, was unattainable by almost all of the Gnostics, with the possible exception of a few Gnostic sects dominated by Judaeo-Christian tendencies. With the dualistic philosophy is further connected an attitude of absolute indifference towards this lower and material world, and the practice of asceticism. Marriage and sexual propagation are considered either as absolute Evil or as altogether worthless, and carnal pleasure is frequently looked upon as forbidden. Then again asceticism sometimes changes into wild libertinism. Here again Gnosticism has exercised an influence on the development of the Church by way of contrast and opposition. If here a return was made to the old material

view of the resurrection, entirely abandoning the more spiritual conception which had been arrived at as a compromise by Paul, this is probably the result of a reaction from the views of Gnosticism. It was just at this point, too, that Gnosticism started a development which was followed later by the Catholic Church. In spite of the rejection of the ascetic attitude of the Gnostics, as a blasphemy against the Creator, a part of this ascetic principle became at a later date dominant throughout all Christendom. And it is interesting to observe how, namely, Saint Augustine, though desperately combating the dualism of the Manichaeans, yet afterwards introduced a number of dualistic ideas into Christianity, which are distinguishable from those of Manichaeism only by a very keen eye, and even then with difficulty.

The Gnostic religion also anticipated other tendencies. As we have seen, it is above all things a religion of sacraments and mysteries. Through its syncretic origin Gnosticism introduced for the first time into Christianity a whole mass of sacramental, mystical ideas, which had hitherto existed in it only in its earliest phases. But in the long run even genuine Christianity has been unable to free itself from the magic of the sacraments; and the Eastern Church especially has taken the same direction as Gnosticism. Gnosticism was also the pioneer of the Christian Church in the strong emphasis laid on the idea of salvation in religion. And since the Gnostics were compelled to draw the figure of the Savior into a world of quite alien myths, their Christology became so complicated in character that it

frequently recalls the Christology of the later dogmatic of the Greek "Fathers".

Finally, it was Gnosticism which gave the most decided impulse to the consolidation of the Christian Church as a church. Gnosticism itself is a free, naturally-growing religion, the religion of isolated minds, of separate little circles and minute sects. The homogeneity of wide circles, the sense of responsibility engendered by it, and continuity with the past are almost entirely lacking in it. It is based upon revelation, which even at the present time is imparted to the individual, upon the more or less convincing force of the religious imagination and speculations of a few leaders, upon the voluntary and unstable grouping of the schools round the master. Its adherents feel themselves to be the isolated, the few, the free and the enlightened, as opposed to the sluggish and inert masses of mankind degraded into matter, or the initiated as opposed to the uninitiated, the Gnostics as opposed to the "Hylici"; at most in the later and more moderate schools a middle place was given to the adherents of the Church as Psychici.

This freely-growing Gnostic religiosity aroused in the Church an increasingly strong movement towards unity and a firm and inelastic organization, towards authority and tradition. An organized hierarchy, a definitive canon of the Holy Scriptures, a confession of faith and rule of faith, and unbending doctrinal discipline, these were the means employed. A part was also played in this movement by a free theology which arose within

the Church, itself a kind of Gnosticism which aimed at holding fast whatever was good in the Gnostic movement, and obtaining its recognition within the limits of the Church (see Clement of Alexandria). But the mightiest forces, to which in the end this theology too had absolutely to give way, were outward organization and tradition.

It must be considered as an unqualified advantage for the further development of Christianity, as a universal religion, that at its very outset it prevailed against the great movement of Gnosticism. In spite of the fact that in a few of its later representatives Gnosticism assumed a more refined and spiritual aspect, and even produced blossoms of a true and beautiful piety, it is fundamentally and essentially an unstable religious syncretism, a religion in which the determining forces were a fantastic oriental imagination and a sacramentalism which degenerated into the wildest superstitions, a weak dualism fluctuating unsteadily between asceticism and libertinism. Indirectly, however, Gnosticism was certainly one of the most powerful factors in the development of Christianity in the first century.

8. This sketch may be completed by a short review of the various separate sects and their probable connection with each other. As a point of departure for the history of the development of Gnosticism may be taken the numerous little sects which were apparently first included under the name of "Gnostics" in the narrower sense. Among these probably belong the Ophites of

Celsus (in Origen), the many little sects included by Epiphanius under the name of Nicolaitans and Gnostics, the Archontici (per Epiphanius), and Sethites should also here be mentioned, and finally the Carpocratians. Common to all these is the dominant position assumed by the “Seven” (headed by Ialdabaoth); the heavenly world lying above the spheres of the Seven is occupied by comparatively few figures, among which the most important part is played by the μήτηρ, who is sometimes enthroned as the supreme goddess in heaven, but in a few systems has already descended from there into matter, been taken prisoner, etcetera. Numerous little groups are distinguished from the mass, sometimes by one peculiarity, sometimes by another. On the one hand we have sects with a strongly ascetic tendency, on the other we find some characterized by unbridled libertinism; in some the most abandoned prostitution has come to be the most sacred mystery; in others again appears the worship of serpents, which here appears to be connected in various and often very loose ways with the other ideas of these Gnostics—hence the names of the “Ophites,” “Naasseni.” To this class also fundamentally belong the Simoniani, who have included the probably historical figure of Simon Magus in a system which seems to be closely connected with those we have mentioned, especially if we look upon the “Helena” of this system as a mythical figure. A particular branch of the “Gnostic” sects is represented by those systems in which the figure of Sophia sinking down into matter already appears. To these belong the Barbelognostics (in the description given by Irenaeus the figure of the Spirit takes the place of that of Sophia), and the Gnostics

whom Irenaeus describes. And here may best be included Bardesanes, a famous leader of a Gnostic school of the end of the second century. Most scholars, it is true, following an old tradition, reckon Bardesanes among the Valentinians. But from the little we know of Bardesanes, his system bears no trace of relationship with the complicated Valentinian system, but is rather completely derived from the ordinary Gnosticism, and is distinguished from it apparently only by its more strongly dualistic character. The systems of Valentinus and his disciples must be considered as a further development of what we have just characterized as the popular Gnosticism, and especially of that branch of it to which the figure of Sophia is already known. In them above all the world of the higher aeons is further extended and filled with a throng of varied figures. They also exhibit a variation from the characteristic dualism of Gnosticism into monism, in their conception of the fall of Sophia and their derivation of matter from the passions of the fallen Sophia. The figures of the Seven have here entirely disappeared, the remembrance of them being merely preserved in the name of the Δημιουργός (ἑβδομάς). In general, Valentinianism displays a particular resemblance to the dominant ideas of the Church, both in its complicated Christology, its triple division of mankind into πνευματικοί, ψυχικοί and ὑλικοί, and its far-fetched interpretation of texts. A quite different position from those mentioned above is taken by Basilides. From what little we know of him he was an uncompromising dualist. Both the systems which are handed down under his name by Irenaeus and Hippolytus, that of emanations and the monistic-evolutionary

system, represent further developments of his ideas with a tendency away from dualism towards monism. Characteristically, in these Basilidian systems the figure of the “Mother” or of Sophia does not appear. This peculiarity the Basilidian system shares with that of Saturnil of Antioch, which has only come down to us in a very fragmentary state, and in other respects recalls in many ways the popular Gnosticism. By itself, on the other hand, stands the system preserved for us by Hippolytus in the *Philosophumena* under the name of the Naasseni, with its central figure of “the Man,” which, as we have seen, is very closely related with certain specifically pagan Gnostic speculations which have come down to us (in the *Poimandres*, in Zosimus and Plotinus, *Ennead*, Book 2, line 9). With the Naasseni, moreover, are related also the other sects of which Hippolytus alone gives us a notice in his *Philosophumena* (Docetae, Perates, Sethiani, the adherents of Justin, the Gnostic of Monoimos). Finally, apart from all other Gnostics stands Marcion. With him, as far as we are able to conclude from the scanty notices of him, the manifold Gnostic speculations are reduced essentially to the one problem of the good and the just God, the God of the Christians and the God of the Old Testament. Between these two powers Marcion affirms a sharp and, as it appears, originally irreconcilable dualism which with him rests moreover on a speculative basis. Thanks to the noble simplicity and specifically religious character of his ideas, Marcion was able to found not only schools, but a community, a church of his own, which gave trouble to the Church longer than any other Gnostic sect. Among his disciples the speculative and

fantastic element of Gnosticism again became more apparent. As we have already intimated, Gnosticism had such a power of attraction that it now drew within its limits even Judaeo-Christian sects. Among these we must mention the Judaeo-Christian Gnostic Cerinthus, also the Gnostic Ebionites, of whom Epiphanius gives us an account, and whose writings are to be found in a recension in the collected works of the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions and Homilies; to the same class belong the Elkesaites with their mystical scripture, the Elxai, extracts of which are given by Hippolytus. Later evidence of the decadence of Gnosticism occurs in the Pistis-Sophia and the Coptic Gnostic writings discovered and edited by Schmidt. In these confused records of human imagination gone mad, we possess a veritable herbarium of all possible Gnostic ideas, which were once active and now rest peacefully side by side. None the less, the stream of the Gnostic religion is not yet dried up, but continues on its way; and it is beyond a doubt that the later Mandaicism and the great religious movement of Mani (perhaps the son of a Mandaean priest) are most closely connected with Gnosticism. These manifestations are all the more characteristic since in them we meet with a Gnosticism which remained essentially more untouched by Christian influences than the Gnostic systems of the second century A.D. Thus, these systems throw an important light on the past, and a true perception of the nature and purpose of Gnosticism is not to be obtained without taking them into consideration.

GREAT MOTHER OF THE GODS, the ancient Oriental-Greek-Roman deity commonly known as Cybele in Greek and Latin literature from the time of Pindar. She was also known under many other names, such as Semiramis, the wife of Nimrod, and mother / wife of Tammuz (Hellenized Adonis), alternatively co-identical with Isis, Osirus, and Horus, and various other names which were derived from famous places of worship: such as Dindymene from Mount Dindymon, Mater Idaea from Mount Ida, Sipylene from Mount Sipylus, Agdistis from Mount Agdistis (or Agdus), and Mater Phrygia, one of the greatest strongholds of her cult; while other names are reflections of her character as a great nature goddess: Mountain Mother, Great Mother of the Gods, Mother of all Gods and all Men. As the great Mother deity whose worship extended throughout Asia Minor she was known as Mā or Ammas. Cybele is her favorite name in ancient and modern literature, while Great Mother of the Gods, or Great Idaean Mother of the Gods (Mater Deum Magna, Mater Deum Magna Idaea), the most frequently recurring epigraphical title, was her ordinary official designation.

The legends agree in locating the rise of the worship of the Great Mother in Asia Minor, in the region of loosely defined geographical limits which comprised the Phrygian empire of prehistoric times, and was more extensive than the Roman province of Phrygia. Her best-known early seats of worship were Mount Ida, Mount Sipylus, Cyzicus, Sardis and Pessinus, the last-named city, in Galatia near the borders of Roman Phrygia, finally becoming the strongest center of the cult. She was known to the

Romans and Greeks as essentially Phrygian, and all Phrygia was spoken of as sacred to her. It is probable, however, that the Phrygian race, which invaded Asia Minor from the north in the ninth century B.C., found a great nature goddess already universally worshipped there, and blended her with a deity of their own. The Asiatic-Phrygian worship thus evolved was further modified by contact with the Syrians and Phoenicians, so that it acquired strong Semitic characteristics. The Great Mother known to the Greeks and Romans was thus merely the Phrygian form of the nature deity of all Asia Minor.

From Asia Minor the cult of the Great Mother spread first to Greek territory. It found its way into Thrace at an early date, was known in Boeotia by Pindar in the sixth century, and entered Attica near the beginning of the fourth century. At Peiraeus, where it probably arrived by way of the Aegean islands, it existed privately in a fully developed state, that is, accompanied by the worship of Attis, at the beginning of the fourth century, and publicly two centuries later (D. Comparetti, *Annales*). The Greeks from the first saw in the Great Mother a resemblance to their own Rhea, and finally identified the two completely, though the Asiatic peculiarities of the cult were never universally popular with them. In her less Asiatic aspect, that is, without Attis, she was sometimes identified with Gaia and Demeter. It was in this phase that she was worshipped in the Metroön at Athens. In reality, the Mother Goddess appears under three aspects: Rhea, the Homeric and Hesiodic goddess of Cretan origin; the Phrygian Mother, with Attis; and the Greek Great

Mother, a modified form of the Phrygian Mother, to be explained as the original goddess of the Phrygians of Europe, communicated to the Greek stock before the Phrygian invasion of Asia Minor and consequent mingling with Asiatic stocks.

In 204 B.C., in obedience to the Sibylline prophecy which said that whenever an enemy from abroad should make war on Italy he could be expelled and conquered if the Idaean Mother were brought to Rome from Pessinus, the cult of the Great Mother, together with her sacred symbol, a small meteoric stone reputed to have fallen from the heavens, was transferred to Rome and established in a temple on the Palatine (vide Livy). Her identification by the Romans with Maia, Ops, Rhea, Tellus and Ceres contributed to the establishment of her worship on a firm footing. By the end of the Republic it had attained prominence, and under the Empire it became one of the three most important cults in the Roman world, the other two being those of Mithras and Isis. Epigraphic and numismatic evidence prove it to have penetrated from Rome as a center to the remotest provinces. During the brief revival of paganism under Eugenius in A.D. 394, occurred the last appearance of the cult in history. Besides the temple on the Palatine, there existed minor shrines of the Great Mother near the present church of St Peter, on the Sacra Via on the north slope of the Palatine, near the junction of the Almo and the Tiber, south of the city.

In all her aspects, Roman, Greek and Oriental, the Great Mother was characterized by essentially the same qualities. Most

prominent among them was her universal motherhood. She was the great parent of gods and men, as well as of the lower orders of creation. "The winds, the sea, the earth and the snowy seat of Olympus are hers, and when from her mountains she ascends into the great heavens, the son of Cronus himself gives way before her" (Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*). She was known as the All-begetter, the All-nourisher, the Mother of all the Blest. She was the great, fruitful, kindly earth itself. Especial emphasis was placed upon her maternity over wild nature. She was called the Mountain Mother; her sanctuaries were almost invariably upon mountains, and frequently in caves, the name Cybele itself being by some derived from the latter; lions were her faithful companions. Her universal power over the natural world finds beautiful expression in Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*. She was also a chaste and beautiful deity. Her especial affinity with wild nature was manifested by the orgiastic character of her worship. Her attendants, the Corybantes, were wild, half demonic beings. Her priests, the Galli, were eunuchs attired in female garb, with long hair fragrant with ointment. Together with priestesses, they celebrated her rites with flutes, horns, castanets, cymbals and tambourines, madly yelling and dancing until their frenzied excitement found its culmination in self-scourging, self-laceration or exhaustion. Self-emasculatation sometimes accompanied this delirium of worship on the part of candidates for the priesthood. The *Attis* of Catullus is a brilliant treatment of such an episode.

Though her cult sometimes existed by itself, in its fully developed state the worship of the Great Mother was accompanied by that of Attis. The cult of Attis never existed independently. Like Adonis and Aphrodite, Baal and Astarte, etcetera, the two formed a duality representing the relations of Mother Nature to the fruits of the earth. There is no positive evidence to prove the existence of the cult publicly in this phase in Greece before the second century B.C., nor in Rome before the Empire, though it may have existed in private.

The philosophers of the late Roman Empire interpreted the Attis legend as symbolizing the relations of Mother Earth to her children the fruits. Porphyrius says that Attis signified the flowers of spring time, and was cut off in youth because the flower falls before the fruit (Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 7, Chapter 25). Maternus (*De error* 3) interprets the love of the Great Mother for Attis as the love of the earth for her fruits; his emasculation as the cutting of the fruits; his death as their preservation; and his resurrection as the sowing of the seed again.

At Rome the immediate direction of the cult of the Great Mother devolved upon the high priest, Archigallus, called Attis, a high priestess, *Sacerdos Maxima*, and its support was derived, at least in part, from a popular contribution, the *stips*. Besides other priests, priestesses and minor officials, such as musicians, curator, etcetera, there were certain colleges connected with the administration of the cult, called *cannophori* (reed-bearers) and

dendrophori (branch-bearers). The Quindecimvirs exercised a general supervision over this cult, as over all other authorized cults, and it was, at least originally, under the special patronage of a club or sodality (Showerman, pages 269-276). Roman citizens were at first forbidden to take part in its ceremonies, and the ban was not removed until the time of the Empire.

The main public event in the worship of the Great Mother was the annual festival, which took place originally on the 4 of April, and was followed on the fifth by the Megalesia, games instituted in her honor on the introduction of the cult. Under the Empire, from Claudius on, the Megalesia lasted six days, April 4-10, and the original one day of the religious festival became an annual cycle of festivals extending from the 15 to the 27 of March, in the following order. (1) The 15 of March, *Canna intrat*—the sacrifice of a six-year-old bull in behalf of the mountain fields, the high priest, a priestess and the *cannophori* officiating, the last named carrying reeds in procession in commemoration of the exposure of the infant Attis on the reedy banks of the stream Gallus in Phrygia. (This may have been originally a phallic procession.) (2) The 22 of March, *Arbor intrat*—the bearing in procession of the sacred pine, emblem of Attis' self-mutilation, death and immortality, to the temple on the Palatine, the symbol of the Mother's cave, by the *dendrophori*, a gild of workmen who made the Mother, among other deities, a patron. (3) The 24 of March, *Dies sanguinis*—a day of mourning, fasting and abstinence, especially sexual, commemorating the sorrow of the Mother for Attis, her abstinence from food and her chastity. The

frenzied dance and self-laceration of the priests in commemoration of Attis' deed, and the submission to the act of consecration by candidates for the priesthood, was a special feature of the day. The taurobolium was often performed on this day, on which probably took place the initiation of mystics. (4) The 25 of March, Hilaria—one of the great festal days of Rome, celebrated by all the people. All mourning was put off, and good cheer reigned in token of the return of the sun and spring, which was symbolized by the renewal of Attis' life. (5) The 26 of March, Requietio—a day of rest and quiet. (6) The 27 of March, Lavatio—the crowning ceremony of the cycle. The silver statue of the goddess, with the sacred meteoric stone, the Acus, set in its head, was borne in gorgeous procession and bathed in the Almo, the remainder of the day being given up to rejoicing and entertainment, especially dramatic representation of the legend of the deities of the day. Other ceremonies, not necessarily connected with the annual festival, were the taurobolium, the sacrifice of a bull, and the criobolium, the sacrifice of a ram, the latter being the analogue of the former, instituted for the purpose of giving Attis special recognition. The baptism of blood, which was the feature of these ceremonies, was regarded as purifying and regenerating.

The Great Mother figures in the art of all periods both in Asia and Europe, but is especially prominent in the art of the Empire. No work of the first class, however, was inspired by her. She appears on coins, in painting and in all forms of sculpture, usually with mural crown and veil, well draped, seated on a

throne, and accompanied by two lions. Other attributes which often appear are the patera, tympanum, cymbals, scepter, garlands and fruits. Attis and his attributes, the pine, Phrygian cap, pedum, syrinx, and torch, also appear. The Cybele of Formia, now at Copenhagen, is one of the most famous representations of the goddess. The Niobe of Mount Sipylus is really the Mother. In literature she is the subject of frequent mention, but no work of importance, with the exception of Catullus, is due to her inspiration. Her importance in the history of religion is very great. Together with Isis and Mithras, she was a great enemy, and yet a great aid to Christianity. The gorgeous rites of her worship, its mystic doctrine of communion with the divine through enthusiasm, its promise of regeneration through baptism of blood in the taurobolium, were features which attracted the masses of the people and made it a strong rival of Christianity; and its resemblance to the new religion, however superficial, made it, in spite of the scandalous practices which grew up around it, a stepping-stone to Christianity when the tide set in against non-Christianized paganism.