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Inscribed in the Book of the Living: *Gospel of Truth* and Jewish Christology

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There is little hope of ever deducing an explanation for gnosticism; but we can learn much by analyzing that which gnosticism explains.
Henry Corbin

Abstract
In this study, I shall argue that the *Gospel of Truth* preserves an archaic Jewish/Christian theologoumenon that provides an alternative account of the incarnation to the version in the prologue to the *Gospel of John*. It is reasonable to presume a common matrix—most likely related to Jewish Wisdom speculation—for the two accounts. Careful analysis of the text, moreover, sheds light on the spot where the tributaries of Jewish and Christian esotericism converged and diverged. By heeding this site we may contribute in a modest way to the question regarding the intricate relationship between Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism in Late Antiquity.

Keywords
Jewish Christianity, Gnosticism, Jesus, Valentinus, Valentinianism, Gospel of Truth, Gospel of Thomas, secrecy, esotericism, Sabbath, incarnation, Torah

In this study, I shall argue that the *Gospel of Truth*, discovered at Nag Hammadi in two Coptic versions (presumably based on an original Greek composition), preserves an archaic Jewish/Christian theologoumenon that provides an alternative account of the incarnation of the Father in the Son to the better-known version in the prologue to the *Gospel of John*. To state my hermeneutical presupposition at the outset: Instead of viewing the incarnational teaching in the *Gospel of Truth* as dependent on the Prologue to the

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Fourth Gospel, or vice versa, it is more viable to presume a common matrix—most likely related to Jewish Wisdom or Logos speculation—for the two exegetical accounts.[1] In addition to the intrinsic value of delineating the variant incarnational mythologoumena, a careful analysis of the text may shed light on the spot where the respective tributaries of Jewish and Christian esotericism at a very crucial moment historically converged and diverged.[2] By heeding the site of the concomitant convergence and divergence, we may contribute in a modest way to the question regarding the intricate relationship between Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism in Late Antiquity. Without denying that there were existing social realities to which these three terms refer, the latter are in great measure taxonomic structures that serve the heuristic purpose of allowing historical research.[3]

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1) Here I follow the structure of the argument presented by G. Robinson, "The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel," in *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World in Honor of James M. Robinson*, edited by J. E. Goehring, C. W. Hedrick, J. T. Sanders, with H. D. Betz (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1990), 37-50. On the relationship between these two texts, see also N. F. Denzey, "Genesis Traditions in Conflict? The Use of Exegetical Traditions in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Johannine Prologue," *Vigiliae Christianae* 55 (2001): 20-44.

2) Scholars have long debated in varying degrees the possible Jewish milieu of the incarnational doctrine of early Christianity. For example, see P. Borgen, "Observations on the Targumic Character of the Prologue of John," *New Testament Studies* 16 (1969/70): 288-295; idem, "Logos Was the True Light: Contributions to the Interpretation of the Prologue of John," *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972): 115-130; J. C. O'Neill, *Who Did Jesus Think He Was?* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 94-114; M. De Jonge, "Monotheism and Christology," in *Early Christian Thought in its Jewish Context*, edited by John Barclay and John Sweet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 225-237; J. Andrew Dearman, "Theophany, Anthropomorphism, and the *Imago Dei*: Some Observations about the Incarnation in the Light of the Old Testament," in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, edited by S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, S.J., and G. O'Collins, S.J. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 31-46, A. Segal, "The Incarnation: The Jewish Milieu," op. cit., 116-139; D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 89-111.

3) Many scholars have weighed in on the question of the relationship between Judaism and Gnosticism. Here I offer a sampling of the relevant bibliography that I find especially noteworthy but by no means exhaustive: R. Mcl. Wilson, *The Gnostic Problem: A Study of the Relations between Hellenistic Judaism and the Gnostic Heresy* (London: Mowbray, 1958); G. W. MacRae, S.J., "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970): 86-101, reprinted in idem, *Studies in the New Testament and Gnosticism*, selected and edited by D. J. Harrington, S.J. and S. B. Marrow, S.J. (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987), 184-202; E. M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed*

The *Gospel of Truth* well illustrates the complex interweaving of these divergent threads. Close textual analysis exposes the shortcomings of the more rudimentary attempt to catalog these matters as discrete ideological trends. The ensuing analysis will lend credence to the view that the milieu for the development of the central themes that inform the *Gospel of Truth* (and related literature typically classified as Valentinian) is a soteriological esotericism cultivated in Jewish/Christian channels.[4] It is obviously too simplistic to identify in a one-to-one correspondence Jewish-Christianity and Gnosticism, but it is reasonable to revive the locution of Wilhelm Bousset and to speak of a "Jewish-Christian gnosis."[5] In line with more current research, however, I would argue that this expression denotes a hybridity that, at once, reinforces and destabilizes the hyphen that separates and connects the two foci of identity construction, Judaism and Christianity.

Far from viewing the attempt to reconcile Christian faith and Jewish practice as "a monstrosity with many shapes" or as the "mythical many-headed hydra," terms used in the fourth century by Epiphanius to describe Ebion and the movement that evolved out of his teachings,[6] the author of the *Gos-*

Evidences, revised edition (London: Tyndale Press, 1983); idem, "Jewish Gnosticism? The Prologue of John, Mandaean Parallels, and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, edited by R. van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 467-497; J. M. LaFargue, *Language and Gnosis: The Opening Scenes of the Act of Thomas* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 122-129; B. A. Pearson, "The Problem of 'Jewish Gnostic' Literature," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, edited by C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodhsom, Jr. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1986), 15-35; idem, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 10-51, 84-94; J. Magne, *From Christianity to Gnosis and From Gnosis to Christianity: An Itinerary through the Texts to and from the Tree of Paradise*, foreword by Michel Tardieu, translated by A. F. W. Armstrong (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 59-71; M. Desjardins, "Judaism and Gnosticism," in *Hellenization Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World*, edited by W. E. Helleman (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), 309-321; N. Deutsch, *The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah Mysticism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995); C. B. Smith, *No Longer Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004).

4) G. G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 156.

5) W. Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1907), 197. For a succinct review of the question of the relationship between Gnosticism and Jewish Christianity, see S. Pétrement, *A Separate God: The Christian Origins of Gnosticism*, translated by C. Harrison (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 468-476.

6) For citation and discussion of the relevant text, see J. Verheyden, "Epiphanius on the Ebionites," in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, edited by P. J. Tomson and D. Lambers-Petry (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 186-187.

pel of Truth and the members of the alleged circle to which he belonged likely did not identify themselves exclusively as Jews or as Christians but as individuals graced with a wisdom that allowed them to exist concurrently as both Jews and Christians. From this perspective even the notion of syncretism is not precise since there is no evidence for two distinct and clearly demarcated phenomena that need to be combined. It is misguided, therefore, or at the very least onesided, to characterize the *Gospel of Truth* as "a contemplative homily on the Christian message of salvation."[7] The paradigm of redemptive knowledge sponsored by this text is illustrative of a situation that is far more complex than what is conveyed by the label "Christian message." Even the ostensibly more charitable account of "name speculation" in the *Gospel of Truth* and related "Gnostic speculation about language" as being "connected to Jewish heterodoxy and to grammatical and exegetical theory as developed out of Stoic and Philonic allegoricization" casts the issue in terms that are still too bifurcated; the lived situation, we may presume, was more fluid. The interpretive challenge, accordingly, is not to answer the question of "how Valentinus and other Gnostics appropriated to their own purposes vocabularies and themes that were not originally their own."[8]

Closer to the mark is the description of the *Gospel of Truth* as a "pivotal work" that reinterprets "Jewish apocalyptic Christianity as Jewish gnostic Christianity," though even this formulation fails to capture adequately the hybrid nature of the phenomenon.[9] Utilizing the language of Daniel Boyarin, we can say that the author of the *Gospel of Truth* and his intended audience were "exotic Jews/Christians that we call Gnostics."[10] The teaching of

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7) Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 200. Another typical prejudiced description is given by Wilson, *Gnostic Problem*, 69, in his assertion that the *Gospel of Truth* confirms the "essential Christianity of Valentinus." See ibid., 226: "the *Gospel of Truth*… although clearly Gnostic… centres upon the Jesus of the Christian faith." And ibid., 255, where the text is said to be "much nearer to 'orthodox' Christianity" with respect to the issue of the Passion.

8) J. Fineman, "Gnosis and the Piety of Metaphor: The Gospel of Truth," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 2 vols., edited by B. Layton (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 1:292.

9) *The Gnostic Bible*, edited by W. Barnstone and M. Meyer (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), 239. It should be noted that in the same context the *Gospel of Truth* is characterized as "an early discourse on Christian gnostic mysticism," a classification that surely privileges the Christian component over the Jewish, a privileging that is also evident in the expression "Jewish gnostic Christianity." See ibid., 240: "The Gospel of Truth begins with a Jewish-Christian enunciation of joy in the good news of the gospel, which brings hope to those who would seek the father."

10) Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 95.

redemption that may be elicited from this text is no less Jewish than it is Christian; indeed, relative to its own hermeneutical constitution, it may be considered "Christian" only because it is "Jewish" and "Jewish only because it is 'Christian'." We may even go so far as to say that in this textual accretion gnosticism is the hyphenated reality that bridges Jewish and Christian in a con/fusion of identical difference. I take issue with the claim of Joel Fineman that "Gnosticism begins as a literary criticism, as a kind of textual anti-Semitism (perhaps reflexive, if Gnosticism really does develop out of disaffected Judaism) with regard to the Old Testament that establishes the commentary, the re-reading, as the genre appropriate to Gnostic discourse.... So too, the Gnostic refrain 'Not as Moses said' defines a negative stance towards literature, towards the authority of a text and a textual tradition, as much as it expresses a dogma."[11] I might well agree that Gnosticism should be construed as a form of literary criticism, but I dare say that to call it "textual anti-Semitism" arising out of a "disaffected Judaism" is very problematic and in theory anachronistic. The re-reading of the scriptural text, even if it entailed outright rejection of the Mosaic Torah, does not constitute a "negative" hermeneutic, let alone something as crude as a rhetoric of anti-Semitism. It is more appropriate, in my estimation, to characterize the exegesis on display in the *Gospel of Truth* as counter-reading, a reinscription of the text through the lens of interpretation—perhaps we should not even treat these two as separate but rather conceive the contours of the text being reformed constantly by the path of interpretation, and of the path of interpretation being reconfigured constantly by the contours of the text.[12]

As it happens, Fineman himself provided a better explanatory model: "In its purest version—a purity which is perhaps only ideal and that may never have been realized—Gnosticism proposes to link these oppositions each to the other without quite collapsing the opposition into an identity. It thus

11) Fineman, "Gnosis," 309.

12) My approach here is informed by the assumption regarding the ongoing reinscription of the scriptural text in Jewish sources from the Second Temple period articulated by H. Najman, "Interpretation as Primordial Writing: Jubilees and its Authority Conferring Strategies," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 30 (1999): 379-410; idem, "Torah of Moses: Pseudonymous Attribution in Second Temple Writings," in *The Interpretation of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity: Studies in Language and Tradition*, edited by C. A. Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 202-216; idem, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 41-69; idem, "The Symbolic Significance of Writing in Ancient Judaism," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, edited by H. Najman and J. E. Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 139-173.

problematizes its oppositions without erasing them, and then proceeds to make that problem into its piety." The general theoretical point is illustrated immediately by the specific example related to the question as to whether Gnosticism is to be considered monist or dualist. Fineman astutely observed that it is neither one nor the other, but "the troubled difference *between* the two… exactly the difference that permits both these transcendentalisms to be thought in their own purity, so that, once thought, they can retrospectively efface and disavow the very difference that is their possibility."[13] In another passage, Fineman described Valentinianism as "the least anti-Semitic and the most Christian of Gnosticisms," though he continued to depict it as "maximally Gnostic because it establishes the minimum distance from its other, the smallest critical difference, within which to work out its criticism. Its proximity to its other brings their differences, and the methodology by means of which those differences are enunciated, into sharper relief."[14] The key hermeneutical point is the assessment that difference is accentuated and not eradicated by proximity. It is plausible to apply this perspective to the question of the relationship of Judaism and Christianity in the *Gospel of Truth*, that is, it is precisely the *troubled difference* between the two—a disparity that notionally resists a collapse into selfsame identity—that is effaced in the facing of their difference.

Gospel of Truth: Esoteric Exotericism or Exoteric Esotericism?

In the introduction to their English translation of the *Gospel of Truth*, Harold T. Attridge and George W. MacRae described the work as "a Christian Gnostic text with clear affinities to the Valentinian school, offering a subtle yet moving reflection on the person and work of Jesus."[15] Based on these affinities and the somewhat elusive reference to a "Gospel of Truth" in

13) Fineman, "Gnosis," 308.

14) Ibid., 309-310.

15) *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, fourth revised edition (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 38. In preparation of this study, I have also utilized *Evangelium Veritatis: Codex Jung f.VIII^{v}-XV^{lv}* (p. 16-32) / f.XIX^{r}-XXII^{r} (p. 37-43), edited by M. Malinine, H.-C. Puech, and G. Quispel (Zürich: Rascher Verlag, 1956); J.-É. Ménard, *L'Évangile de vérité* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972); and the edition and translation of the text by H. A. Attridge and G. W. MacRae in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices, Volume One*, edited by H. W. Attridge (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 55-117.

the *Adversus Haereses* (3.11.9) of Irenæus,[16] a number of experts have deemed it reasonable to presume the work was composed in the second century, sometime between 140 and 180, perhaps by Valentinus himself.[17] Thus, as Attridge and MacRae themselves put it, the *Gospel of Truth* is a homily "designed to introduce Valentinian soteriological insights to members of the great church."[18] In the more extensive introduction to their critical edition and translation, Attridge and MacRae concluded that the text "may best be characterized as a homiletical reflection on the 'Gospel' or the message of salvation provided by Jesus Christ."[19]

In a similar vein but with slightly different focus, Bentley Layton portrayed the *Gospel of Truth* as a "Christian sermon on the theme of salvation by acquaintance with god (*gnōsis*).... It is the earliest surviving sermon of Christian mysticism."[20] Layton does not elaborate on this suggestive depiction, proceeding rather to provide a cartographic sketch of the ancient author's imagination. Noting that the work is "overtly Christian" and "makes no specific reference to the gnostic myth," Layton charts various intellectual influences, to wit, the Platonic contrast of repose and movement and the pantheistic monism of Stoic cosmology, though the latter presumably was colored by a "strongly antimaterialist, even illusionist" perspective on the reality of material structures. Finally, Layton notes the influence of New Testament books, especially Johannine literature, on the author of *Evangelium veritas*.[21]

There is much to be garnered from these brief summaries, especially the tantalizing use of the term "mysticism" to describe the text, but for my pur-

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16) The text of Irenæus is cited and translated in *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, 65. For analysis of the relevant passage, see A. Y. Reed, "ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ: Orality, Textuality, and the Christian Truth in Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 56 (2002): 15-24.

17) For review of this scholarly debate, see Wilson, *Gnostic Problem*, 155-156; idem, "Valentinianism and the Gospel of Truth," in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 1: 133-145. The attribution of the text to Valentinus has been recently affirmed by K. L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 154. See also Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 200.

18) *Nag Hammadi in English*, 38.

19) *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, 67.

20) B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation With Annotations and Introductions* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1987), 250.

21) Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 250-251. On the utilization of New Testament themes and motifs in the *Gospel of Truth*, see also W. C. van Unnik, "The 'Gospel of Truth' and the New Testament," in *The Jung Codex*, translated and edited by F. L. Cross (London: Mowbray, 1955), 79-129; *Nag Hammadi Codex*, 80, and J. A. Williams, *Biblical Interpretation in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth From Nag Hammadi* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

poses I will concern myself only with Layton's insistence that the theogonic and cosmogonic elements are psychologized in the *Gospel of Truth*. In support of his view, Layton draws the following analogy: the *Gospel of Truth* is to cosmological narrative as allegory in Hellenic philosophic exegesis is to text. "In this almost complete allegorization the underlying dynamic of gnostic myth (fullness—lack—recapture of the lacked) is reapplied microcosmically, at the level of the individual Christian."[22] Subsequently, I shall revisit this issue, presenting an alternative way to interpret the relation of the mythopoeic imagination and psychological interiorization.

Judith Hoch Wray has argued on the basis of philological considerations that the *Gospel of Truth* is better labeled a "sermon" than a "homily."[23] The terminological concern has important implications for how the reader is to view the text. By shifting from homily to sermon, Wray seeks to refocus our gaze in the direction of the performative, that is, the "poetics" of the text revolves about its sermonic nature, the "rhetorical event" of being heard.[24] At the compositional level, we may presume, irrespective of how we ultimately construe the contours of "composition," the rhetorical intent is to draw readers/listeners into the circle of initiation. A similar point has been made by Patricia Cox Miller in her observation that the "primary message" of the *Gospel of Truth* "is a hermeneutical one. It is a revelation of the linguistic dynamic fundamental to revelation, and its interest is in showing how knowledge is related to language, and how language is related to authority."[25] Hence, in the text itself we find hints to a missionizing tendency to disseminate the secretive knowledge so that others may be awakened from the dream state of corporeal existence and return to the Father (30.5-16). We can presume that the principle affirmed by the author of the *Gospel of Truth* was not an esoteric elitism that prohibited or discouraged the disclosure of the mysteries to the multitude. Conversely, the text does not convey an aversion to esotericism as we find, for instance, in the saying attributed to Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas*, "For nothing hidden will not become manifest, and nothing covered will remain without being uncovered,"[26] a statement that has a

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22) *Gnostic Scriptures*, 251.

23) J. H. Wray, *Rest As a Theological Metaphor in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Gospel of Truth: Early Christian Homiletics of Rest* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 95 n. 2.

24) Ibid., 97.

25) P. Cox Miller, *The Poetry of Thought in Late Antiquity: Essays in Imagination and Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 252.

26) *Gospel of Thomas* 6, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7*, edited by B. Layton, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 55. A. D. DeConick, *Seek To See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the*

precise parallel in the Q tradition preserved in the synoptic gospels (Mark 4:22; Matt 10:26-27; Luke 8:17, 12:2-3). In greater propinquity to the spirit of the *Gospel of Truth* is a second saying attributed to Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas*: "It is to those [who are worthy of my] mysteries that I tell my mysteries. Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is going to do."[27] A comparable orientation is attested in another passage wherein Jesus separates Thomas from Simon Peter and Matthew and reveals to him "three things" that cannot be shared with the others.[28]

Analogously, in the *Gospel of Truth*, there is clearly a sense of discrimination, for not all people are considered worthy of receiving the gnosis, an attitude that resonates with the principle of accommodation attested already in the New Testament, an idea that rests on the assumption that teachings must be tailored to the students receiving them (Mark 4:10-12; 1 Cor 3:1-4, 9:19-23; Heb 5:11-14).[29] The act of judgment is framed in one passage through the metaphor of the bad jars, or the jars that are broken as a result of being placed in inauspicious locations, contrasted with the full jars that were made perfect and purified (25.25-26.15).[30] The author of the text assumed a soteriological task vis-à-vis his imaginary audience, and by so doing he was consciously emulating Jesus who is referred to as the "hidden mystery" that reveals "through the mercies of the Father" the way of truth that enlightens "those who were in the-darkness-through-oblivion"-(18.15-20), the redeemer who "entered the empty spaces of terrors" and "passed through those who were stripped naked by oblivion, being knowledge and perfection, proclaiming the things that are in the heart" (20.34-36). Just as Jesus is portrayed as the one to "teach those who will receive the teaching" (21.3), so the author perceived his own mission in these didactic terms. This interpretation is enhanced considerably by the description of Jesus assuming the corruptible

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Gospel of Thomas (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 103, suggests that the Thomasites "would have probably understood this Jesus saying… to refer to God's hidden *kavod* which would become manifest to them during their ascent experience."

27) *Gospel of Thomas* 62, p. 77.

28) Ibid., 12, p. 59.

29) See M. M. Mitchell, "Pauline Accommodation and 'Condescension' (συγκατάβασις): 1 Cor 9:19-23 and the History of Influence," in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, edited by T. Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 197-214, 298-309; idem, "Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that 'The Gospels Were Written for All Christians'," *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005): 61-67.

30) Compare the contrast between the "vessels of wrath" (σκεύη ὀργῆς) and "vessels of mercy" (σκεύη ἐλέους) in Rom 9:22-23. See also 2 Tim 2:20-21.

form of the material world in the image of his "taking" or "putting on" the book of the living (20.1-14, 24-30). I shall come back to this central theme in the *Gospel of Truth*, but what needs to be underscored here is that the act of enclothing himself in the book provides the method through which those illumined by Jesus should illumine others, that is, the way of truth that Jesus, the embodiment of the book, revealed is, as Miller put it, "a way of writing, a way of understanding textuality and authorship, and a way of conceptualizing authority with respect to writing."[31] In the concluding passage of the treatise, we can detect an allusion to the fraternity to which the author belonged, a fraternity whose "realized eschatology"[32] was informed by the mandate to disseminate the gnostic wisdom to all who are worthy:

> For the rest, then, may they know, in their places, that it is not fitting for me, having come to be in the resting-place, to speak of anything else. But it is in it that I shall come to be, and (it is fitting) to be concerned at all times with the Father of the all and the true brothers, those upon whom the love of the Father is poured out and in whose midst there is no lack of him. They are the ones who appear in truth, since they exist in true and eternal life and speak of the light which is perfect and filled with the seed of the Father, and which is in his heart and in the pleroma, which his Spirit rejoices in it and glorifies the one in whom it existed because he is good. And his children are perfect and worthy of his name, for he is the Father: it is children of this kind that he loves. (42.39-43.20)

The message of salvation is carried directly by the text to the reader as it is assumed that ontologically the latter is consubstantial with the indivisible unity of the Father manifest in the plurality of aeons that collectively make up the totality or the pleroma (18.5-8; 18.34-19.10; 21.18-22). As Anne McGuire put it, "The *Gospel of Truth* blurs or dissolves distinctions. The first of these is the apparent distinction between the readers and the Entirety."[33] Members of the enlightened circle are designated as the "perfect" (18.14; 43.20) for they have gained knowledge of the mystery, which is identified more specifically as the name of the Father, on account of the name that dwells within them. I will discuss the matter of the name in more detail at a later stage, but suffice it here to underscore the hermeneutical "circularity of

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31) Miller, *Poetry of Thought*, 257.

32) This is the term used by H. W. Attridge and G. W. MacRae, S.J., *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Notes*, edited by H. A. Attridge (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 134.

33) Anne McGuire, "Conversion and Gnosis in the Gospel of Truth," *Novum Testamentum* 28 (1986): 350.

salvation"[34] set forth in the text: those within whom the name dwells gain knowledge of the name, that is, the name is bestowed upon those who bestow the name.[35] Alternatively expressed, knowledge of the Father is granted to souls who are of the same substance as the Father, and hence the content of the revelatory act can be construed as self-knowledge (*epignōsis*) that is at the same time contemplation of the divine.[36] The reciprocity of the theosophic and pneumatic is made in a striking way in the following passage:

> But those who are to receive teaching [are] the living who are inscribed in the book of the living. It is about themselves that they receive instruction, receiving it from the Father, turning again to him. Since the perfection of the totality is in the Father, it is necessary for the totality to ascend to him. Then, if one has knowledge, he receives what are his own and draws them to himself. (21.3-13)

The virtual ontic identity of the divine and human accounts for the ostensibly imprecise way that the author on occasion slips from describing the emanations or manifestations of the aeons who greet the Father in truth and are joined to him in perfect power, on the one hand, to describing those who are

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34) Fineman, "Gnosis," 294.

35) I am here elaborating on a theme that I mentioned briefly in E. R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 272. It seems to me that a similar hermeneutical circle can be discerned in the admonition of Jesus to his disciples that "the man who has will be given more, and the man who has nothing will lose even what he has" (Mark 4:25; parallel in Matt 13:12 and Luke 8:18). The context wherein this proverb appears is the explanation of Jesus at the conclusion of the parable of the sower regarding the use of a parable to reveal the truth to those on the inside while concealing it from those on the outside. If this surmise is correct, then the point of the remark is that the disciples on the inside can receive the secret because the ones who already have receive more, but the ones on the outside cannot receive and if they were to receive it would result in causing them to lose what they already possess. In some measure, the exegetical basis for the circularity can be sought in the divine utterance "in the heart of every wise-hearted I placed wisdom," ובלב כל חכם לב נתתי חכמה (Exod. 31:6): wisdom is bestowed on those who are already marked as wise in heart.

36) Ménard, *L'Évangile de vérité*, 77; H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, second edition, revised (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 74-80, 194-197; G. Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, translated by A. Alcock (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 39-40; D. Trakatellis, *The Transcendent God of Eugnostos: An Exegetical Contribution to the Study of the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi With a Retroversion of the Lost Original Greek text of Eugnostos the Blessed*, translated by C. Sarelis (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1991), 82-83; M. Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1996), 167-168.

joined in love to the truth and receive the Holy Spirit, which is the tongue, through the mouth of the Father, on the other hand (26.28-27.7). The swerve of redemptive knowledge—fleeing from carnal bondage and the pneumatic return to the Father tellingly described as "the one who encircles all spaces while there is none that encircles him" (22.26-27)—informs the reader of the mutual character of visionary initiation and recitation of the name: "Who, therefore will be able to utter a name for him, the great name, except him alone to whom the name belongs and the sons of the name in whom rested the name of the Father, (who) in turn themselves rested in his name" (38.25-30).[37]

In light of this and other relevant passages, it is difficult to accept the characterization of the text by Attridge as "exoteric."[38] To be sure, Attridge does not dismiss the importance of secrecy for a proper comprehension of the *Gospel of Truth*, but he discerns a concerted effort on the part of the author to conceal secrets from ordinary Christians. It seems to me, however, that on this very basis we should classify the text as "esoteric," the intentional secreting necessarily imbibes a doubling of secrecy. Interpreting the matter in this way, a suggestive analogy could be drawn between this text and the sentiment expressed in the logion attributed to Jesus in response to his disciples regarding the secretive nature of parables preserved in the synoptic gospels (Mark 4:11-12; Matt 13:11-17; Luke 8:9-10).[39] Bracketing the question of the historical authenticity of the saying as well as the variations that distinguish the three literary versions, on the main point there is agreement: Responding to the request on the part of the twelve disciples for clarification of the parable of the sower, Jesus affirms the rhetorical efficacy of the parable as a form of double-speak, that is, speaking in such a way that two things are

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37) For discussion of this theme, see B. Standaert, "L'Evangile de Vérité': critique et lecture," *New Testament Studies* 22 (1976): 243-275; R. Mortley, "The Name of the Father is the Son (Gospel of Truth 38)," in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, edited by R. Wallis and J. Bregman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 239-252; Fineman, "Gnosis," 289-318; Miller, *Poetry of Thought*, 253-259.

38) H. A. Attridge, "The Gospel of Truth As an Exoteric Text," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, edited by C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson, Jr. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1986), 239-255. See also *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, 79-80. According to Attridge's line of reasoning, the *Gospel of Truth* is an exoteric presentation that hides a fuller mythology from the eyes of the uninitiated; according to others, this text is a relatively early composition and thus it is possible that the fuller mythology evolved at a later date, perhaps by way of an exegetical elaboration on earlier redactional strata of the text.

39) R. E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Word "Mystery" in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 32-36; C. S. Mann, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1986), 263 n. 11.

heard, or two possible layers of meaning, the hidden for those in the light and the overt for those in the dark. The parable, as Maimonides later fittingly noted, is an appropriate vehicle for the transmission of esoteric knowledge—even if, as it is in his case, the secret ultimately is that there is no secret to conceal other than the fact that there is no secret—insofar as it betrays the dual structure of the shell and kernel,[40] and thus it is the rhetorical device that affords one the opportunity to reveal and to conceal simultaneously, indeed, to reveal by concealing and to conceal by revealing.[41]

Closer in historical proximity to the *Gospel of Truth*, we may invoke the remark of Clement of Alexandria in the beginning of the *Stromateis*. Mindful of Plato's warning that it is impossible for what is written not to be disclosed,[42] Clement (and anyone who is to follow his example) asserts that "secrets, like God, are entrusted not to writing but to the expressed word."[43] The statement in the gospel of Matthew that "nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known" (10:26) could have surely been read as a hermeneutical slogan for exotericism, but it is interpreted by Clement as a code for esoteric transmission: "we say that in this pronouncement he foretold that the hidden secret shall be revealed to the one who listens in secret, and all that is veiled, like the truth, shall be shown to the one who is capable of receiving the traditions under a veil, and that which is hidden from the majority shall become clear to a minority."[44] In the final analysis,

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40) In this matter, Maimonides doubtlessly was influenced by the fundamental tenet of Islamic esotericism even though there were also rabbinic precedents from which he drew inspiration. For a brief but useful summary of the hermeneutical principle, see R. Guénon, *Insights into Islamic Esoterism and Taoism*, translated by H. D. Fohr and edited by S. D. Fohr (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2003), 9-13.

41) For a more detailed discussion, see E. R. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia—Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy, and Theurgy* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2000), 38-55; idem, "Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in *Moses Maimonides (1138-1204): His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, edited by G.K. Hasselhoff and O. Fraisse (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2004), 217-220.

42) *Epistles* 2, 314c, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, edited by E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, with Introductory and Prefatory Notes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 1567. On the philosophical esotericism implicit in Plato's insistence that secret traditions should be transmitted orally and not committed to writing, see Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 148 and references to other scholars cited in nn. 7-8 *ad locum*.

43) Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis: Books One to Three*, translated by J. Ferguson (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 1.13.2, p. 31.

44) Ibid., 1.13.3, p. 31.

according to Clement, one can commit to writing esoteric teachings he received orally from his teachers only if he adopts a method of writing that will still elicit the need for a teacher to expound the written text.[45] The writing of secrets, therefore, must partake of the nature of secrecy and attempt "to say something unobtrusively or to reveal something without uncovering it or to demonstrate it without saying anything."[46] In the parable of the sower, the interplay of disclosure and occlusion relates more specifically to the mystery of the kingdom of God, which is revealed to those on the inside and hidden from those on the outside, interpreted by some as an allusion to the growing rift between followers of Jesus and the Pharisees.[47]

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45) Ibid., 1.14.4, p. 33. On the interface of the oral and written as a model to explain the medieval kabbalistic approach to revealing secrets, see E. R. Wolfson, "Beyond the Spoken Word: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Medieval Jewish Mysticism," in *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality and Cultural Diffusion*, edited by Y. Elman and I. Gershoni (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 166-224.

46) *Stromateis*, 1.15.1, p. 33. For a detailed analysis of Clement's teaching strategies, see J. L. Kovacs, "Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher according to Clement of Alexandria," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001): 3-25, esp. 23-24. On the need to conceal esoteric matters connected to monastic teachings as an emulation of Scripture, see the discussion in R. D. Young, "Evagrius the Iconographer: Monastic Pedagogy in the Gnostikos," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001): 58-61.

47) This, for instance, was the view proffered by A. Jülicher in *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (1888). See discussion in D. Stern, "Jesus' Parables from the Perspective of Rabbinic Literature: The Example of the Wicked Husbandmen," in *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, edited by C. Thoma and M. Wyschogrod (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 46-47. For a challenge to interpreting the parables as secretive in nature, see J. Bowman, *The Gospel of Mark: The New Christian Jewish Passover Haggadah* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 131-140. In Bowman's mind, the link between parable and mystery does not bespeak an intentional concealing, but the belief in a depth of meaning that is revealed gradually to those who know. Ostensibly, support for Bowman might be elicited from the remark attributed to Jesus, "For there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret, except to come to light" (Mark 4:22), an idea buttressed as well by the parabolic comparison of the kingdom of God to a seed or grain of mustard seed scattered upon the ground (ibid., 26-32). I would note, however, that even these affirmations of disclosure are not necessarily applied democratically to all people, that is, the force of the parabolic depiction of speaking a parable as lighting the lamp or sowing the seed is meant to convey the idea that by means of this rhetorical form truth is both hidden and disclosed. On the phenomenon of secrecy and the mystery of the kingdom of God in Mark, see W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, translated by J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1971), B. B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 343-362, esp. 345-347; H. Räisänen, *The 'Messianic Secret' in Mark's Gospel*, translated by C. Tuckett (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1990); J. M. Perry, *Exploring the Messianic Secret in Mark's Gospel* (Kansas City: Sheed &

The formulation of the messianic secret, whether or not it reflects the authentic pedagogy of Jesus, offers an alternative way to construe the contours of esotericism and the transmission of soteric knowledge advocated in the early stages of the Christian movement.[48] Just as the secret according to the synoptic account is the marker of difference that establishes the boundary separating the privileged community, the inner circle, who see the kingdom of God dawning, and those on the outside for whom this is not yet a reality, so the mystery in the *Gospel of Truth* sets apart followers of Christ who know the secret and those from whom it must be withheld.[49] On this basis, I would respectfully differ with Attridge and suggest that the *Gospel of*

Ward, 1997); and A. Y. Collins, "Messianic Secret and the Gospel of Mark: Secrecy in Jewish Apocalypticism, the Hellenistic Mystery Religions, and Magic," in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, edited by E. R. Wolfson (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 1999), 11-30. For a more recent attempt to uncover the "midrashic" background of the use of parabolic speech to depict metaphorically the unfolding of divine mystery, see M. N. Sabin, *Reopening the Word: Reading Mark as Theology in the Context of Early Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 39-51.

48) For references, see Brown, *Semitic Background*, 33 n. 101. Also relevant is the comprehensive study of M. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1990); Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*; Mitchell, "Patristic Counter-Evidence," 75-77.

49) Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 39-40. It is of interest to consider in this light the exchange between Jesus and Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas* 13, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7*, 58-59. Jesus prods the disciples to compare him to someone and to tell him whom he resembles. Simon Peter compares him to a righteous angel and Matthew to a wise philosopher, but Thomas was reluctant to give any positive answer since the mouth is not capable of describing Jesus. The latter expresses his approbation by informing Thomas that he is no longer his master, whence we are to deduce that Thomas is no longer a disciple. Interestingly, the state of enlightenment is portrayed figuratively in the language of Thomas becoming intoxicated by drinking "from the bubbling spring" that Jesus "measured out." As a reward for his response, Jesus withdrew with Thomas and revealed to him three things that he could not disclose to the other disciples. We see, again, in this context, that esotericism is a divisive force, but in this setting, the division occurs within the secret fraternity itself and not simply between the disciples and others. There is more to say about the image of the "bubbling spring" that Jesus measured out, and the affinity it has with the later kabbalistic theme expressed in zoharic literature regarding the line-of-measure that both extends and overflows (two meanings derived from the root משׁח), but I will refrain from doing so in this note. On the possible connection between the wisdom espoused by Thomas on the inability to describe Jesus and Jewish traditions concerning the ineffable name of God, see DeConick, *Seek To See Him*, 112-113; idem, *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 87.

Truth is thoroughly "esoteric" in its parabolic deportment; indeed, the text displays an esotericism so abounding that it appears to be exoteric: the secret secrets itself in the concealment of disclosure wrought by the disclosure of its concealment. If the content of what is to be disclosed is a secret, then the disclosure perforce must be secretive, and nowhere is this more evidently concealed than in the exposure of the secret.

Secret of the Name and the Wisdom of Return in Jewish Christological Teaching

The hermeneutical duplicity of secrecy outlined above is illustrated in the *Gospel of Truth* in the teaching imparted regarding the ineffability of the name, which is linked to the mystery of the invisibility of the divine. The ideal of salvific gnosis, the knowledge of the unknowable Father, facilitates "a return to him and a perfectly unitary knowledge" (19.5-7). By receiving such knowledge there is a "turning again," a reintegration of the self into the "perfection of the totality" that "is in the Father" (21.8-9). Significantly, "bringing back" to the pleroma is designated "repentance" (35.22-23), in Coptic ⲙⲉⲧⲁⲛⲟⲓⲁ, which is based on the Greek μετάνοια, though it is reasonable to suggest that behind this term is the Hebrew תשובה, which is derived from the root שׁוּב, "to return."[50] Assuming the correctness of this philological surmise, we may conclude that underlying the key soteriological concept of the *Gospel of Truth* is a hyperliteral interpretation of the Jewish notion of repentance that yields one of the hallmark gnostic teachings: to repent is to return to the source of all being, which is essentially a return to oneself.

The Hebraic background in enhanced by the reference to the ineffable name, which, as a number of scholars have noted, brings to mind the Jewish conception of the *shem ha-meforash*.[51] The doctrine of the Son bearing the name of the Father, an idea whose roots stretch back to Second Temple Jewish reflections on the Tetragrammaton and the theophanic figures enclothed

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50) On the Semitic etymology for the word ⲙⲉⲧⲁⲛⲟⲓⲁ, see *The Gospel of Truth: A Valentinian Meditation on the Gospel*, translation and commentary by K. Grobel (London: Adams and C. Block, 1960), 162-163.

51) Grobel, op. cit., 183; Attridge and MacRae, S.J., *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Notes*, 120-121. See also Ménard, *L'Évangile de vérité*, 104-105, 131, 178-181, 184; Trakatellis, *Transcendent God*, 44 n. 38. For a useful review of the evidence related to the restricted use of the Tetragrammaton in early Judaism, see S. M. McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos: Rev. 1:4 in its Hellenistic and Early Jewish Setting* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 111-116.

thereby,[52] is a central motif in early Christology, attested in several books of the New Testament (John 17:11; Rev 19:12-13, 16; Heb 1:4; Rom 10:13; Phil 2:9; Eph 1:21).[53] The traditional perspective, however, is interlaced in the *Gospel of Truth* with Neoplatonic and Christological elements. The former relates to the fact that the assertion that the Father's name is not spoken marks the transcendence of the Father's essence, an idea that resonates with one of the basic components of gnostic theology, the distinction between the supreme unknowable God and the demiurge.[54] Going beyond the notion of the ineffable name expressed in rabbinic sources, the author of the *Gospel of Truth*, perhaps influenced by the conception of God's unknowability articulated by Philo of Alexandria,[55] presumes in an apophatic manner that no

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52) McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, 58-122; C. A. Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003): 121-127.

53) Magne, *From Christianity to Gnosis*, 181-185; McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, 126-128; Gieschen, "Divine Name," 127-148. On the possible connection between the Logos Christology in the *Gospel of John* and the Jewish Christian conception of the hypostasized name expressed, for instance, in the *Gospel of Truth* and in the *Gospel of Philip*, see R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1970), 41-46; J. E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985), 106-112, 125-127; idem, *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 109-133; G. Quispel, "Het Johannesevangelie en de Gnosis," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 11 (1956/57): 173-202; idem, "Qumran, John and Jewish Christianity," in *John and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, edited by J. H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 137-155, esp. 149-154; M. L. Turner, *The Gospel According to Philip: The Sources and Coherence of an Early Christian Collection* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 231-232. See also the study of Stroumsa cited below, n. 57.

54) Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 42-43, 49; B. A. Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 203.

55) A similar argument is made with respect to Valentinus by Pétrement, *A Separate God*, 378; Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 217; Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, 202. On Philo's negative conception of God as indescribable, unknowable, incomprehensible, and unnameable, see D. Runia, "Naming and Knowing: Themes in Philonic Theology with Special Reference to *De Mutatione Nominum*," in *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, edited by R. Van den Broek, T. Baarda, and J. Mansfield (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 69-91, esp. 76-78; R. Radice, "The 'Nameless Principle' from Philo to Plotinus: An Outline of Research," in *Italian Studies on Philo of Alexandria*, edited by F. Calabi (Boston: Brill, 2003), 167-182, esp. 178-181. A possible Jewish background for the conception of God's unknowability affirmed in gnostic sources may be adduced as well from the following teaching of the Marcosians, a branch of the Valentinian school, polemically reported by Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, 1.20.1-2. According to the story transmitted by the Marcosians, when Jesus was a child learning the letters—it is reasonable to presume that in the "original" version of the tale the

name can be assigned to the Father since he is beyond description.[56] The mystery of the incarnation is framed, therefore, as the declamation of the name of the nameless, the "great name," that the Son "to whom the name belongs" bestows upon the "sons of the name in whom rested the name of the Father, (who) in turn themselves rested in his name" (38.25-30).[57]

The Neoplatonic orientation is recast in a Christological light as may be gathered from the assertion that the inaudible name of the invisible Father is rendered visually audible and audibly visual through the Son who is identified further as the Logos: "In this way the Word of the Father goes forth in the totality, as the fruit [of] his heart and an impression of his will. But it supports the totality; it chooses them and also receives the impression of the totality, purifying them, bringing them back into the Father, into the Mother, Jesus of the infinite sweetness" (23.33-24.9). I will return to the triad of hypostases implied in this excerpt, but suffice it here to note the link that is made between the Word and Son as it pertains specifically to the revelation of the ineffable name. The point is elaborated in a second passage:

> Now, the end is receiving knowledge about the one who is hidden, and this is the Father, from whom the beginning came forth, to whom all will return who

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reference is more specifically to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet—and his teacher asked him to pronounce "Alpha" (or *alef*), he replied by saying the letter, but when the teacher asked him to say "Beta" (or *beit*), he responded, "Do thou first tell me what Alpha is, and then I will tell thee what Beta is," at which point Irenæus adds: "This they expound as meaning that He alone knew the Unknown, which He revealed under its type Alpha." The nexus between the unknown and the letter *alef* is a well attested motif in medieval kabbalistic sources, an idea that is exegetically grounded in the fact that the consonants that make up the word *alef* can be rearranged to spell *pele*, that is, "mystery" or "wonder." It is curious that this older gnostic account likewise links the unfathomable nature of God and the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is also relevant to recall here the rabbinic tradition preserved in the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 104a, regarding the "infants" (*darddaqei*) who came to the school house (*beit midrash*) to reveal some of the mysteries of the tradition encoded in the *alef-beit*.

56) Closer to the spirit of the rabbinic orientation is the teaching of Marcus reported by Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, 1.15.1: "Moreover, that name of the Saviour which may be pronounced, viz., Jesus [Ἰησοῦς] consists of six letters, but His unutterable name comprises four-and-twenty letters. The name *Christ the Son* (υἱὸς Χρειστός) comprises twelve letters, but that which is unpronounceable in Christ contains thirty letters." The issue here is the ineffability of the secret names and not the unknowability of the divine being to whom these names apply.

57) See G. G. Stroumsa, "A Nameless God: Judaeo-Christian and Gnostic 'Theologies of the Name,'" in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, edited by P.J. Tomson and D. Lambers-Petry (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2003), 230-243.

> have come forth from him. And they have appeared for the glory and the joy of his name. Now the name of the Father is the Son. It is he who first gave a name to the one who came forth from him, who was himself, and he begot him as a son. He gave him his name which belonged to him; he is the one to whom belongs all that exists around him, the Father. His is the name; his is the Son. It is possible for him to be seen. The name, however, is invisible because it alone is the mystery of the invisible which comes to ears that are completely filled with it by him. For indeed, the Father's name is not spoken, but it is apparent through a Son. (37.37-38.24)

Toward the end of the above citation we encounter an interesting distinction between the verbal and ocular aspects of the name: the Father's name is invisible, indeed the very "mystery of the invisible," but it does come to "ears that are completely filled with it by him." The ears of the enlightened can apprehend what they cannot see. Thus the name that is not spoken is nevertheless rendered "apparent" through the Son. But with respect to Jesus the distinction between the visual and sonic is no longer tenable, for the name of the invisible Father is given to Jesus "since he alone sees him, he alone having the power to give him a name.... The name, therefore, is that of the Father, as the name of the Father is the Son" (39.8-26). The power of the Son to bestow the inscrutable wisdom of the Father on others by vocalizing the unutterable name derives from the fact that the Son alone saw that which cannot be seen.[58] "But he <is> unnamable, indescribable, until the time when he who is perfect spoke of him alone. And it is he who has the power to speak his name and to see it" (40.16-23).

The gnosis—knowledge of the name of the nameless Father revealed through the Son—is also depicted as an escape from the imprisonment of this world, a return flight to the realm of light, an inward journey whose telos is described as repose in the Father. The mythopoeic images notwithstanding, the philosophic import of the notion of salvation is paramount, understood as the awakening of the mind to the true being, the One that is all, so that the spirit will see through the illusion of material reality;[59] the acosmic transformation envisioned in the gnostic ideal of salvation is expressed

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58) The text expresses a sentiment similar to John 1:18.

59) For discussion of the pertinent philosophical issues related to this theme, see E. Thomassen, "The Derivation of Matter in Monistic Gnosticism," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, edited by J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 1-17. On the relationship of the mythological and philosophical elements in the *Gospel of Truth*, see Trakatellis, *Transcendent God*, 133-134.

through a process of metaphoricization that transposes the physical world into an image of the pleroma, which is imagined, in turn, as an image of the imageless truth.[60]

The doubling of the image captures an essential feature of gnostic epistemology, a doubling that renders fluid the distinction between myth and history. Insofar as every image is an image of an image, truth can never escape the snare of parabolic duplicity.[61] To use Fineman's turn of phrase, at work in

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60) Relevant to this theme is the description in *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV, 1 with BG 8502,2*, edited by M. Waldstein and F. Wisse (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 6.2-4, p. 39: "This is the pentad (πεντάς) of aeons (αἰών) of the Father, which is the first Man, the image (εἰκών) of the invisible (ἀόρατον) Spirit (πνεῦμα)." The language of this passage is reminiscent of the representation of Jesus as the "image of the invisible God" (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου) in Col 1:15. For a detailed study of this text, see Fossum, *Image of the Invisible God*, 13-39. A similar idea seems to be implied in the response of Jesus to Philip's request to be shown the Lord, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9), a sentiment also expressed at an earlier point in this gospel, "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (1:18). To speak of Jesus as the likeness of the invisible is to convey the Christological teaching that Jesus is the earthly manifestation of the transcendent and hidden God, the image by which human beings approach the unimaginable. The characterization of Christ as the image of God is found as well in 2 Cor 4:4 and it is reflected in Heb 1:3. On the relationship of Valentinian gnosticism and the *Apocryphon of John*, see G. Quispel, "Gnosis and the Apocryphon of John," in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 1:118-132. The portrayal of Jesus as the image of the invisible (Col 1:15) or as the reflection of God's glory (Heb 1:2-3) is related to patterns of Jewish speculation on the Wisdom or Word of the divine (*Wisdom of Solomon* 7:25-26) by M. de Jonge, *Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Response to Jesus*, foreword by W. A. Meeks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 196.

61) This, no doubt, is the intent of the passage in the third-century text, *Gospel of Philip*, generally thought to be Valentinian in provenance: "Truth did not come into the world naked, but it came in types and images. The world will not receive truth in any other way. There is a rebirth and an image of rebirth. It is certainly necessary to be born again through the image. Which one? Resurrection. The image must rise again through the image. The bridal chamber and the image must enter through the image into the truth: this is the restoration" (67:9-18). I have utilized the translation of W. W. Isenberg based on the text edited by B. Layton in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7*, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 175. The passage is cited with a similar intent by Fineman, "Gnosis," 307. See also *Gospel of Thomas* 82-83, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7*, 85: "Jesus said, 'The images are manifest to man, but the light in them remains concealed in the image of the light of the father. He will become manifest, but his image will remain concealed by his light.' Jesus said, 'When you see your likeness you rejoice. But when you see your images which came into being before you, and which neither die nor become manifest, how much you will have to bear!'" For discussion of the concept of the image in *Gospel of Thomas*, see B. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel According to Thomas*, translated by E. Sharpe (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1961), 200-206; Buckley, *Female*

the *Gospel of Truth* is the "piety of metamorphic semiosis,"[62] a seemingly interminable process of allegorization that rests on "a continued play of vaguely denominated antecedents such that Father and Son blend together in the space of pronomial ambiguity."[63] The name by which the unnameable is proclaimed, the name that widens even as it bridges the gap separating Father and Son, is the "devolution of truth as its own displacement."[64] And it is exactly with regard to this issue that the viewpoint espoused in the *Gospel of Truth* may be profitably contrasted with the transcendental theologies espoused by Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic thinkers:[65] If we are to speak of the Father as the ultimate reality according to the author of the *Gospel of Truth*, his nature is expressed as the "linguistic gesture" that "sets in motion a movement of signification"[66]—hence truth is located in the mouth of the Father and the tongue is the Holy Spirit through which one is joined to the truth (26.33-27.4)—and as such it defies ontological reification since it is

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Fault, 97-99; DeConick, *Seek To See Him*, 148-172. On the centrality of the pictographic orientation in gnostic theory and practice, see P. C. Finney, "Did Gnostics Make Pictures?" in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 1:434-454.

62) Fineman, "Gnosis," 293.

63) Ibid., 295.

64) Ibid., 296. For an alternative approach and critique of Fineman, see D. Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1992), 165: "Valentinus's prose does not produce unmitigated antimimesis, generating a semantic indeterminacy that proliferates endlessly, each word disseminating an endless series of other meanings. He is not, despite initial appearances of unrestrained metaphorical innovation, a deconstructionist *avant la lettre*. Instead, Valentinus assumes a visionary stance that escapes, or rather confronts and then surpasses, the alternatives of mimesis and antimimesis. Valentinus's use of metaphors that lack determinate meaning does not lead to an antimimetic, semantic regression because the resulting semantic indeterminacy is not linear (i.e., his signifiers are not extended infinitely in time and space, endlessly differing from one another and deferring meaning; instead, they are self-reflexive). We must imagine, then, neither an endless chain of signifiers nor an arbitrary end to such a chain, but rather something like an expanding and contracting balloon; when full, a balloon is different than when empty, but whether expanded or contracted, it remains the same balloon." I am grateful to Virginia Burrus for drawing my attention to the work of Dawson.

65) A number of scholars have discussed the similarities and differences between the deployment of negative theological discourse in gnostic and Neoplatonic sources. For instance, see C. Hancock, "Negative Theology in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, 167-186; J. P. Kenney, "Ancient Apophatic Theology," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism*, 259-275; M. A. Williams, "Negative Theologies and Demiurgical Myths in Late Antiquity," op. cit., 277-302.

66) Miller, *Poetry of Thought*, 254.

subject to the "semiosis of metaphorization,"[67] that is, an endless chain of metonymic replacement and metaphoric substitution: "Being itself is named as Speech itself, with the result that the being of Being is fractured in the moment of its voicing, just as the Father is lost as presence when he is represented as a Name."[68]

Utilizing Lacan's contention that the "hidden signifier" is not "entirely absent from the chain which it subtends," but it is rather "present through its metonymic relationship to the rest of the chain," Fineman suggests that "the Son and the Name of the Father are metonymies of the Father himself (i.e., contiguously related figures of the Father that represent him whole). As such, as metonymies of the Father, they testify to the absence of the Father in that they continually refer to Him whom they replace."[69] Without entering all of the details of the Lacanian construct, let me emphasize the most critical points for my analysis. The apophasis operative in the *Gospel of Truth* yields the following paradox: ignorance of the Father is redeemed through knowledge of the Father, but that knowledge is linked to the Son who bears the name of the nameless. Insofar as the name is the sign of that which cannot be signified except as the hidden signifier that is present through its absence displayed in the potentially inexhaustible chain of signification, it follows that "the Son through whom knowledge of the Father is revealed is at the same time a representation of the very lack that the revelation is intended to redeem."[70] The "semiotic reality" of the name, therefore, is perched between Father and Son, the fullness of lack and the lack of fullness, the presence of absence and the absence of presence, the difference of synonymity and the synonymity of difference.[71]

Gnostic redemption, accordingly, is revisioned as a neutralization of messianic apocalypticism, an internal rather than external seeing, an insight that renders the ontic autonomy of discrete beings illusory.[72] Even the language of

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67) Fineman, "Gnosis," 300.

68) Ibid., 298.

69) Ibid., 301.

70) Ibid., 302.

71) Ibid., 307-308.

72) P. Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 154-156. See also Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 145: "the *Gospel*… strives to neutralize the sort of narrative sensibility that depends on memory and anticipation, offering instead a rhetorical mode that seeks to collapse and absorb narrative temporality into an atemporal revelation that occurs in the mind rather than in history."

ascent and descent so critical to the gnostic soteriology bespeaks the contrasting epistemological states of knowledge and ignorance and not an existential condition dependent on spatial location.[73] When this aspect of the *Gospel of Truth* is apprehended properly, then one can appreciate the inadequacy of the attempt to classify the Christology of the text as docetic as opposed to veridical. Let me cite the crucial passage:

> When he had appeared instructing them about the Father, the incomprehensible One, when he had breathed into them what is in thought, doing his will, when many had received the light, they turned to him. For the material ones were strangers and did not see his likeness and had not known him. For he came by means of fleshly form, while nothing blocked his course because incorruptibility is irresistible, since he, again, spoke new things, still speaking about what is in the heart of the Father, having brought forth the flawless word. (30.32-31.12)

Various attempts have been made to unpack the Christological implications of this passage.[74] It is possible, as some have suggested, that implied herein is a docetic interpretation attested in other gnostic texts: Jesus assumes the "likeness" of an anthropos and thus clothes himself in the "fleshly form" by which he appeared in the world.[75] An approach more consistent with the worldview of the *Gospel of Truth*, however, would preclude dichotomizing the docetic and veridical perspectives. In his mission of bringing forth the Word and thereby communicating what is in the heart of the Father, Jesus had to take on the likeness of the human, the fleshly form of this world (23.30, 26.9), but the "material ones" were not capable of seeing it. If the likeness were merely a corporeal body, then there is no reason why the "strangers" ensconced in the physical universe would not be capable of apprehending the incarnational form. The body assumed by Christ is the image—the vehicle by

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73) S. Davies, "Gnostic Idealism and the Gospel of Truth," in *Religious Writing and Religious Systems: Systemic Analysis of Holy Books in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Greco-Roman Religions, Ancient Israel, and Judaism*, vol. 1, edited by J. Neusner, E. S. Frerichs, and A.-J. Levine (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 85.

74) For discussion and reference to other scholars, see Attridge and MacRae, S.J., *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Notes*, 88-89.

75) Perhaps the language of the passage in the *Gospel of Truth* alludes to the incarnational hymn in Phil 2:7-8, which offers a veridical as opposed to docetic perspective. For a more elaborate discussion of salvation and the anthropomorphic image of Christ, see P. Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 177-190.

means of which the invisible deity is manifest[76]—but the image is what is *real*, and hence it can be seen only by the "sons of interior knowledge" (32.38-39), the ones awaiting salvation "whose image is light with no shadow in it" (35.5). Ascertaining knowledge of the Father is described, therefore, as being illumined in the darkness (18.17; 24.37), awakening from a state of drunkenness (22.17), opening eyes that are blind (30.15-16).

Salvific Gnosis, Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and the Redemptive Rest of Sabbath

The ascription of the *Gospel of Truth* to a Jewish/Christian milieu is supported further by the fact that the esoteric gnosis is rendered figuratively by utilizing images associated with the poetic symbol of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the second and third chapters of Genesis combined with an allusion to the crucifixion. Thus, "Jesus, the Christ," the "hidden mystery" of the Father (18.15-16), is described in the following terms:

> He was nailed to a tree (and) he became a fruit of the knowledge of the Father. It did not, however, cause destruction because it was eaten, but to those who ate it I gave (cause) to become glad in the discovery, and he discovered them in himself, and they discovered him in themselves. (18.25-30)

Inverting the narrative account in Genesis, the eating of this fruit does not entail punishment and destruction, but, quite to the contrary, the possibility of salvation and engendering, which the text presents as a reciprocal discovery, Jesus discovering himself in those who eat the fruit, and those who eat the fruit discovering Jesus in themselves.[77] As Karen King put it, the author of the text (whom she identifies as Valentinus) interprets the nailing of Jesus to the cross "allegorically in terms of Genesis and the Gospel of John: Jesus is

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76) M. A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 125.

77) Miller, *Poetry of Thought*, 256-257; Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi*, 151-153. See also the comments on this passage in *The Gnostic Bible*, 240-241: "This passage reverses the fundamental biblical notion that knowledge is sin. It dissolves the original stricture against obtaining knowledge by eating of its fruit, for which disobedience came a punishment of shame, sensuality, and death. Rather, here in the Gospel of Truth the fruit of knowledge is a discovery bringing joy. It signifies that one finds god in oneself, that the fog of error and terror is gone, and that the nightmare of darkness is exchanged for an eternal heavenly day. Therein is stated the essence of gnosis: the word of knowledge redeems rather than kills."

the fruit of the true Tree of Knowledge that brings life when one eats of it (perhaps a reference to a sacramental meal); he is the divine Word of revelation, posted like a public notice on a wooden pole and read like the Book of Life."[78]

The roots for the Valentinian soteriology are to be recovered in the words ascribed to the serpent in its effort to convince the first woman (אשה) that she and her mate (איש) would not die if they touched or ate from the Tree of Knowledge (עץ הדעת). The rationale for the prohibition, according to the serpentine wisdom, is that God knew that on the day they would eat from the fruit of the tree their eyes would be opened and they would become godlike, knowing good and evil, כי ידע אלהים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו ונפקחו עיניכם והייתם כאלהים ידעי טוב ורע (Gen 3:5). The gnostic revision preserves a critical component of the scriptural account as the wisdom that effaces the boundary between divine and human ensues from the woman and man disobeying the divine command not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge; in the mind of the gnostic revisionary, however, it is precisely the transgression of breaking the limits set by Elohim and following the sway of the serpent's seduction that occasions the knowing that leads to salvation.[79] The soteriological principle is predicated on the presumption that ignorance of the Father brings about a state of oblivion and deficiency. By contrast, knowledge of the Father—that is, knowledge of the Father's name through the Son—facilitates the return of all things to the fullness of the Father, the

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78) *What is Gnosticism?* 155. On the question of influence of the Hebrew bible on the author of the *Gospel of Truth* King is not consistent, as we can see, for example, by her categorical statement, op. cit., 44: "Works like the *Gospel of Mary* or the *Gospel of Truth* built their theologies and Christologies with hardly any reference to Jewish Scripture at all."

79) On gnostic soteriology as a reinterpretation of Genesis 1-4, see A. H. B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1996), 211-257. See also E. Pagels, "Adam and Eve and the Serpent in Genesis 1-3," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, edited by K. L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 412-423; idem, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988), 57-77. On the centrality of the image of the serpent in gnostic symbolism derived from a subversive revision of the narrative in the book of Genesis, see Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 92-94, 116-118. On the Gnostic tendency to mythologize scriptural narratives, see G. P. Luttikhuizen, "The Thought Pattern of Gnostic Mythologizers and Their Use of Biblical Traditions," in *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, edited by J. D. Turner and A. McGuire (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 89-101. See also the survey by B. A. Pearson, "Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in Gnostic Literature," in *Mikra: Text, Translation and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, edited by M. J. Mulder and H. Sysling (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), 635-652.

vanishing of the many in the fusion of unity, the restoration of the totality to the incomprehensible and inconceivable monad (18.25; 24.25-25.16; 39.52). The one who attains gnosis, therefore, "will purify himself from multiplicities into Unity, consuming matter within himself like fire, and darkness by light, death by life" (25.14-16).

Attridge and MacRae conclude that the main theme of the homily is offered in the "final block of exposition," the concern of which is the "process of reintegration to the primordial source" (33.33-36.39), an ontic return of the many to the one, depicted poetically as rest in the Father (40.23-41.14). The monopsychic conception of rest, the "unity of perfect thought" (33.34), is a motif associated with Valentinian teaching in other sources, as we find, for example, in the following account of the restoration (the Coptic **апокатастасіс** is a loan word from the Greek ἀποκατάστασις) to the Pleroma in the *Tripartite Tractate*:

> The restoration is at the end, after the Totality reveals what is, the Son, who is the redemption, that is, the path toward the incomprehensible Father, that is, the return to the preexistent, and (after) the Totalities reveal themselves in that one, in the proper way, who is the inconceivable one and the ineffable one, and the invisible one and the incomprehensible one, so that it receives redemption… an ascent [to] the degrees which are in the Pleroma… an entrance into what is silent, where there is no need for voice nor for knowing nor for forming a concept nor for illumination, but (where) all things are light, while they do not need to be illumined. (123.28-124.25)

Redemption, which is portrayed as an ascent to the pleroma, the restoration of all things to the realm of pure light, is linked to the Son who is the pathway that leads to the Father. Insofar as the latter is incomprehensible, invisible, and ineffable, the return to the pleromatic radiance is construed as entrance into silence, the illumination beyond description, indeed an illumination so luminous that all things contained therein are light and hence they have no need to be illumined. Significantly, the author of the *Tripartite Tractate* attributes this soteric credo to the "race of the Hebrews" who are associated with psychic wisdom in contrast to the Greeks who are demarcated as the "hylics," that is, those whose knowledge is based exclusively on the material world (110.23-25).[80] In consonance with the locution introduced in

[80] See the notes by H. A. Attridge and E. H. Pagels to the *Tripartite Tractate* 110:23 in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Notes*, edited by H. A. Attridge (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 424.

another part of the composition, the Greeks are "those on the left" whereas the Hebrews are "those on the right" (105.7-8; cf. 98.15-20). The Hebrews, accordingly, are distinctive as they attain "the order of the unmixed ones, the one which is established, the unity which exists as a representation of the representation of the Father. It is not invisible in its nature, but a wisdom envelops it, so that it might preserve the form of the truly invisible one" (110.34-111.3). The righteous ones and prophets amongst the Hebrews "did not think of anything and did not say anything from imagination or through a likeness or from esoteric thinking, but each one by the power which was at work in him, and while listening to the things which he saw and heard, spoke of them" (111.10-16). The full intent of the last remark is made clear in the continuation where the author contrasts the heresies of the Jews, which arise from the multiple interpretations of Scripture proffered by the "teachers of the Law," and the truths revealed by the prophets on the basis of what they saw and heard "through the proclamation of the Savior" (112.18-113.11). This criticism does not necessarily mean the author is not Jewish but it does indicate an animus toward the emerging rabbinic approach whereby textual interpretation replaces prophetic inspiration as the ultimate means by which one ascertains truth. Be that as it may, it is instructive that the Jews are still privileged as the "race" that bears the seed of redemptive gnosis to be disseminated in the world. To be sure, the ultimate redemption is envisaged as an eschatological unity marked by the overcoming of all polarities including the distinction between Jew and non-Jew. In an elocution that is reminiscent of the baptismal formula preserved by Paul and attested in other early Christian sources,[81] the ideal is articulated in the following terms: "For when we confessed the kingdom which is in Christ, <we> escaped from the whole multiplicity of forms and from inequality and change. For the end will receive a unitary existence just as the beginning is unitary, where there is no male nor female, nor slave and free, nor circumcision and uncircumcision, neither angel nor man, but Christ is all in all" (132.18-27).

The unity achieved at the end is a restoration of the unity that characterized the beginning, a return to a state of nondifferentiation wherein all oth-

81) Gal 3:27-28, Cor 12:13, Col 3:11; *Gospel of Thomas* 22, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7*, 63; *2 Clement* 12:2; the fragment of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* preserved in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 3.13.92, p. 314. For analysis of these and additional sources, see Ménard, *L'Évangile selon Thomas*, 113-115, and other scholarly discussions delineated in Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 437 n. 15.

erness is obliterated.[82] Although this baptismal language is not utilized in the *Gospel of Truth*, it seems to me plausible to suggest that the author of this text would have embraced such a formulation. What is most significant for our purposes is to emphasize that the soteriological conception of return to the Father, the one that comprehends everything within itself, is expressed in the image of rest that is obviously indebted to the Jewish Sabbath but radically revisioned through the prism of the gnostic myth.[83] Support for my surmise that the portrayal of noetic rest in the Father through the Son is based on the nexus between Sabbath and redemption can be drawn from the comment that Jesus carried out the work of salvation—laboring on behalf of the lost sheep who had fallen into a pit—even on Sabbath (31.18-32.30).[84] The language employed here is a precise echo of the exchange between Jesus and the Jews concerning the legitimacy of his performing acts of healing on the Sabbath (Matt 12:10-12),[85] a rationalization that has affinity with the rabbinic principle that one can violate the laws of Sabbath if the saving of life (פיקוח

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82) The depiction of the end in terms of the beginning is a well-known motif affirmed in various gnostic characterizations of salvation. For, instance, see the response of Jesus to the disciples who inquired about the end according to the *Gospel of Thomas* 18, in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7*, 61: "Have you discovered, then, the beginning, that you look for the end? For where the beginning is, there will the end be. Blessed is he who will take his place in the beginning; he will know the end and will not experience death." See ibid., 49, p. 73: "Blessed are the solitary and elect, for you will find the kingdom. For you are from it, and to it you will return."

83) A similar exegetical strategy is evident in Heb 4:3-11. See A. T. Lincoln, "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, edited by D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 197-220; T. Baarda, "'If You Do Not Sabbatize the Sabbath…': The Sabbath as God or World in Gnostic Understanding (Ev. Thom., Log. 27)," in *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, 178-201.

84) Baarda, "'If You Do Not Sabbatize the Sabbath…'," 191-192.

85) Van Unnik, "'Gospel of Truth'," 113-114; C. Tuckett, *Nag Hammadi and the Gospel Tradition: Synoptic Tradition in the Nag Hammadi Library*, edited by J. Riches (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 58-60; Williams, *Biblical Interpretation*, 123-126. The metaphorical trope of laboring on behalf of the lost sheep who had fallen into a pit, which is found both in Matthew and the *Gospel of Truth*, is lacking in the parallel versions in Mark 3:1-6 and Luke 6:6-11. Compare also John 5:17-19 and its interpretation in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 1.1.12-13, p. 31: "Again, the Savior is always engaged in saving. He is always at work, as he sees his father always at work.… The Lord did not hold us back from doing good because of the sabbath laws. He agreed that 'those who were capable of receiving' should share in the mysteries of God and in that holy light."

נפשׁ) is at stake.[86] In the literary context of the *Gospel of Truth*, salvation cannot be idle on the Sabbath, for in its imaginal sense the Sabbath refers to the pleromatic world of unity and hence it is the most fitting day for the savior to raise those who had fallen into a pit so that they may "know interiorly" (32.19-20) and speak "from the day from above, which has no night, and from the light which does not sink because it is perfect" (32.27-30).

The vehicle of return from darkness to light, from oblivion to knowledge, is the Son who bears the name of the Father (36.39-40.23). The binarian structure is the one most prevalent in this treatise though there is at least one allusion to a threefold personification of the sole power that comprehends everything.[87] I refer to the description mentioned above of the Son, "Jesus of the infinite sweetness"[88] (24.8-9), the Word that goes forth from the totality of aeons that constitute the unity of the Father (16.34-35), as the agency that purifies and brings the totality back to the Father and Mother (23.30-24.9). Surely, as scholars have duly noted, the triad Father-Mother-Jesus bears affinity to the triad Father-Mother-Son that appears in other texts of both

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86) *Tosephta based on the Erfurt and Vienna Codices with parallels and variants*, edited by M. S. Zuckermandel, new edition (Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1970), Shabbat 15:16, p. 134; *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, edited by H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, revised edition (Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1970), 340 (ad Exod 31:12); Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 132a, Yoma 85a. The statement attributed to Jesus, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27; the relevant comment is not found in the corresponding versions extant in Matt 12:8 and Luke 6:5), has an interesting parallel in the dictum attributed to R. Simeon ben Menasya in *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, 341 (ad Exod 31:14): "The Sabbath has been given to you, but you have not been given to the Sabbath" (לכם שבת מסורה ואי אתם מסורין לשבת). On the gospel narratives about Sabbath and the healing miracles attributed to Jesus, see H. A. McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue: The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 147-151. See also D. A. Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 57-97; D. J. Harrington, "Sabbath Tensions," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, edited by T. C. Eskenazi, D. J. Harrington, and W. H. Shea (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 47-56; Verheyden, "Epiphanius on the Ebionites," 204-205; M. Wyschogrod, "On the Christian Critique of the Jewish Sabbath," in *Sabbath: Idea, History, Reality*, edited by G. J. Blidstein (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of Negev Press, 2004), 43-56.

87) Mention should also be made of the references to the Holy Spirit in the *Gospel of Truth*. Especially interesting is the identification of the truth as the mouth of the Father and the tongue as the Holy Spirit (26.33-35). Insofar as the truth is the Word uttered by the tongue of the Father (Attridge and MacRae, *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, 79), it is reasonable to assume that the trinitarian structure of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is implied.

88) Ménard, *L'Évangile de vérité*, 119 nn. 8-9, suggests that the "sweetness" (*douceur*), which renders γλῦκύτης, denotes incomprehensibility, as does the word ἀνεξιχνίαστος.

Valentinian and Sethian provenance,[89] the "Christian trinity in its Gnostic form."[90] The Mother, accordingly, assumes the position of the Holy Spirit (*ruaḥ ha-qodesh* in the Jewish tradition, which may also be related to the figure of *Ḥokhmah* or Sophia).[91] What needs to be emphasized with respect to this text, however, is the portrayal of the restitution of the aeons to the Father and Mother by way of Jesus who endures the ignominy of the material world to enlighten the children of light entrapped in the darkness of oblivion (18.11-21). One is here reminded of the baptismal formula used in conjunction with the spiritual marriage, a mystical initiation ritual enacted in the bridal chamber,[92] by the Marcosians, followers of Marcus, a teacher of the Valentinian school: "Into the name of the unknown Father of all, into Truth, the mother of all, unto him who came down into Jesus, into Unity and Redemption and fellowship with the powers."[93]

The use of the Christological language should be construed as an affirmation of metaphysical monism in mythopoeic garb.[94] In a manner that has great affinity to medieval kabbalistic texts, the *Gospel of Truth* illustrates the conceptual framing of the gnostic temperament as a hybrid of philosophic abstraction and mythological concretization.[95] Attridge and MacRae conclude that the "identification of Son and name involves the most subtle of the reflections of the text (38.6-40.23), combining ancient Jewish-Christian exaltation patterns with philosophical semantics."[96] In my judgment, we

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89) Pétrement, *A Separate God*, 429-432.

90) Ibid., 429.

91) For references, see H.-M. Schenke, *Die Herkunft des sogenannten Evangelium Veritatis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), 16 n. 7; Ménard, *L'Évangile de vérité*, 119 n. 7; Pétrement, *A Separate God*, 75-77; Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi*, 30-31. See also the study of MacRae, "Jewish Background;" and K. L. King, "Sophia and Christ in the *Apocryphon of John*," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, 158-176.

92) On the symbol of the bridal chamber and the gnostic motif of spiritual marriage, see R. M. Grant, "The Mystery of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip," *Vigiliae Christianae* 15 (1961): 129-140; J. J. Buckley, *Female Fault and Fulfilment in Gnosticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 99-101, 106-107, 111-112, 120-125, 136-138; Turner, *Gospel According to Philip*, 201-204, 216-218.

93) Cited in *Gnosticism: An Anthology*, edited by R. M. Grant (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 193.

94) See W. R. Schoedel, "Gnostic Monism and the *Gospel of Truth*," in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 1: 378-390.

95) For an elaboration of this characteristic of gnostic sources more generally, see J. D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (Sainte-Foy, Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001).

96) *Nag Hammadi*, 39.

must focus more circumspectly on the conjunction of esoteric and soteric, the secretive and the salvific, implied in the proposed Jewish-Christian tradition about the incarnation of the name in the person of Jesus, the glorious Adam that is the Word. The secret, amongst other things, bears the characteristic of being a matter that is preserved, for it is precisely that which is preserved that is transmitted as secret, the withholding that offers a promise of something everlasting; hence, the placing of esoteric in proximity to soteric. Building on the insights of others, I attempt to render a bit more comprehensive the symbolic and exegetical framework of this imaginary constellation, all the while mindful of swinging back and forth from the medieval kabbalistic sources to the gnostic homily of the early patristic period, a time when, presumably, rabbinic scribes had well begun the process of re/writing—that is, writing over and thus invariably trespassing the textual boundary of—the scriptural inscription.

Inscribed in the Book of the Living: Textual Embodiment and the Release from the Body

To recapitulate some of the main elements in the theological myth set forth in the *Gospel of Truth*: One begins with the supposition that all things come forth from the Father and hence to know something is to know it as part of the totality that is the Father. When the Father is not known, error leads to oblivion, and this ignorance is the real nature of transgression. The Father, however, is merciful, and thus he sends through his "mercies" the "hidden mystery," the anointed savior, Jesus Christ, to enlighten those in darkness by showing them the way of truth that is the truth of the way. Through knowledge of this mystery one is glorified and restored to the Father whence one originated.

The reader must be struck by the emphasis on the mysterious quality associated with acquiring knowledge of the Father—why should knowledge that brings salvation/glorification be treated so secretively? Reasonably, one might here begin to suspect that the text points us in the direction of a somewhat earlier time, a moment when the apocalyptic imagining of the image as imagined had to be treated as secret wisdom. Coincidentally, or perhaps not, it is at the juncture of the treatise when the symbolic portrayal of revelation as the book of life embodied in the person of the redeemer is put forth that the Jewish gnosis begins to unveil itself in and through the veil of the text. Consider the perceptive comment of Hans Jonas on the Valentinian conception of the "call" expressed in the *Gospel of Truth* as the "person's mystical

spiritual name" being "inscribed" from eternity in the "book of the living": "This idea, like the whole 'name'—and 'book'—mysticism so conspicuous in the Gospel of Truth, points to certain Jewish speculations as the probable source; but the motif may have been widespread in oriental thought."[97] The final qualification notwithstanding, the initial surmise concerning the Jewish background of the key idea of inscription in the book of life found in the *Gospel of Truth* is insightful. To appreciate the full ramifications of this claim, it should be recalled that Jonas was of the opinion that Gnosticism was a revolt against rather than within Judaism, a position that nonetheless presumes that Gnosticism originated in "close vicinity" to Judaism and in "partial reaction" to it.[98] Given the reluctance on the part of Jonas to view Gnosticism as an internal Jewish phenomenon, it is all the more important that he discerned a Jewish influence with respect to this crucial theme.

Careful scrutiny of the relevant passages regarding this motif demonstrate the soundness of this suggestion. I would go further than Jonas, however, and argue that the more precise background for this idea is a Jewish conception of Christ as the incarnation of Torah, which is designated the "living book of the living" based in all probability on the Hebrew idiom סֵפֶר חַיִּים (Ps 69:29) or on its Greek equivalent, βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς (Rev 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 15, 21:27). The symbol of the "book of life" derives from the ancient Near Eastern idea of heavenly tablets upon which the gods would inscribe the destinies of human beings,[99] a notion whose reverberations are well attested in later Jewish[100] and Christian sources.[101] A trace of this older usage is preserved in

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97) *Gnostic Religion*, 75 n. 28.

98) H. Jonas, "Delimitation of the Gnostic Phenomenon: Typological and Historical," in *The Origins of Gnosticism: Colloquium of Messina 13-18 April 1966* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 98-112 (the aforecited expressions appear on p. 102), reprinted in his *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 263-276; idem, "Response to G. Quispel's 'Gnosticism and the New Testament': 1. The Hymn of the Pearl. 2. Jewish Origins of Gnosticism?," in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, edited by J. P. Hyatt (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 279-293.

99) For references to this theme, see Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 516 n. 80.

100) Dan 12:1; 1QH 1:24; *1 Enoch* 47:3, 108:3; *Jubilees* 6:29, 31, 35; 30:19-23; *Joseph and Aseneth* 15:4; Babylonian Talmud, Rosh ha-Shanah 16b; L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), 6: 55 n. 284. Needless to say, the image figures prominently in the traditional liturgy for the High Holidays when Jews pray to be inscribed by God in the celestial book of life.

101) In addition to the passages in the book of Revelation cited in the body of this study, see also Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; *Odes of Solomon* 9:11; *Testament of Jacob* 7:27; and the passage from the *Hymn of the Pearl* preserved in *Acts of Thomas* 110.

the assertion in the *Gospel of Truth* that those who are to receive the teaching are "the living who are inscribed in the book of the living" (21.3-5), but in the context of this work the ancient tradition assumes new meaning as the book of the living is identified as the Son[102] who embodies the wisdom contained in the mind of the invisible and unknowable Father. To appreciate the full force of this claim it is necessary to heed the precise ways in which this critical notion is articulated.

The initial depiction of this idea states that in the hearts of "little children … to whom the knowledge of the Father belongs" (19.29-30) was manifest the "living book of the living—the one written in the thought and the mind [of the] Father, which from before the foundation of the totality was within his incomprehensibility—that (book) which no one was able to take, since it remains for the one who will take it to be slain" (19.35-20.6). Three points are noteworthy: first, the book of the living is manifest in the heart of the little children to whom the knowledge of the Father belongs; second, this book is inscripted before the emergence of the totality of aeonic emanations in the incomprehensible thought and mind of the Father; and, third, the ironic twist that only the one who is slain can assume possession of the book of life. Salvation is dependent on the appearance of the book in the corporeal world, but this event takes place by the demise of the one who puts on the book so that it might appear. "For this reason the merciful one, the faithful one, Jesus was patient in accepting sufferings until he took that book, since he knows that his death is life for many" (20.10-14). The incarnation and passion of Christ are recast in decisively textual terms as the body that Jesus assumes is the image that is the name, which is identified further as the body of the living book of the living.

We may conclude, therefore, that the *Gospel of Truth* preserves an alternative incarnational theologoumenon to the Prologue to John. Instead of the more familiar logocentric idea of the Word becoming flesh, the embodiment of Jesus is to be interpreted grammatologically as Christ's putting on the book of the living, a gesticulation that signifies the materialization of the imageless Father in the form of an image of the Son, the avowal of the nameless in the enunciation of the name, the etching of the book on the heart that beholds the form of the invisible in the utterance of the ineffable. Jesus, in an

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102) In Rev 13:8 and 20:27, the figure of the Lamb is described as possessing the book of life but not identified with it. On the possibility that the former instance is a later interpolation, see *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* by J. Massyngberde Ford (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 213.

ironic twist, can put on the book of life for he knows that his death will be life for many. The death of the redeemer is life inasmuch as he instructs "those who await the salvation which is coming from on high" (35.1) that life is the death one must die in order to live the life that is death. Jesus assumed this form—that is, took on the text—to accept the sufferings of others until he was manifest as the totality that lay hidden in the invisible Father as a fortune in a will of the deceased master before it is opened. "For this reason Jesus appeared: he put on that book; he was nailed to a tree; he published the edict of the Father on the cross" (20.24-27). To put on the book is the technical elocution that denotes the incarnation of the Father in the Son, the drawing down to life through death—as Jesus is nailed to the tree he clothes himself with the book and thereby makes public the edict (διάταγμα) of the Father;[103] at the moment that death is uplifted to life—symbolized by the image of the crucifixion—suffering is alleviated. Jesus strips himself of the "perishable rags," that is, the mortal body, and puts on "imperishability" (20.30-31), that is, the garment of the name, the glorified body of the text.[104]

Those who receive the teaching are similarly transfigured as they become the living "inscribed in the book of the living" (21.3-4). Miller draws the obvious conclusion of the mythologic implied in the hermeneutical circularity of the gnostic awakening: "If Jesus embodies the book that is the written form of the Father's thought, then that text—and the texts produced by others who have the living book inscribed in them—is marked by the same dynamics of play, of polyvalence and dissemination, as is language itself."[105] The knowledge that the ones inscribed in the book receive regarding the book is in fact knowledge about themselves for they ontically comprise the "perfection of the totality" (21.5-9), and just as the book that is incarnate in the Son, the image of the imageless Father, is the manifest concealment of the

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103) On the possible connection between this passage and Col 2:14, see Williams, *Biblical Interpretation*, 50-54. Consider especially the following comment: "Jesus may not actually be identified with the written document here, but he is closely associated with it in that he is said to wrap himself in it. The identification of Jesus with a written document is thought by some to have become a traditional exegesis of Col 2:14 in the early years of Christianity, particularly in those strands with continuing Jewish influence" (p. 52). In the continuation, the author refers to the *Odes of Solomon* 23 where Jesus is identified with a letter, and she refers the reader to J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, 1964), 203-204, and O. Blanchette, "Does the Cheirographon of Col 2,14 represent Christ Himself? *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 (1961): 308-312.

104) For a different interpretation, see Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi*, 152-153.

105) Miller, *Poetry of Thought*, 257.

concealed manifestation, so those incorporated into the book become themselves living books that express the concealed manifestation of the manifest concealment, the textual fabric of the semiotic flesh inscripted in and from the mind of the Father onto the heart of the visionary. The self-knowledge is portrayed as well in the image of the Father vocalizing the name of the ones who apprehend the esoteric gnosis of the Father's name: "Those whose name he knew in advance were called at the end, so that one who has knowledge is the one whose name the Father has uttered. For he whose name has not been spoken is ignorant" (21.25-31). Noteworthy is the convergence of the graphic and phonic: To be inscribed in the book is to have one's name enunciated by the Father. Underlying this claim is the principle we have mentioned several times in the course of this study: the name is revealed to those who already bear the name, and thus to know God is to be known by God.[106]

A similar idea is expressed in yet another passage but in this case with reference to the revelation of the book to the pleroma more generally: "This is the knowledge of the living book which he revealed to the aeons, at the end, as [his letters], revealing how they are not vowels nor are they consonants, so that one might read them and think of something foolish, but they are letters of the truth which they alone speak who know them" (22.38-23.10). The singular character of the living book is highlighted by the comment that the letters of this book are neither vowels nor consonants but rather *letters of truth* that are known exclusively by those who speak them. The reason given for why the linguistic elements are not vowels or consonants is to preclude the possibility of an ordinary person reading the text and considering it foolish. It is possible, and in my judgment likely, that implicit in this remark is an esoteric understanding of the alphabet attested in ancient magic, especially of a Jewish provenance, which influenced a number of gnostic sources.[107] According to this conception, language in its most elemental form—often identified cosmologically as the matrix of creation—is the divine name, which is identified further as the invisible symbol, the seemingly incoherent and inchoate linguistic configuration that facilitates speaking the unspeakable, visualizing the invisible, and imaging the unimaginable.[108]

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106) See Gal 4:9.

107) F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1922); N. Janowitz, *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 19-61.

108) For further discussion of the impact of this conception of the magical alphabet on Gnosticism, see Miller, *Poetry of Thought*, 222-224.

The language of the book of life, accordingly, consists of the amalgam of the letters of truth that comprise the divine name, which is discernible only by the initiate.[109] The text resumes its depiction of these semantic morphemes: "Each letter is a complete <thought> like a complete book, since they are letters written by the Unity, the Father having written them for the aeons in order that by means of his letters they should know the Father" (23.11-18). The way to know the Father is through the letters of the book since these letters were written by the Father for this purpose. The letters, therefore, function as symbols of the spiritual reality that is beyond language, the media of revelation by means of which the unapparent becomes apparent. The complexity of the linguistic theory is underscored by the further assertion that each letter is itself a complete book or a complete thought in the mind of the divine unity. Whereas the ordinary communicative function of language is dependent on vowels and consonants, and the combination of letters into meaningful words, the mystical conception implied in this section of the *Gospel of Truth* involves an understanding of language whose efficacy is related to the ineffability of the primal semiotic displacement—the "original metaphoric occultation"[110]—of the Father's namelessness communicated in the name of the Son that is distributed isomorphically in each letter of the alphabet. A view analogous to what is espoused here is found in the teaching of Marcus reported by Irenæus, which is worthy of full citation:

> When first the unoriginated, inconceivable Father, who is without material substance, and is neither male nor female, willed to bring forth that which is ineffable to Him, and to endow with form that which is invisible, He opened His mouth and sent forth the Word similar to Himself, who, standing near, showed Him what He Himself was, inasmuch as He had been manifested in the form of that which was invisible. Moreover, the pronunciation of His name took place as follows: He spake the first word of it, which was the beginning [of all the rest], and the utterance consisted of four letters. He added the second, and this also consisted of four letters. Next He uttered the third, and this again embraced ten letters. Finally, He pronounced the fourth, which was composed of twelve letters. Thus took place the enunciation of the whole name, consisting of thirty letters, and four distinct utterances. Each of these elements has its own peculiar letters, and character, and pronunciation, and forms, and images, and there is not one of them that perceives the shape of that [utterance] of which it

109) Wilson, *Gnostic Problem*, 170 n. 77, wondered if the "letters of truth" mentioned in the *Gospel of Truth* were not "a cryptic reference to the Tetragrammaton."

110) Fineman, "Gnosis," 299.

> is an element. Neither does any one know itself, nor is it acquainted with the pronunciation of its neighbor, but each one imagines that by its own utterance it does in fact name the whole. For while every one of them is a part of the whole, it imagines its own sound to be the whole name, and does not leave off sounding until, by its own utterance, it has reached the last letter of each of the elements. This teacher declares that the restitution of all things will take place, when all these, mixing into one letter, shall utter one and the same sound. He imagines that the emblem of this utterance is found in *Amen*, which we pronounce in concert. The diverse sounds (he adds) are those which give form to that *Aeon* who is without material substance and unbegotten, and these, again, are the forms which the Lord has called angels, who continually behold the face of the Father.[111]

In the continuation of the account of Marcus given by Irenæus, the reader is apprised of the fact that the "fountain of all speech, and the beginning of all sound, and the expression of all that is unspeakable" is the Anthropos that is identified as the "body of truth." The first word uttered by this form, which is also portrayed as the female figure of Aletheia, is the "name" or "Christ Jesus."[112] A number of scholars have noted the affinities between this gnostic doctrine and comparable traditions regarding the cosmic Adam preserved in Jewish esoteric and Mandaean literature.[113] Less attention, however, has been paid to the likely Judaic background of the parallel, albeit much abbreviated, formulation in the *Gospel of Truth*. Both the author of the *Gospel of Truth* and Marcus (at least according to the summary offered by Irenæus) maintained that the aeons are constituted by letters. Collectively, all of these potencies make up the one name, the Logos, the form by which the invisible is rendered visible in its invisibility. Just as the beginning is depicted as the fracturing of the ineffable into the disparate forms of the letters that constitute the book of the living, so the end is marked by the restitution of all the letters to the ineffable, a return of sound to silence. In the account of Marcus, the soteriological ideal of combining the different letters into one word is related to the Jewish liturgical practice of uttering *amen* at the termination of a blessing. According to Marcus, moreover, the forms of the letters are identified as the angels who behold the face of God. This description of

111) Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, 1.14.1.

112) Ibid., 1.14.3-4.

113) For discussion of this theme and reference to other scholarly treatments, see Deutsch, *Gnostic Imagination*, 90-91.

angels is probably based on Matt 18.10, but the key idea concerning the linguistic nature of the angelic bodies is corroborated by a number of Jewish mystical and magical sources.[114]

Although we do not find a reference to this precise idea in the *Gospel of Truth*, I would suggest that this view is not inconsistent with what we do find in this treatise. The common denominator is the alternative doctrine of incarnation that is based on the conception of the textual body. Without denying that the site of the incarnation is the historical person of Jesus—whether this is understood veridically or docetically—the fleshly form that the savior assumes is the image of the book that he puts on, a book that is made up of the letters that together compose the name by which the nameless is revealed. The operative understanding of body, therefore, is not the corruptible body of physical limbs but the incorruptible body of semiotic ciphers. This notion of textual embodiment, which has parallels in ancient Jewish mysticism, especially in some of the strands of the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition,[115] evolved into one of the central doctrines of medieval kabbalah, which I have referred to as the doctrine of "poetic incarnation,"[116] but the analysis of the *Gospel of Truth* that I have presented in this study suggests that at a much earlier historical moment a similar idea was imagined by Jewish/Christians or Christian/Jews in their attempt to explain the mystery of knowing the unknowable by speaking the unspeakable and envisioning the invisible.

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114) For references, see E. R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 245 n. 235. Many more sources could be added to the ones mentioned in that note, and I hope someday to write an independent study of this motif.

115) M. Idel, "The Concept Torah in Hekhalot Literature and Its Metamorphosis in Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 41-42 (Hebrew); idem, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*, foreword by H. Bloom (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 172-173.

116) Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 190-260. On the textualization of God's body in kabbalistic symbolism, see also Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 44, 116-124, 483-487.