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David Noel Freedman
GENERAL EDITOR

THE GNOSTIC SCRIPTURES

A NEW TRANSLATION
WITH ANNOTATIONS
AND INTRODUCTIONS
BY

BENTLEY LAYTON



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To
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- 13 And I brought it (the first begetter) to the end of its judicial
authority, which is the ignorance^b that belongs to chaos. 44:27
- 15 And while among the angels, I showed myself forth in their
likeness;
- 17 While among the powers, as though I were one of them;
- 18 And while among the children of humankind, as though I
were a child of the human being,^c
- 19 Although I am the parent of everyone.
- 20 I hid myself in all these (spiritual beings)^d until such time as I
might show myself forth out of my own members.
- 22 And I taught them about the ineffable ordinances and about
the siblings.
- 23 They^e are uninvoked by all realms and powers of rulers—only
by the offspring of the light alone.
- 26,26 They are the ordinances of the parent; •they are the glories
27 superior to all glories; •they are the five seals^f that are
perfect through intellect. 48:30, 50:9
BJn 31:22+
- 28 Whoever possesses the five seals of these very names has
taken off robes^g of ignorance^b and put on shining light. 48:12
- 32 And none that belongs to the powers of the rulers will appear
before that person.
- 34 Within such persons, darkness will perish and [. . .]ⁱ will die;
- 36 And the thinking of the [. . .] creation [. . .] bestow one and
the same manner, and [. . .] will perish.
- 38 And [. . .] and [. . .] incomprehensible [. . .] in [. . .]
- 6 50 until such time as I should show myself forth [. . .] and
until such time as I should gather [. . .] all [my (?) . . .]
siblings in my [. . .].
- 9,10 And I proclaimed the [five] ineffable seals unto them, •so that
[I might dwell] in them, and they too might dwell in me. 49:27 +
- 12,13 For my part, I put on Jesus;^h •I extracted him from the
14 accursed wood;^b •and I made him stand at rest in the
dwelling places of his parent. 49:11
- 15 And the beings^c that watch over their dwelling places did not
recognize me.
- 16 For I myself am unrestrainable, together with my posterity. Th 19:20 +
- 18 And I shall bring my posterity in to the holy light, in
incomprehensible silence. Amen!^d RR 97:7

b. Lit. "lack of acquaintance."

c. Or "a son of man."

d. "all these," namely spiritual beings:
gnostic jargon used in this text, probably to
mean the sum total of spiritual reality deriv-
ing from the Barbēlō aeon; cf. Zs note 2e.

e. The ordinances.

f. The "five seals" are associated with the
reception of *gnōsis* in gnostic baptism (for
which, see "Historical Introduction," Part
One).

g. "robes": cf. note 47b. Also possible is
"He who possesses the five seals . . . took
off."

h. Lit. "lack of acquaintance."

i. Possibly "[ignorance]."

50 a. The body or person of Jesus is here
likened to the garment in which first thought
is clothed during her final advent; a Platonist
cliché for the relation of body to soul. This
incarnation, or adoption, parallels the final
advent of the great Seth, EgG 75:15f.

b. Possibly the cross. The corresponding
Greek word *hylē* also means "matter," and
it may have been mistranslated into Coptic.

c. The rulers.

d. In the MS, the text concludes with the
chapter title of Chapter III, the general title
of the work (at 50:22) and the following
expression: "Holy scripture, paternally auth-
ored in perfect acquaintance."

THE HOLY BOOK OF THE GREAT INVISIBLE SPIRIT or THE EGYPTIAN GOSPEL

ACCORDING TO MS NHC IV
(EgG)

Contents

The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit, also entitled *The Egyptian Gospel* ("The Gospel of the Egyptians"), tells the gnostic myth as though it were the solemn prelude to a baptismal ritual; the work ends with an account of the establishment of gnostic baptism and a baptismal service book, including a list of metaphysical beings that preside over gnostic baptism and a hymn to be said by the baptized. For further discussion of gnostic baptism, see the "Historical Introduction" to Part One. The entire gnostic myth is recounted, but with emphasis on the first and last acts of the mythic drama—that is, the expansion of the invisible spirit or first principle into a full spiritual universe and the establishment of the gnostic church. These two emphases provide a mythic setting for the participation of metaphysical beings in baptism and the establishment of the baptismal ritual. The spiritual universe is described as a glorifying throne room ("Doxomedōn Domedōn"), filled with incessant litanies sung by a hierarchical retinue whose names and laudatory epithets are repeatedly catalogued. The Barbēlō aeon in EgG has a threefold structure, as in FTh, Zs, Fr, and 3Tb. As in BJn, the preexistent savior (here called the great Seth) comes three times to intervene in human history. The third advent is said to be the incarnation or adoption of Jesus by the preexistent great Seth. The account of creation is brief and positive, emphasizing divine providence as in RR and FTh.

The work has no obvious Egyptian character; the reference to Egypt in the title is obscure. EgG is *not* identical to "The Gospel According to the Egyptians" occasionally cited by fathers of the church.

Literary background

The author and place of composition of EgG are unknown. The date of its composition must be sometime before A.D. 350, the approximate date of the MS. In mythic content the work resembles RAd, 3Tb, Zs, Fr, and 3Tb. The language of composition was Greek.

The mixture of genres in EgG is slightly complex, combining various traditional materials:

I. Heavenly message

A. Learned treatise: (1) cosmogony; (2) "true history"

B. Liturgical service book: (1) uranography; (2) hymn

As in RAd and 3Tb, the whole work is presented (80:15f) as a *heavenly message*, in this instance composed by "the great Seth" (i.e. the spiritual archetype) and left by him in high mountains, perhaps engraved on tablets. The convention of the heavenly message is a commonplace of ancient Mediterranean revelation literature. The message is not spoken by Seth in the first person, but rather is quoted obliquely; the work therefore purports to be not the message itself, but a transcript of the message by someone else. The body of the heavenly message falls into two parts. The first has the form of a *learned treatise on cosmogony*, followed by a revisionist "*true history*" of the Sethid line of humanity down to the final incarnation of the savior. The second part is a *liturgical service book* for gnostic baptism, beginning with a *uranographic catalogue* (list of structural elements of the universe) of "great beings that stand at rest" and preside over gnostic baptism and concluding with an ecstatic *hymn* spoken by the newly baptized gnostic.

Mythic characters

I. The Incorruptible Beings

The PARENT. The great invisible virgin spirit.

THREE POWERS and their LIGHTS:

1. THE FATHER, consisting of
 - Thought
 - Verbal expression (Word)
 - Incorruptibility
 - Eternal life
 - Will
 - Intellect
 - Prior acquaintance
 - Androgynous father

2. THE MOTHER

3. THE SON

AEONS, GLORIES, POWERS, THRONES, etc., partly associated with the Doksomedōn realm

IOËL. The silence of silent silence, a masculine female virgin.

The ANOINTED (Christ). The thrice-male child, Telmaël-Telmakhaël-Ëli-Ëli-Makhar-Makhar-Seth.

ËSËPHËKH. The child of the child, holder of the glory.

The MOIROTHEA, probably the same as PLËSITHEA. Mother of the luminaries and the incorruptible beings that are with them.

FOUR LUMINARIES and their CONSORTS, ATTENDANTS, and ATTENDANTS' CONSORTS:

HARMOZËL

LOVELINESS—GAMALIËL—MEMORY

OROIAËL

PERCEPTION—GABRIËL—LOVE

DAUEITHE

INTELLIGENCE—SAMBLÖ—PEACE

ËLËLËTH

PRUDENCE—ABRASAKS—ETERNAL LIFE

BEINGS that dwell with the luminaries:

The SELF-ORIGINATE WORD (or verbal expression). An offspring of the anointed (Christ). Fused with Adamas.

ADAMAS. The incorruptible first human being. With Harmozël.

The GREAT SETH, his son. The "child of the human being" (son of man). With Oroiaël.

SEED OR OFFSPRING OF THE GREAT SETH. The incorruptible immovable race. With Daueithe.

SOULS of the offspring. With Ëlëlëth.

MATERIAL WISDOM (Sophia)

ANGELIC AGENTS in the birth of the seed of Seth:

HORMOS

EDÖKLA

GUARDIANS of the seed of Seth:

400,000 ETHEREAL ANGELS

AEROSIËL

SELMELKHEL

OTHER INCORRUPTIBLE BEINGS who preside, receive, guard, etc., including the living water Iesseus-Mazareus-Iessedekus and others.

II. The Rulers

SAKLA. The great angel that rules over Hades and chaos, the devil.

NEBROUËL. The great demon that is with Sakla.

Sakla's ANGELS, that preside over Hades and chaos

III. Humankind

ADAM

HIS WIFE (Eve)

THREE SONS ("sowings") begotten on Eve:

A SON by the rulers (Cain)

A SON by Adam (Abel)

A SON by the great Seth (Seth)

The RACE OF SETH on earth, including perhaps:

A FEMALE VIRGIN by whom Seth becomes incarnate (Mary)

JESUS of Nazareth. Seth incarnate as a reason-born being.

Text

The original Greek apparently does not survive. The text is known only in Coptic translation, attested by two manuscripts, MSS NHC III (pp. 40–69) and NHC IV (pp. 50–81), which were copied just before A.D. 350 and are now in the Cairo Coptic Museum. Each of the two Coptic manuscripts contains an independent and stylistically distinct translation based on the Greek; thus, wherever the two texts are parallel, they differ in vocabulary and style. Careful comparison of the parallels has made it possible to gain a systematic understanding of the different ways in which the two ancient Coptic translators carried out their task; and thus, in cases where one of the two manuscripts is defective, its original text can often be restored by consideration of the wording of the parallel.

There are also important differences between the two manuscripts that are not a matter of ancient translation technique, but rather indicate that two distinct editions of the Greek text were already in circulation in antiquity when the Coptic translations were being made. At present, there is no certainty among scholars as to which ancient edition contains the more accurate version of the original text, though the editors of the critical edition believe that NHC IV may have been generally superior. For that reason the present translation is based on MS NHC IV; in many places where NHC IV is defective, its readings can be conjecturally restored by comparison and stylistic adjustment of the reading found in the other manuscript. Such restorations, which are supported by the parallel manuscript, are *printed in italics*.

Comparison of the other manuscript has also clarified the meaning of certain Coptic expressions in NHC IV and has thus been an aid in translation. In a few instances both manuscripts are defective in a given passage but the original text can nevertheless be conjectured with certainty: these totally conjectural restorations are enclosed within square brackets []. Reference numbers keyed to the translation follow NHC IV, even in italicized passages, except when NHC IV is so defective that its line numbers are uncertain. In such cases a reference to NHC III is given (e.g. III 55).

The translation below is based upon Böhlig and Wisse's synoptic critical edition of the Coptic, with some alterations: A. Böhlig and F. Wisse, *Nag Hammadi Codices III,2 and IV,2* . . . (see "Select Bibliography"), 52–167. The translation is based on MS NHC IV; parallel line references of the other manuscript are also provided in the margin.

An English translation of the other ancient edition of the work, which is found in MS NHC III, is given in Böhlig and Wisse's critical edition.

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THE HOLY BOOK OF THE GREAT INVISIBLE SPIRIT

or

THE EGYPTIAN GOSPEL^a

I. THE INCORRUPTIBLE REALM

Title. The parent.

- IV III
1 (40 12) **IV 50** *The Holy Book* of the [. . .] of the Great Invisible
3 (13) [Spirit]:^a the *unnameable* parent [that] emanated from the BJn 2:26 +
5 (17) heights; •the light of [the] fullness; the eternal light of the aeons;
the light in silence—in forethought and the parent's silence; the
light in word and truth; the light of the incorruptibilities; the inac-
cessible light; •the light that has emanated forever, belonging
12 (41 2) to the aeons of the ineffable, traceless,^b and unproclaimable par-
ent; the eternity of the aeons; •the self-originate, self-radiation,
18 (5) and alien; •the inexplicable power of the ineffable parent.
21 (–)
23 (7) Three powers emanated from it: namely the father, the
mother, and the son, which are self-manifest beings, from the BJn 9:9 +
29 (9) incorruptible parent's living^c silence. •They emanated from the RAAd 65:25
the *ineffable parent's silence* [. . .] **51** Dokso-medōn-Domedōn,^a Zs 58:23
4 (15) the eternal realm of the aeons. •[From that source] emanated 3Tb 121:32 +
the light—[that] is, the emanation—of each of their powers; IrG 1.29.3
and in this way the son emanated as the fourth, the mother as v.29
11 (19) the [fifth], the father as the sixth. •[. . .] it^b was [not . . . ; 53:3, 55:7
rather, it is] traceless,^c [and] it left no mark in all the powers, 62:4, 65:13
glories, and incorruptibilities. III 56:1
Zs 126:6

Emanation of three powers

- 15 (23) From it there had emanated three powers,^d which are three
octets, which the parent emitted from its bosom in silence and
by its forethought: the father, the mother, the son.

The father

- 22 (42 5) The first octet, for whose sake^e the thrice-male^f child^g ema- 55:11
nated:

Title a. The double title is found in the colophon in MS NHC III at the end of the work (III 69:6f). Many scholars translate the subtitle as "The Gospel of the Egyptians" and call the work only by this designation.

The following translation is based on MS NHC IV wherever that MS is extant; for the meaning of *italics*, see the introduction to EgG, "Text."

IV 50 a. In the colophon of MS NHC III, the main title of the work is copied as the last phrase, a normal place for titles. It is based upon these opening words.

b. MS NHC III next has "unaging and."

c. "living": gnostic jargon used in this text to indicate membership in the incorruptible realm.

51 a. Apparently not an actor but a place.

b. The parent.

c. MS NHC III next has "unfamiliar."

d. This passage is a detailed retelling of 50:23f.

e. Or "because of which."

f. "thrice," i.e. "supremely": gnostic jargon used in this text; "male": gnostic jargon used in this text to indicate membership in the incorruptible realm.

g. Or "servant."

which beholds [glories . . . treasures] in [. . . invisible] mysteries
[. . .] of silence [. . . the] masculine [female] virgin [. . .].

- 20 (-) Next was [shown forth the child of the] child Ēsēphēkh.^a 59:24, 62:1
23 (-) And [thus] it was completed: 65:19
24 (-) the [father]; III 55:22
[the] mother; IV 73:17
the son; Zs 13:7+
25 (-) the five seals; 58:6, 59:27
25 (-) the invincible power, which is the great [anointed 66:25, 74:13
(Christ)] of all the incorruptibilities. 78:3
BJn 31:22+
2 (-) [. . .] 57 holy [. . .] the end [. . .] and [. . .] are powers, [glories],
13 (-) and incorruptibilities [. . .] emanated [. . .] •it lifted [up praise]
unto
14 (-) the hidden, obscure [. . . , the] concealed (aeon)^a [. . .]
in [. . .] the aeons [. . .] throne(s) [. . .] and [. . .]
25 (-) each [. . .] •countless myriads of [. . .] surrounded
them, [glories] and incorruptibilities [. . .] and [. . .];
3 (-) 58 the father;
the mother;
the son;
5 (-) all [the fullness] of which I have already [spoken];
6 (-) [the] five seals [. . .] of [. . .]. 56:25+
8 (-) They [. . .] presiding over [. . .] •and the aeons [. . .] •and the
14 (-) eternal aeons [in very] truth.
21

Emanation of another being

- 23 (-) Next [. . .] •[emanated] in [silence] together with [living]
silence [of] the spirit [and] the parent's Word (or verbal 51:22+
27 (-) expression) and light. •[It] had [. . .] the [five] seals, which the 56:25+
2 (-) [parent emitted] from its bosom; 59 •it had passed through all
4 (-) the aeons of which I have already spoken; •and it had established
glorious thrones [and] countless [myriads] of angels [that]
7 (-) surrounded [them]—[powers and incorruptible] glories, [sing-
ing] and glorifying, all praising [. . .] with [one voice] in a form
with a never silent cry, [. . . unto]:
13 (-) the father;
the [mother];
[the] son, [. . .];
14 (-) [all the] fullnesses [of which I have already] spoken;
i.e.
16 (-) [the great] anointed (Christ), which came from
[silence], [which] is the [incorruptible] child
Telmaēl-Telmakhaēl-[Ēli-Ēli]-Makhar-Makhar-
[Seth], [the] power [that] is in very truth living;
22 (-) [the] masculine [female virgin] that is with [it], Iouēl;
24 (-) Ēsēphēkh, holder [of the glory] and [child] of the
child;
26 (-) [the crown of] that being's glory;

56. a. Known elsewhere also as Ēphēskh.
Cf. Zs 13:7f.

57 a. "[the] concealed (aeon)": according
to Zs, the highest of the three aeons that
constitute the Barbēlō aeon.

58 a. Only part of this word is preserved in
the one surviving MS of the present passage;
the original text might have been either "[an
emanation]" or "[forethought]."

- 27 (-) [. . .] the five [seals: the] fullness [of which I have 56:25+
already spoken].
1 (-) 60 The great living self-originate [Word (or verbal expression)], 51:22+
4 (-) [the] truly [divine], the unengendered nature, •whose name I IrG 1.29.2
7 (-) shall utter by saying [. . .] Jaia[. . .] thaōthōsth.[. . .] •which is EpG 26.10.4
[the] offspring of the [great] anointed (Christ),^b i.e. the offspring
9 (-) [of] ineffable silence, having [emanated] from there, •having
come forth from the great [invisible] and incorruptible [spirit
13 (-) as] the [offspring] of silence^c together with [silence], •revealed
[. . .] treasure [. . .] its glory [. . .] appeared in the visible [. . .].
19 (-) And it [established] the four [aeons]. •By means of the Word 51:22+
21 (-) (or verbal expression) it established [them].
22 (-) It (the Word) lifted up [praise] unto the great invisible virgin
24 (-) spirit, •[the silence (?)] of the [parent], in silence [of the] living
27 (-) silence of [silence], •[where] the human being reposes, [. . .]
by means of [. . .].

Emanation of the Moirothea and production of Adamas

- 30 (49 1) Thence there next emanated the *great cloud* of light, a living
power, the mother of the holy *incorruptible* beings of the great
5 (5) powers, the *Moirothea*.^a 61 •And she engendered *that being*
whose name I shall utter by saying, FTh 38:14+
Zs 6:21+
3Tb 119:11+
v.5
BJn 8:28+
6 (6) [Thou art unique!]
Thou art unique!
Thou art unique!
8 (7) *Ea, Ea, Ea!*^b
8 (8) Inasmuch as *the latter—Adamas*—is *light* that has radiated
11 (9) [. . .], this being [is] the eye of the [light]. •Indeed, [this is] the FTh 38:5+
first human being, because of *whom* [are] all things, *unto whom*
14 (13) *are all things, and without whom is nothing*: •the inaccessible
parent^c *beyond thought*, who *has become immanent* and has
emanated down from above for the obliteration of *the lack*. 71:1,
BJn 14:8

Fusion of the self-originate Word with Adamas

- 18 (16) Next, the *great divine* self-originate *Word* (or verbal expres- 51:22+
sion) and *Adamas* the incorruptible human being *became* by
22 (21) fusion a *human rational faculty*. •And *human beings* came into
existence because of a *rational faculty*.
23 (22) *This (fusion) lifted up praise unto*
24 (23) *the great invisible, incomprehensible, virgin spirit;*
26 (25) *the masculine female virgin, [the Barbēlō];*
28 (26) *the thrice-male child;*
29 (50 1) *the masculine female virgin Iouēl;*
1 (2) 62 [the] child Ēsēphēkh, holder of the glory and
child of the child;

60 a. An esoteric word, not Greek. The MS
is imperfect here.

b. The divine Logos (Word) is not iden-
tical with the preexistent Christ but rather
its offspring.

c. Cf. note 55c.

sibly meaning "divine part."

b. Or possibly "[Thou art unique!] Thou
art unique! Thou art unique! O five, O one!
O five, O one! O five, O one!" (i.e. "O five
in one"). The letters *E* and *A* represent
"five" and "one" in Greek.

c. "parent," i.e. father of the great Seth.

61 a. Moirothea: a Greek neologism, pos-

- 3 (3) the crown of that being's glory;
 4 (4) the great aeons of Doksomeḏōn; 50:29 +
 5 (5) the thrones that are within them;
 5 (6) the powers that surround them—glories and
 incorruptibilities and the whole fullness of which I
 have already spoken;
 9 (10) the ethereal^a god-receiving realm, where holy people
 of the light receive image—people of the light of
 the parent of silence and the [silent] living
 wellspring; FTh 45:23 + BJn 4:21 +
 14 (15) i.e. the parent and all the fullness of these beings, as I have
 just said.

Adamas's request for four aeons

- 16 (17) The great divine self-originate Word (or verbal expression), 51:22 +
 in the company of Adamas the incorruptible human being, lifted
 19 (21) up praise •and made a request for power and eternal strength
 and [incorruptibility] (to be given) unto the self-originate in the
 24 (24) form of a full complement of four aeons; •so that by their
 agency might appear the glory and power of the^b [. . .] parent
 unto the holy people of the great light that was to descend unto
 the gloomy world. RAd 64:6 +

Production of the great Seth

- 30 (51 5) [Next] Adamas the [great (?)] incorruptible human being BJn 9:11 +
 made a request for a child (to be produced) for it from out of
 1 (7) itself—63 •that for its part, it (the child) might become parent
 4 (9) of the immovable and incorruptible race;^a •that, for the sake of
 6 (12) this race, silence and speech might be shown forth; •and that,
 at its instigation, the realm that is dead might arise and dissolve.

Production of four luminaries

- 8 (14) And so the great [. . .] power of the great light emanated
 11 (16) from above. •The effulgence engendered four luminaries: BJn 7:30 +

Harmozēl;
 Oroiaēl;
 Daueithe;
 Ēlēlēth;

- 14 (20) together with •the great incorruptible Seth the son of Adamas
 [the great] incorruptible human being.
 17 (22) And so was completed the full septet^b—which resides in a
 [mystery] of hidden mysteries, and which was glorified [. . .]
 22 (52 2) and •became a group of eleven octets, thus [being completed
 by (?)] four octets.

Production of the luminaries' consorts

- 24 (3) And the parent consented, and the full complement of the
 27 (6) luminaries joined in the consent. •Consorts were shown forth

62 a. Lit. "airy."

b. MS NHC III next has "invisible"; the original reading of the text is uncertain.

63 a. The "child" is the great Seth, and "the immovable . . . race" is the seed of the great Seth.

b. I.e. a septet of octets.

to bring about the completion of the octet of the divine self-originate:

- 2 (8) 64 loveliness, for the first luminary Harmozēl;
 3 (10) perception, for the second luminary Oroiaēl;
 5 (11) intelligence, for the third luminary Daueithe;
 6 (13) prudence,^a for [the] fourth luminary Ēlēlēth.
 8 (14) This is the first octet of the divine self-originate.

Production of the luminaries' attendants

- 10 (16) And the parent consented, and all the full complement of the
 13 (19) luminaries joined in the consent. •And attendants emanated: 76:15
 FTh 48:26
 14 (20) first, great Gamaliēl, [belonging to] the great
 luminary Harmozēl; RAd 75:21
 Zs 46:31
 17 (22) great Gabriēl, [belonging to] the second great
 luminary Oroiaēl; Zs 58:20
 19 (24) great Samblō, belonging to the third great luminary
 Daueithe;
 20 (26) great Abrasaks, belonging to [the] fourth [great]
 luminary Ēlēlēth.

Production of consorts for the luminaries' attendants

- 23 (53 1) And consorts emanated by the parent's consent to them:

- 26 (4) memory, for the first, great Gamaliēl;
 27 (5) love, for the second, great Gabriēl;
 28 (7) peace, for the third, great Samblō;
 1 (8) 65 eternal life, for the fourth, great Abrasaks.

- 2 (10) And thus the five octets became complete, a sum total of forty:
 the inexplicable [power].

- 5 (12) Next the great self-originate Word (or verbal expression) and 51:22 +
 all the full complement of the four luminaries lifted up praise
 unto:

- 9 (16) the great invisible, uninvoked, unnameable virgin
 spirit;
 12 (18) the masculine female virgin;^a
 13 (19) the great aeons of Doksomeḏōn; 50:29 +
 14 (20) the thrones that are in them;
 15 (21) the powers that surround them^b—glories and powers
 and authorities;
 17 (23) the thrice-male child;
 18 (24) the masculine female virgin Iouēl;
 19 (25) Ēsēphēkh, holder of the glory;^c
 20 (54 2) the crown of that being's glory;
 21 (3) all the fullness and all the glories within the
 inaccessible fullnesses and the unnameable aeons;

64 a. "intelligence . . . prudence," MS NHC III: NHC IV here has "acquaintance . . . teaching," alternate Coptic translations of the corresponding Greek words (syne-sis . . . phronēsis).

65 a. The Barbēlō.

b. The MS here erroneously inserts "and."
 c. MS NHC III next has "and [child] of the child."

- 25 (6) *so that they [for their part] invoked the parent^d—namely the*
 26 (7) *...-th^e—and the incorruptible [immovable] race of the parent;*
 28 (8) [and] called [this race] *the seed of the great Seth.*

Enthronement of the four luminaries in the four eternal realms

- 30 (13) *Next the fullness began to move, and disturbance seized the*
 2 (13) *incorruptibles. 66 •And then the thrice-male child emanated*
down from above unto the unengendered and self-originate
beings,^a and unto those engendered in the (realm of) generation.
 6 (18) *That great being who belongs to all the greatnesses of the great*
anointed (Christ) emanated, and established thrones of glory^b
 10 (23) *in the four eternal realms (aeons). •And countless myriad powers*
 13 (55 1) *surrounded them—glories and incorruptibilities. •And in this*
way it emanated.
 14 (2) *And the incorruptible spiritual congregation^c developed into*
full strength within the four luminaries of the great, living, self-
originate [Word (or verbal expression)], the god of truth, 51:22 +
 19 (6) *praising [and] singing, all glorifying with one voice in unanimous*
form with a never silent cry unto:
 22 (9) *the father;*
the mother;
the son;
 23 (10) *their fullness, of which I have [already] spoken*
[. . .];
 25 (11) *the five seals that preside [over] the myriads; 56:25 +*
 27 (12) *the beings that rule over the aeons;*
 28 (13) *the governors that convey glory, having [been]*
ordered to appear^d unto the worthy.
 1 (16) **67 Amen!**

II. HISTORY OF THE SEED OF THE GREAT SETH

Production of the seed of Seth

- 2 (16) *Next the great Seth, son of Adamas the incorruptible human*
being lifted up praise unto:
 4 (19) *the great, invisible, uninvoked, unnameable, virgin*
spirit;
 7 (21) *the masculine female [virgin];^a*
 8 (–) *the thrice-male [child];*
 9 (21) *[the] masculine [female] virgin Iouël,^b*
 – (55 22) **III 55** ⁽²²⁾*Ēsēphēkh,^a holder of the glory;*

d. Or "father."

e. "...-th": an ordinal number. The original reading of the text is uncertain here. MS NHC III has "seventy-fourth," which the ancient copyist has struck out, adding "fourth" above the canceled word; NHC IV is imperfect here.

66 a. "self-originate beings": according to Zs, the lowest of the three aeons that constitute the Barbēlō aeon is "the self-originate (aeon)," and it consists of self-originate.

b. MS NHC III next has "countless myriads."

c. The same word also means "church."

d. Or "to make revelations."

67 a. The Barbēlō.

b. "Iouël": i.e. Iōēl.

III 55 a. The following passage, "Ēsēphēkh . . . great Seth" (67:9–70:31 = NHC III 55:22–59:10), has been almost entirely destroyed in MS NHC IV, and so is translated from the parallel text in NHC III, taking account of the usual style of NHC IV whenever possible.

- (23) ⁽²³⁾*the crown of that being's glory, the child of the*
child.^b
 – (56 1) **III 56** ⁽¹⁾*the great Doksomedōn aeons; 50:29 +*
 – (2) ⁽²⁾*the fullness of which I have already spoken.*
 – (3) ⁽³⁾*And he (Seth) made a request for his seed. BJn 9:14 +*
 – (4) ⁽⁴⁾*Thence there next emanated Plēsitheia^a the great power of*
the great light, mother of the angels, mother of the luminaries,
 – (8) *mother of glories, (8) the female virgin that has four breasts,*
 – (9) *(9) bearing fruit as a wellspring out of Gomorrah and out of*
 26 (12) *her. IV 67 •She emanated through the agency of^a the great*
Seth.
 27 (13) *Next the great Seth rejoiced at the grace that had been*
 31 (17) *bestowed upon him by the incorruptible child. •He took his*
 2 (19) *seed from the female virgin that has four breasts 68 •and*
established it along with her (?)^a within the four aeons, in the
third great luminary Daueithe.

Appearance of material wisdom

- 5 (22) *After five thousand years, the great luminary Ēlēlēth said,*
 7 (24) *"Let something rule over chaos and Hades." •And a cloud*
 9 (26) *[. . .] "material wisdom" (Sophia) appeared. III 57 (2) [. . .] BJn 8:19 +*
 – (57 2) *gazed upon the [. . .], with her face resembling [. . .] in her*
manner [. . .] blood.

Emanation of Sakla, Nebrouēl, and Sakla's angels

- (5) ⁽⁵⁾*And [the great] angel Gamaliēl spoke [to (?) great Gabriēl],*
the attendant belonging to [the great luminary] Oroiaēl, [saying,
 – (9) ⁽⁹⁾*"Let an] angel emanate [to rule] over chaos [and Hades]."*
 – (11) ⁽¹¹⁾*Next the cloud [. . .] from the two units^a [. . .] light [. . .]*
 31 (16) *she established [. . .] within the cloud [. . .] IV 68 •Sakla^a the*
great [angel] beheld Nebrouēl the great demon that was with
 3 (18) *him, 69 •and they [. . .] became an earthborn spirit [with*
 – (21) *helping angels. III 57 (21) Sakla [said] to Nebrouēl the great BJn 10:27*
[demon], "Let the twelve aeons exist within [. . .] aeon(s) . . .
 – (25) *worlds [. . .]."* ⁽²⁵⁾*Through the will of the self-originate, the*
 – (58 1) *great angel [Sakla] said, III 58 (1) "The [. . .] shall [. . .] the*
 – (3) *quantity of seven [. . .]."* ⁽³⁾*And it said to the [. . .] angels,*
"Go! Let [each] of you rule over its own [. . .];" and each [of
them] went.
 – (6) ⁽⁶⁾*[These are the] twelve [angels]:^a*
 – (7) ⁽⁷⁾*[the first] angel, [Athōth . . .], who is called BJn 10:28 +*
"[. . .] by the] races of humankind;

b. "the child of the child": probably this phrase has been copied in the wrong place and belongs after "Ēsēphēkh, holder of the glory."

68 a. "along with her (?)": the MS here erroneously has "along with him(self)."

III 57 a. Or "two monads."

III 56 a. Plēsitheia: perhaps "nearby goddess."

IV 68 a. "Sakla" (Aramaic "fool"): a conventional name of Satan in Judaism.

IV 67 a. Or "out of."

III 58 a. The destroyed words in the passage have been restored by comparison with a similar list in BJn 10:28f.

- (10) ⁽¹⁰⁾second, Harmas, [the eye of fire];
 — (12) ⁽¹²⁾third, [Kalila];
 — (12) ⁽¹²⁾fourth, Iōbēl;
 — (13) ⁽¹³⁾fifth, Adōnaïos, who is called "Sabaōth";
 1 (15) **IV 70** sixth, [Cain, whom all (?) the races of]
 humankind call "the sun";
 3 (17) [seventh, Abel];
 4 (18) eighth, Akiressina;^a
 4 (18) ninth, Ioubēl;
 5 (19) tenth, [Harmoupiaēl];
 5 (19) eleventh, Arkheir-[Adōnein];^b
 — (21) **III 58** ⁽²¹⁾twelfth, [Belias].
 — (21) ⁽²¹⁾These preside over Hades [and chaos].

Reproof of Sakla's arrogance

- (23) ⁽²³⁾And after the preparation [of the . . .],^a Sakla said to its BJn 13:5 +
 — (24) [angels (?)], ⁽²⁴⁾"For my part, I am a [jealous] god; and none Ex 20:5
 has [come to exist] apart from me:" [for it was]^b confident of Dt 49:9
 its origin. Is 46:9
 — (59) 1 **III 59** ⁽¹⁾Next a voice came from on high, saying, "The RR 94:23 +
 — (4) human being^a and the child of the human being^b exist"—⁽⁴⁾with BJn 14:18
 reference to the descent of the higher image resembling its
 voice on high, which belonged to the image.

Projection of an image. Creation of Adam.

- (6) ⁽⁶⁾It (the image) gazed out. ⁽⁶⁾By the gaze of the image was RR 87:11
 — (6) modeled the first modeled form,^c because of whom repentance BJn 13:32 +
 came into existence.
 — (10) ⁽¹⁰⁾It (the image) received its realization and its power through 74:13
 the will of the parent and the delight that the parent took in RR 87:22 +
 the great incorruptible, immovable race of the great mighty
 1 (16) people of the great Seth,^d **IV 71** •who sowed it (the image) in 61:14 +
 the earthborn aeons, so that because of it the lacks might be
 3 (18) completed. •For that (image) which descended from on high
 into the gloomy world [. . .] came to issue exhortation.^a

Cain, Abel, and Seth

- 6 (21) And after the sowing by the ruler of this realm and those BJn 24:8 +
 [that derive from] that ruler—a defiled and corrupt sowing of IrS 1.24.2
 10 (25) the demon-begetting god^b—[and] after the sowing by Adam, BJn 24:34
 11 (60) 2 a sowing that resembles the sun and the great Seth,^c •next the Zs 47:9
 great angel Hormos^d emanated in order to prepare for the great
 Seth's sowing^e through the holy spirit in a holy, reason-born 75:15

IV 70 a. Probably an error for "Abiresina." Cf. BJn.

b. Melkheir-Adōnein in BJn.

III 58 a. Possibly "[of the world]."

b. Or possibly "[for it was not]."

III 59 a. Adamas.

b. Or "son of man"; i.e. the great Seth.

c. "first modeled form": i.e. Adam; Jewish and Christian jargon, based on the fact

that the creator modeled Adam out of earth.

d. The following passage (to IV 78:18f) survives in MS NHC IV, and the translation is based on that MS.

IV 71 a. Or "to summon."

b. The begetting of Cain (and perhaps Abel) by Sakla and Sakla's offspring.

c. The begetting of Seth son of Adam.

d. Lit. "refuge."

e. Or "seed."

vessel,^f by the means of the virgins of the defiled sowing of this realm.

Incarnation of the seed of Seth

- 18 (9) Next the great Seth came, bringing his seed, and he sowed
 it in the earth-born aeons, whose number is the infinite number
 of Sodom.
 22 (12) [And they (the aeons)] were called a pasture^g of the great
 25 (15) Seth, i.e. Gomorrah. •The great Seth took the plant from [the]
 27 (16) spring of Gomorrah •and planted it in the second location,
 which also was called Sodom.
 30 (19) This is the race^h that appeared through the agency of Edōkla.
 2 (20) **72** For by means of reason, it (Edōkla) engendered truth and
 right (?),^a i.e. the source of the seed of eternal life and of all
 those who are going to endure because of acquaintance with
 7 (25) their emanation. •This is the great incorruptible race that
 appeared from out of three (previous) worlds.^b 74:17 +

The flood and other catastrophes

- 10 (61) 1 And the flood will come as a prototype for the end of the age BJn 28:32 +
 13 (4) [and descend] against the world. •On account of this race RA 75:9
 16 (6) conflagrations will come upon the earth [. . .] •grace will come
 through the agency of the prophets and the watchmen of the
 19 (10) living race. •On account of this race plagues and famines will
 22 (12) occur. •All these things will come to pass on account of this
 24 (13) great, incorruptible race. •On account of this race, temptations
 [and] deceptions of false prophets will occur.

Prediction of Sakla's downfall

- 27 (16) Next the great Seth saw that in the devil's^c activity, in its
 crookedness, in its scheme that it was going to bring down
 upon the immovable race, in the persecution waged by its
 6 (22) powers and its angels, and in its deception, **73** •it was going
 to act recklessly against its own self.
 7 (23) Next the great Seth lifted up praise unto:
 8 (24) the great, *uninvoked*, invisible, *unnameable*, virgin
 spirit [of the father];
 11 (25) the masculine female virgin, the Barbēlō;
 12 (62) 2 the male child^a Telmaēl-Telmakhaēl-Ēli-Ēli-Makhar-
 Makhar-Seth, the power that is in very truth
 living;
 16 (5) the masculine female virgin Iouēl;
 17 (6) Ēsēphēkh, holder of the glory;
 18 (7) the crown of that being's glory;
 19 (8) the great glorifying aeon:^b

f. The "reason-born vessel" is Jesus, cf. 74:25f and 75:15f. The begetting of Seth the son of Adam establishes a line of descent "by means of the virgins . . . of this realm" leading ultimately to Jesus and his adoption by the great Seth.

g. Or "distribution."

h. I.e. the race of Seth on earth.

72 a. Gk. *themissa*, perhaps a proper name coined by the author. In Greek *themis* means

"established custom, right."

b. Corresponding to the "three advents" of 74:17. MS NHC III next has "into the (present) world."

c. "the devil": Sakla.

73 a. MS NHC III instead has "the thrice-male child."

b. MS NHC III, "the great Doxomedōn aeon."

- 20 (9) the thrones that are within it;
 21 (9) the great beings that surround them, and glories and incorruptibilities and *the* whole fullness of which I have already spoken.

Emanation of guardian angels

- 25 (12) And he first made a request for guardians of his seed. •Next
 27 (13) four hundred *ethereal angels* emanated from the great aeons;
 29 (15) with *them* were Aerosiël and the great Selmelkhel, the guardians of the great incorruptible race, its fruit, and the mighty people
 4 (19) of the great Seth 74 •from the time and age of *truth* and right (?)^a down to the *end* of these aeons^b and their rulers, •whom
 8 (22) the great *judges* have condemned to death. RR 97:10 + Zs 9:6

Seth's incarnations

- 9 (24) Next the *great Seth* was sent by the *four* great luminaries—
 11 (26) by the will of the self-originate and all their (the luminaries')
 13 (63 1) whole fullness, •through the gift and delight of the great, invisible spirit, the five seals, and the whole fullness III 59:10 56:25 +
 17 (4) to live through the three advents of which I have already
 19 (6) spoken, •the flood, the conflagration, and the judgment of the rulers, authorities, and powers; 72:7 RR 96:28 + v.19 IrSat 1.24.2
 22 (8) to save that (race) which went astray, •by [destruction] of
 23 (9) the world and *baptism* of the body, •and by [that]
 25 (10) reason-born being^c which the great Seth prepared 75:15 + mystically through the female virgin;^d
 29 (13) to make the *holy people*^e be born again^f BJn 25:20 +
 30 (14) by the *holy spirit* and invisible, hidden symbols;
 2 (16) 75 by destruction of world against world;
 4 (17) by renunciation of the world and the god of the thirteen aeons;^a RAd 77:27 +
 7 (19) by invitation from the holy, ineffable, and
 9 (20) incorruptible beings •(in)^b the bosom of the mighty light that *preexists* in forethought.

His establishment of baptism

- 11 (22) And by forethought he established the holy and the baptism
 14 (25) that is higher than the heavens: •(he did this) by the holy, by
 15 (64 1) the incorruptible, •and by the living reason-born Jesus, whom 71:11, 74:25 77:12, 79:26 IrUnid 1.30.12 EpS 39.3.5 EpG 26.10.4
 17 (3) the great Seth put on (like a garment).^c •And he nailed down
 20 (5) the powers of the thirteen aeons and made them inactive; •at his instigation they are fetched and they are removed.
 21 (6) And they^d are armed in invincible, incorruptible power with an armor consisting of acquaintance with the truth.

74 a. Greek *themissa* (cf. note 72a).

b. Or "ages."

c. Jesus (cf. 75:15f).

d. The virgin Mary.

e. The race of Seth on earth.

f. In incorruptible baptism (cf. 77:18f).

75 a. Perhaps corresponding to the thirteen kingdoms of RAd.

b. Through an inadvertence the MS here omits "in."

c. The body or person of Jesus is here likened to the garment in which the great Seth is clothed, or which he adopts, at his final incarnation; a Platonist cliché for the relation of body to soul.

d. The holy people? Cf. 74:29f.

III. BAPTISMAL SERVICE

Incorruptible beings that preside over baptism

- 24 (9) And the following have been revealed as great beings that stand at rest: Zs 47:12
 25 (10) Iesseus-Mazareus-Iessedekus, the living water; RAd 85:30
 27 (12) the great *governors*, the great Jacob, and Zs 47:5 v.27
 Theopemptos, and Isauël; Zs 47:15 Zs 47:12
 1 (—) 76 the being that presides over grace, Mēp[. .]-ēl (?);
 2 (14) those that preside over the springs of truth, Mikheus, Mikhar, and Mnēsinous; 76:7? FTh 48:18 +
 5 (16) the one that presides over the baptism of the living, the purifier Seseggen-Barpharaggēs; Zs 6:11
 7 (19) those that preside over the gates of the waters of life, Miseus^a and Mikhar; 76:2?
 10 (20) those that preside over ascent, Seldaō and Elainos; Zs 6:13 +
 12 (22) the receivers of the holy race and incorruptible, mighty people of the great Seth;
 15 (24) the attendants of the four luminaries—great Gamaliël, great Gabriël, great Samblō, and great Abrasaks; 64:14 +
 19 (65 1) those beings that preside over the sun's path of coming out, Olsēs, Hymneus, and Heurymaios; Zs 47:15?
 22 (3) those that preside over the (sun's) way of going in unto the repose of eternal life, Phritanis, Mikhsanthēr, and Mikhanōr;
 26 (6) the *guardians* of chosen^b souls, Akraman and Strempsoukhos; Zs 46:31
 2 (8) 77 the great power Telmakhaël-Telmakhaël-Ēli-Ēli-Makhar-Makhar-Seth;
 4 (9) the being that is great, invisible, *virgin*, and unnameable, i.e. in spirit and silence;
 7 (12) the great luminary Harmozēl, where there is the living, self-originate god in truth, with whom is Adamas the incorruptible human being;
 12 (16) Oroiaël, where there is the great Seth and *Jesus* of life, who came and crucified what was subject to the law; 75:15
 16 (19) third, *Daueithe*, where the offspring of the great Seth repose;
 18 (20) fourth, *Ēlēlēth*, where *the souls of the offspring* repose; III 65
 — (23) (23) *fifth, Iōēl, who presides over the name of the being who will be ordained to baptize with the holy, incorruptible baptism that is higher than heaven.*^a IV 77

Effect of baptism

- 31 (26) But henceforth 78 •by the agency of the holy and incorruptible Poimaël, •(acting) for the sake of those worthy of baptisms
 3 (66 1) (2) of renunciation and the ineffable seals thereof, •whichever 56:25 +
 6 (4)

76 a. Or "Mikheus."
 b. Or "slain."

III 65 a. The baptism that is acquaintance. Cf. RAd 85:22f.

persons have gained acquaintance of *their* receivers, according as they have *been instructed* and have learned, *shall not taste death*.

Baptismal hymn

- 10 (8) O Iesseus! 75:25 +
 11 (9) [.jōēouōōua!
 11 (9) In very truth!
 12 (10) O Iesseus-Mazareus-Iessedekus!
 13 (11) O living water!
 14 (11) O child of the child!
 14 (12) O name of all glories
 15 (12) In very truth!
 16 (13) O eternal being!
 17 (13) IIII ÊÊÊÊ EEEE OOOO YYYYY ÔÔÔÔ AAAA!^a
 18 (14) In very truth!
 19 (15) III 66 ⁽¹⁵⁾ÊI AAAA ÔÔÔÔ!^a
 - (16) ⁽¹⁶⁾O being, which beholds the aeons
 - (17) ⁽¹⁷⁾In very truth!
 - (17)

⁽¹⁷⁾A
 E E
 Ê Ê Ê
 I I I I
 Y Y Y Y Y Y
 Ô Ô Ô Ô Ô Ô Ô Ô^b

- (19) ⁽¹⁹⁾O existent for ever and ever
 - (20) ⁽²⁰⁾In very truth!
 31 (20) IV 78 ÎÊA AÎÔ in the heart!
 2 (21) 79 O existent upsilon forever unto eternity!
 3 (21) You are what you are!
 3 (21) You are who you are!
 3 (22) This great name of yours is upon me,^a o self-originate
 that lacks nothing and is free,
 8 (25) O invisible unto all but [me]!
 9 (25) O invisible unto all!
 11 (26) For what being can comprehend^b you by speech
 or praise?
 12 (27) Having myself become acquainted with you,
 I have now mixed with your unchangeableness;
 14 (67 2) And I have girded myself and come to dwell
 in an armor of loveliness^c and light, and I have
 become luminous.

78 a. Cf. 54:3f.

III 66 a. Or possibly "Thou art Alpha, Alpha, Alpha, Alpha, Omega, Omega, Omega!" Cf. note 53d.

b. In the MS this passage is copied as a string of letters rather than a pyramid; the pyramid progresses from Alpha (A) to Omega (Ô) (cf. note 53d and 78:15). Possibly a line of text ("OOOOO") has been omitted after "IIII" through an inadvertence, and the original reading is as follows:

A
 E E
 Ê Ê Ê
 I I I I
 O O O O O
 Y Y Y Y Y Y
 Ô Ô Ô Ô Ô Ô Ô Ô

79 a. After baptism.

b. Or "contain."

c. Or "grace." The remainder of the text has been almost entirely destroyed in MS NHC IV and so is translated from the parallel text in NHC III, taking account of the usual style of NHC IV whenever possible.

- (4) III 67 ⁽⁴⁾For the mother^a was there, because
 of the fair beauty of the loveliness.^b
 17 (6) IV 79 For this reason I have stretched out
 my two hands.
 18 (8) I have been formed within the orbit of the riches
 of the light,
 21 (9) For it (the light) is within my bosom, bestowing
 form upon the various engendered beings by
 unreproachable light.
 24 (12) I shall truly declare your praise,
 25 (13) For I have comprehended you:
 26 (14) (It is) yours, O Jesus! Behold, O eternally omega,
 O eternally epsilon,^a O Jesus! 75:15 +
 27 (14) O eternity! Eternity!
 - (15) III 67 ⁽¹⁵⁾O god of silence! I beg you utterly!
 2 (16) IV 80 You are my realm of repose.
 3 (17) O son, Ês Ês, the epsilon!^a
 4 (17) O being without form that dwells among those
 without form,
 5 (19) Raising a human being by whom you will sanctify me
 into your life according to your ineffaceable name.
 9 (22) For this reason, the fragrance of life is within me:
 10 (23) For it has been mixed with water to serve as a prototype
 for all the rulers,^b
 12 (25) So that in your company I might have life in the
 peace of the saints,
 13 (26) O eternally existent in very truth!

IV. CIRCUMSTANCES OF COMPOSITION

- 15 (68 1) This is the book that the great Seth composed •and which 3Tb 118:10
 16 (2) he placed in high mountains upon which the sun has never RAAd 85:9 +
 19 (5) risen—nor can it. •And from the beginning of their days, the Fr 68:2
 name has never risen upon the hearts of the prophets, the
 24 (9) apostles, or the heralds—nor could it; •and their ears have not
 26 (10) heard it.^c •The great Seth composed this book in writing in 130
 2 (12) years and 81 •placed it in the mountain called Kharaksiō,
 - (14) III 68 ⁽¹⁴⁾so that, by emanating at the end of times and ages
 through the will of the self-originate god and all the fullness, III 59:10 +
 because of the gift of the unsearchable, inconceivable, parental,
 - (20) will, ⁽²⁰⁾he might appear unto this holy, incorruptible race of
 - (22) the great savior and unto ⁽²²⁾those^a who sojourn with them in
 - (23) love—⁽²³⁾along with the great, invisible, eternal spirit and ⁽²³⁾its
 - (25) only-begotten offspring, and ⁽²⁶⁾the eternal light and III 69 ⁽¹⁾its
 - (69 1) great incorruptible consort and incorruptible wisdom (Sophia)
 (5) and the Barbēlō and utter fullness in eternity. ⁽⁵⁾Amen!

III 67 a. The Barbēlō.
 b. Or "grace."

IV 79 a. "epsilon," or "five." Cf. note 53d.

80 a. Or "the five." Cf. note 53d.

b. Here MS NHC IV seems instead to have "For it has been blended with [the] baptismal [waters of all] the rulers."

c. I.e. neither the "prophets" of Israel nor Christian "apostles" and "heralds" have known the truth.

III 68 a. "appear unto this . . . unto those . . ."; or "reveal this . . . and those . . ."

Colophon in MS NHC III^a

- (6) ⁽⁶⁾THE EGYPTIAN GOSPEL,^b a book of divine authorship, holy
 (8) and secret. ⁽⁸⁾May loveliness, intelligence, perception, and
 prudence^c be with the copyist, the beloved Eugnōstos in the
 spirit—in the flesh my name is Gongessos^d—and with my
 (14) companion luminaries in incorruption. ⁽¹⁴⁾O Jesus Christ, O son
 (15) of God, O savior! O ikhthys!^e ⁽¹⁵⁾Of divine authorship is the
 (18) Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit! Amen! ⁽¹⁸⁾THE HOLY
 BOOK OF THE GREAT INVISIBLE SPIRIT. Amen!

III 69 a. At the end of MS NHC III the copyist or a predecessor has added the following note.

b. See note IV 50a.

c. Not only virtues, but also consorts of the four luminaries (cf. 64:2f).

d. Latin *Concessus*.

e. "ikhthys" (Greek "fish"): a traditional early Christian acronym in Greek for "Jesus Christ, son of god, savior" (*Iēsous KHRistos THEou Yios Sōtēr*).

ZŌSTRIANOS

(EXCERPTS)

(Zs)

Contents

Zōstrianos describes gnostic baptism of acquaintance as a mystical ascent of the soul toward acquaintance or *gnōsis* with the ineffable first principle. The steps in the ladder of this ascent are the "aeons"—eternal hypostases or abstractions—that according to gnostic myth have emanated from the first principle and populate the spiritual universe. The structure of abstractions follows a threefold division of the Barbēlō as in EgG; although most details are lost owing to the imperfection of the manuscript, the structure is clearly one in which higher levels subsume lower ones in a relationship of whole to parts.

The theory of the soul's progress from higher to higher abstraction toward a mystical leap to *gnōsis* had been laid down by Plato in a much-studied passage of the *Symposium* (210a–212a), and it was a standard element in the teaching of Platonism in the second century A.D. The mystical ascent is not, therefore, the final and decisive ascent of the soul after death, but rather a means of gaining nondiscursive knowledge or *gnōsis* ("acquaintance"). Once it has achieved its goal, the soul must descend back through the same levels it passed before, in reverse order. Zs thus narrates the intellectual voyage of the mystic. In accordance with a convention of apocalyptic literature, the voyager is accompanied by a series of revealing angels who explain the various levels of abstraction and incidentally mention other details of the gnostic myth.

Because baptism was the main metaphor of acquaintance in gnostic Christianity, the voyage is mythologized as a progression of "baptisms" in "waters" that "fill" each abstraction. A precedent had already been set in BJn 4:21f, where the first principle is called a wellspring; RAd 85:22f explicitly equates baptism with *gnōsis* or acquaintance with god. Higher levels of abstraction in Zs are thus mythically quantified as numbers of baptisms, with resultant transformations of the voyaging soul. For further discussion of gnostic baptism, see the "Historical Introduction" to Part One.

Zs is of particular importance in the history of philosophy because Plotinus, the great Neoplatonist philosopher, was acquainted with its contents (cf. Porph 16.3f) and took it into account in his cycle of lectures against the gnostics (*Enneads* 3.8, 5.8, 5.5, and 2.9 [nos. 30–33 chronologically]).

The work concludes with a classic example of gnostic sermon.

The limited scope of Zs does not allow for reference to the history of Israel or the foundation of Christianity, and the pseudepigraphic frame story and its main character imply a setting in pre-Christian Persia. Some scholars therefore consider