

WISDOM AND METEMPSYCHOSIS A Gnostic MYTH

EZIO ALBRILE

As is well known, the theory of the Jewish origins of Gnosticism is gaining today more and more popularity. Now the Jews are the brothers of the Samaritans, and it is only natural that the latter as well as the former should have contributed to Gnostic origins. We can safely dismiss the opinion that Simon Magus was really no Samaritan, i.e. a member of the people worshipping God on Mount Gerizim, and that he appealed to the pagan population of Samaria. The name Simōn, though Greek, was common among Jews and Samaritan, and even often substituted for Symeōn, the usual and indeclinable form of the Semitic Šym'ōn.

Moreover, Simon was hailed as «the Great Power», and this was a well-known Samaritan epithet of God. In the Samaritan Targum the Hebrew *El* can be translated by *ḥylh*, «the Power», or *ḥywlh*, «the Power» or, perhaps, «the Mighty One». In the early sources, the hymns of the Defer and the midrashic work *Memar Marqah*, «the Power» is often praised as «great» (*rb*), and even «the Great Power» occurs as a divine name and is praised as being «great».

Thus we read in an early hymn that Moses taught the desert generation the significance of the Sabbath «in order that they should rest on it and say: "Great is the Great Power, for He has exalted it!"» (Cowley, p. 46, lines 3 f.). This divine name occurs only once outside the Samaritan realm, namely in the account of the martyrdom of James the Just, who is reported to have said that Jesus is sitting in heaven at the right of the Great Power (Hegesippus, as quoted by Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* II.23.13). James, however, was a Galilean and apparently in touch with the religious traditions of Samaria, the province

separating his native land from Judea. If Simon were a non-Samaritan appealing to non-Samaritans, he would hardly have used a specifically Samaritan divine name.

Did Simon thus claim to be God himself, YHWH, having come down to earth? Now Samaritan texts do relate of the descent of God. The following excerpts are taken from an early hymn describing what happened when the Law was given on Mount Sinai:

«The Great Power was shaken and the Glory descended in the midst (of the angels and the people gathered on the mountain) and made the voice of the trumpet be heard from the interior of the burning fire (...). The Godness (i.e. God) was shaken and descended. Mount Sinai trembled before Him. His children gathered together to hear the voice of God (...). The Glory was shaken and descended. Mount Sinai trembled before him. He made the trumpet be heard before Him (...). The inner of heaven was opened and the Eternal King (i.e. God) descended (...).» (Cowley, p. 54, lines 1 ff.).

Here we note the interesting fact that the hymn alternates between describing the divine descent as that of God and that of the Glory: «The Great Power was shaken», but «the Glory descended»; «the Godness» – a Samaritan name of God – descended; «the Glory was shaken and descended»; «the Eternal King», i.e. God, descended.

In Samaritanism the Glory is identical with the Angel of the Lord, the figure of whom we know from several Pentateuchal passages. In *Memar Marqah* the Glory applies the well-known words about the Angel of the Lord in *Ex.* 23.20 f. to himself:

«The Glory said: “The Great Name (*šmh rbh*) is within me, and I do not shun him who is rebellious in action. When a man deviates, I forfeit him, and thus it is said of me, For he will not pardon your transgression, since My Name is in him”». (III. 5)

The presence of the Angel of the Lord, or – in Samaritanism – the Glory, is equivalent to the presence of God himself, for he has been given the Divine Name, the concept of which in the ancient world signified the divine nature or mode of being. The Angel of the Lord or the Glory of God is thus an extension of God’s own personality and has full authority to withhold the absolution of sins.

As is well known, in some Biblical passages it is impossible «to differentiate between the Malak YHWH and Yahweh himself. The One who speaks or acts, i.e., Yahweh or the Malak YHWH, is obviously one and the same person. Yet in the haphazard alternation between the two there is a certain system. When the reference is to God apart from man, Yahweh is used; when God enters the apperception of man, the Malak YHWH is introduced. (...) Originally the stories probably referred quite naively to purely sensual theophanies. The editors then softened this primitive tradition in the interest of stricts transcendence by interposing the figure of the Malak YHWH as Yahweh's mode of manifestation». (G. von Rad in *TWNT I*, pp. 77 f.)

This kind of interchangeability between God and the Angel of the Lord apparently accounts for the hymn's representation of the divine descent as both that of God and that of the Glory, who is identical with the Angel of the Lord. Moreover, this way of describing how we are to explain that Simon is called by a divine name. Simon is God's earthly form of manifestation. With a paraphrase from Christology, we may say that Simon is a hypostasis of the divine *ousia*.

This interpretation of Simon as the Great Power of God makes it possible to explain the reason for the addition of the genitive «of God». The genitive is commonly taken as *genitivus appositivus*, but it has to be admitted that it does not effect the impression that «the Power» is a divine name. But what is the genitive possessive? The only phrase in *Acts of Luke* which corresponds to the description of Simon in *Acts* 8.10 in grammatical structure and position of the parts of speech is found in *Acts* 3.2, «the gate of the temple called the Beautiful». Here the genitive «of the temple» has been added to the name «the Beautiful Gate», so that people who did not know so much of the temple gate. On this analogy I would conclude that the genitive in *Acts* 8.10 is possessive and suggests that the Power is not God himself, but a divine hypostasis.

There is quite a lot of evidence to the effects that God could be held to have an agent of human form sharing his Name(s).

Thus, in a Qumran text *11 Q Melch*, Melchizedek – who is known from *Gen.* ch. 14 to have been a kingly priest of God in Salem – is identified as the Elohim in *Ps.* 82.1, «Elohim stands in the congregation of God (*El*); among the heavenly ones (*elo-*

him) he judges». Melchizedek-Elohim is said bring back the exiles at the end of days, announce the expiation of their sins, pass judgment and assume the eschatological reign. The text even says that it is Melchizedek who is referred to by the declaration in *Isa.* 52.7, «Your God is King», where the context speaks of YHWH bringing back the exiles to Jerusalem.

Even the proper Name of God could be given to his plenipotentiary. In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which is extant only in a Slavonic version but stems from the first or the beginning of the second century of our era, the patriarch is said to have been vouchsafed an angelophany by a figure who describes himself in the following manner: «I am called Yahoel by Him who moves that which exists with me on the seventh expanse of the firmament, a power in virtue of the Ineffable Name which is dwelling in me» (10.9). This is obviously an allusion to the figure of the Angel of the Lord in *Ex.* 23.20 f., where God says that he has put his Name into the Angel. The name of the Angel in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* consists of the proper Name of God, Yaho (YHWH), as well as the divine name *El*.

Simon Magus apparently could be held to share even the proper Name of God. In the *Acts of Peter*, it is told that Simon once lodged with a certain woman by the name of Eubula and – upon leaving – stole all her money. Eubula, however, suspected her household:

«But Eubula, discovering this crime, began to torture her household, saying: “You took advantage of (the visit of) this Man of God and have robbed me, as you saw him coming in to me in order to do honour to a simple woman. His name, however, is the Name of the Lord (*cui nomen est autem nomen domini*)”.» (Ch. 17)

Eubula is represented as a type of the people who were deceived by Simon and acclaimed him as «the Man of God» and «the Name of the Lord». I shall come back to the former epithet: for now it suffices to note that the latter title designates Simon as a sharer of the divine nature or mode of being.

There is another text which is of great importance for this discussion: this is the legend of the contest between Dositheus and Simon incorporated into the basic writing of the *Pseudo-Clementines*. When Dositheus, who had usurped the leadership of the sects, perceived that

«Simon was destroying his reputation in the eyes of the majority, so that they did not think that he was the Standing One, he came in a rage to the usual meeting-place and, finding Simon, began to hit him with a staff. But it passed through Simon's body as if it were smoke. Thereupon Dositheus, in amazement, said to him: "If you are the standing One, I too will worship you". When Simon said, "I am", Dositheus, knowing that he himself was not the Standing One, fell down and worshipped. Associating himself with the thirty-nine chiefs, he placed Simon in his own seat of honour. Then, not long afterwards, while Simon stood, Dositheus fell down and died.» (Hom. II. 24)

This story, which is not at all anti-Simonian, but anti-Dosithean and pro-Simonian, represents the two Samaritans as rivalling over the right to the title «the Standing One», to which I shall return shortly. When Simon affirms that he is the Standing One by the words *Egō eimi*, Dositheus falls down. Now it is commonly accepted that Jesus in the *Gospel of John* employs the phrase *egō eimi* in order to indicate that he is the possessor of the Name of God; this would seem certain at least in those cases where the term is used in an absolute sense, for «I am» without a predicate is meaningless in Greek (see 8.24, 28, 58; 13.19).

In *Ex. 3.13 f.* the Tetragrammaton is interpreted as «I am who I am», denoting the eternal self-existence of God, and «I am» used as an equivalent of YHWH. Moses is bid to go to the Israelites and say, «I AM has sent me to you». It is also related that God commanded Moses, «Say to the people of Israel, "YHWH (...) has sent me to you"».

In Samaritan texts «I AM» often occurs as a name of God. Two examples from *Memar Marqah* will have to suffice:

«He is the Ancient One who has no beginning. He is the One who existed above the abyss of the primeval silence. He it is who created when He willed. He is I AM: He is the One who is after the world, and just as He was in the first, so he will be in the last». (IV. 4)

«He is eternal in His oneness, I AM in divinity, everlasting in awesomeness» (IV. 5).

It is true that a predicate of «I am» in the *Pseudo-Clementine* text is supplied by Dositheus question, but a deeper meaning may yet be present. In the Fourth Gospel there are some

borderline cases of *egō eimi* where we cannot be sure whether a divine name is hinted at, although a predicate may be supplied from the context. A significant passage is 18.4-6. When Judas and the men of the priests and the Pharisees come to arrest Jesus, he asks them, «Whom do you seek?» «They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, *Egō eimi*. As soon as he had said *Egō eimi*, they stepped backwards and fell to the ground». True, the pronoun «he (of whom you are speaking)» may be supplied from the context, but the reaction to the answer suggests that a deeper meaning may be present. Jews did not fall to the ground for a mere man.

The mention of the Divine Name, however, made people drop. The Jewish apologist Artapanus (ca. 100 B.C.E.) relates that Pharaoh fell as if dead when he heard Moses uttered the Name of God (as quoted by *Euseb., Praep. ev.* IX. 27. 25 f.). When the high priest spoke the Name in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the priests standing near by fell on their faces (see *Qidd.* 71a; et al.). It seems plausible that *John* 18. 5 f. implies that Jesus uttered the Name of God and that the Jews fell to the ground upon hearing it.

In like vein, Dositheus hearing the words «I am» from the mouth of Simon fell down. Simon apparently possessed the Name of God, making him a partaker in the eternal life of the divine. Thus, while Simon persisted, Dositheus one day fell down never to rise again.

This interpretation is corroborated by the fact that the legend implies that Dositheus, Simon's rival, acts as if he was the possessor of the Name. We know that Dositheus claimed to be the Prophet like Moses mentioned in *Deut.* ch. 18, and it has been plausibly suggested that the rod with which Dositheus tries to bring Simon down is the wonder-working rod of Moses known from *Exodus*, since the Samaritans believed that the Moses-like saviour would recover this staff. Now traditional material relates that the staff of Moses was inscribed with the Name of God. Thus the claim to be the Prophet like Moses and having recovered his rod actually implied the claim to be the possessor of the Divine Name.

A couple of texts from *Memar Marqah* is of interest in this connection. In a long praise of the rod of Moses spoken by God, it is said: «This (i. e. the rod) will be a wonder for you (i. e. Moses) – no one shall stand ($\sqrt{\text{qwm}}$) before you while it is in

your hand» (I.2). The rod of Moses will bring about the fall, the death, of anyone opposing the one holding it. Dositheus tries to bring Simon to fall with his staff.

In another text God says to Moses:

«(...) all your enemies will fall before you. Do not fear them, for they are in your power. With the rod I gave you, you will subdue them. Who will be able to stand (\sqrt{qwm}) before you, when My Great Name is with you? Verily, every foe will fall before you as suddenly as evening falls». (I. 3)

We note the explicit association of the Name with the rod: Moses will subdue his enemies with the rod, while the Great Name – which is in the possession of Moses – will cause every foe to fall. It is in reality the Name, inscribed upon the rod, which effects the downfall of Moses' enemies.

The Samaritan texts underline that no one will be able to «stand» before the one holding the staff of Moses. It is the one possessing the staff who is «the Standing One», the title for which Dositheus and Simon vied.

The usage of this term in the *Clementina* reveals a Samaritan background. In an early hymn it is said: «He (i. e. God) is standing (*q^cym*) forever; He exists unto eternity. Standing Ones (*q^cymyn*) (i. e. angels) and mortals (literally, «dead») are under His rule» (Cowley, p. 27, line 18). In contrast to me, God and his angels are imperishable; this is what is expressed by the participle *q^cym*. This is exactly the sense in which ὁ ἕστῶς is employed in the *Clementina*. It is said that Simon «uses this title to indicate that he shall always stand, and that there is no cause of corruption which can make his body fall» (*Hom.* II. 22).

We thus see that in Samaritanism the title «the Standing One» has the same sense as the divine name «I AM», and that in the *Pseudo-Clementines* the very same meaning is assumed for the former appellation. When Simon asserts to be «the Standing One» by uttering «I am», he apparently appropriates divine honours.

Since Dositheus, Simon's rival, cast himself into the role as the Prophet like Moses, we may ask whether Simon, too, laid claim to this office. The text from the *Acts of Peter* quoted above says that Simon was designated as «the Man of god» as well

as «the Name of the Lord», and the former appellation is used of Moses already in *Deut.* 31. 1. In *Memar Marqah*, Moses is also «the Man of God» or, more frequently, simply «the Man». The Prophet who was to be like him would naturally appropriate the same title.

Now it is interesting that the participle *q^cym* could be used with reference to Moses. In *Ex.* 33.21 God says to Moses: «Here is a place by me, and you shall stand on the rock». It is worth nothing that the Samaritan Targum uses the verb *qwm* in this verse.

Another text is of greater significance: this is the end of the Samaritan decalogue. After *Ex.* 20.21a (in the Masoretic version verse 18), the Samaritan Pentateuch adds *Deut.* 5.25b-28 (*Mt.* verses 28b-31) and *Deut.* 18.18-22. The latter passage, which contains a warning against false prophets and a prophecy of the advent of a prophet like Moses, is splitting the former. Right after God has promised that he some time in the future will «raise up» (*qwm*) a prophet like Moses, he says to him: «And, as for you, stand here by Me, and I shall teach you all the commandments, statutes and laws which you shall teach them» (*Deut.* 5.28). The Samaritan Targum again uses a form of the verb *qwm*, reading, (...) *w'th hkh qwm cmy*.

By the way, the end of the Samaritan decalogue may provide us with a clue to the strange relation that Simon ascribed the invalid precepts of the Law to the prophets:

«The prophets spoke their prophecies inspired by the angels who created the world; hence, those who have their hope in him and Helen pay no further attention to them, but do as they wish as free man. for men are saved by his grace and not by righteous works.» (Ir. *Adv. haer.* I.23.3)

If we are to believe Irenaeus, Simon did not repudiate Moses and his Law, but the «prophets» and their precepts. According to the Samaritans, the false prophets against whom it is warned in *Deut.* 18.18-22 are, of course, the Israelite-Jewish prophets. The words of the true prophet, the Prophet like Moses, mentioned in the same passage, are identified with «all the commandments, statutes and laws» which God set down for Moses (*Deut.* 5.28). The Samaritans thus could infer that the Jewish prophets spoke «laws», although wrong laws.

To the Samaritans there was only one prophet aside from Moses: the prophet who was going to be like him. If Simon claimed this office, he naturally would turn against the Jewish prophets. Irenaeus, however, easily could have interpreted this as an antinomianism in the vein of a radical Pauline antagonism of Grace and Law like that of Marcion.

But let us return to the concept of the Standing One

Deut. 5.28 is quoted by *Memar Marqah* in a long praise of Moses:

«No prophet like Moses has stood forth (*q̄m*) or will ever stand forth (*yqwm*). He was exalted above the whole human race and progressed until he joined with the angels, as was said of him, «And I (i. e. God) will join you» (*Sam. Targ. Ex.* 25.22). Where is there anyone like Moses who trod the fire? Where is there anyone like Moses to whom his Lord said, “Stand by Me”? (...)» (IV. 12)

Marqah's denial of the possibility of the appearance of a prophet like Moses and his rhetorical questions are aimed at the Dositheus, who claimed that their hero was the Prophet like Moses. It is noteworthy that *Memar Marqah* and the Defter do not attach any «Messianic» significance whatsoever to *Deut.* 18.15, 18 ff., while the Samaritan Targum underlines that this prophecy was fulfilled by Joshua and that no prophet like Moses would arise after Joshua's time. But all the texts glorifying Moses must be based upon traditional material which was appropriated by the Dositheus, and also by the Simonians.

In the *Pseudo-Clementines* it is said that Simon laid claim to the title «the Standing One» in order to indicate that he was the Christ:

«(...) he wished to be regarded as a certain Highest Power, even above the God who created the universe. Sometimes he intimates that he is the Christ by calling himself the Standing One». (II. 22)

We must amend the statement that Simon claimed to be the Messiah. If Simon tried to bring round his own people, he would have called for the office of the Prophet like Moses. The term «Messiah» is found only in a few medieval Samaritan texts. Thus, by claiming to be «Standing One», Simon presented himself as the Prophet like Moses.

The text just quoted says that Simon gave himself out to be God as well as the Saviour raised up by God. This is entirely comprehensible when we consider that Simon possessed the Divine Name. Moreover, Samaritan literature teaches that Moses, the model of the Saviour, possessed the Name. This doctrine is found throughout *Memar Marqah* and the Defter and is obviously an old traditional theme. Thus we read in a hymn:

«Mighty is the Great Prophet, who vested himself with the Name of the Godhead and revealed the five books. He was standing (*q^cm*) between the two assemblies, between the Standing Ones (*q^cymyn*) and the mortals. (...) The Elohim of creation mankind was standing between the two assemblies.» (Cowley, p. 54, lines 31 ff.).

It is often difficult to decide which divine name is assumed. In some passages it is clear that the name is that of Elohim, but in other texts it is unmistakably the proper Name of God. Thus we read in *Memar Marqah*: «*Hē* is the Name with which he was vested» (IV. 1). The letter *Hē*, of course, is an abbreviation of the Tetragrammaton.

All the divine names obviously could be given to Moses. We have seen that the prophet could be referred to by the divine epithet «the Standing One», called by the name of Elohim, and said to have been «vested» with the Tetragrammaton. Similarly, Simon is referred to as «the Great Power» and «the Standing One», and even recognized as «the Name of the Lord». The statement in the *Acts of Peter* that Simon's «name is the Name of the Lord» has a striking parallel in the following statement about Moses in *Memar Marqah* that his «name was made the Name of the Lord (*d't'bd šm mth šmh*)» (IV. 1).

Simon would appear to have given himself out as the Prophet like Moses, just like Dositheus. This pretension implied the claim to possess the Name of God, for Moses was described as the possessor of the name of God. Several heavenly messengers in the literature of this period are presented as the possessor of the Divine Name. The ultimate model of this kind of Saviour figure is the Angel of the Lord in the Pentateuch.

It is impossible to speak of Simon as a Gnostic Redeemer. In fact, the idea that God or, rather, a divine hypostasis has appeared upon earth seems incompatible with the dualistic

ideology of Gnosticism. Still, it is justifiable to characterize Simonianism as being at least proto-Gnostic. For this determination we have to turn to the Simonian myth, the pivot of which is the figure of Helen.

After having said that Simon was regarded as «the First God» by his followers, Justin Martyr says:

«And a certain Helen, who at that time went about with him but had formerly maintained herself in a brothel, is said to have been the First Thought (πρώτη ἔννοια) emanating from him». (*Apol.* 26)

Here Helen is characterized by a term which points to a philosophical concept. The goddess Athena, who had sprung forth out of her father head, was construed as God's φρόνησις or νόησις, and Irenaeus at the end of his report tells us that Simon and Helen were worshipped in images of Zeus and Athena (I. 24.3). Justin in another place in his *Apology* (ch. 64) says that «the devils», adapting the Biblical teaching that God created through his Word, taught that Minerva (Athena) was «the First Thought» of Jupiter (Zeus). We can thus conclude that the idea of Helen as God's «First Thought» referred to the philosophical allegory of Athena as the creative Thought of God.

The teaching that the Thought of God had appeared on earth as a whore would seem to assume a myth. Now Irenaeus recounts a Simonian myth about God's Thought which is remarkably simple and quite possibly identical with the one Justin knew. It is in fact possible that Irenaeus in this part of his work bases himself on the lost *Syntagma* of Justin.

The Simonian myth about God's Thought, however, does not contain any elements which are derived from teachings about Athena. The identification of Simon and Helen with Zeus and Athena apparently is secondary and may be connected with the fact that the emperor Hadrian in the beginning of the second century C.E. erected a temple to Zeus on Mount Gerizim. Syncretistic Samaritans apparently identified Zeus and YHWH, and later Simonians could assert that their cult hero was Zeus as well as «the Great Power», the God of their ancestors.

In the *Urbe*, a stele erected to the honour of the old Sabine god Semo Sancus, if we are to believe Justin (*Apol.* 26.2, whe-

re, however, the stele – which actually has been recovered – mistakenly is said to have been reected in honour of Simon himself). This may be accounted for by the fact that Semo in Roman times was identified with Zeus Horkios or Zeus Pistios (<*Hypsistos*).

It is a Sophia myth which is the basis of the Simonian myth of Ennoia-Helen. As pointed out, the *Pseudo-Clementines* give «Sophia» as one of the names of Simon's consort. It is even possible that Epiphanius is right that the Simonians called Helen «the Holy Spirit», for Wisdom and the Spirit were welded in Jewish tradition (*Sir.* 24.3; *Wisd.* 1.4 ff.; 7,7 and 22; 9.10 and 17; Philo, *Op. mundi* 135, 144; *Gid.* 22, 27). Epiphanius also says that Helen was named Barbelo and *Prounikos*, but this must be accounted for by the heresiologist himself, as will become clear later on.

That Ennoia proceeds from God is an idea which has its origin in Judaism. Already in *Proverbs* ch. 8 Wisdom describes herself as having been born by God before the world was created. We may note that the statement in verse 25, «I was given birth», employs the same verb (γίνομαι) as Justin uses to describe Ennoia's emanation from God. The apocrypha and Philo of Alexandria continue the tradition of Wisdom as having been brought forth by God (*Sir.* 24. 3; *Wisd.* 7. 24; Philo, *Fuga* 50; cf. *Cher.* 49 f.).

Now it is possible that Jews knew the traditions about Athena springing forth from the head of Zeus. In the *Book of Wisdom* ch. 18 the figure of Sophia-Logos springs forth from the royal throne as «a stern warrior» bearing «a sharp sword». This image may be based upon the Greek myth, according to which Athena was born in full armor (as well as upon a couple of Biblical texts describing the Angel of the Lord, i.e. *Ex.* ch. 12 and *I Chron.* 21. 16). The Simonians identification of Wisdom with Athena apparently was made in order to present their religious system more appealing to people versed in the classical tradition.

Like Athena in philosophical allegory, Sophia in Judaism and Samaritanism had a cosmogonic function. In the speech of Wisdom in *Proverbs* ch. 8, she goes on to describe herself as «a master craftsman» by God's side when he created the world (verse 30). In the *Book of Wisdom*, Sophia is a singular demiurge, not even working in cooperation with the interpretation of the opening of the Bible, «In the beginning God created»,

which construes the preposition (I, ἐν) in an instrumental sense and substitutes «Wisdom» for «beginning», since Wisdom in *Proverbs* 8.22 says that God begat her as «the beginning» his works. Thus we obtain the following reading of *Gen.* 1.1, «Through Wisdom God created heaven and earth».

But Ennoia – or Sophia – in Simonianism does not create heaven and earth. According to Irenaeus report, she creates «angels and powers, by whom (...) this world was made». «Powers» is a ward denoting archangels, as can be seen by comparing the phrase «angels and powers» to the parallel «angels and archangels» a couple of lines above. That Wisdom only created the angels is no Jewish teaching. It is, however, a Samaritan doctrine.

In the Samaritan liturgy we find a hymn which reads, «In the beginning God created the heavens through his Wisdom» (Cowley, p. 624, line 16). Heaven is the abode of the angels. In another hymn we read, «Through the Beginning He created angels (literally, «mighty creatures»); through His Wisdom (*bhkmth*) He made them great, perfect, free from defect» (p. 32, line 24). The parallelism between «the Beginning» and «His Wisdom» assumes the interpretation of *Gen.* 1.1 just mentioned. We may read «through Wisdom» in both sentences, «through Wisdom» in both sentences, «Through Wisdom He created the angels; through Wisdom He made them great, perfect, free from defect».

In Simonianism, however, the angels are not «perfect» and «free from defect». They detain Wisdom in their own domain, the lower regions of the upper world, harass her, and then bring her down into the material world, where she is shut up in a human body and forced to migrate through the ages. Ennoia in Simonianism is often compared to Sophia in the great Gnostic systems. It has to be admitted by the champions of the Jewish background of the Gnostic Sophia in second century Gnosticism, does not fall; she is forced down into the material world. Can this idea be find in Judaism?

Job 15. 7-8 contains this interesting question, «Were you the first man ever born, and were you brought forth before the hills? did you belong to God's council and have you snatched away Wisdom?». «The first man» in this text, of course, is not Adam, the first man upon earth. He is brought forth before the world («the hills») and belongs to «God's council», a concept

which in Semitic religion denoted the gathering of all the gods in heaven and in Israelite Jewish religion came to denote the assembly of God's heavenly servantes, the angels. The text, then, assumes a myth about a heavenly man, a more or less divine being, sequestering Wisdom, an entity distinct from God. Perhaps Wisdom in the *Book of Job* is not a personal being, but, as we have seen, she is certainly conceived as such in *Proverbs* and later texts, and the Simonian idea of the capture of Wisdom can find a basis in the myth assumes in this Scriptural passage.

The angels not only detained Wisdom, but also brought her down into the material world. That Wisdom had descended from heaven is told in Jewish tradition, where, according to the *Book of Sirach* ch. 24, for instance, she is said to have come down from heaven, traversed the lower regions and, finally, taken up her abode in Israel. Here, of course, Wisdom is interpreted as the Law, but this is obviously a secondary conception meant to call a halt to the tendency to view her as a divine hypostasis, a goddess. This is the rise of the Šekinah's concept.

According to *Sirach*, of course, Wisdom is not abducted from God's company and forced down into the world. She descends voluntarily. Now we find an interesting question in the *Book of Baruch*, «Who has gone up into heaven and taken her (i.e. Wisdom) and brought her down from the clouds?» The question, of course, is rhetorical: the answer, for we have read *Job* 15. 7-8, which alludes to a myth of about Wisdom being sequestered by a heavenly being. If we combine the two text, we obtain the raw material of the Simonian teaching that Wisdom was captured by the angels and forced down into the world of men.

After the angels brought Wisdom down into the material world, they made her pass through the generations. In the text from *Sirach* already referred to, Wisdom appears among the people of the earth and says, «Among all these I sought a resting-place, and (I said), "In whose inheritance shall I lodge?"». In the *Book of Wisdom*, Sophia is a veritable hypostasis which, «from generation to generation, passing into holy souls, makes (men) friends of God and prophets» (7. 27).

Sirach and the *Book of Wisdom* do not represent the migration of Sophia through the generations as a *via dolorosa*, like

that of Wisdom in Simonianism, but the view that Wisdom was suffering on earth is found in another Jewish work. In an interpolated part in *I Enoch* we read, «Since Wisdom found no place where she could dwell, a place was allotted to her in heaven. When Wisdom came in order to make her dwelling-place among the children of men but found no dwelling, Wisdom returned to her place and took her seat among the angels» (42. 1-2). This text speaks of the futile descent of Wisdom and her resigned ascent. Wisdom is really a stranger on earth, as she is in Simonianism.

Another allusion to the misfortunes of Wisdom on earth is found in a later passage, which contains a clear reference to the text just quoted, «For I know that sinners will tempt men to harm Wisdom, so that no place will be found for her» (94.5a). Wisdom will be harmed by men and therefore withdraw to heaven. The raw material for Simon's idea that Wisdom continually endured humiliation on earth and had to be brought back to her heavenly home is thus present in the sapiential tradition.

As for the remainder of the account by Irenaeus, some critical remarks are in order. In the last paragraph Helen is identified with the lost sheep of *Luke* 15. 4-6. The parable of the lost or strayed sheep (cf. *Matt.* 18. 12-14) was very popular in Gnosticism, where the sheep stood for Sophia and the shepherd for Christ. It is of course not possible to derive this allegory from Simonianism; it is obviously a Christian interpretation of the figure of Helen.

That this paragraph derives from a later hand is also seen by from the fact that it contains certain terms taken from the end of the first paragraph, the paragraph before the identification of Ennoia, i.e. Wisdom, with Helen of Troy. *Transmigran-tem, corpore* and *contumeliam* are all repetitions of words from the first paragraph.

The second paragraph is introduced very abruptly. After having said that Ennoia was transmigrated into ever different female bodies, Irenaeus states, «She was also in that Helen (...) (*Fuisse autem eam et in illa H.*)». The heresiologist then relates a «strange» legend about the aedus Stesichorus. According to Isocrates and Plato, Stesichorus was blinded because of his criticism of Helen, but regained his sight when he repented and asserted that only her εἶδωλον, her phantom, was brought to Troy. This does not fit the story of Ennoia, who is really

present and suffering here on earth. God has to descend in Simon's person in order to save Ennoia or Wisdom. A phantom, on the other hand, is not in need of redemption. In this context the «image» is the Soul vitality.

In later accounts of Simonianism, the figure of the docetic Helen is given more and more prominence over that of the really incarnated and suffering Wisdom.

Hippolytus utilizes Irenaeus account, but he has got some additional material about Helen (*Ref.* VI. 19. 1-3). She is here not only one among all of the incarnations of Wisdom, but has much more weight and is fully welded with the figure of Ennoia or Wisdom. Moreover, she is the cause of not only the Trojan war but of all wars.

According to Epiphanius, Helen was not affected when the powers of the world fought for her, but, through their bloodshed, was able to obtain their power and thus escape from the chain of metempsychosis and ascend to heaven (*Pan. haer.* XXI. 2. 5. f.). Here the notion of the triumphant Helen has suppressed that of the suffering Wisdom, who has to be saved by God in Simon's person.

The representation is based on the Gnostic myth about Barbelo or *Prounikos* which is known from different sources (e.g. Epiphanius. *Pan. haer.* ch. XXV f.): Barbelo or *Prounikos* is a female deity who appears to the Archons and, due to her beauty, causes the emission of their semen, which she gathers, because it contains the spiritual power which the evil ones somehow had managed to take away from her. It's perhaps not impossible that the adaptation of this myth, which may be discernible already in Hippolytus account, is genuinely Simonian (but the names Barbelo and *Prounikos* were probably not accredited to Helen by the Simonians). This myth is also called «Seduction of the Archons».

In the *Pseudo-Clementines*, the image of the suffering Helen has disappeared completely. Here it is related that it was Simon who had brought her down from heaven. Moreover, it is made pointed that when the Greek and Barbarians fought for Helen, «they had for their eyes but an image of truth, for she, who is really the Truth, was with the Highest God» (*Hom.* II. 25).

This development apparently is genuinely Simonian, because there is no parallel in Gnosticism to the adaptation of the story of the εἶδωλον of Helen. In any event, it is evidently

not original in Simonianism and need not detain us, since we are concerned with the Samaritan and Jewish antecedents of Simonianism.

After having identified Ennoia or Sophia with the lost sheep, Irenaeus says, «Therefore he (i. e. Simon) came himself in order to redeem her first and free her from her fetters» (I. 23. 3). This marks the end of the myth about the female divinity in Simonianism.

There is also given another reason for Simon's descent: «For since the angels were governing the world badly, because each one of them desired the supremacy for himself, he came in order to amend matters» (*ibid.*). Irenaeus then relates the descent of Simon, his «anti-nomianism» (which actually would seem to be a refutation of the Israelite-Jewish prophets; see above, pp. 8 f.), and finally his promise of the dissolution of the world and the deliverance of those who believe in him and his Helen.

There is here an anthropological dualism, a teaching of a divine spark in men which has to be awakened by the Saviour. After the statement quoted at the end of the previous chapter, Irenaeus says, «(...) but to men he accorded redemption through the recognition of him». Men obviously had to be recognize Simon as «the Great Power». Cf. *Acts* 8.10, «This one is the Great Power (of God)».

Helen cannot be the *anima generalis*, because she is shut up only in individual female bodies. However, she is the *prima salvanda* and thus the prototype of all who are saved. The whorehouse is only the last station on her *via dolorosa* and could be compared to the Gnostic image of the whorehouse in the *Exegesis of the Soul* and the *Authoritative Teaching* from the Nag-Hammadi library, where the very incarnation of the Soul is compared to the work of a prostitute.

Furthermore, Simonianism does not know an ontological dualism to the effect that matter in and of itself is evil and opposed to the spiritual world. It is true that the angels not only rule the world but also have created it, but the creation itself is no anti-divine act. On the contrary, it was God's will that the world should be created. The myth reads, «This Ennoia, leaping forth from him and knowing what her Father willed, descended to the lower regions and gave birth to angels and powers by whom this world was made».

There is a theological or metaphysical dualism in Simonianism, but this is determined by the event that the angels detained the divine Wisdom and brought her down into the material world where she had to suffer. There is also an anti-cosmic dualism in so far as the angels rule this world and even misconduct their rule. Simon thus has to descend in order to save Sophia and announce the breaking up of this world. Those who believe in him will be saved.

The antecedents of Simonian dualism are present in Jewish and Samaritan tradition. We have seen that apocalypticism knew about Wisdom's futile descent and suffering on earth. That the nations of the world were ruled by their respective angels was a well-known tenet of apocalypticism which is in need of no demonstration. Simon combined these two ideas: the angels, who were ruling the world badly, had to be responsible for the misfortunes of Sophia. For this there actually was an old antecedent in the old myth of the abduction of Wisdom by a heavenly being. God thus had to descend in order to save Sophia. The divine descent, however, was the descent of God's plenipotentiary, the possessor of the Divine Name, since God himself had to be hidden from humans. In Samaritanism God's agent was the Prophet like Moses.

Now Simon asserted that Sophia had been incarnated in a real woman. It is difficult to find an antecedent for this conception. Simon may have been simply an ingenious and provocative person. However, since the objective is to find the Samaritan and Jewish background of Simonianism, I would rather like to direct your attention to the theory that Simon imitated the marriage of Hoseah, the only prophet who came from the Kingdom of Israel, the later province of Samaria. Hoseah married a prostitute in order to demonstrate God's unceasing love for his people, who had turned away from him. But what was Sophia's sin? She did «what her Father willed». The origin of Gnosticism may be ascertained in a split within God himself.