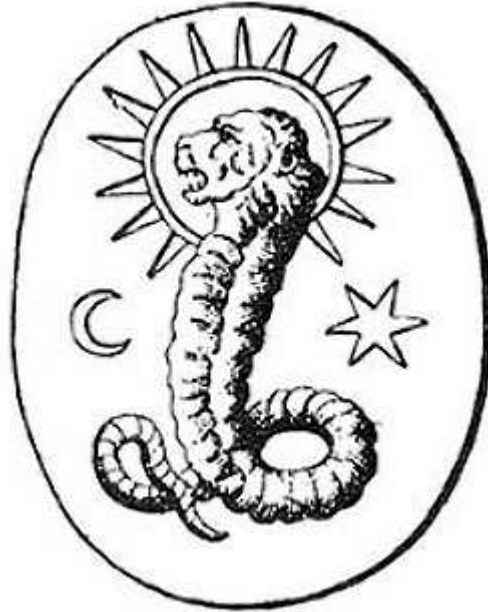


## **Gnostic Myth, or What Gnostics Believed**



**Any Gnostic scholar knows that it was only in the 17th century when a Cambridge Platonist More introduced the term "Gnosticism". This word denotes a broad religious and philosophical movement originating in the 1st century AD.**

**So, why did this teaching of Gnostics cause 2nd-century Orthodox Christians wage wild war against Gnosticism? What made them destroy all Gnostic documents and write a myriad of tomes endeavouring to refute Gnostic theories?**

Indeed, we used to know about Gnosticism only from the works of Orthodox apologists until the 19th century. And only after the discovery of Nag Hammadi library, in 1945, we got a chance to learn from the first-hand sources what Gnostics believed.

All the known attempts to expound Gnostic myth in its pure form relied on several Gnostic manuscripts, often not only extraneous but also contradictory. The researchers sometimes depended on a more developed, late mythology. They would immediately start analysing the myth, attributing its origin to Greek philosophy, Judaism, and treating Gnosticism as a parallel to Orthodox Christianity teaching. Gnostics were considered as sectarians by default.

We will outline Gnostic myth in a possibly unbiased way, using the earliest Gnostic texts to avoid further fantasies and myth-making. Only dimensional understanding of the Gnostic myth and its logic can help realise the structure of thinking of the first Gnostics and its further embellishment and syncretisation with various other cosmogonic models.

We will rely on the Apocryphon of John and the Gospel of Thomas, since these works are probably the oldest known Christian records, including the earliest versions of canonical Gospels. We will also consider the "Gospel of Mary" from the Berlin Codex 8502.

Our next starting point, of course, will be the canonical Bible and the Gospels containing the most authentic sayings.

The longer version of the Apocryphon of John is more recent than a shorter one from the Berlin Papyrus 8502 and Codex III of the Nag Hammadi library. Yet, the differences are terminological and do not affect the structure of Gnostic myth. Also, the lengthy version of the Apocryphon of John has two professional translations in Russian. Trofimova translation (in the 70-s) and Alekseev translation (around 2010) have made it possible to separate the authentic text of the document from the later interpolations and developments.

So, Gnostic cosmogony from the Apocryphon of John rests on the idea of a single, extramundane, divine beginning, called Invisible Spirit. It can only be described in negative images. It is invisible, unbreakable, unlimited, incomprehensible, immeasurable, incomparable, it can not be thought of as God, gods or anything like that. The text makes it clear that Invisible Spirit or Light is everything and the basis of everything. This is the whole world, ideal and real, and all the "building material" from which the world is made. Everything exists within this Spirit and there is nothing existing outside.

There is a certain order within Spirit, manifested by Spirit, for building the ideal world of Spirit from himself in himself. This order consists of specific qualities that form the structure of Spirit. The fundamental quality, or Power of Spirit, is Thought, the maternal womb of everything, i.e. any action or movement in the ideal world begins with Thought, which is Life and is called Mother.

As the Apocryphon of John continues, Thought creates other fundamental qualities: Providence, Indestructibility, Eternal Life and Truth. All these qualities belong to Thought and Spirit. While in the early Christianity the epithet "Love" is constantly used towards the Father, it can be concluded that all these five qualities, including Thought, comprise Love and are called Father. The structure of the qualities of Father is a structure in Spirit that serves the category of Life - Thought, bringing images arising in the depths of Thought in accordance with the structure of Spirit. Thought forms images. Indestructibility is a quality, thanks to which nothing can ever destroy these images. Providence makes it possible to know all the information. Eternal Life is something that lets indestructible images exist endlessly. And Truth makes all these images flawless. So, they belong to Spirit and his structure. All these five qualities of the category of Love are present in the category of Life, according to the Apocryphon of John. Being multiplied in two (Mother and Father - each of them possesses five), they form ten qualities that are a single unit. They are called Mother-and-Father, or Decade. Any movement of Mother gives impetus to the beginning of the synchronous movement of Father, which Father ends with the termination of the movement of Mother. The cycle of Mother-Father movement is called syzygy and is repeated endlessly. The first movement of these principles, the first cycle, reproduces the category of Knowledge, which is the instrument by which Mother and Father act. The category of Knowledge is called Son, Word and Self-born God. The full cycle of the movement of Mother-and-Father with the simultaneous reproduction of the category of Knowledge is the process of Creation. So, the category of Life gives birth to the idea and the image, while the category of Love brings this image into line with the qualities of Spirit. The category of Knowledge completes this process by the actualisation of the images brought into line with the qualities of Spirit. There is a duplication of the basic design of Life-Love-Knowledge in each cycle. Besides, Knowledge has several auxiliary qualities, the basic of which is Mind. The

ideal world created this way has eight components - five qualities of Father (Thought, Providence, Immortality, Eternal Life and Truth), Son-Word, plus Mind and Deed. This ideal world - Eightfold or Ogdoad - is called Fullness or Pleroma. Thought constantly forms images, coordinating them with the structure of Spirit. The category of Love leads the images in accordance with the structure of the Spirit, whereas the category of Knowledge actualises these images. Fullness is in constant motion, reproducing a multitude of interconnected duplicates within itself, repeating the order manifested by Spirit. In Fullness, there is an ever-increasing infinite number of duplicates of the structure of Spirit, which make up one single unit. And this structure, eternally moving in itself, represents absolute order and peace.

In Gnostic cosmogony, Life (one of the infinite duplicates of Fullness) began the cycle of Creation in accordance with the order manifested by Spirit. Together with the category of Life, Love began to move. Yet, Knowledge did not realise for some unknown reason the images of Mind, brought into line with the qualities of Spirit. Since the category of Life could not stop the perpetual motion, the result of Creation was not contained in Love and Knowledge. So, the Creation turned out to be not containing all the necessary qualities of Spirit, namely: Providence, Truth and Mind, and, as a result, was not complete. It means it did not belong to Fullness. The structure of Fullness was broken.

The imperfect creation, called First Archon, containing a full-fledged Thought and being a duplicate of the mother's womb, starts creating from the moment of its manifestation in accordance with the laid order of Spirit. Not having a complete set of qualities of Fullness, an inferior creation gives birth to images in accordance with the order established in Spirit. But it lacks the qualities that were not given to this creation. Initially inferior creations come into existence, actualising these images without referring to the structure of the Spirit. Although they are similar to the images of Fullness, they are more of a caricature because they lack a complete set of qualities of Spirit. The First Archon, being the mother womb for the created world, actualises this world without the categories of Love and Knowledge, without the qualities of Providence, Mind and Truth. This means that the world created by him does not belong to Fullness because of the absence of these categories and qualities. At the same time, in accordance with the mechanism established in First Archon, he creates in himself the likeness of the category of Love, i.e. Father, and the likeness of the category of Knowledge, i.e. Son, actualising the structure of his creation. But unlike the cycle of creation in Fullness, the cycle of Archon creates a resemblance of cycles without the obligatory components - Providence, Truth and Mind, continuing the pleromic system and creating its duplicates. They are initially imperfect creations, fully repeating both the systematics and cyclicity of Pleroma, generating new syzygies in the form of new "fathers" and "mothers". Thus, First Archon created his imperfect world filled with inferior but eternal creations. The imperfect double in the structure of Fullness disrupted the order existing in Spirit.

Fullness, restoring its structure, isolates the world of Archon within itself from itself and tries to return Force-Thought in the Archon to stop the appearance of his new creations, possessing Eternal Life. So, Archont was shown the image of the category of Love-Father-First Man. This demonstration of the image of Love pushes First Archon to create the image of First Man. And First Archon, helped by his multiple creations, makes the soul-sensual image of the category of Love and involuntarily, being ignorant, moves his Thought-Force into this image to let the created image exist. Thus, First Archon cannot create eternal images, and the created image of Love has the potential to return to Fullness, and thereby finally to

restore the disturbed order in the structure of Fullness. So, a path between Fullness and the isolated world of Archon is created from various aeons with certain functions. This is a kind of filter that allows the image of First Man to gradually pass through this chain of aeons and cleanse itself from the defected layers and to return to Fullness in a pristine state.

All these events, from the appearance of First Archon to the creation of the first sensual body of First Man by First Archon, are briefly and partly allegorically depicted in the Bible in the first chapter of Genesis, as well as in the earlier texts of the mythology of Mesopotamia. Hence the plural, supposedly archaic, in the name of the Creator of the Almighty - Elohim and the hovering Spirit of God-Thought-Mother, and a man, a man and a woman in one person.

Deprived of Force and helped by his creations, First Archon dissolves the soul-sensual image of First Man in the only form of substance available to him for creation - short-lived. He turns into matter the form of substance lacking Providence, Immortality, Eternal Life and not belonging to Fullness, and therefore not having Truth. Having placed the image of First Man in a material cast and trying to regain Force, the First Archon managed to divide Force into two parts and to place the separated part in the second material cast. However, he could not regain Force. Reflecting in each other, the two parts of Force multiplied in their reflection, thereby attracting the category of Life from Fullness. These two material images are called the first man and woman.

First Archon, having lost the hope of regaining Force and using the mechanism of reflecting the two parts of the Mind in the impressions of material people and thus attracting the Mind from Fullness, creates a mechanism of material birth. Thanks to this mechanism, the short-lived material bodies independently reproduce themselves, attracting in the process of reproduction new parts of Thought in newly conceived material shells (outer men). The material world was created with the organic life in the process of creating this mechanism, on the basis of which the casts of material people were created, where Thought from Fullness was concluded. The short-lived material shell (outer men) releases the soul-sensual image of the First Man after the end of its existence. And this image, gradually cleared of the emotional layers of the material world, returns to Fullness.

Thus, the material world, with Light dissolved in it, will exist only until material people reproduce, continuing the mechanism of attracting new parts of Thought from Fullness. Archons are interested mostly in the continuation of the life of the material world, because this is their world and they can control even those in whom there is an image of Thought. But it was necessary to create mechanisms that do not allow the images of First Man to recall their origin and leave this world, ceasing to exist, in order to control the material world. So, First Archon (the image of the mother's womb or the category of Life) and the pseudo images of the Father-category of Love and Son-category of Knowledge created by him make from themselves the distorted pseudo-images of Spirit, Father and Son, using their eternal part from Fullness. Thus, an illusion of Spirit is formed, in which the category of Life is replaced by death, the category of Love is replaced by fear and jealousy, the category of Knowledge is replaced by deceit. Endless worries, struggle for life, laws that do not allow one to divert from deceitful Spirit that is dominating the material world, to assess their essence, to learn and remember their essence and origin, are being introduced to consolidate the effect in the life of material people. The implemented laws, which are not working in all cases of material life,

without exception, lead to the fact that material people persist in fear, aggravating their fear of physical death, and not letting them realise their inner essence.

The world of Archon, surrounding the material world, also called "the places of the middle", does not let the material-sensual bodies of people (souls), freed from the material shells (outer men) after physical death, go beyond these places of the middle, where the souls also fail to know their essence, cleanse themselves from fear and return to Fullness. Thus, the world of Archon, isolated from Fullness thanks to the mechanism of procreation of material people, draws new parts of Fullness into the world, and these parts do not have a chance to return.

Certain changes also take place in the world of Archon. While the maternal womb (First Archon) loses his Force and consequently becomes equal to his own creations, his creation (the pseudo-category of Knowledge-Blindness) absorbs both the pseudo-category of Life-Death and the pseudo-category of Love-fear and jealousy. It becomes the sole ruler and owner of the world of Archons and of the material world. It is this Archon who is mentioned in the Bible as the only God named Yahweh. The echo of these processes can be heard in the folklore of different nations, where later created gods-sons absorb or destroy their gods-parents.

In order to neutralise the actions of Archons in the middle places, in order to enable the souls to be cleansed and for Light to return to Fullness, Knowledge has to come to the middle places to correct his own flaw. The path to the isolated places from the middle goes through the incarnation in the matter, i.e. Knowledge enters the material world at the birth of a material person. And the natural way to the middle places is through the death of the material body. In the material body, Knowledge gives Knowledge of Love-Father to material people. This Knowledge with the understanding and awareness of the person about the fact who he is, where he is and where he should return, is called "to be born from above".

The cruel execution of the material shell (outer man) of Knowledge is indicative of the impotence of the master of the material world over what is in any human material shell (outer man). In addition, the execution demonstrates the imperfection of the laws of the material world, and, consequently, the imperfection of the one who gave these laws and created the material world. Once in place, the middle category of knowledge insulates the ruler of the material world and his "army", thereby making it possible for all the souls who are in the middle of the field cleanse themselves, while Light can return to Pleroma.

After the death of material shells (outer men), the souls fall in the middle of the space. The further speed of their progress in Pleroma depends on their conscious desire to receive Knowledge and return to Fullness. Being in the material body, people are able to perceive and receive Knowledge either by obtaining information from people and sources that contain this Knowledge or directly from Knowledge by the so-called revelations. It happened, according to the preserved texts, with people after the death penalty of their material shells (outer men) of Knowledge. Thus, Salvation is the received Knowledge about the imperfection of the material world, the presence of the eternal component of the person and the possibility for him to come back to the real Father. It is their eschatological scheme. This Salvation-Knowledge is available to any one, but the ability to take it fully, partially, or not to take it at all helps divide people into three types. There is a spiritual man or a pneumatic. He is a conventional shell which is Light. A psychic is a natural body made by Archons with Light = a spiritual man or pneumatic. A ghilik, or a

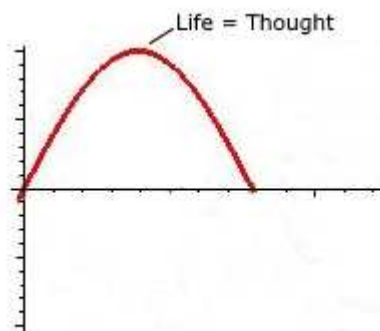
material human being, is an outer nesting doll, an outer man with a psychic and a pneumatic stuck inside. And it is up to a person: if he can distinguish one of these inside himself, then he is the one.

According to Gnostic myth, our material world is a temporary phenomenon, which shall end in a natural way - either die or become empty after people have received the knowledge and cease to multiply.

The task of a Gnostic, a man accepted this Knowledge, is to go through this life, as far as possible without any affection for this world, leaving no descendants, to go for a meeting with his real Father. Nothing is valuable or useful in this world for such a Gnostic, except for love and compassion for all living creatures, tormented in this world. There is also love between like-minded Gnostics who understand and accept the way to Knowledge.

This is a summary of Gnostic myth which helps see eschatological ideas of the Gnostics and their beliefs. Also, the content of this myth allows us to track the development of human thought which used this myth to develop other cosmological schemes. Today, we can declare that this myth was used to construct such later religious systems as Orthodox Christianity, teachings of Basilides, Valentine, Mandaeans, Manichaeans, Kabbalists, Cathars, Bogomils, and, maybe, the ancient Roman Mithraism, as well as philosophical Neoplatonism, Hermetism, etc. Today, we are able to understand what the first Gnostics believed and can measure the depth of their teachings, so unloved by most world religions. But the roots of this hate are quite understandable.

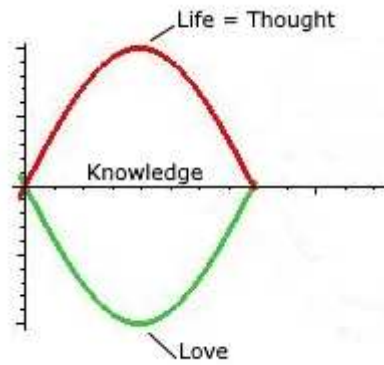
In conclusion, I wish to describe one curious thing. Trying to show graphically the process of creation in the standard coordinate axes in the form of curves like sine and minus sine, the following occurred. Conditional axis were drawn and the movement of Life = Thought = Mother was indicated:



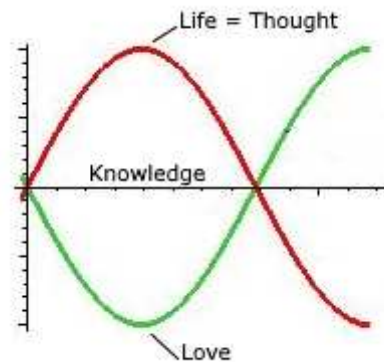
Any movement of Mother gives a boost to the top of the synchronous movement of the category Love = Father. And Father finishes it simultaneously with the end of the movement of Mother.

The first cycle reproduces the category of Knowledge, which is a tool used by Mother and Father. Knowledge is called Son, Word, and Self-born God. We show it

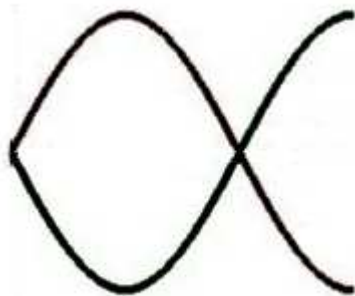
like this:



Mother-Father cycle movement is called syzygy and is being repeated endlessly. Let's draw two more lines to illustrate the continuation of the movement of Mother and Father.



Mother and Father are two parallel functions starting and ending simultaneously. Conventionally, Mother is a sinusoidal function, while Father is a minus sine curve. The two conditional points of intersection of these two curves are the beginning and the end of the cycle. The figure in the form of an eye is the syzygy or Mother-and-Father, making up the category of Knowledge or Son. This figure, similar to an eye, represents a kind of conditional cell of Fullness, which, being constantly doubled, produces itself. It is shown by the tails, as they are an extension of their endless action. So, it is a conventional image of functions on the plane. Having erased the conditional axes and names, we get what is called the oldest Christian symbol:





Amazingly, the image of the fish is present in the ancient Christian catacombs. They say the symbol itself came from Egypt, and the first Christians used this sign to get to know each other. But some people are trying to convince us that this logo was taken from the biblical story of the loaves and fishes and that character has some Eucharistic significance. They also explain it by fact that some of Christ's disciples were fishermen and even claim that the Greek word "ichthys" is an old acronym of Jesus Christ. All these explanations may be well-grounded. But we find the beauty of our approach in the fact that the whole Gnostic cosmogony can be incorporated in this symbol.

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Translated by Eugen Rodin

