

Fabrizio Amerini (Ed.)

“In principio erat Verbum”

Philosophy and Theology
in the Commentaries on
the Gospel of John (II-XIV Centuries)

Archa Verbi
Subsidia, Vol. 11

Archa Verbi
Yearbook for the Study of
Medieval Theology

Subsidia

11

Fabrizio Amerini (Ed.)

“In principio erat Verbum”

Philosophy and Theology in the Commentaries on
the Gospel of John (II–XIV Centuries)

 **Aschendorff**
Verlag

Archa Verbi
Annuario Societatis Internationalis pro Studiis
Theologiae Medii Aevi promovendis

Annuaire de la Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Théologie Médiévale
Annuario della Società Internazionale per lo Studio della Teologia Medievale
Anuario de la Sociedad Internacional para los Estudios de la Teología Medieval
Jahrbuch der Internationalen Gesellschaft für Theologische Mediävistik
Yearbook of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theology

Subsidia

iussu Societatis edenda curaverunt

Rainer Berndt S. J.
Hanns Peter Neuheuser
Hideki Nakamura S. J.

Jan Klok
Britta Müller-Schauenburg
directorium Societatis

Volker Leppin
praeses Societatis

This volume is published with the financial support of
Dipartimento di Antichistica, Lingue, Educazione, Filosofia A.L.E.F., University of Parma

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Bibliothek:
Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;
detailliert bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar.

© 2014 Aschendorff Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Münster

Das Werk ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Die dadurch begründeten Rechte, insbesondere die der Übersetzung, des Nachdrucks, der Entnahme von Abbildungen, der Funksendung, der Wiedergabe auf fotomechanischem oder ähnlichem Wege und der Speicherung in Datenverarbeitungsanlagen bleiben, auch bei nur auszugsweiser Verwertung, vorbehalten. Die Vergütungsansprüche des § 54 Abs. 2 UrhG werden durch die Verwertungsgesellschaft Wort wahrgenommen.

Gesamtherstellung: Druckzentrum Aschendorff, Münster, 2014

Gedruckt auf säurefreiem, alterungsbeständigem Papier ☺

ISSN 1865-2964

ISBN 978-3-402-10226-8

Inhalt

FABRIZIO AMERINI	
Preface	VII
DOMENICO DEVOTI	
The First Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John: The Notes of the Gnostic Heracleon	1
DOMENICO PAZZINI	
Theology and Episteme in Origen's Commentary on the <i>Gospel of John</i>	23
GIOVANNI SALMERI	
Qu'est-ce que l'interprétation littérale? Quelques réflexions sur le <i>Commentaire à l'Évangile selon Jean</i> de Théodore de Mopsueste	33
FRANCO DE CAPITANI	
La figura di Giovanni nel pensiero dell'Agostino laico	47
ARMANDO BISOGNO	
Dal <i>Verbum</i> ai <i>verba</i> : la teofania della Parola in Agostino e Giovanni Scoto	71
ALEXANDER ANDRÉE	
Trinitarian Theology in Commentaries on the Fourth Gospel from the School of Laon	93
MARK J. CLARK	
The <i>Fortuna</i> of the Prologue to the <i>Gospel of John</i> in Four Important, Twelfth-Century Texts: the <i>Glossed John</i> , Peter Comestor's Lectures on the <i>Glossed John</i> , Comestor's <i>Historia scholastica</i> , and Langton's Course on the <i>History</i>	111
ABIGAIL ANN YOUNG	
Rupert of Deutz, John, and Moses: The Figure of Moses in the Fourth Gospel through a Twelfth-Century Lens	129
MARTA CRISTIANI	
Ildegarda di Bingen e l'ermeneutica del <i>Prologo</i>	143

JULIE CASTEIGT Quelques propositions synthétiques pour une lecture des interprétations albertienne et eckhartienne de <i>Jn.</i> 1,6–8.	159
GRAZIANO PERILLO La nozione di <i>Verbum</i> nell'esegesi a <i>In principio erat Verbum</i> nella <i>Lectura super Iohannem</i> di Tommaso d'Aquino. Aspetti teoretici e interpretativi.	177
TIMOTHY BELLAMAH O.P. Authorship and Authorial Intention in William of Altona's <i>Postilla Super Iohannem</i>	199
CHRISTIAN RODE Peter of John Olivi's Theory of the <i>Verbum</i> in Comparison with William of Ockham's <i>Intellectio</i> -Theory	215
WILLIAM O. DUBA The Man in the Middle: Peter Auriol's Syllogistic Commentaries on the <i>Gospel of John</i>	229
ALESSANDRO PALAZZO Philosophical meanings of <i>lux</i> (<i>Jo.</i> 1,4–5, 1,9) in Eckhart's <i>Commentary on the Gospel of John</i>	247
Index of Names	271

Preface

The fourth Gospel is one of the philosophically denser texts in the Bible and has served as the object of investigation by scholars belonging to different fields, from different perspectives and at different levels, although it goes without saying that greater attention has been paid by scholars interested in early Christian thought and biblical exegesis. It would be impossible to list here all the studies, projects and research concerning this book of the Bible; let it suffice to cite here a pair of recent international colloquia, to give just an idea of the enduring and vibrant interest in the *Gospel of John*. The first was organized by Julie Casteigt on 13–14 January 2011 at the Maison de la recherche de l'Université Toulouse II-Le Mirail, with the title *Le témoin dans la tradition johannique*, while the second, with the title *The Gospel of John in Ancient and Medieval Commentaries*, assumed the form of a series of meetings organized jointly by Markus Bockmuehl and David Lincicum at Keble College of Oxford during the academic year 2011–2012. Traditionally, colloquia devoted to the *Gospel of John* have privileged a theological and/or religious perspective, hardly surprising given that the *Gospel of John* is usually considered as the most spiritual and symbolic of the four Gospels.

While organizing a Conference at Parma on this tradition, I was working on the Commentary of Thomas Aquinas on the Prologue to the Gospel. Aquinas's commentary is full of philosophical suggestions and annotations, concerning both the text and the theological content of the Prologue and of the Gospel in general. This is one of the reasons why I decided to title the Conference *In principio erat Verbum... Philosophy and Theology in the Commentaries on the Gospel of John (II–XIV centuries)*. With such title, my original intention was to put the accent on the philosophical besides theological profundity of the fourth Gospel, and it was with this intent that I invited speakers to look at the philosophical themes that can be found in the Commentaries on this Gospel authored by the most significant representatives of this tradition and to consider them, as far as possible, from a philosophical point of view. After all, Ancient and Medieval commentators had already noted the philosophical import of the Gospel. By commenting on the Gospel, they not only reflected on typical religious Christian issues, such as the spirituality of the figure of John, the fundamental role played by charity or love for the Christian's life, the moral evaluation of the teaching of Christ, the discrepancies between this Gospel and the other synoptic Gospels and the like, but they also approached theological and exegetical themes such as the nature of God and Christ, the connection between the word 'Logos' and the second Person of the Trinity, the Son, the exact meaning and function of the Word in God, the significance of the theme of 'light', or

even the most correct way of reading the Holy Scripture (whether literally or spiritually and symbolically).

The short but dense Prologue in particular provides the place where the Christian religious and philosophical traditions meet. The hymn to the Word in the Prologue gives interpreters the occasion to address a set of philosophical problems, such as the meaning of the word 'Word', the reasons why it is better to translate in this context the Greek word 'Logos' with the Latin word 'Verbum' rather than with the more usual words 'Essence' or 'Ratio', the intellectual mechanisms of generation of the Divine Word and, by contrast or by analogy, the mechanisms of formation of the inner word or concept in the human intellect, and so on.

The present volume gathers together fifteen substantial and original articles devoted to the Ancient and Medieval tradition of the Commentaries on the *Gospel of John*. The majority of these contributions were delivered at the Conference I organized at the University of Parma, Italy, on 15–16 December 2011, but this volume is not, strictly speaking, a volume of proceedings. Papers have been substantially developed and expanded, and other scholars (Alexander André, Mark J. Clark, Abigail Ann Young) later joined the project. The spirit of the Conference has been however preserved.

The contributions to this volume cover a vast period, from 2nd to 14th century, and they are divided ideally into two parts. The first part is devoted to the Ancient and Late Ancient commentaries and contains fundamentally four contributions. The volume opens with DOMENICO DEVOTI's contribution *The First Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John: The Notes of the Gnostic Heracleon*. Devoti proposes to present and discuss the significance of what is likely the first extant commentary on the fourth Gospel, that of Heracleon, a disciple of the famous Gnostic philosopher Valentinus and who, with Ptolomaeus, represents the branch of the Valentianism defined as 'Italian' by the Pseudo-Hippolytus. Our knowledge of this source comes from the 48 fragments of his Commentaries that have been handed down and criticized by Origen.

The second contribution of this first part is correlated to the first one. In his article *Theology and Episteme in Origen's Commentary on the Gospel of John*, DOMENICO PAZZINI continues his investigation on Origen's Commentary, already developed in many publications, by dealing with the specific issue of the meaning of the Greek word 'Logos' and hence addresses the border between theological investigation and rational knowledge of God and Christ in Origen. In particular, Pazzini illustrates the network of terms related to the Greek words 'theologia' and 'episteme' and their interplay in Origen's interpretation of the fourth Gospel. As Pazzini argues, the notion of episteme, which plays an explanatory role both as to the topic of the economy of salvation and as to that of the Trinity, is the mark of Origen's interpretation. 'Episteme' sums up the coexistence of rational discourse and discourse by revelation.

The third contribution of this part is GIOVANNI SALMERI's article *Qu'est-ce que l'interprétation littérale? Quelques réflexions sur le Commentaire à l'Évangile selon Jean de Théodore de Mopsueste*. Salmeri focuses on a particularly popular subject

among the first commentators of the *Gospel of John*, namely the literal vs. allegoric or symbolic interpretation of the Bible. This problem becomes more acute in the case of the fourth Gospel, because of its symbolic speech and theological figures. In his paper, Salmeri reconstructs the position taken on this issue by Theodore of Mopsueste (ca. 350–428), one of the most representative members of the so-called exegetical school of Antioch and one of the fathers of the Christological heresy of Nestorianism.

The first part concludes with FRANCO DE CAPITANI's contribution *La figura di Giovanni nel pensiero dell'Agostino laico*. Augustine wrote an important and influential commentary on the *Gospel of John*, which scholars have extensively studied. Well aware of this work, de Capitani prefers to follow another, unusual and untrodden path, reconstructing the *Gospel of John's* contribution to the philosophical and moral formation of the young Augustine. In particular, de Capitani looks through Augustine's writings preceding 391, the year of Augustine's conversion, to bring to light the influence that especially the Prologue to the Gospel had on the conversion of Augustine, on the constitution of his exegetical methodology and, more generally, on his theological thought.

The second part is more extensive, containing eleven contributions, which introduce commentators belonging to the High (V–XI centuries) and Late Middle Ages (XII–XIV centuries). It begins with ARMANDO BISOGNO's article *Dal Verbum ai verba: la teofania della Parola in Agostino e Giovanni Scoto*, which is devoted to compare Augustine's and John Scotus Eriugena's precisions on the meaning of the word 'Logos'. In his article, Bisogno illustrates Augustine's and Scotus's vocabulary, explores their views of the semantic similarities and dissimilarities between God's act of emitting the Word and our language, between the divine *Verbum* and the human *verba*, and finally reconstructs at great length Augustine's and Scotus's teaching on the human possibility of speaking about God and on the ways in which God manifests Himself to us.

ALEXANDER ANDRÉE's article *Trinitarian Theology in Commentaries on the Fourth Gospel from the School of Laon* and MARK J. CLARK's *The Fortuna of the Prologue to the Gospel of John in Four Important, Twelfth-Century Texts: the Glossed John, Peter Comestor's Lectures on the Glossed John, Comestor's Historia scholastica, and Langton's Course on the History*, issue from a common field of research and offer us a detailed picture of the richness of twelfth-century biblical exegesis and Trinitarian theology. In the twelfth century, the theological center of reference is Laon, in France, the place where an important school of theology grew under master Anselm and where the practice of glossing the Bible began. One of the most important theologians of this period was Stephen Langton (1150–1228), Archbishop of Canterbury and *magister* at the University of Paris, who was greatly influenced by the school of Laon. Alexander Andrée reconstructs the first phase of this story, illustrating some aspects of the two channels through which the exegetical and theological activity pursued at Laon reached us: collections of theological sentences and biblical glosses. Andrée clarifies the typology and the relationship between the different forms of commentaries on the *Gospel of John*, comparing their interpretations of Trinitarian theology

occasioned by the Prologue and other selected passages of the Gospel. Mark J. Clark continues this line of investigation, revisiting his own paper about Peter Comestor's paraphrase of the opening lines of *Genesis* and of the *Gospel of John* (associated with each other by the common reference to *in principio*) and the commentaries on that paraphrase by Stephen Langton, Pseudo-Langton, and Hugh of St. Cher. Clark calls attention to the importance of Comestor's lectures on the *Glossed Gospel* not only to understand Comestor's masterpiece, *Historia scholastica*, but also the continued evolution of that text at the hands of Stephen Langton.

In her paper *Rupert of Deutz, John, and Moses: The Figure of Moses in the Fourth Gospel through a Twelfth-Century Lens*, ABIGAIL ANN YOUNG focuses on another XII-century commentator on the *Gospel of John*, the influential Benedictine theologian Rupert of Deutz, but she approaches the topic from a different angle. In the fourth Gospel the reference to the Jews is quite frequent, so Young decides to discuss the relationship between the exegesis of the Gospel and Christian anti-Judaism. In particular, she proposes to examine Rupert's use of the figure of Moses and the Torah, and of certain passages from the books of *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*, to see what, if any, recognition there may be in Rupert's work of the Jewish character of the *Gospel of John*.

MARTA CRISTIANI's article, *Hildegarda di Bingen e l'ermeneutica del Prologo*, is the last contribution devoted to the XII century. Hildegard left us an exposition of the Gospels and many other works, but Marta Cristiani opts for reconstructing Hildegard's untraditional interpretation of the Prologue on the basis of three theological and prophetic works (*Scivias*, *Liber meritorum*, and *Liber divinorum operum*). The article dwells on key aspects of Hildegard's interpretation, like the prophetic value of the figure of John and the theological significance of the body understood as the manifestation of the Incarnation of the 'Logos'. As Cristiani concludes, Hildegard's interpretation of the Prologue is one of the most important hermeneutics of corporality elaborated during the Middle Ages.

Four contributions deal with commentators of the XIII century. In her article *Quelques propositions synthétiques pour une lecture des interprétations albertienne et eckhartienne de Jn. 1,6–8*, JULIE CASTEIGT makes a comparison between the interpretations of the Prologue given by Albert the Great and Meister Eckhart. In particular, she illustrates the differences between them by examining the way in which they read John's reference to John the Baptist as the announcer and testimony of the 'light' of Christ. Casteigt reconstructs and generalizes the answers they give to such questions as the need for John the Baptist's testimony, the subject and the beneficiary of it, the conditions for the testimony to be received by men, and its content and theological value. The notion of testimony becomes for those authors a special category to account for our knowledge of God.

GRAZIANO PERILLO dedicates his article, *La nozione di Verbum nell'esegesi a In principio erat Verbum nella Lectura super Iohannem di Tommaso d'Aquino. Aspetti teoretici e interpretativi*, to discussing Thomas Aquinas's position, as expressed in his *Lectura super Iohannem*, dating to the end of his career, about the nature of the *verbum*, both in God and in human beings. The purpose of the article is

to determine whether, from the *Summa theologiae* onward, Aquinas completely abandoned the thesis that the *verbum* may be predicated *essentialiter* of God. In order to reach this goal, Perillo reconsiders Aquinas's doctrine of the *verbum mentis* and its evolution from the Commentary on the *Sentences* (1254–1256), the first major work written by Aquinas, up to the Commentary on the *Gospel of John* (1270–1272).

In his contribution *Authorship and Authorial Intention in William of Alton's Postilla super Iohannem*, TIMOTHY BELLAMAH O.P. returns to the theme introduced in Giovanni Salmeri's contribution, namely the problem of the literal exposition of the Bible. In particular, Bellamah shows that William of Alton made use of contemporary developments in Western philosophy to understand and explain the literal sense of the *Gospel of John* as resulting from the twofold intention of its divine and human authors. His conclusion is that William's characteristic analysis of the diverse causes of the *Gospel of John* allows him to unfold its literal sense without casting doubt on the unity of the truth it reveals and, at the same time, his understanding of causality equips him to seek the divine author's meaning in that of the Gospel's human author, John the Evangelist.

The last contribution reserved to XIII century is CHRISTIAN RODE's contribution *Peter of John Olivi's Theory of the Verbum in Comparison with William of Ockham's Intellectio-Theory*. This article presents a particularly significant late XIII-century case of philosophical use of the Prologue to the Gospel. The Franciscan Peter of John Olivi takes the occasion of the Prologue to compose a 'treatise on the word' (*Tractatus de verbo*), a treatise in which Olivi elaborates his own theory of concepts and discusses crucial philosophical questions concerning human knowledge such as the ontological status of universal concepts or the reducibility of concepts to the acts of understanding that caused them. Specifically, Rode dwells on the parallels and differences between Olivi's theory and the so-called 'second' theory of concepts developed by William of Ockham.

The last two contributions of the volume focus on two important authors of the XIV century: the Franciscan Peter Auriol and the Dominican Eckhart of Hochheim, commonly known as Meister Eckhart. In his article *The Man in the Middle: Peter Auriol's Syllogistic Commentaries on the Gospel of John*, WILLIAM DUBA confronts two commentaries on the *Gospel of John* attributed to Peter Auriol; one, as part of Auriol's widely influential *Literal Compendium* on the entire Bible, and the other, a self-standing commentary on the *Gospel of John* discovered by Friedrich Stegmüller in 1948 and found to exist in one manuscript. Both commentaries view the *Gospel of John* as having a syllogistic structure, with an ultimate conclusion "Jesus is the Son of God", but otherwise they have massive differences. On the basis of these differences, Duba argues that either Stegmüller's claim that Auriol's logicization of exegesis is more than a rhetorical art-form is false, or that Auriol is not the author of the separate commentary on the *Gospel of John*.

The last contribution of the volume is ALESSANDRO PALAZZO's *Philosophical Meanings of lux (Jo. 1,4–5, 1,9) in Eckhart's Commentary on the Gospel of John*. In the works of Meister Eckhart several terms, belonging to the semantic field of

light, appear. The theme of light plays a central role in Eckhart's thought, in explaining its symbolism and mystical vein. In order to clarify this idea, Palazzo concentrates on a few passages taken from Eckhart's Commentary on the *Gospel of John*. His conclusion is that Eckhart regards the *Gospel of John* as a summa of concealed speculative truths. The verses on light prove this. Starting from the exegesis of these verses, Eckhart develops such distinguishing speculative motifs of his thought as the *ratio-quietitas* doctrine, the hierarchical view of the reality connected with the analogy of reception, the principle of essential causality, and the Creator-creature relation.

The First Commentary on the Gospel according on St. John: The Notes of the Gnostic Heracleon

DOMENICO DEVOTI

The first commentary of a certain width, and with relatively systematic characteristics, on the Gospel of St. John was written at the dawning of Christian history not within what was going to evolve as orthodoxy or proto-orthodoxy but in a sphere, if not in contrast, at least alternative to or that tended to distance itself from orthodoxy.

Such comment issues, as a matter of fact, from the Gnostic world, specifically from the Valentinian one, which is, perhaps, the best represented tendency both by indirect sources, that is Patristic and heresiological ones, and by the direct ones, starting from the codices discovered between the 1800's and the 1900's, and especially from the extraordinary discovery of a whole "Gnostic" library at Nag Hammadi, in Upper Egypt, in 1945.¹ Its author is Heracleon, a disciple of Valentinus and a representative, with Ptolomaeus, of that branch of Valentinianism defined as "Italian" by the Pseudo-Hippolytus.²

The 48 fragments of his Commentary to the 4th Gospel, handed down and refuted by Origen in his *Commentarium in Johannem*, for their nature of quotations, literal most of the times, have been studied preferably by many modern scholars, especially before the recent findings quoted above or, subsequently, in constant comparison with the newly found Gnostic codices. Their importance, actually, appeared unquestionably superior to that of the great heresiological

¹ As concerns the texts of Nag Hammadi, it is not acceptable to define their totality as "Gnostic library", given the presence among them of texts not ascribable to Gnosticism. They are, if anything, a collection of various works put together and made up into codices by a group of intellectuals or spirituals or, for some scholars, even by a monastic community of the Pacomian type founded in that region at the beginning of the 4th century. The question of the relationship between Gnosticism and Monasticism is still undecided.

² See ps.-Hippolytus *Elenchos* VI, 35, 5–6. The biographical data on the Gnostic master are few: Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* II, 4, 1) barely mentions him next to Ptolomaeus; Clemens Alexandrinus (*Strom.* IV, 9, 71, 1) calls him "the most eminent of the school of Valentinus"; Tertullian just mentions him (*Adv. Val.* IV, 2); Origen calls him "γνώριμον of Valentinus" (*In Jo.* II, 14, 100) and writes also about his disciples (*In Jo.* XX, 20, 170), consequently, he must have had a school. His literary and didactic activity must, then, have taken place between 170 and 200, while his relations with Valentinus would date back to about the middle of the 2nd century, that is to the period of his stay in Rome. Afterwards he must have moved to Alexandria, and have taught and written his works there, among which the Commentary or Notes ('Υζομνήματα) to the Gospel of St. John.

news which, in spite of being systematic, and of having continuity and logical coherence, could very easily, in the name of such coherence and of the aims of the heresiologists, distort the true thought of those authors whose doctrine they meant to relate. Such great news, however, continued to be the reference and to originate a constant confrontation, even if the analysis of the fragments led to opposing evaluations.

To quote the two extreme positions, if for Antonio Orbe, in a way, or even more for Justo Collantes, Heracleon was a dangerous heretic, to the point that the latter scholar goes as far as saying that Heracleon is “an example of that subtle mastery through which he injects his poison and baffles even Origen”,³ for Janssens, instead, his doctrine appears definitely orthodox. She even claims, though stressing the radical dualism of his system, that “one is struck by the intelligence and by the keenness of his remarks, and it is surprising to notice, more than once, that modern exegesis repeats certain interpretations of Heracleon that Origen, less happily believed they had to be refuted.”⁴ An interesting medial position that can (still) be shared is that of Manlio Simonetti, who, starting from an analytical viewpoint, definitely more concerned with details and based on specific themes, comes to the conclusion that “Ptolomaeus’ Gnosis represents the most advanced attempt at Christianization that Gnosis has undergone [...] the Christian contribution turns out to be remarkable, under certain, decisive, aspects; Ptolomaeus and Heracleon have a profound knowledge of at least some works of the New Testament; they are, basically, exegetes, the first masters of Christian exegesis.”⁵

With the extraordinary discovery of Nag Hammadi, the indirect evidence, that is the quotations from the Fathers and from the heresiologists, has been superseded and the scholars have devoted themselves especially to these new texts, considered very old and first hand writings and therefore more significant and reliable for a reconstruction of the more authentic Gnostic thought. Except that, with the progress of studies and a more subtle analysis, such texts have been found to belong to a much later date (they are, at present, dated between the 4th and the 5th century, and even later) and their nature to be extremely complex and varied, having behind them a long history marked by numerous revisions and rewritings of what are supposed to be the Greek originals.

A debate on the very notion of Gnosticism and its peculiar characteristics has been recently started with, as a consequence, a radical questioning of the concept itself and the reality of the phenomenon defined by it. Definitions of the phenomenological-existential type, meant to give a unitary and global image of the Gnosis and/or Gnosticism (like those of Hans Jonas and Kurt Rudolph) now tend to be left in the background or even dropped and replaced with much more fluid and varied visions in which the different currents

³ See COLLANTES 1953, pp. 13–14.

⁴ See JANSSENS 1959, p. 102.

⁵ See SIMONETTI 1966, pp. 41–42.

and traditional Gnostic schools assume, more and more, the aspect of differentiated forms of Christianity or of different interpretations that the various Christian communities of the origins gave to some nuclear components of the evangelical message.⁶ Thus the Gnostic universe takes on different facets, its outline breaks up and the boundaries between the rising orthodoxy and what will come to be defined as heterodoxy or heresy are less and less marked.

I must say, then, that if this “postmodern” tendency to bring up for discussion all the “isms”, the “umbrella terms” and, in general, the traditional categories, surely results from a more careful evaluation of the complexity of the historical phenomena under examination, from a more precise contextualization, and especially from the historicization of the construction itself of the categories and of the interpretative models, and also from the underlying ideological “a priori”, however it runs the risk of questioning everything and of breaking up those certainties that are absolutely necessary parameters, at least in the initial stage of any research; it could even thwart the objects under investigation. In fact, they maintain, as schemes of interpretation and of organization of the complex variety of historical data, an unquestionable operational usefulness and are conceptual references of an immediate evidence that can define fields and spheres and represent a solid base from which to start and, then, to study in depth and introduce all the due distinctions.

Such preliminary remarks have seemed appropriate because this sort of historiographical “revision” has extended almost to everything, including both the traditional attestations concerning the great doctrinal systems dating back to the leading figures of Gnosticism of the 2nd century, among whom Basil, Marcion, Valentinus and, of course, our Heracleon, and to the new documents.

Till almost the 80’s of the last century, the prevailing opinion among the scholars, concerning the Valentinian system, was that the basic reference text, that best represented it, was the Irenaeus’ Great Report,⁷ even with the reversal and redirection of a later phase in favor of the fragments and direct quotations to which I referred previously. As to the macroscopic differences between these and the great reports they were explained having recourse to the specific destination and deliberateness of the various writings, making chiefly the distinction between texts of an esoteric character, that is belonging to the Gnostic conventicles and intended for the initiates, and exoteric writings, that is of propaganda, therefore addressed externally and aiming at a sectarian proselyt-

⁶ See WILLIAMS 1996, in part. pp. 51 ff. (where he coins the substitute expression “biblical demiurgical traditions”), and KING 2003. See also the discussion and the sensible theory by EHRMAN 2006 (it. transl., 2006, pp. 88 ff.) and DECONICK 2009, pp. 26 ff.

⁷ Generally seen by the scholars as systematization by Valentinus’ disciple Ptolomaeus (IRENAEUS *Adv. Haer.* I, 1–8), a representative of the Italian branch of Valentinianism according to the typology of the two branches, Oriental and Italian, reported by the *Elenchos* (6, 35) by the pseudo-Hippolytus. Valentinus’ specific formulation was presented synthetically by Irenaeus himself a little further on (*Adv. Haer.* I, 11,1). See the recently book by THOMASSEN 2006 and, for Heracleon, THOMASSEN 2010, pp. 173–210.

ism. Those addressed internally had to be more for initiates and, consequently, rely on subjects of a mystery type, with a strong mythological tone whereas the others had to adopt more covered and more easily acceptable forms, arguments and themes. Thus, the absence of myth in Heracleon's fragments, in particular of the theogonic events and of Sophia's intra and extrapleromatic ones, and the whole viewpoint of his commentary, found an adequate explanation in this way⁸ and could be included in the Valentinian universe and be connected to the general model represented by Ptolomaeus' system.

Afterwards, though, things have changed and the great systematizations reported by the heresiologists have been subject to radical criticism and considered, in line with the tendency to post-dating, constructions with a strong, mythic color by successive disciples or followers, and then assigned a role of secondary importance or depreciated as witnesses of the authentic and more original thought of the first masters.

From this viewpoint two works have marked a radical change: for Valentinus, that of Christoph Marksches⁹ and for Heracleon, that of Ansgar Wucherpfennig.¹⁰ Two markedly new readings, both in the planning and in the basic interpretation, precisely in line with the revisionism referred to above. Both scholars, that is, aim at disconnecting the two Gnostic masters from the heresiological constructions and systematizations, and try to set them in the more general socio-cultural and intellectual context of the period, assuming as essential references the philosophy – in this case the middle platonic one – and the rhetorical-literary culture of the school, besides, of course, the New Testament writings profoundly and originally reconsidered by these leaders of the movement.¹¹

Valentinus' and Heracleon's would then be a sort of pre-Gnosis or of a stage in which are set the premises of what will become, especially by means of their disciples, the real Gnosis. The title itself of their works questions their quality of Gnostic masters, one referring to it in an interrogative form and the other, indeed, replacing it with that of "philologist" – obviously in the old meaning of the word, that is of literary critic heedful of the doctrinal-philosophical and rhetorical-grammatical aspects of the texts.

The two studies are, really, the final outcome, however provisional and questionable, of an argument that has a long history and has seen the progressive questioning of well-established and generally accepted interpretations, the result of mighty historical-philosophical and doctrinal studies by great specialists of Gnosis and history of Christianity like Foerster, Sagnard, Orbe, etc. In

⁸ This applies to other writings like *Lettera a Flora* by Ptolomaeus himself, reported in EPHIPHANIUS' *Panarion*, or the *Gospel of Truth* found at Nag Hammadi, etc.

⁹ See MARKSCHIES 1992. See also MARKSCHIES 2000, pp. 249 ff., in which the Ptolemaic paternity of the interpretation of John's prologue is denied (IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* I, 8, 5–6) whereas the heresiologist ascribes it to Ptolomaeus quoting it literally.

¹⁰ See WUCHERPENNIG 2002.

¹¹ See also what Manlio Simonetti says in a detailed note concerning Wucherpfennig's book in SIMONETTI 2003, pp. 196 ff.

this history – that has seen also the present writer as an actor and an author (not of the last) – the intention has been that of favouring, as already said, and of re-reading and contextualizing with greater attention the most direct attestations, that is the fragments found within the quotations of the heresiologists, as the most original ones of the ancient thinkers, freeing them, as far as possible, from preconceived theological-doctrinal understandings and schemes of interpretation superimposed for the sake of dispute or of harmonization and reduction to unity of the variety of the currents, ramifications and forms of Gnosis.

This keeping distance from the Great Reports has led to emphasizing and considering especially the hugest differences and absences, interpreting them as original specificities of the authors rather than reductions, alterations or disguises with a tactical-propagandistic aim. It is in this sense that the studies based on this viewpoint have ended up favouring, and therefore revising, themes which had their unity and coherence within the fragments but were in conflict with the well-known and well established systematizations. Among these – as appropriately pointed out by Manlio Simonetti –¹² the one that has particularly impressed the scholars, and brought new life to the scientific debate, has been the strictly anthropological issue of the three classes of men (pneumatics, psychics, hylics) that, far from appearing as a rigid and pre-determinately fixed tripartition in the fragments, would appear as a modifiable condition, as the outcome of a free choice by man.¹³ Another theme is that of the relationship between the two Testaments, with the abandoning of Marcion's marked opposition and the retrieval of the Old Testament and of the Demiurge as a material executor of the Logos.

From this viewpoint, Heracleon's fragments were an excellent test both for the importance and the intellectual honesty of the old author who quoted them and with them had a systematic exchange – I mean Origen who, first, devoted a great comment to the 4th Gospel within the ecclesiastical and patristic world – and because they appeared with the character of uniqueness within the various panorama of the Gnostic writings, in particular the Valentinian ones. They actually are, all in all, the first and perhaps only systematic comment of a New Testament writing by a Gnostic writer. And even this statement is to be taken with all possible caution, in particular for the fragmentary character of the excerpts quoted by Origen literally, often alternated with recapitulatory passages or paraphrases of Heracleon's thought, and for the incompleteness and discontinuity of the expounded passages.

¹² See SIMONETTI 1992 (now in SIMONETTI 1994).

¹³ The works by Janssens, Langerbeck, Schottroff, Mühlenberg, Aland and the present writer follow this trend. See Simonetti's discussion quoted at note 10 for the details of his criticism of all these works including mine. It is very careful criticism and for some aspects aligns itself to the traditional interpretation. It would deserve a systematic analysis and a detailed answer to several, often relevant, remarks though it is not possible, here, to study the question in depth but only in general, as we shall see further on.

Origen's Commentary reached us in a fragmentary and largely incomplete condition: two thirds of the original works¹⁴ are missing and we do not know if the conclusion was in the last of the books attested by tradition, that is, the 32nd ending with the interpretation of *Jo.* 13,33.¹⁵ Since its original conception, first draft and actual writing, the work met with difficulties of various kinds: it was begun at Alexandria about 230, where, probably, the first five books were composed, taken up again at Caesarea (232) and ended after 238.

As to Heracleon's Commentary, it has been supposed¹⁶ that it was sent to Origen by his patron and friend Ambrose, perhaps the very purchaser of the Alexandrian's Commentary. It is difficult to say, given the fragmentariness of the text that reached us, how profound was the Gnostic's exegesis and if it was continuous or limited to a few extracts. This fact persuades us to be particularly cautious in the formulation of any type of hypothesis, of extrapolation, of integration, of apparent gaps or silences, of conjectural restoration of hypothetical interpretations, and of partial or global evaluation to the light of similar texts or paraphrases or critical readings of the works of Origen.¹⁷ We only have a little part of his text and, what is more, spread over different sections of John's Gospel.

Which was then, we may wonder, the original nature of the Commentary? Was it somewhat similar to Origen's *Commentary*, based on the classic philosophical Greek commentary with its fundamental partitions or, rather, a short and concise commentary on single passages or parts of the Gospel or, more simply, a collection of remarks or *Notes* with the function of a memorandum for teaching or the systematic elaboration in successive more wide-ranging and structured works?¹⁸

It is certainly very little what Origen's *Commentary* has passed on to us and, altogether, made up by a remarkable series of blocks systematically analysed and commented by the Valentinian master. These blocks seem to be centred around themes which, if not homogeneous, appear to be part of a unitary project with coherence, a systematic nature and, perhaps, even a precise deliberateness. I would not fall, here, into generalizations as I have just reaffirmed

¹⁴ We only have eight books left (I, II, IV, X, XIII, XX, XXVIII, XXXII) to which we must add a part of book XIX, fragments of books II, IV and V quoted in *Philocalia* and numerous fragments that reached us in a catenary way.

¹⁵ On this point several doubts may be raised. On the subject see SIMONETTI 2005.

¹⁶ See WUCHERPFENNIG 2002, p. 2 and n. 62.

¹⁷ Origen remarks, sometimes, that Heracleon omits to comment some passages (*In Jo.* XIII, 225; XIX, 89), sometimes accuses him of forcing the text with alterations, additions, omissions (II, 137 and 100; XIII, 71, etc.), at other times criticizes him for not quoting scriptural or rational evidence to his interpretations or statements (II, 100 and 103; VI, 306; X, 118; XIII, 65–66). See CORSINI 1968, p. 84, n. 360.

¹⁸ On the subject, see POFFET 1985, p. 3 and n. 5. Poffet recalls also the wide range of meanings of the word ὑπομνήματα used by Origen (*In Jo.* VI, 92) to indicate Heracleon's work: short notes, philosophical treatise, single volume of a work in more volumes, commentary.

that one must avoid them, but limit myself to pointing out the different blocks and the common elements that link them to one another.

First of all, let us see which they are and on what they are centred:

- the first (fragments 1–3) analyses parts of John’s prologue (*Jo.* 1,3; 1,4; 1,18) and distinguishes clearly the two worlds outlined by the Valentinian system – though with significant differences – that is the divine world and our own material one;
- the second (fragments 4–10) is about the figure of John the Baptist (*Jo.* 1,21, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29) and is mostly concerned with the complex and controversial theme of the relationship between the economy of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament;
- the third (fragments 11–16) deals with John’s extracts about the purification of the Temple of Jerusalem from the merchants (*Jo.* 2,12–20), after interesting remarks on Jesus’ wanderings between Capharnaum and Jerusalem;
- the fourth, that significantly makes up the most important group of fragments (fragments 17–39), refers to the episode of the meeting between Jesus and the woman of Samaria and to the subsequent preaching in Samaria (*Jo.* 4,12–42): it represents, in a way, the central theme of Heracleon’s meditations since it is centred on the existential condition of the Gnostic who lives in this world and on the redeeming function of the Gnosis he is given by the Saviour;
- the fifth consists only of fragment 40 and refers to the healing of the son of the royal officer residing in Capharnaum, an episode interpreted by the Gnostic master as an example of the conversion and salvation of the Psychics with their chief, the Demiurge;
- last, we have a group of eight fragments (41–48) which, starting from the dialogue characterized by harsh tones and dramatic moments between Jesus and the Judeans in the Temple (*Jo.* 8,21, 22, 37, 43, 44, 50) deal, in the most direct way, with strictly anthropological themes concerning the nature(s) of man, the concept of offspring and the consequent destiny of salvation or damnation of the different human types.

As we can see, just by simply pointing out at the various themes, the *Commentary* seems to be characterized by a somewhat systematic nature and to meet precise urgencies so that it would be quite restrictive to have them depend on a tactical-strategic plan of diffusion of the Gnostic ideology. As to the relative systematic nature, this, in my opinion, is perhaps more influenced by the text of the Gospel on which Heracleon meditates than determined by a preconceived scheme suggested by the Gnostic author or by Origen himself for the sake of confutation.¹⁹

¹⁹ As to this, I do not think that I can share Daniele Bertini’s opinion who, after reconstructing in a convincing way the plan of the *Notes*, singling out a decisively systematic, theological progression – from the ontology of the creation to the progressive revelation to the triple modality of being of the created reality to the forms of salvation and

Heracleon's exegetic work, as it appears and is carried out, is, in my opinion, isolated within the Gnostic production and cannot be compared with the partial exegeses of a Valentinus, of a Ptolomaeus or of a Theodotus, or of other authors belonging to the school of Valentinus who use, clearly, scriptural texts to legitimate or find confirmation to their theological or doctrinal assumptions.²⁰ I believe, rather, that the reading and the meditation of the 4th Gospel have deeply influenced our author bringing him much closer to the faith of the Great Church, though he kept some fundamental conceptions and beliefs of the specific Valentinian doctrine in which he had been brought up.

Following the plan of the Gospel, Heracleon starts from the Prologue where, contrary to other exegeses – chiefly Ptolomaeus' one – he does not, in the least, mention the reality of the Pleroma and the theogonic process that in it occurred before the formation of the world, though assuming it, but is interested in the reality, function and activity of the Logos as regards the creation: this is the true agent, the true efficient cause which avails itself, to be confirmed in actual fact, of an intermediary, the Demiurge; this one is, then, a subordinate but, far from seeing his action undervalued, as it happens in most Gnostic texts,²¹ he becomes a collaborator of the Creator, receiving from him the αἰτία (= creative cause) and, perhaps, the τύπος of the creation itself.

The Logos is introduced immediately, then, as the true, perhaps the only authentically active character not only as a creator but as the one who produces or rather generates and brings to perfection the spiritual beings, consequently consubstantial with him (fragment 2),²² the one who coherently plans and starts the whole history of salvation directed to their reinstatement into the Pleroma through a progressive improvement crowned, at the end, by that accomplished "Gnosis" which is the perfect self-knowledge. To achieve all this grandiose development he avails himself of collaborators who reveal themselves along the history of the world, embodied in turn by the Demiurge and his angels with their counterparts on the Earth, that is Moses, the lawgiver, the

to the existential conditions for attaining it – declares that "it might seem reasonable to suppose that the Alexandrian master, in the choice of the material to quote from Heracleon's *Commentary*, may have been led by the polemical demands of his enterprise to introduce, in the presentation of the exegesis of his opponent, themes of a systematic nature perhaps absent in the original" (BERTINI 2010, p. 40). Immediately afterwards, however, Bertini softens and tones down this idea.

²⁰ See, for example, Valentinus, fragments 2 (*Mt.* 5,8; 12,45; 19,17) and 5 (*Rom.* 1,20); Ptolomaeus in IRENAEUS *Adv. Haer.* I, 8, 5–6 (John's Prologue).

²¹ In the Valentinian doctrine, the Demiurge, as a creator, is identified with the God of the Old Testament.

²² Concerning *Jo.* 1,4 ("what was done in him was life"), Heracleon "in a totally forced way has interpreted 'in him' as referred to the 'spiritual men' thinking, that is, that the Logos and the Spirituals are the same thing, even if he does not say so clearly. And as if to explain, he says: the Logos, actually, gave them (that is to the Spirituals) the first education, the one according to birth (κατὰ τὴν γένεσιν), bringing to an accomplished form, to an illumination and identification of its own, and revealing them, those seeds that were thrown by another."

prophets, to a certain extent the Precursor, and then by Jesus, the Saviour, and by his own angels, the celestial counterpart of the Apostles. The substitution of the Sophia of the Irenaeus' Great Report with the Logos is clearly apparent which causes a remarkable historical and doctrinal problem because it is all the Hebraic-Judaic sapiential tradition standing behind the reality and function of this feminine divine being which is questioned together with the role of the feminine polarity and therefore with the typically Valentinian system based on the syzygies.²³ Unless it is a reconversion inspired by John's Gospel.²⁴

The Logos and the Spirituals are, therefore, the two principal agents in the exegetic development of Heracleon, all the other characters being a corollary or, anyhow, acting in preparation, support, cooperation or opposition – as represented by the demoniac entities – with the *Kosmokrator*, that is the devil, at their head.

Starting, then, from the fragments concerning the Prologue, those related to the following episodes are nothing but the concrete and historical illustration of a process leading the spiritual men from a “formation according to the substance” to a “formation according to the gnosis”; a process of a long duration and extremely complex which sees different individuals and groups interchange and act. It is in this interplay of characters and roles that, in my opinion, we must reread and reinterpret the controversial issue of the three natures and of the elements composing and characterizing them.

I believe that Simonetti, quite rightly, in the above quoted article referred again to fragment 46, a comment on *Jo.* 8,44 (in which Jesus addressed the Judeans calling them “children of the devil”) on which the scholars based themselves to impair the determinism connected with the concept of nature. It is worthwhile reading it again in full:

“And this also against Heracleon's thinking who interprets the words: ‘*From the father of the devil*’ as ‘*from the substance of the devil*’. And again, concerning ‘*You want to fulfil your father's wishes*’, he, distinguishing, says that the devil has no will (θέλημα) but only wishes (ἐπιθυμίας). [...] After this, Heracleon says that certainly such words are not addressed to those who, by nature (φύσει) are children of the devil, that is the material ones (χοικούς = made of mud, the hylics) but to the Psychics who have become the children of the devil by position (= adoption) (θέσει); from which some, for their very nature (τῆ φύσει) may even be called children of God for their position. And he declares that these (that is the Judeans addressed by the Saviour) become children of the devil (though they are not by nature)

²³ As it is said in a more synthetic and clear way in *Et.* 32,1: “indeed – they say – all that comes from the syzygy is Pleroma, instead all that comes from the single is image (i.e. imperfection).”

²⁴ Also in the *Tripertite Treatise* found at Nag Hammadi, the Logos performs, in every respect, the function of Sophia, so much so that a study previous to its official publication ascribed to Heracleon the original paternity of the treatise (PUECH/QUISPEL 1955, pp. 100–02), an opinion no more accepted today, since there is the tendency to date the treatise to the second half of the 3rd century. On the complexity of the functions of Sophia and its androgynous nature (on which see esp. the note concerning the Ophites in IRENAEUS *Adv. Haer.* I, 30, 4) see ORBE 1974, pp. 355 ff.

loving and fulfilling his wishes. As to the appellation of children (τέκνα), he explains that there are three ways of interpreting it: the first 'by nature' (φύσει); the second by 'deliberate choice' (γνώμη); the third 'by merit' (ἄξια). By nature – he says – it is what is, what has been generated by a generant, and this is called son in a proper sense; by deliberate choice, instead, when one, fulfilling the will of another, for this decision is called the son of who whose will he accomplishes; by merit, at last, [it is the meaning] according to which one says that some are *children of the Gehenna, of darkness and of iniquity, generations of serpents and vipers* (Mt. 23,15, 33). Such things, by their nature, do not generate anything but are a cause of corruption and destroy those who run into them. And since [they] have accomplished their works, they are called their children. [...] He says also that [Jesus] at this point calls these (that is the Judeans) children of the devil, not because the devil can generate somebody but because they, performing the works of the devil, become similar to him."²⁵

The Psychics, then, here represented by these Judeans, are called children of the devil not by nature but by position, because they love and fulfil the wishes of the devil, whereas the material and the spiritual beings are determined by nature. Gifted, then, with free will (ἀντεξουσία), they can decide with an act of will their destiny and reach the place allotted to them by their nature: suspended between two equally possible, opposite achievements, *adopted* by the chiefs of one as of the other class,²⁶ and become then, rightly so, children of God or children of the devil. I agree with Simonetti's remark,²⁷ according to which the three ways of having children have nothing in common with the three classes of men, but simply intend to illustrate the three ways of using the word "child"; the three ways then become actually two: a child in the proper sense, that is by the nature and a child by adoption; the second category is divided into two modalities in order to account for some scriptural expressions – generation of vipers, children of the Gehenna, etc. Heracleon, then, meant that one can speak of a child in a proper and in a metaphoric sense.

I share this conclusion only in part because, if the metaphoric sense may apply to the subdetermination ἄξια, I think that it may not also apply to γνώμη which concerns a precise inclination of man's will capable of transforming his intimate essence to the point of making him an adopted son. Of which God, though? Not of the Demiurge, given that the Psychics are already, by nature, his children and consubstantial with him – as we can infer from fragment 40²⁸ – and

²⁵ Cf. ORIGENES *In Jo.* XX, 24, 213–8.

²⁶ As I mentioned in a previous work (DEVOTI 1985, p. 144, n. 5) concerning the opposition between θέσει and φύσει – where the former seems to oppose to what possesses a natural and objective reality, subject to imperative physical and natural laws, what possesses a nature acquired by an act of will affected by a being gifted with θέλημα – in Stoic rhetoric it is said that the names are imposed by the *logos* of man by means of an act of will (θέσει), at the same time they are of a natural origin (φύσει) because the denominations correspond to the *physis* of the nominated things. See AMMONIUS *In Aristotelis De interpretatione* 34, 20–39, 11 (in part. p. 36, 23).

²⁷ See SIMONETTI 1992, p. 10

²⁸ As for "his son (that is of Regulus = Demiurge) who is in Capharnaum, he means the one who is in the lowest part of the 'intermediate region' (τῆς μεσότητος), towards the sea,

there cannot be a choice if it does not radically change the condition of the chooser. Then, they can only place themselves in a situation of consubstantiality acquired with the spirituals. Does this mean, consequently, a similar destiny and, also for them, a place in the Pleroma? Heracleon denies this formally, in fragment 13 where he says:

“Concerning the pronaos, where also the Levites are, it stands symbolically for the Psychics who, out of the Pleroma, are in a state of salvation.”²⁹

Would there be, then, two conditions and places of salvation, one for the Psychics in the “pronaos” of the Pleroma and the other for the Spirituals in the “sanctuary” (or Holy of Holies) that is the Pleroma? The contradiction with what affirmed before is obvious and the scholars who see the Psychics as beings subject to transformation have had to take note.

I have tried to resolve the contradiction through a very careful analysis of the group of fragments centered on the figure of John the Baptist who seems to be, in Heracleon’s vision, and particularly in his conception of the historical development as to the salvation of the spirituals, a conclusive divide. With the Baptist and, immediately afterwards, with the advent of the Saviour, the course of history suffers a drastic turn and reveals itself to the eyes of man, in the sense that the Gnosis brought by Jesus, besides healing and converting, shows the reality of things and the true nature of man confronting him with a radical choice, this time between two antithetical worlds and beings: the world of the spirit and of God, and the world of the matter and of the devil. Man is, then, in the middle, free to make his choice between one or the other option with its attendant destiny; his possibility of choice is rooted in that part of the human compound that is the *soul* whose nature is, per se, mortal³⁰ but whose fundamental quality is certainly given by the freedom to adhere and assimilate to one or the other of these poles.

History itself, in its globality, seems to be characterised by two great stages which, by the standards of that microcosm that is man, distinguish the two processes of formation: “according to the substance” (represented by the Old Testament) and “according to the Gnosis” (represented by the New Testament

that is the part in direct contact with the matter (= hylic and demoniac element); and he says that the man belonging to this [region], being ill, that is being in a condition not consistent with his nature was in a state of ignorance and sin.” (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 60, 416)

²⁹ See ORIGENES *In Jo.* X, 33, concerning *Jo.* 2, 13–15.

³⁰ See the already quoted fragment 40 (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 60, 417–18): “with the expression *he was at the point of death* [*Jo.* 4, 47] he says that the opinions of those who admit the immortality of the soul are refuted and he means the same also with the other expression for which *the body and the souls perish in the Gehenna* [*Mt.* 10, 28]. Heracleon thinks that the soul is not immortal but only gifted with an aptitude to salvation: it is – he says – the corruptible dressed with incorruptibility and the mortal dressed with immortality, when the *death of it* (= of the soul) *is swallowed up in victory* [*I Cor.* 15, 33 ff.].” The materialistic conception of the soul seems to suggest a Stoic influence. See what I write in DEVOTTI 1985, p. 148, n. 21.

and by the message of salvation brought by the Saviour). The three classes of individuals that till then seemed to exist, or better, of which the spiritual one was concealed, rendered invisible because included, wrought and made to grow in a latent way within its psychic covering,³¹ with the advent of Jesus and the new economy seem to become two, depending on the acceptance or the refusal of the message of salvation: the Spirituals with the balancing of the destiny of salvation between them and the psychic believers, and the materials or psychic non-believers. The invitation to convert and to accept the Gnosis seems, at this point, to be addressed to all men, *in primis*, to the Spirituals that is the “chosen ones” whose seed is always shrouded in the soul, and to the Psychics, that is the “summoned ones”, let them have or not the spiritual seed within them.

“I do not know, then, how we could interpret the harvest as referred to the soul of the believers, saying: ‘They are already ripe (ὄκμοῶλοι) and ready (ἔτοιμοι) for the harvest and apt (ἐπιτήδαιοι) to be collected in the barn (Mt. 13,30) that is in the rest through faith (=obtained by the faith) those, at least, who are ready since not all of them are: some, as a matter of fact – he says – were ready, some were going to be, some are going to be, and some, finally, have just been sown.’”³²

Are these souls destined to be collected in the barn, that is to rest in the Pleroma, the Psychics who have believed in the Saviour and made themselves worthy to receive the spiritual seed or are they the Spirituals? Both answers

³¹ From this viewpoint much discussed and variously interpreted fragments concerning sowing and reaping are illuminating (fragments 33–36, commenting *Jo.* 4,35 ff.) which, besides emphasizing what appears to the eyes of Heracleon as a continuous sowing, formation and reaping, a process, that is, all *in fieri* stresses the two stages of the macro history of the human world. So in fragment 36 Heracleon says “these seeds have been thrown neither through them (he means the Apostles) nor because they come from them: but those who have toiled are the angels of the economy through whom, as mediators, the seeds have been thrown and made to grow.” As to the expression “Ye are entered into their labours” (*Jo.* 4,38), he explains: “it is not actually the same toil of the sowers and of the reapers because the ones sow, till the soil in cold weather, with sweat and labour, and during the winter they take care of it hoeing and weeding; the others, instead, going near the fruit when it is already ripe in summer, reap happily.” (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 50, 336). Here, clearly, the sowers are the “angels of economy” that is of the Demiurge (or, more precisely of the psychic Christ = “The Son of man who is on the Place”: see fragment 35, ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 49, 324 and what I say in DEVOTI 1978, pp. 40 ff., in part. pp. 50–51), the reapers, the angels of the Saviour (and the Apostles as their earthly counterpart).

³² Cf. fragment 32 (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 41, 271 on *Jo.* 4,35). See also fragment 33 (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 44, 274): “the harvest truly is plenteous but the labourers are few [*Mt.* 9,37], that is the believers are ready for the harvest to be collected from now on in the barn, in the rest through faith (διὰ τῆς πίστεως εἰς ἄναπαυσιν), ready, that is, for salvation and the acceptance of the word.” On the contrary in fragment 43 it is said: “[those who introduce natures], reading this expression *my word hath no place in you* (*Jo.* 8,37b), explain following Heracleon’s interpretation that it does not reside in them because they are not apt (ἀεπιτήδαιοι), both for the essence (κατ’ οὐσίαν) and for the will (κατὰ γνώμην).” (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XX, 8, 54).

have been suggested and it is undoubtedly difficult to settle the issue. It is certain, though, that we are not at the end of time but in the middle of a historical process, in the heart of sowing and reaping (see fragment 35)³³ and in that stage “in which the pneumatic economy replaces the psychic one and, individually, every righteous soul, having carried out its mission, leaves the responsibility of the human compound to the spiritual seed that was in it and of which it became conscious through the Saviour.”³⁴ One could also think of the pure Psychics that for their acceptance of the redeeming message and for their being righteous deserve to wear the spiritual, that is to wear the clothes of immortality and incorruptibility, no more, then, carrying the seed in themselves but being carried by it: connection and reunion of soul and spirit, a *sui generis* form of ἀνάπαυσις ἐν γόμφῳ.

At all events we are, at this point, only in the presence of human beings within whom, before the advent of the Saviour, predominated the psychic element but who, owing to the illumination and healing brought by him, have become conscious of their own spirit that had been, meanwhile, made to grow within them or bestowed to them as clothes of light when they became worthy of them.

I believe, in short, that, to answer fully of so many aspects, even contradictory aspects, of Heracleon’s commentary, we have to overcome the barrier of the rigid fixation of concepts, categories and doctrinal developments, getting as much as possible free from the great and consistent heresiological systematizations, and to see his reflections and, often, marginal meditations on John’s Gospel in a more free and dynamic way. Practically all his figures are moving and open to change, starting, as far as the human sphere is concerned, from that of the Baptist and continuing with that of the woman of Samaria and of the son of the king’s officer. They are all figures on their way, all of them in a situation of imperfection or of illness, that is of want – want of knowledge and, at the same time, of a support capable of filling the very want³⁵ – but also in the sense of a deviation caused by the weight of the flesh and the proximity of the matter, anti-divine *par excellence*.

³³ “The sower rejoices because he is sowing and also because a part of his seeds is being collected and he has the same hope also for the others; the same happens to the reaper just because he is sowing [...] at the present, each doing his work, they rejoice together because they make their common joy consist in the perfection of the seeds.” (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 49, 322–323).

³⁴ See DEVOTI 1978, p. 30.

³⁵ On the subject of the order given by the Saviour to the woman of Samaria of going to call her husband (*Jo.* 4,16), Heracleon says in fragment 18: “the person called by the Saviour husband of the woman of Samaria is her *pleroma* (= completion or fullness) [and she calls him] so that, going with him to the Saviour, she may receive from the latter the power (δύναμις), the union (ἔνωσις) and the fusion (ἀνάκρασις) with her *pleroma*,” and he adds a few lines down that “the Saviour clearly refers (with those words) to the companion of syzygy (σύζυγος) who comes from the *Pleroma*.” (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 11, 67–68).

Heracleon's meditation is chiefly a meditation on soteriology, that is on the different modalities of and on the different ways to salvation after the advent of the Saviour: a salvation obtained by an immediate and direct adhesion to the Revealer in consequence of a recognition of identity, that is of becoming immediately aware of the equality by nature between oneself and the Revealer of the profound essence of one's being a spiritual man. This type of salvation is perfectly illustrated by the meeting with the woman of Samaria. There is, on the contrary, a more difficult salvation requiring a strong and constant commitment, both on the plan of the moral behaviour and on the cognitive one, to get free from a religious and psychological legacy, imperfect and, by now, obsolete because replaced by the new revelation – a redeeming path peculiar to those who have only the soul or are still entangled in it and/or essentially determined by it.

Forerunner and precursor of this type of salvation, both for his inner nature and for the specific position that he has in history, as a man who is in the middle, between the two economies – of the Old Testament (psychic) and of the New Testament (spiritual) – is John the Baptist.³⁶ In the series of fragments devoted by Heracleon to this figure, fragment 5, perfectly illustrating this aspect of his soteriology, is emblematic.

Given the critical position in which the Baptist finds himself, on the divide separating two essential moments in the history of the salvation, his specificity is characterized by an intrinsic duality which appoints him, at the same time, as a *prophet* of the old economy and as a *disciple* of the new one (fragment 3).³⁷ Thanks to this duality John is fully inserted in the old economy, that is in the world of Judaic prophetism so that he is said to belong to Levi's tribe and is called prophet and Elijah by Jesus himself. Though, these are peculiarities forming his historic legacy, his external *ἔνδυμα*, belonging, that is, to his mere exteriority and, as well, to the language, to the beliefs, to the ritualities – particularly the rituality of baptism – and to the cognitive modalities that are specific to him.

It is, however, the function of baptizing that marks him out specifically as the *Baptist*, that distinguishes him from all the previous prophetic order and appoints him as a prophet of the new economy, a prophet, that is, who, with the particular baptism that he administers, purifies the minds in view of the coming of the Gnosis brought by the Saviour through a ritual practice of the penitential type.³⁸

In fragment 5 Heracleon begins by saying:

³⁶ On whom see BERTINI 2010, p. 71 ff. He has written beautiful pages of a remarkable depth with which I completely agree.

³⁷ Concerning *Jo.* 1,18 (“No man hath seen God at any time [...]”): “these words are not uttered by the Baptist but by the disciple.” (ORIGENES *In Jo.* VI, 3, 13)

³⁸ In the nature of a “prophet” he is both psychic and consubstantial with the Demiurge who is the head of the psychic substance (see fragment 8, in ORIGENES, *In Jo.*, VI, 39, 197–200), while in the nature of a “disciple” he is *akin* to the Saviour (see fragment 5).

“The word (Logos) is the Saviour, the voice in the desert is represented by John, the echo (=sound) is the whole order of prophets. [...] I do not know, then, how he can, without any evidence, affirm that the voice that is most akin (ὀικειοτέραν) to the Logos, becomes Logos, just like the woman becomes a man. And almost having the authority of fixing dogmas, of being believed and of proceeding thus, he says that the sound will turn into voice, giving the voice turned into Logos the status of a disciple; and to that turned from sound into voice the status of a servant.”³⁹

We must remark, here, the mastery of Heracleon who switches from a static, defining moment, aiming at identifying the different subjects to be found in John’s passage,⁴⁰ to a moment of dynamic proceeding in which the three elements making up the communicative act seem to become alive and pass one into the other, each transforming itself into the subsequent one and then turning from a more imperfect to a more perfect condition.

Perhaps this is the reading key of the whole commentary: a description of the specific course of the Gnostic man, a formative and transformative course of constitution and perfecting whose final outcome is fundamentally the consciousness of his spiritual being but also of the complexity of which he is made up and which can certainly hinder, slow down or even expose to a risk the whole process but, if integrated and arranged, it can also become the privileged medium and, at the same time, the companion and collaborator of his ascent and of his (re)integration into the Pleroma.

The concept of *affinity*⁴¹ – as distinguished from that of ὁμοίωσις, indicating the state of equality in nature of two realities (in progress) – more than specifying a state (of kinship), it points out, for Heracleon, to a dynamic potentiality, so that a certain entity tends to return to this natural destination from a condition of remoteness from what it should be, by nature, *connected* to because similar to it. It expresses quite well, therefore, the situation of the separation and even of the distinction of a reality from its natural complement to which it had to be, originally, joined, giving, however, a vague idea of the

³⁹ Cf. ORIGENES *In Jo.* VI, 20, 108 (on *Jo.* 1,23). It is thanks to its substantial affinity with the Logos-word that the *voice* is destined to join its natural complement and become, then, one with the *word*, having actualized precisely into word. This is typical Stoic language with all the psychological, epistemological and cosmological implications. But one can also vaguely see an implicit ideology that gives the utmost importance to the principle of synergistic complementarity; such principle seems to organize the world, mankind and social relations, in particular, the relation man-woman, logic, language etc., everything depending on the basic concept of *coincidentia oppositorum*.

⁴⁰ And in this way to prove the superiority of the word – identified with the Logos – on the voice – represented by John – and of the voice on the echo – which refers back to the prophetic order.

⁴¹ The term οἰκέιον / οἰκείωσις and its related concept, perhaps dating back to Theophrastus, is of the utmost importance in Stoicism (in its use both in the psychological and ethical spheres and in the cosmological one) and it is in the stoic meaning that Heracleon uses it – a further step in Heracleon’s education and an indication of the familiarity that he must have had with the thought and the language of the Stoics.

intimate tension to re-join and to reconstruct the original unit.⁴² It is, then, a complementarity that explains the tendency to re-joining and reunifying what is, temporarily, separate and different.

If you look well into it, this counts, in the first instance for the spiritual nature which, separate from its own world and from its pleromatic complement, banished to a strange environment, that is lost in the matter and at the mercy of the wickedness of the material substance,⁴³ it is intent on the quest of its far off home and of its celestial double. As a matter of fact, it counts also for the psychic nature which, put in direct touch with the matter over which it should rule and being itself in its mortal essence, it runs the risk of dying, a prey to the passions and sin but in consequence of the illumination and of the forgiveness of the Saviour it gets back to the top from which it had fallen and, through upright conduct and faith, attains to a condition superior to what its nature would allow: of participation in life and immortality peculiar to the spirit.

The soul possesses, then, since its very origin, an inner aptitude (ἐπιτηδειότης)⁴⁴ to salvation, that is to being accepted in the peace through faith, having also an inclination to accept the Logos. It is this inner inclination that causes a radical change in its condition allowing it “to wear immortality” and to become similar, as to its destiny, to that spiritual seed with which it lives in mutual union – if the seed is present in it – and that, at the end, becoming equal to the Logos, in its turn, saves its soul⁴⁵ by making it persist in a staunch faith and getting it thus the eternal rest.

Two destinies, of the spirit and of the soul, analogous but separate: both destinies of rest, of quietness, but one “in the nuptials” (ἐν γάμῳ), in the junction with the Saviour and with its own angelic complement within the Pleroma, the other “in the faith” (διὰ πίστεως), in the confiding acceptance of

⁴² See DEVOTI 1972–1973, p. 731. In fragment 23 (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 20, 120) the dynamic reality of that theology of the uprootedness and estrangement from the world, typical of the gnostic thought and sensibility, is expressed very well: “what is akin (οἰκέϊον) to the father, says Heracleon, is lost in the deep matter of mistake; and it is being sought so that the Father may be worshipped by all who are akin (ὑπὸ τῶν οἰκέϊων) to him.”

⁴³ See fragment 18: “By the six husbands (*viz.* of the woman of Samaria) she means all the wickedness of the material substance with which she had mingled and to which she went near to fornicate, far from the Logos, abused, rejected and deserted by them (= worldly husbands).” (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 11, 72)

⁴⁴ See above, note 28, and see also fragment 40 (on the mortal illness and the healing of the royal officer at Capharnaum) where it is expressly said that “the soul possesses an aptitude to salvation” (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 60, 418). On this potentiality of the soul see also *Et.* 46,2: “and he made (that is the Saviour) within the bodies a property (ἐπιτηδειότητα) adequate to their nature” and, especially, IRENAEUS *Adv. Haer.* I, 4, 5: “And so he formed in them (that is in the passions of Sophia) an aptitude and a nature which allowed them to form combinations of bodies and that two substances came into existence: the evil one deriving from the passions and the acceptable one from the conversion.”

⁴⁵ See fragment 27: “It is, actually, through the mediation of the spirit, or rather because of this very spirit, that the soul is led to the Saviour.” (ORIGENES *In Jo.* XIII, 31, 187). See the analogous conception of Tatian in *Oratio ad Graecos* 13.