

out, abortion of the German Republic took place. These three decisive mental experiences were the following: First, the Prophets of Israel, whom I read at that time not in Hebrew, but in a translation provided by the Protestant text-critical school. The translators were H. Gressmann, H. Gunkel and others.¹ It was through their historical rendering and their text-critical notes, connected with a commentary, that I discovered the Prophets of Israel; not through the Jewish *Religionsunterricht* of my childhood, but through the Protestant rendering of that school. Second, Imanuel Kant, of whom I first read *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, which begins with this immortal sentence that thunders through my life similarly to the words of the Prophets: "Es ist uberall nichts in der Welt, ja auch ausserhalb derselben zu denken moglich, was ohne Einschränkung konnte fur gut gehalten werden, als einzig ein guter Willie."² And third, there was Martin Buber. At that time I read Buber's famous *Drei Reden uber das Judentum*¹ and *Die Legende des Baalschem*, the beginnings of his great work on Chassidism, and strangely enough it blended with Kant and with the Prophets of Israel. It was a blending which could probably not stand a rigorous critique of compatibility, but somehow it fused in my own mind. Thus, when I entered university, two things were clear for me. One was that I wanted to study philosophy. The other was that religion is an essential aspect of humanity, and that no study of philosophy is possible without somehow being joined with a study of the religious phenomena. How much of a personal commitment to one or another religion or creed is at play in such a vision is a secondary consideration. The first consideration was that religion, especially as part of the tradition of Western man, is as indispensable an aspect in giving account of oneself and one's background as is the great tradition of philosophy starting with the Greeks, with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. This combination has somehow gone with me through my life, and this statement is the first attempt to explain what brought a philosophy student to the study of Gnosticism.

But of course, it would be a distortion to pretend that things are only governed by internal consistency, by intrinsic logic; accident and chance play a role. Without certain teachers, influences and tasks set at one time or another, without a certain combination of circumstances, which in my case were mainly focused in the two names of Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann, I would not have become what I am, and the study of Gnosticism would have, for better or for worse, gone without the participation of Hans Jonas. It was this combination which I encountered in

Marburg that brought me to the study of Gnosticism by a sequence of events which I will briefly relate, and that also somewhat explains why I thought and still think that Gnosticism, apart from the challenge it poses to philologists, historians, theologians and so on, also poses a challenge to philosophers. Among philosophers I am still, it seems, the only one who has acted on that belief; in spite of everything I have always been something of an outsider, because my interest was not quite the same as that of the real workers with the texts, i.e., those who read Iranian, Coptic, Turkish, and so on, and who know the whole field at first hand.

What was the philosophical situation at the time when I studied in the twenties in Germany? There was the powerful figure of Edmund Husserl in Freiburg, the founder of the phenomenological school in philosophy, and there was his disciple, a young, impressive and disturbing *Privatdozent*, Heidegger, who in some manner transferred the phenomenological method, i.e., the careful description of phenomena of the mind, from the purely cognitive field to which Husserl had confined it (perception, thinking, knowing, conceptualization and so on) to the phenomena of *existence*, i.e., the individual enmeshed in the *concerns* of life, being more than an *ego cogitans*, being engaged in the business of living and dependent on the "facticity" of his being which he had not chosen himself. Kierkegaard, in addition to Husserl, stood behind Heidegger: not the theologian Kierkegaard or Kierkegaard the Christian thinker, but Kierkegaard the discoverer of "existential" thought as such. In other words, in the person of Heidegger "existentialism" had entered the sacrosanct domain of the strictly objective, descriptive style of Husserlian phenomenology. An entire young generation came under his spell. It so happened that Heidegger, after I had first experienced him as a *Privatdozent* under Husserl in Freiburg, received a call to Marburg/Lahn, and his faithful students, including myself, followed him. One of the most wonderful combinations came about there, namely a close friendship between Heidegger and Bultmann. It was almost "bon ton" among certain of Heidegger's disciples to go also to Bultmann and study New Testament theology and, if admitted, to enter Bultmann's seminar on the New Testament, and vice versa, for the better or more favoured or serious students of Bultmann to go to Heidegger's lectures and, if admitted, also to be members of his seminars. As a result this consensus of young minds came about: study both fields! While I had continued the study of the Old Testament for three semesters in Berlin during my early student years under Gressmann and

Sellin in addition to attending the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, I found myself, through this combination, suddenly a student of New Testament theology.

Quite soon, in 1924, I was an active member of Bultmann's New Testament seminar together with another Jewish student of Heidegger, to whom a lifelong friendship has bound me since: it will be fifty years next year that we have been friends. She is Hannah Arendt, whose name is known as that of a political philosopher. We two were the only Jews in Bultmann's seminar. One day I accepted an assignment from Bultmann, namely to submit a report about the concept of $\gamma\lambda\upsilon\omega\sigma\kappa\epsilon\omega\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ — $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma\ -\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in the Fourth Gospel. Let me offer a few words on the importance of the Gospel of John to Bultmann. In his New Testament work he felt more and more attracted to this Gospel for reasons which, I would say, belong to the nonarguable ones, a kind of decision about which it is entirely inappropriate to ask: Is it correct or incorrect? I never followed him there, since I personally never liked the Fourth Gospel particularly. To me, the epistles of Paul, which I also learned to know through Bultmann, became the most essential, the most interesting, the historically and philosophically decisive documents in the New Testament. But Bultmann's love was the Fourth Gospel, and through its medium came the point of contact with Gnosticism: especially with the newly discovered Mandaean documents that came out of the masterhand of Lidzbarski⁴ and were first, if I remember rightly, treated in their possible importance for the Gospels by Reitzenstein in *Das Mandäische Buch des Herrn der Grosse und die Evangelienüberlieferung*.⁵ It was the possible bearing of the Mandaean nomenclature, of their vocabulary and their imagery on the problem of authorship and the whole meaning and spirit of the Gospel of John, which brought Bultmann into the realm of gnostic studies. And so one day he assigned to me the task of investigating the meaning of the terms $\gamma\lambda\upsilon\omega\sigma\kappa\epsilon\omega\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ — $\gamma\upsilon\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma\ -\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in the Fourth Gospel for a report in his seminar session. This is what I meant with the role of chance in the story of a life. The Gospel of John became my destiny through this connection. For when I prepared this seminar paper (in 1925 or 1926), I delved, of course, into the background which Bultmann himself had pointed out. For the first time I studied the Mandaean writings in Lidzbarski's translation. I studied Reitzenstein. I read Norden's *Agnostos Theos*, which had come out in a second edition about that time. It was a powerful book, which I think was subtitled *Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede*.⁶ I

found myself in a world where I soon realized one thing: this is not just a task for a seminar paper. It kept growing under my hands. The result was that I committed what in itself is an unforgivable sin. Instead of using my thirty minutes of the seminar session for the report and leaving the remaining hour and a half for discussion, I kept talking from notes for two solid hours and at the end of the session still had not come remotely to the end of what I had to say. Looking back, I believe that this determined a good part of my future. Bultmann, who had said only a few words at the end, talked to me afterwards and said, "Jonas, this was really important! You must go on with it! This is only a beginning!" He did more. He told Heidegger, who was my main teacher and under whom I was supposed to write my doctoral dissertation, about my performance, including its unfinished character. Heidegger talked to me about it and said, "If you want to, I am willing to accept a dissertation in philosophy on that topic or something connected with it. I have Bultmann's assurance that he will serve as a Korreferent for that kind of dissertation." That settled it.

What was my conception then, when I started seriously? The time had come after many years of being a student. In Germany at that time you could draw out your university studies as long as you liked or your father permitted by sending his monthly *Wechsel*. One could also change universities at will. I do not know how matters are now, but at the time I moved from Freiburg to Berlin, from Berlin back to Freiburg, from Freiburg to Marburg. When Marburg became a bit boring to me, once I worked on the dissertation and did not attend classes anymore, I went to Heidelberg for some time, which was a much livelier place in some respects. The time had come when I had, after all, to produce something and show my father that I was not the eternal student. So I "conceived a conception," to use gnostic language, and brought forth an emanation, so to speak, a still formless fruit, and its name was to be "Pistis and Gnosis." I wanted to take up the question: Why did the Church reject Gnosticism? Apart from the obvious reason that many of its teachings were fantastic and not in agreement with the Gospels, why was Gnosis as such from Paul on rejected as a possible option? Why was Pistis chosen instead? This I wanted to explain to my own satisfaction and probe into the meaning of that momentous decision, for Pistis and against Gnosis. I realized that the first thing to do was to try to understand what is Pistis and what is Gnosis. I started with Gnosis for obvious reasons: Gnosis had one familiar basis, namely the Greek philosophical antecedents of the term "to know." As a student of Plato and

Aristotle, I was familiar (or thought I was) with what knowledge means in the Greek context. And so I set myself as a first task to find out what is different in the gnostic from the Greek meaning of "Gnosis." I started to collect material from the patristic literature (which I still have lying in copious notes, destined never to be used) about the meaning of "to know" in the religious context. It turned out to be very different from that of theoretical knowledge in philosophy and science, and the religious thinkers themselves were aware of the difference. As an example I refer to the Genesis sentence "and Adam knew Eve his wife." There, "to know" stands for the sexual union, and already the Church Fathers used the sentence exegetically for denoting a knowledge that terminates in a reciprocal union with its object—namely God—as opposed to the "distancing" theoretical knowledge of the Greeks. You still find Luther making the same use of this Hebrew paradigm. Clearly, to "know God" in the Hebrew sense is different from the knowledge of the Divine in the Aristotelian sense. Yet neither of the two is "gnostic." But there is a third sense: Gnosis as *mystical knowledge*, and the Genesis passage is particularly apt to represent this when given that turn (from which patristic exegesis on the whole refrained). It was in this direction that I began to search for the meaning of γνῶσις - θεοῦ in the gnostic context; and once I had discerned such a salvational type of "knowledge" with its own phenomenology, I suddenly glimpsed, as in a blinding light, the possible, nay, persuasive hypothesis that what the Gnostics understood by "Gnosis" is by no means confined to them in the environment of declining antiquity: rather, that what the later Platonists—Plotinus, Porphyry and others—had to say about the highest form of knowledge, about the union with the One, is another, more refined version of this same type of knowledge that goes beyond the knowledge of "logos" and of "theory" in the Greek tradition. In other words, I suddenly found my terms widened even beyond the vast enough sphere of theological thought — Christian and Jewish, orthodox and heretical—and stretched also over the whole sphere of late-pagan quasi-philosophical thought that hovers on this curious borderline of philosophy and mysticism, where it is difficult to say whether it is philosophy in the sense of Plato and Aristotle, or whether it is mysticism. It is, of course, both.

At this point, the vastness of the subject took matters out of my hands and relegated "Pistis," the original matching mate of my twin-topic, to an indefinite "later." "Pistis and Gnosis" shrank to "Gnosis" pure and simple. And this I decided *to* attack from the end rather than from the beginning,

from Plotinus and the Neoplatonists after him, even as late as Dionysius Areopagita, i.e., from the philosophic-mystical elaborations of that "knowing" which is at the same time a union with the divine reality. My aim in this was not a record of its history but a hermeneutics of its phenomenology as it manifested itself in those testimonies. That was the subject of my doctoral dissertation, "Der Begriff der Gnosis," which only made passing references to the whole mythological area of the second century and concentrated mainly on third- and fourth-century "spatantikes" thinking. However, for future publication, I had to write a historical introduction to that, namely on the mythological Gnosis of the second century, which more and more I realized presented the real flesh-and-blood form of what appeared in such a spiritualized, conceptually rarefied form in the later mystical thinkers who tried to keep as much as possible within the Greek tradition. That introduction, once the dissertation itself lay behind me, grew into the first volume of *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist*. And so, what my position in your field of scholarship rests on is the fragment of a fragment of my original plan. From Pistis and Gnosis, it focused upon Gnosis, and from Gnosis it focused on the mythological Gnosis mainly of the second century.

Who were the scholars in the field at that time, besides Bultmann, who had a wonderful way of letting me do what I wanted or felt driven to do? Who were the authorities in the existing literature? Reitzenstein, whom I mentioned above, was a strange kind of force, one who gave me a push in one direction and after some time revised himself, after he had come under some other influence, or some other light had dawned on him, and gave me a push in another direction. I first studied the *Poimandres*,⁷ and Gnosticism was mainly of Egyptian origin. Then he discovered Iran, and the "Urmensch-Gayomart" traditions.⁸ Each time he managed to have an expert in the field as his advisor and translator of the texts. It was, for the Iranian period, I think, Andreas in Gottingen with whom he collaborated. Each time such a turn happened, the student of the field had to make himself familiar as best he could with this new background area for Gnosticism. From Egyptology to Iranology. It was, of course, Harnack who at first so strongly emphasized the Greek background with his thesis that Gnosis is "die akute Hellenisierung des Christentums."⁹ Each time one had to switch, not necessarily in one's conviction or in one's conception of the subject itself, but at least in one's inventory of the knowledge of facts, and one could never really keep pace. The happy situation in which the sources

for Gnosticism were the Church Fathers—Irenaeus, Hippolytos, Ephiaphanius, Tertullian, etc.—which after all you could read and where you had your material well defined, was changed beyond recognition. The Turfan fragments, which had been discovered at the beginning of the century, began slowly to be published step by step, a process which I think is still going on.¹⁰ Then the Coptic Mani-library was discovered in Egypt, which Schmidt and Polotsky started to edit.¹¹ Furthermore, Lidzbarski, as I mentioned earlier, brought out the Mandaean documents. In other words, the ideal situation in which everything could be kept in the family, the family of New Testament theologians and early church historians, was gone and one was thrown into this open field of ever new texts, in ever new languages, and you could never be sure that you had the evidence now. On the contrary, you could never keep pace, and I still remember how it was a race with time to get some of the Kephalaia material into the first edition of *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist*. It was just touch and go. I think the first two *Lieferungen* were out by that time. Little did I dream that twenty years later the floodgates would open. Nobody anticipated the Nag Hammadi.

Meanwhile I had advanced in my work in spite of these handicaps, the greatest of which was that my language knowledge was restricted to Greek, Latin, Hebrew and a bit of Aramaic. I knew enough Aramaic to understand Mandaean terms, but I never went on to learn Coptic. I did not foresee, of course, what would happen later. Somehow I managed by 1933 to have finished the manuscript of *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist. Erster Teil: Die mythologische Gnosis*.¹² In that year the idea of a "Habilitation" was finished; but I had the manuscript. I made my farewell visit to Bultmann in Marburg, the only one of my academic teachers I wanted to see once more before I emigrated. London was the first stop of my emigre life. I went there, not because I had any intention of settling in England, but because I wanted to finish the studies on Gnosticism, and the library of the British Museum was there, as was also another, the Doctor William's Library, which I found very useful. I considered London a better place to do this work and also the proofreading of the first volume, then my final destination, Jerusalem, where I would hardly have found all I needed by way of sources and literature. In any case, I thought this was the moment to make contact with some British scholars in the field of Gnosticism. So far, all my direct teachers and the indirect teachers, i.e., authors of the books that had instructed me, were German: Reitzenstein, Bousset¹³, the whole "Religionsgeschichtliche Schule," and the orientalist too (Cumont¹⁴ excepted). I sent

a part of my manuscript on "Gnosis und spatantiker Geist" to Burkitt, whose *Church and Gnosis*¹⁵ I had read with the little English I knew at the time. Of course, I had not missed the fact that his view of Gnosticism was very different, not only from mine, but from German scholarship at that time.

Nevertheless, I was unprepared for the response I got in a letter from Burkitt. I had, of course, something practical in mind. After all, I had to seek contact in the non-German world, having ceased to be a member not only of the nation but also of the German academic community. I had to establish myself somehow in a non-German world. I got back a letter, to the effect: I have read your manuscript with interest, but I must tell you frankly that with this kind of view of the matter, which is completely in the German vein, you cannot hope to cut any ice here. I even remember the sentence, "Of what audience are you thinking? Who should read that here?" It was not an encouraging letter to a young emigre scholar, but it opened my eyes for the first time to how nationally determined the different views of one and the same subject were at that time. I think it is no longer that way, but at that time, to come from the German school, meaning Reitzenstein and Bousset and Schaeder and Bultmann and so on, was a bad thing. It gave one a bad name, but incidentally so and certainly not politically at that time. This is no longer the spirit of international scholarship today.

I had one other attempt at British "contacts." Gershom Sholem in Jerusalem, the great scholar of Jewish mysticism, had become interested in my work since he had read parts of the manuscript. When he heard that I was going to London, he said, "You must visit an old friend of mine, Evelyn Underhill, an internationally renowned authority on mysticism. She will surely be interested in what you are doing," and he wrote me a letter of introduction to her. I sent it to Underhill and got a kind reply. In due course, I was invited to tea, and there I learned to know the English tea ceremonial: a beautifully laid table, old silver and china, the presence of three or four couples and so on. It was absolutely a ritual. Underhill, a frail old lady of noble features, poured the tea, and then she addressed the seated guests in turn with the proper polite questions. When my turn came, she said, "Dr. Jonas, I understand you are working on Gnosticism?" I replied eagerly, "Yes, I am." She said, "That must be interesting!"—and passed on to the next. Well, so much for my attempt to break into the British establishment.

In 1934 the first volume of *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist* came out in Germany, with that remarkable foreword by Bultmann. Incidentally, my publishers too have always behaved in a very fine manner in everything concerning me and my work. In 1935 I went to Jerusalem, to continue my work and to become part of this new Zionist-Hebrew community. This meant a switch in language—a long toil of "blood, sweat and tears." In between I asked myself: How is *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist* doing? An author, and certainly a beginner, waits for reviews. But it was a difficult situation for German reviewers. How does one review the work of a Jewish emigre scholar? If you praise it, that may be dangerous, and if you blame it, you come under the suspicion that you have not been objective for political reasons. The way out of the dilemma was mostly no reviews. There was a notable and clever exception. *Gnomon* brought a long and searching review, in English, by A. D. Nock¹⁶: the one extensive review in Germany of *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist* was in the English language and by a British scholar living in America.¹⁷ Then I remember a Dutch review by G. A. van den Bergh van Eysinga¹⁸, and a few from France. Finally, a French-Canadian Dominican wrote a long monograph of fifty or sixty pages on *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist* in a periodical which, I think, was a semiannual publication edited by the House of the Dominican Order in Ottawa.¹⁹ Well, things in Palestine and the developments in Germany and the world eventually diverted my attention and often my time from the unfinished job on Gnosticism, and the question of reviews was no longer even of vestigial interest.

I will not bother with the war years, in which I served as a volunteer in the British Army, except to say that, cut off from books and from all the paraphernalia of scholarship, I was forced to suspend all work—research and writing, even thinking—on Gnosis and its halfborn second part. Instead, I undertook a thorough revision of my philosophical views, and I came back from the war with the decision to work out a philosophical program which would take me far afield from historical studies, from Late Antiquity, from Gnosticism and so on: namely the philosophical understanding of our organic Being, and not only ours, but of life in general. Why the experience of the war and the parallel rethinking of first principles led me to this particular philosophical decision is not part of the story now. In 1945 I decided to say goodbye to Gnosticism. I also thought that twelve years of a philosopher's life devoted to the inquiry of a historical subject was enough of an apprenticeship that now I should directly attack

philosophical problems not connected with particular historical situations. However, I made the experience that many a "goodbye" may in fact be an "Auf Wiedersehen," and somehow I had from that time on to live a double life rather than be in one area of work.

Let me now say something about my coming back to Germany, which to some extent meant picking up where my scholarly beginnings had earlier been broken off; that was in the rather dramatic context of entering Germany with the British occupying forces in 1945. Incidentally, it gave me the opportunity to make true the vow with which I had left Germany in 1933: namely never to return except as the soldier of a conquering army. I visited those I thought I ought to visit. There was Karl Jaspers on the one hand and Bultmann on the other, but unfortunately, not Heidegger.

The meeting with Bultmann is so memorable—a reunion exactly twelve years after saying goodbye to him—that I recount it here. In 1945 I stood on the threshold of his house, in the battle dress of a British artillery sergeant, with my battle decorations on it. Mrs. Bultmann opened the door, stared at me for some seconds and then burst into a torrent of words and tears. I cannot trust myself to repeat that scene here. . . . With the words "Rudolf, you have a visitor," she led me into his study. There he was sitting, as always, at his desk, pale but peaceful, his collar several sizes too wide for his neck shrunken from undernourishment. "Herr Jonas!" he exclaimed and hastened toward me. And then, after the first hurried exchange of words—both of us still standing in the middle of the room—something unforgettable happened. I had come to Marburg from Gottingen and carried under my arm a book²⁰ which Mr. Ruprecht, Bultmann's publisher and mine, had asked me to take to him, because civilian mail service was not yet restored in devastated Germany so soon after the surrender. At this wrapped book Bultmann pointed and asked, "Darf ich hoffen, dass dies der zweite Band der Gnosis ist?" ("May I hope that this is the second volume of the Gnosis?")²¹ Words fail to express what these words of loving interest and unshaken faith in the continuity of the mind's business did to me at that moment. Twelve cataclysmic years—of Hitler, of a world war, of the destruction and collapse of Germany, of untold sorrow—were bridged by this stunningly sober and touching question. In all the deafening noise of the world, *he* had not ceased to think of this unfinished matter and to care about it!

After this encounter, and some others (as with Jaspers), it became extremely difficult for me to abide by my decision to make a clean break