

## L'Authentikos Logos

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In a scant 14 pages, the *Authentikos Logos* assembles and presents an impressive array of images and metaphors, through which it transmits its teachings on the real nature of the soul, its present fallen state, and how it may be saved. The image of the soul's adversary as a fisherman, “[qui] nous surveille, nous guettant comme un pêcheur qui veut nous saisir et...nous manger” (30,7-10) has attracted the most attention from scholars, but it is far from alone. The density of the imagery that the author presents and the exhilarating speed with which he presents it make the *Authentikos Logos* a text that is simultaneously exciting and perplexing to read: in this text, the images themselves seem to converse, developing the narrative through their dialectical interplay. Professor Ménard believed that the text was entirely non-Christian: since this volume's publication, this assertion has been debated.

The *Authentikos Logos* is the third text in Nag Hammadi codex VI. It is preceded by the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* and *Thunder: Perfect Mind*, and is followed by the *Concept of Our Great Power*, an excerpt from Plato's *Republic*, the *Discourse of the Eighth and Ninth*, and the *Prayer of Thanksgiving*, as well as a scribal note and a fragment of the Hermetic text *Logos Teleios*. The text is well preserved, with the exception of the upper six to ten lines of the first seven pages, which are either missing entirely or at best extremely lacunous. It is written in Sahidic, a dialect of Coptic.

The *Authentikos Logos* begins with an unfortunately fragmentary description of the original state of being, one of repose in the immortal heaven. But then “les mondes invisibles (et) indicibles” (22,12) are revealed, and the invisible soul of justice (22,13-14) emanates from them. But despite the soul's eventual descent to our world, she can never truly be separated from her original home. For through the agency of the *Logos*, brought to her by her fiancé and placed on her eyes like a balm, she is able to recognize “ceux de sa race, et [prendre] conscience de sa racine” (22,29-30). Her ultimate goal is to abandon matter and the material world entirely and to receive anew what is hers.

Next, the text turns to discussing the situation that its readers find themselves in, namely their kinship with, and yet difference from, the non-gnostics. The image employed is that of the relationship between the children of a man's earlier marriage and their new step-brothers and step-sisters, the offspring of his wife's earlier unions. Thus, after having been cast into a body, the soul becomes sister to desire, hatred and jealousy (23,14-16). But despite this she must not consider herself to be like them, or else she will forfeit her true inheritance. To become like her step-sisters would be to become like a prostitute, to abandon modesty and to be cast into the place of prostitution (24,8). However, as the text immediately informs us, the choice that the soul must make is actually a choice between life and death (24,10-13). But, it goes on, the soul has really chosen drunkenness, presumably as opposed to sobriety, and with the pair to be equated to death and life respectively (24,14-15). But drunkenness is equivalent to vice, or rather vice in fact *is* drunkenness (24,16-17). At any rate, the soul forgets her father and her brothers and falls into a bestial state, which is contrasted with the blissful and productive state of the thoughtful son, her brother (24,26-7).

After the gap at the top of p. 25, we find ourselves in the middle of a discussion of the need for purity to be absolute: one must beware of the least imperfection. This principle is illustrated by a discussion of the fate of wheat mixed with chaff. While the pure wheat is kept safe in storehouses, the mixture of wheat and chaff is sold and is thrown among all the other chaff, and mixed with other sorts of materials (25,20-23). Then, with a curt “Mais, tout cela nous l'avons dit” (25,25-26) the text turns to a justification of the situation that its readers find themselves in: the world is full of strife because the Father wished to be able to manifest his glory and abundance (26,8-12). The gnostics are to prove themselves by

despising the material world and all of its goods, and returning to their place of origin. They are simply to ignore the calumnies and attacks of their enemies in this world.

At this point (27,30 ff.) the soul of the gnostic is identified with the invisible soul of justice that was mentioned above, and the image of the *Logos* as a balm to be applied to the eyes reappears. The discussion is again interrupted by a long lacuna, but it seems that the *Logos* not only enables the soul to see, but also casts her enemies into blindness (28,16-17).

The nature of her enemies is now refined. They are, it appears, those who were born in her house, but have turned against her because of desire (29,2-3). In a confusing mixture of images, the *Authentikos Logos* first warns the reader against being captured by their nets and pulled downwards, under the water (29,7-17) and then immediately afterwards compares the actions of the enemies to those of a fisherman, and identifies the gnostics as the fish (29,20-30,10). In its discussion of the nature of the snares that the adversary sets for the soul, the text returns to its earlier theme of the need for absolute purity. The minute the soul desires one thing, no matter how small, it is rendered subject to all the other desires, which become "un appât mortel" (30,25).

But the wise soul will ignore all these temptations, and the text engages in another of its characteristic barrages of images to express how the soul will conduct herself: she has become aware of her light (32,2), she has shed this world (32,3-4). Further, she has become aware of her depth (32,9), but she also is engaged in hastening towards her fold, since the Shepherd stands at the door (32,10-11). A touch of pathos enters the text here: when the soul abandoned her body, "les négociants des corps sont assis et pleurent" (32,18-19), because they had taken pains to make the body a home for the soul, never realizing that she has another, truer home.

The text then turns to attack those who don't seek God (33,5), which is evidently meant to describe either Jews or non-gnostic Christians, since these people are considered to be worse than pagans (33,11). This is apparently because the pagans are at least faithful to their beliefs, wrong and corrupt though they are, while the Jews or non-gnostic Christians have heard the call to better things, and have ignored it. Their ignorance is wilful, and thus culpable.

The text ends with a message of hope: despite all the dangers that have assailed the soul, she does finally receive the knowledge of God, and in doing so she rediscovers her East (35,8).