

Melchisédek (NH IX,1)

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Presses de l'Université Laval (Quebec City)
«Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi [section «Textes»]», 28
2001
XVIII + 189 pages
ISBN: 90-429-1021-6 (Peeters) 2-7637-7861-5 (Presses Université Laval)

How do you become a priest of the Most High? It's simple: just ask Melchisedek himself, who is as eternal as his priesthood. Between the apocalypse of Gamaliel, which started him in his vocation, and the revelations brought by mysterious messengers that assure him of his victory at the end of time over all the worldly powers who oppose his ministry, we celebrate with Melchisedek the liturgy of the celestial High Priest. In fulfilling his role, he and his congregation offer thanksgiving to the Father of All, and he receives and dispenses a baptism of water which fills the recipient with celestial light, a baptism which leads the children of Seth back to their transcendent origins. Melchisedek has been in the world since the beginning of time, and will remain until the end. He is the first step on the ladder that leads the luminous souls upwards.

With its many christological references, its opposition to docetism, and its surprising exegesis of *Hebrews*, this treatise represents an extreme case of the Christianization of Sethian gnosis. The Coptic text as established by W.-P. Funk is a substantial improvement on that of the *editio princeps* (1981). Jean-Pierre Mahé's introduction shows the coherence of the text, demonstrating that despite its apocalyptic appearance, it is essentially liturgically—and community—oriented. The introduction also shows the text's links with the Sethian tradition.

In addition to resolving the numerous difficulties which this extremely lacunous text presents, the commentary, written by Claudio Gianotto, discusses both the gnostic understanding of the figure of Melchisedek, and this figure's connection with the Christ of the Gospels and the celestial Saviour.