

Eugnoste, Lettre sur le dieu transcendant (NH III,3 & V,1). Introduction, édition et traduction

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In order to announce the existence of a transcendent God, a God who has remained unknown to all, including the sages of this world, and who is, therefore, not the creator of the world, *Eugnostos* adopts the rhetorical genre of the eulogy. Using language that is at once philosophical and hymnal, it reveals the transcendent God who reigns over the All, i.e., the spiritual universe. A great coherence can be seen in the organization of the tractate which progresses from what is hidden to what is manifested and in which the central principle, recurrent among the Gnostics, is the necessity to discover the invisible in the visible, which is only possible by means of a revelation. In other words, only the end of the revelation unveils the identity of this unknown God and his spiritual world, because he has revealed himself here below.

The basic theme is generation, in the sense of spiritual childbirth, with its consequences involving the giving of form and name. While the First Principle is without form or name, it reveals itself by separating from its own form (or the Divine Name that has a specific form) in order to give form and name to each of the spirituals. This form is the Primordial Man, whose ultimate manifestation is the Saviour. The doctrine of the Son can be found here, as well as that of the forms and names of the aeons. The whole revelation can be summarized by the phrase from Clement of Alexandria's *Excerpts from Theodotus* (26,1) claiming that the invisible part of Jesus is the Name, and the visible part, the Church. The visible Church, which has fallen below into chaos, reveals the invisible Name that gives form and illumination.

Eugnostos is also characterized by the importance given to the myth of the Primordial Man as distinct from the terrestrial one, and as the manifestation of the supreme God. This myth, however, is closely linked to the philosophical doctrine of the auto-generation of the second divine principle, a widespread belief throughout the Roman Empire during the first century. Since the notion and vocabulary of auto-generation appears with surprising frequency among the Gnostics, A. Pasquier hopes that the text of *Eugnostos*, in which the philosophical vocabulary is astonishingly precise, will permit a clarification of the same notion elsewhere. According to her, the notion of auto-causality is one of the philosophical ideas that the Gnostics borrowed to explain the doctrine of the redeemed Saviour. The analysis of *Eugnostos*, therefore, touches upon a question hotly debated since the History of Religions School in Germany regarding the links between Christianity and Gnosticism, especially concerning the myth of the Celestial Man or the Redeemed-Redeemer.

Eugnostos could have been produced in Alexandria, since it closely resembles the strongly Platonic Judaism found in Philo of Alexandria and teaches a Christianity well suited for such an environment. The principal texts on which the text is based come from the Jewish Scriptures. This indicates its antiquity, as well as its intended audience. The text's Middle-Platonic philosophical doctrines, as well as its parallels with other patristic literature, indicate a date during the second century CE.