

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott  
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel  
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen  
Weber Freiligrath Frey  
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel  
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas  
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach  
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil  
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London  
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer  
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup  
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff  
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt  
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier  
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder  
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George  
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust  
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot  
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy  
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius  
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates  
Brentano Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Raabe Gibbon Tschchow  
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius  
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke  
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist  
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil  
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus  
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus Moltke  
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo  
Nestroy Marie de France Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht  
Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz  
Marx vom Stein Lawrence Irving  
von Ossietzky May Michelangelo Knigge Kock Kafka  
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# **The Gnôsis of the Light**

F. Lamplugh

# Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

Author: F. Lamplugh

Cover design: toepferschumann, Berlin (Germany)

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg (Germany)

ISBN: 978-3-8491-8494-0

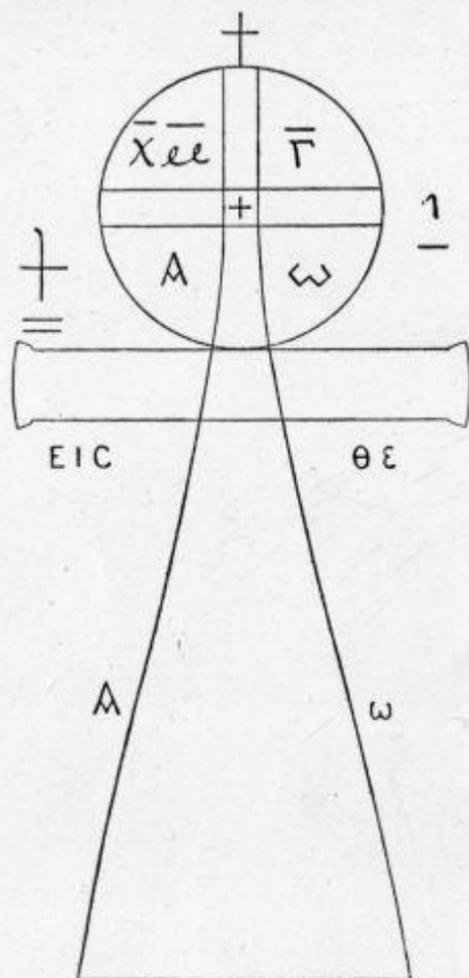
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THE GNÔSTIC CROSS  
(Codex Brucianus)

*[Frontispiece]*



I have loved you, and have longed to give you Life.

Blessed is he who crucifieth the World and hath not suffered the World to crucify him.

Blessed is the man who knoweth these things, who hath brought Heaven down upon Earth and hath taken Earth and hath lifted it up unto Heaven, and hath so wrought that the Midst is a Nothing.

*The Book of the Gnosés of the  
Invisible God.*



## CONTENTS

Introduction

The Gnôsis of the Light

Notes



## INTRODUCTION

This translation of the ancient Gnostic work, called by Schmidt, the *Untitled Apocalypse*, is based chiefly on Amélineau's French version of the superior MS. of the Codex Brucianus, now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. In making the rendering I have studied the context carefully, and have not neglected the Greek words interspersed with the Coptic; also I have availed myself of Mr Mead's translation of certain important passages from Schmidt's edition, for purposes of comparison. Anything that I have added to bring out the meaning of the Gnostic author now and again, I have enclosed in brackets. Such suggestions have always arisen from the text. I fancy my English version will be found to give a reasonably accurate idea of the contents of one of the most abstruse symbolical works in the world. The notes that I have added are not intended to be final or exhaustive, but to give the general reader some guidance towards understanding the intensely interesting topics with which the powerful mind of the ancient mystical writer was preoccupied. I have endeavoured to show myself a sympathetic "Hierophant" or expounder of some of the mysteries, not without study of the Gnosis, both of the Christianised and purely Hellenistic type, for the key to the understanding of symbolism is only given into the hands of sympathy.

The Codex Brucianus was brought to England from Upper Egypt, by the famous traveller Bruce, in 1769, and bequeathed by him to the care of the Bodleian Library, Oxford. It contains several Gnostic works translated into the Upper Egyptian dialect from the Greek, and probably is as old as the sixth century A.D. The Greek originals were of course much older, that is to say, the MSS. to which the codex ultimately goes back were much older. We are only concerned with one of them here, the so-called *Untitled Apocalypse*, which is markedly distinct from the others in character and style. Schmidt dates it well in the second century A.D., and with this estimate I am inclined to agree. It shows, as I have endeavoured to make clear in the notes, marked affinities in some respects to the *Gospel of Mary* (Codex Akhmim), which we know to have been in existence before 180 A.D., and its philosophical basis is the Platonism of Alexandria. If it is by one writer, I think it may be dated

from 160 or 170 A.D.-200 A.D., and belongs to the period of Basilides and Valentinus.

Before venturing upon any discussion of the authorship and contents of our document, it would be as well to say a few words as to the meaning of that much misunderstood technical term "Gnôsis" in Hellenistic and early Christian theology. For a fuller exposition I would refer the reader to the admirable essay upon the subject by Mr G. R. S. Mead in his volume *Quests Old and New*. Gnôsis was not "philosophy" in the generally accepted sense of the term, or even religio-philosophy. "It was immediate knowledge of God's mysteries received from direct intercourse with the Deity—mysteries which must remain hidden from the natural man, a knowledge at the same time which exercises decided reaction on our relationship to God and also on our nature or disposition" (Reitzenstein). It was the power or gift of receiving and understanding revelation, which finally culminated in the direct unveiled vision of God and the transformation of the whole man into spiritual being by contact with Him. The ground of the idea of Gnôsis does not seem to be very different from that of the later "Mystical Theology," "which originally meant the direct, secret, and incommunicable knowledge of God received in contemplation" (Dom John Chapman). The revelation sought for was not so much a dogmatic revelation as a revelation of the processes of "transmutation" of Rebirth, of Apotheosis or "Deification." Its aim was dynamic rather than static. But while the followers of the Gnôsis, both Christian and Hellenistic, would have agreed that the direct knowledge of God is incommunicable to others, they undoubtedly seem to have held that there were what may be described as intermediate or preparatory processes or energisings which could be communicated: (1) by initiation into a holy community; (2) by a duly qualified master; (3) under the veils of symbols and sacraments.

The Gnôstic movement began long before the Christian era (what its original historical impulse was we do not know), and only one aspect of it, and that from a strictly limited point of view, has been treated by ecclesiastical historians. Recent investigations have challenged the traditional outlook and the traditional conclusions and the traditional "facts." With some to-day, and with many more to-morrow, the burning question is, or will be—not how did a peculi-

arly silly and licentious heresy rise within the Church—but how did the Church rise out of the great Gnôstic movement, and how did the dynamic ideas of the Gnôsis become crystallised into Dogmas? I do not indicate a solution; I do not express an opinion. I call attention to a fact in the world of scholarship that will not be without its decided reaction upon the plain man. But the study of the ancient Gnôsis, and indeed of mysticism generally, has left another suggestion that seems laden with limitless possibilities. Let us first go back to what I said as to the communication of certain "processes," "leavenings," or "energising" under a sacramental veil. These processes were held to modify the nature of the person who submitted to them in a peculiar manner that was likened to the impress or "character" of a seal upon wax. These seals or "characters" could not only be acquired through formal rites and by the laying on of the hands of a master, but also, I am disposed to believe, by a certain mode of study—I am developing the Gnôstic theory, not stating one of my own—namely, that of a highly symbolic literature. The objection of the Gnôstic to a plain statement of facts would probably be somewhat as follows: "What you say is very good and true as far as it goes, but it is 'Pistis,' not Gnôsis; Faith, not Knowledge. You desire to be a changed man. Pistis will change you to a certain extent. I have nothing to say against it, but it will not change you in the radical way that Gnôsis does." If you went on to argue that your statement was reasonable and received admirable support from logic and philosophy, he would probably reply: "Philosophy of the kind you mention is excellent, and forms a basis for Gnôsis which is not contrary to reason, though it is above it. Gnôsis is a rebirth by which you become a god, and then you will have no need to find out things by talking and discursive reasoning, for everything will be within yourself and you will know all things in a vital way, by an act of simple intuition in the end. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.' If you tie yourself down to logic, you will not know the real things, the 'Things that are,' by getting inside them. Your knowledge will be external, superficial. Gnôsis, you may be surprised to learn, is not just 'knowing,' it is light *and* 'life,' living and being as well. This must not be taken as an attacking reason; if you join our school you will have a stiff course of Plato. You ought to

know the 'Things that are' from the ordinary point of view, from outside, before you approach them with the idea of getting inside them, and so raising them up within yourself as far-shining lives. Afterwards you will study in a new manner that will seem madness to the common-sensed; and a Divine Madness indeed it is, for it will lead you to the secret of the Cross."

Hence the disciple was confronted in due time with a document that would not yield its secrets to dialectic, a kind of ritual in words that initiated his intuition into self-knowledge. Intense devotion was needed, imagination, and will-power. The Gnôsis came gradually, perhaps after the manuscript had been laid aside; it was the effort towards a sympathetic understanding that mattered, that was rewarded with life and light from God. The mere success of the logical mind in unravelling a puzzle was as nothing, for the readings of these monstrous, many-faceted stars of symbolism were infinite. That the intuition should enter into self awareness as into a sacred place of the mysteries – that was a process of the Gnôsis.

Now this strange way of teaching, which was really a "Cloud of Unknowing," was the real basis and point, as it were, of the Alexandrine method of interpreting Scripture. Think of Philo and what he says of the teaching of his Gnôstic Therapeuts. Think of Clement, and of Origen with his "Eternal Gospel." This quickening of the intuition into knowledge of itself and God, through allegory and symbol based on philosophy, was the Everlasting Gospel.

So Gnôstic documents were not merely intended to puzzle the outsider, but the insider as well. This fact will enable us to appreciate better Basilides' famous remark about the one or two only who could understand his system. His frame of mind was a little like that of a university examiner after setting a paper. We need not think that these people were altogether destitute of humour. It would be a gross exaggeration, of course, to say that all the Gnôstic systems described in Irenaeus and Hippolytus might have been devised by the same man, but it would be a useful exaggeration, illustrating the extreme anti-literalist point of view. Our knowledge of the schools rests for the most part on reports made upon documents such as these, the purport of which was entirely missed by those that made them. They treated Gnôsis as if it were another

kind of "Pistis," or another system of philosophy. One doubts very much the correctness of the traditional classification of schools, which was made by people who were not in very close touch with them. One doubts if there was much hostility between these schools, however much their symbolism may appear to differ on the surface.

What was the result of these processes "initiated" or "started" by sacramental rites, by symbolism, by masters of Gnôsis? Was the result something purely "subjective" at best? The answer of the Masters of the Gnôsis to this question, which is characteristic of the modern mind and expresses the doubt which is gnawing at the heart of much modern religious life, would have been "No. There are certain physical changes as well. The body is spiritualised." They might possibly have added, "It is assumed, in part at least, by the Body of Stars[1] which has been awakened within it. This is the Body by means of which Union with God takes place, and then still more wonderful changes happen. We can awaken the Body of Stars or Rays, but to unite it with Himself, that depends upon the Will of God above, but all is a mystery of Grace."

This awakening of the Body of Stars, this assumption, or partial assumption, by immortality of the inner flesh, is the interesting possibility to which I referred earlier. Let me here quote two Catholic writers. Says Döllinger (*First Age*, p. 235, quoting Rom. vii. 22, 1 Cor. vi. 14, Eph. iii. 16 and 30, in support), "Saint Paul not only divides man into body and spirit, but distinguishes in the bodily nature, the gross, visible, bodily frame and a hidden, inner 'spiritual' body not subject to limits of space or cognisable by the senses; this last, which shall hereafter be raised, is alone fit for and capable of organic union with the glorified body of Christ, of substantial incorporation with it." Dom John Chapman, O.S.B., in his excellent article on "Catholic Mysticism" in Hastings' *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. ix., writes: "It is not to be denied that this psychophysical side demands scientific investigation. It seems certain that St John of the Cross is justified in his view that the body is somehow 'spiritualised' by contemplation. Such facts as the power of saints over the animal world and the power of reading thoughts, *e.g.*, are proved beyond cavil."

Here, then, we have a consistent tradition held by many schools, and I think that it is by investigation along the lines suggested by Dom John Chapman that there is the greatest chance of arriving at some proof of immortality that will satisfy the scientific mind. For the claim of mystics is that here and now it is possible to participate consciously in that which is immortal, and the "spiritualising" of the body is an outward sign of the substantiality of that claim, the standard set up upon a hill to testify that the human consciousness is not planetary merely, not "hylic," nor "psychic," but has its root in the wisdom that issues from an inconceivable Abyss of Life and Light.

I believe that the original source of the document I have translated belonged to an Egyptian community or school of contemplation whose name has been forgotten in the night of time; that it was connected with the preparation of a candidate for the Baptism of Light. What form this rite really took it is impossible to say, but that it had outward signs of some kind is extremely probable. We have an old Gnôstic ritual preserved in the compilation generally known as the "Acts of John." Perhaps this may give us some idea of the sort of ceremony that was worked. I fancy there was an Eucharistic side, and that the Baptism of Light was connected with the mystic crucifixion alluded to so often in the notes. Possibly in the midst of the sacred dance, at the breaking of the Bread, there was a certain laying on of hands by an adept Master, one who had himself attained to the autoptic vision, and then the candidate was left alone to immerse himself in the Dark Ray of the Divine Mind.

I think also that the original MS. was based upon the work of one Master, whose name, like that of the order to which he belonged, is lost in the night of time, but that it also contains amplifications and additions by at least one later hand. It will thus represent the mind of a grade of teaching, and possibly contains material dating back to the period of the Therapeutae that Philo knew. In other words, the community may have been an old one before it was Christianised. In any case, it remains the record of a stupendous spiritual adventure, the attempt to produce a race of Divinised men, that is not without the splendour of tragedy, for at some time, like the Holy Cup of Legend, the presence of Masterhood departed, and the external house fell into ruin and its place knew it no more. Perhaps, in

the desire to propagate, it admitted unworthy candidates; perhaps it turned to the by-ways of magic in an attempt to arrest the external course of nature and to defy necessity; perhaps there came a day when none could understand the inner meaning of the high and far-shining mysteries, and so amidst party strife the building word was lost. Many a man, no doubt, who called himself a "Gnôstic" was but a sorry rogue; many another was but a student of the letter, not of the life; many another was but a spiritual swashbuckler, pompous in his demeanour and cryptic in his utterance; some, led by an abhorrent fantasy, may have wandered along the path that goes to the Venus-berg and have striven to lisp a formula that would transform the earth into Gehenna rather than into Heaven. But, beside this mass of imposture, of folly, of elegant idleness and of corruption, the *à rebours* of a spiritual outpouring, there was a real mysticism that could present the Authentic Spectacle and could utter comfortable words in tongues not of this world utterly. There was a Gnôsis that strove to give the Peace of God to those within and to those without, because in Peace all things were made, that yearned to bring forth children, quickened fiery souls, æons, gods, in bodies of light for the love of God; that saw in all things Grace, the Sponsa Dei, the Mother most pure and immaculate. "No creature was ever wronged of Thee," no spark ever quenched, no hope defrauded and hurled eternally from the sky with shattered wings by Thee. Such is the fair Faith that chanted its prayer beneath a heaven set with such strange galaxies, and whispers to us now through the disremembered symbols of a forgotten book.

It is pleasant, in these days of strife, to be able to quote Dr Schmidt's appreciation of the *Untitled Apocalypse* with a cordial agreement:

"What a different world, on the contrary, meets us in our thirty-one leaves! We find ourselves in the pure spheres of the highest Plêrôma; we see, step by step, this world, so rich in heavenly beings, coming into existence before our eyes; each individual space with all its inmates is minutely described, so that we can form for ourselves a living picture of the glory and splendour of this Gnôstic heaven. The speculations are not so confused and fantastic as those of the Pistis Sophia and our two Books of Jeu.... The author is imbued with the Greek spirit, equipped with a full knowledge of

Greek philosophy, full of the doctrine of the Platonic ideas, an adherent of Plato's view of the origin of evil – that is to say, Hyle.... We possess in these leaves a magnificently conceived work by an old Gnôstic philosopher, and we stand astonished, marvelling at the boldness of the speculations, dazzled by the richness of the thought, touched by the depth of soul of the author. This is not, like the Pistis Sophia, the product of declining Gnôsticism, but dates from a period when Gnôstic genius, like a mighty eagle, left the world behind it and soared in wide and ever wider circles towards pure light, towards pure knowledge, in which it lost itself in ecstasy.

"In one word, we possess in this Gnôstic work, as regards age and contents, a work of the very highest importance, which takes us into a period of Gnôsticism, and therefore of Christianity, of which very little knowledge has been handed down to us."

Finally, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the scholarship of Mr G. R. S. Mead, whose labours in the field of Hellenistic Theology have to my mind received insufficient recognition, and whose admirable translations I have often used in the notes.

[1] Not to be confused with the "astral body" of modern theosophy.

## The Gnôsis of the Light

[1]This is the Father of all Fathers, the God of all ... Gods, Lord of all Lords, Sonship of all Sons, Saviour of all Saviours, Invisible of all Invisibles, Infinity of all Infinities, Uncontainable of all Uncontainables, Beyond-the-Deep of all Beyond-the-Deeps, Space of all Spaces. This is the Spiritual Mind which existed before all Spiritual Minds, the Holy Place comprehending all Holy Places, the Good comprehending all Goods. This is the Seed of all good things. It is He who has brought them all forth, this Autophues or Being who has produced Himself, who existed before all the beings of the Plêrôma which He Himself has brought forth, Who is in all time. This is that Ingenerable and Eternal One who has no name and who has all names; who was the first to know those of the Universe, who has looked upon those of the Universe, who has heard those of the Universe. He is mightier than all might, upon whose incomprehensible Face no one is able to gaze. Beyond all mind does He exist in His own Form, Solitary and Unknowable. The Universal Mystery is He, the Universal Wisdom, of all things the Beginning. In Him are all Lights, all Life, and all Repose. He is the Beatitude of which all in the Universe are in need, for that they might receive Him they are. All beings of the Universe does He behold within Himself, that One Uncontainable, who parts those of the Universe and receives them all into Himself. Without Him is nothing, for all the worlds exist in Him, and He is the boundary of them all. All of them has He enclosed, for in Him is all. No Space is there without Him, nor any Intelligence; for without that Only One there exists nothing. The Eternities (æons) contemplate His incomprehensibility which is within them all, but understand it not. They wonder at it because He limits them all. They strive towards the City in which is their Image. In this City (1) it is that they move and live [and have their true being]; for it is the House of the Father, the Robe of the Son, and the Power of the Mother, the Image of the Plêrôma. He is the First Father of all things, the First Eternal, the King of those that None can Touch; He in whom all things lose themselves, He who has given all things form within Himself; the Space which has grown from Itself, He who is born of Himself, the Abyss of all being, the Great and True One who is in the Deep; He in whom the

Fullnesses (Plêrômata) did come, and even they are silent before Him. They have not named Him, because Unnamable and beyond thought is He, that First Fount whose Eternity stretches through all Spaces, that First Tone (2) whereby all things hearken and understand. He it is whose limbs make a myriad, myriad Powers, and every Power is a being in itself.

The Second Space is that which is called Creator, Father, Word, Source, Mind, Man, Eternal, Infinite. He is the Pillar, the Overseer, the Father of all. He it is upon whose Head the æons form a crown, darting forth their rays. The Fullness of His Countenance is unknown to the external worlds who seek His Face, for evermore yearning to know It; for unto them His Word has run forth and to behold It is their desire. The Light of His Eyes pierces to the spaces of the external Plêrôma and the Word goes forth from His Mouth to those who dwell in Heaven and to those who dwell beneath it. The hairs of His Head are the number of the Hidden Worlds, and the Features of His Face are the type of the Eternities; the hairs of His Beard are the number of the External Worlds. The stretching out of His Hands is the manifestation of the Cross (3). The strain of the Cross is the Ennead, the Ninefold Being. He who springs up [? or is nailed] to the right and to the left of the Cross is the Man whom no man can comprehend. He is the Father, the Fount whence Silence wells, He for whom the Quest is everywhere. The Father is He from whom went forth the Monad and the Spark of Light, and before this all the Worlds were dark nothings. For it is that Spark of Light which has placed all things in the rays of Its Splendour, so they have received Knowledge [Gnôsis], Life, Hope, Peace, Faith, Love and Resurrection, the Second Birth and the Seal. Now these things are the Ennead, the Ninefold Being, which has come forth from the Father without beginning, who alone has been His own Father and His own Mother, whose Plêrôma surrounds the twelve (4) Deeps.

The First Deep is the Universal Fount, from whom all fountains have gone forth.

The Second Deep is the Universal Wisdom, from whom all wisdoms have gone forth.

The Third Deep is the Universal Mystery, from whom all mysteries have gone forth.