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Gertcel David

Simon Magus

The founder of Gnosticism

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founder of Gnosticism**

«Издательские решения»

David G.

Simon Magus. The founder of Gnosticism / G. David —
«Издательские решения»,

The book is based on early first-century manuscripts by the Gnostic Herodotus, son of Angelus. He was a follower of Simon Magus, the father of Gnosticism. These ancient manuscripts reveal who Simon the Samaritan was and what doctrine he taught. The book consists of dialogues that recreate the Gnostic history of the origin of the universe and is intended for all seekers of Truth. The book was translated into English using Google Translator.

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Содержание

Chapter One	6
Scroll 2	11
Scroll 4	13
Chapter Two	19
Scroll 7	26
Chapter Three	34
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	36

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Chapter One

Italy. Torre Annunziata, a southern suburb of Naples. Present day.

A man in his forties, showing his pass to the guard, drove into the area enclosed by a high fence. Turning off the engine and taking a folder of documents from the backseat, he walked toward the archaeological excavation site, which was carefully hidden from prying eyes. Calling over his assistant, Katrin, a recent archaeology graduate, he handed her the folder and cheerfully announced:

“In Naples, our suspicions were confirmed. Radiocarbon dating showed that the discovered manuscripts date back to the first century AD.”

Katrin, looking over the experts’ report, smiled broadly and said in a low voice:

“Professor, this is a stroke of luck. Your guess was correct: this villa belonged to a noble and wealthy Roman who lived two thousand years ago.”

— The laboratory indicated a period from 20 to 70 years, and most importantly, they allowed us to continue excavations.

Katrin continued to smile, but the professor noticed that she was worried about something and asked:

— What’s wrong with you? You don’t seem happy?

Looking towards the van that served as the professor’s temporary office while he directed the excavations, Katrin replied:

“Signor Ponti, while you were at Naples City Hall, two priests from the Vatican came to see us. They want to talk to you.”

The professor also glanced at the van:

“What do they want here? They’re sticking their noses in everywhere. They’d be better off just continuing to pray.”

“They somehow found out that we discovered ancient scrolls and are demanding that we give them our findings, but I said that I cannot do this without your consent.

“Correct. Before handing the manuscripts over to the Vatican, we must translate and study them ourselves. The mayor’s office has asked us to keep the finds confidential for now, so the press doesn’t get wind of it, but apparently they haven’t forgotten to inform the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology.” Looking again at the van, the professor continued, “If the scrolls fall into their hands, they will be hidden forever in the Vatican’s secret archives or — worse — destroyed. The clergy fights against anything that might cast doubt on the existence of Jesus or his divine calling.” He looked his assistant intently in the eyes. “Katrin, just imagine, after so many centuries they haven’t managed to find a single significant piece of evidence for Christ’s existence in either Roman or Jewish sources, so they’re confiscating every document that might mention Jesus of Nazareth, or, worse, that might portray him as an ordinary man, with his vices and weaknesses.”

“I fully support you, Professor Ponti,” Katrin said calmly.

— Well, let’s not talk about sad things. Tell me how the excavations are going.

— Following the plan, we discovered the library that was mentioned in the second of the scrolls we found, written by that same boy.

“Katrin, please, don’t tell anyone about this for now. If the priests insist, I’ll only show them the scroll of the teacher or the boy to divert attention from the excavations, but if we manage to find something significant, I will never agree to hand it over to the Vatican until we’ve studied it ourselves. We archaeologists are also in service, but not to God, but to history. Our mission is to bring historical truth to the people.”

— I agree with you, professor.

Looking again at the van in which two priests were waiting for him, Signor Ponti said:

“The Vatican’s officials are quite influential and capable of cutting off funding for our work. Katrin, you go to the site, and I’ll go and talk to the uninvited guests.”

Giovanni Ponti entered the van and saw two men in black cassocks and collars. One, quite young, was sitting at a table, apparently reading the Bible; the other, about fifty, was looking anxiously out the window, which overlooked the excavation site and a small island in the pond. After introducing himself and greeting his guests, the professor inquired:

— How can I help you?

The older man stepped away from the window, introduced himself as Father Ippolit, and invited everyone to sit at the table. Taking a seat across from the professor, next to a young deacon named Thomas, Ippolit looked closely at Giovanni and said calmly:

“Signor Ponti, you’re probably already aware that we represent the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology. We’ve been informed that manuscripts have been discovered during excavations here that date back to the beginning of the Common Era, meaning they were composed approximately two thousand years ago. As you know, all finds from that period must be submitted to our commission for study. We have the necessary permits for this.”

The priest handed the document to the professor. After quickly examining it, Signor Ponti said:

“I would be happy to carry out this order, but unfortunately, we have not yet discovered anything of interest. Many of the scrolls are significantly damaged, and the text is illegible. As is well known, during the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD, Oplontis, like Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae, was buried under a layer of volcanic ash. Over time, a city arose here, which was named Torre Annunziata. But as for the excavations on this estate, we have only been able to examine two scrolls so far. We also conducted radiocarbon dating and determined, as you have probably already been informed, that these manuscripts were made in the early first century. However, I assure you that you will not find anything special in them.”

— We want to look at the two scrolls that survived.

“You probably won’t understand what it says. Even though the house belonged to a Roman, all the inscriptions are not in Latin, but in Ancient Greek. The first scroll was written by an adult, Greek by birth; we assume he was a Greek teacher, as indicated by the style, language, and handwriting. The second, in all likelihood, was written by a child practicing Greek. As you know, this language, along with Latin, was considered the official language of the Roman Empire.”

Looking at Ippolit, the professor added:

In general, Greek culture had a powerful influence on the Roman nobility. Wealthy citizens of the empire invited Greek teachers directly from Athens for their children.

The priests looked at each other, after which Ippolit said:

“We already know that the scrolls you found are in Ancient Greek, which is why Deacon Thomas came with me. He speaks Latin and Ancient Greek fluently and will understand the meaning without much difficulty. We also have a special lab where we can extract text even from poorly preserved manuscripts. We will study them, after which anyone interested will be able to view these texts in the Vatican Library.”

Realizing that Hippolytus was determined, Giovanni thought it would be better to retreat:

“As you wish. But, I repeat, you’re unlikely to find what you’re looking for there. Yes, analysis confirmed that the scrolls and household items date back to the early first century, making them almost two thousand years old, but this villa is 200 kilometers from Rome, and Jesus, as you know, preached in Judea.”

“Be that as it may,” Ippolit continued to insist, “we need to get acquainted with the scrolls.”

Trying at all costs to prevent the priests from accessing the finds, the professor made another argument:

“The scrolls are very fragile, and if handled carelessly, their contents could be lost forever. Please allow us to continue the excavations. We will carefully extract everything, study it, and after publishing our findings, we will be sure to provide you with copies.”

Ippolit, seeing the professor's stubbornness, sternly said:

“We must study the contents of these scrolls before they are published. The Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology will not allow any heresy to be published.”

“Isn't that why we're trying to make all the finds public and add them to the collection of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples?” Giovanni asked calmly. “We're funded by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, and we have to report to them first and foremost. I just don't understand what you're trying to find here.”

“We came here to fulfill our duty. According to this order,” the priest once again drew the professor's attention to the document, “all objects of interest to the Vatican must be handed over to us. And from then on, we will oversee the excavations. If you refuse to comply with our demands, we will take action. We may even demand that the work be stopped entirely. You know full well that this is within our power.”

The professor was indignant:

“It's the twenty-first century, an era of new technologies and discoveries, yet sometimes it seems like we're still in the Middle Ages, where the Holy See can do whatever it wants and everyone must obey it. You still fear the truth and are ready to oppose anything that might cast a shadow on your version of events as described in the Gospels.”

“Signor Ponti, I do not intend to enter into a discussion with you,” Ippolit remarked coldly.

Realizing that the excavations were at risk, Giovanni lowered his tone:

“So far, we've only found the room of a boy, presumably the son of the estate's owner. There, we discovered two surviving scrolls, dated approximately 27 or 28 AD. It's unlikely anyone knew or even heard of Jesus back then, especially in Oplontis.” After a pause, the professor continued, “I'm well versed in history, and I can say that Judea, with all due respect, was considered a remote province by the Romans. The Roman nobility could only have heard of the most distinguished, great figures of Judea at the time, and, as everyone knows, Jesus began preaching in 30 AD, a few years after the scrolls were compiled.”

— How did you manage to determine the date of the manuscript's composition so accurately?

“The scrolls indicate the year of Emperor Tiberius's reign, or rather, the text in them, as was customary at the time, begins with the year of the emperor's reign, namely, the 14th. Based on this, we established the date of the manuscript, which was later confirmed by radiocarbon dating. The walls in the room are weak, and so far we have only been able to extract two scrolls. We took these to the laboratory, and then to the Naples Archaeological Authority to obtain permission to continue the excavations.” Looking at the young deacon and then at Father Hippolytus, Giovanni continued: “Despite being raised in a secular family, I am thoroughly familiar with the Old and New Testaments, and I assure you that if Jesus really existed, information about him should be sought not here in Oplontis, or even in Rome, but in Judea.”

The priest didn't like the professor's words. He looked at him menacingly and said:

— The existence of our Lord Jesus is beyond doubt, and only an ignoramus can doubt the earthly path of the Savior.

“Forgive me if my statement offended you. I don't dare argue with you. I just want to point out once again that these notes won't shed any light on the story of Jesus; you'll only be wasting your time. In that scroll, which we assumed was composed The scroll, written by a Greek teacher, describes events that took place on the estate: the arrival of guests, the departure of the hostess to Rome, the vast estate, which cannot be explored in a day, the attendance of a boy with poor eyesight at lessons, the boy's love for the garden and workshop, observing the flowers he planted, or checking the fish

to make sure they haven't escaped. And in the second scroll, the child himself describes his day. In short, it describes the ordinary everyday life of a noble family of that time.

— How did you find out the contents of the scrolls so quickly if you claim the text is in ancient Greek?

“I studied this language at university, and after examining the manuscripts, I can confirm that the scrolls contain nothing religious. And none of the heresy you so zealously fight against.”

“Even if these scrolls aren't connected to religion, others may contain important information about the earthly life of our God, Jesus. But be that as it may, all scrolls must be handed over to us, whether they be manuscripts by a child, an adult, or a teacher. Otherwise, funding will be cut off and the work will be mothballed.”

The professor remained silent.

Once again approaching the window and looking at the excavations, Ippolit asked:

— And who exactly owned this estate, did you manage to find out?

“We haven't been able to find any precise information yet, but, as I've already said, it belonged to a certain Roman patrician. Although the estate is so far from Rome, it clearly belonged to a wealthy and noble person: it's so large that it even includes a pond with a small island in the middle. At that time, many patricians owned villas in the Naples area. Not far from our excavation site, in Oplontis, is the villa of Emperor Nero's family.”

Returning to the table and sitting down next to the deacon, who had not uttered a word during this entire time, Ippolit once again demanded that the scrolls be presented.

Giovanni kept all his finds in his personal van, where he was forced to go. There, he photographed the manuscripts and returned to the priests. Carefully laying both scrolls out on the table, the professor said:

“So far, we've only found a few rooms, the best-preserved of which are the nursery and the library. We haven't reached the library yet, and these scrolls were discovered in a room that presumably belonged to a child or a teacher.”

“Is teacher the name of that servant?”

“No, we couldn't find out his name. Pedagogues were Greek slaves who served in the homes of Roman nobles, teaching their children Greek and good manners. Literally, “pedagogue” translates as “child attendant.”

Bending over the scrolls, Ippolit began to examine them carefully.

The professor meanwhile continued:

— The scrolls we were able to decipher were written in Koine. Koine — from the Greek for “common” — is a form of ancient Greek that was widely spoken in the Eastern Mediterranean. Knowledge of two languages was mandatory for the Roman aristocracy, and it was considered good form to read Greek philosophers in the original, which is probably why they hired a Greek tutor for their children. Koine was widely spoken in the Roman Empire; even in the marketplace, merchants from various countries communicated with Roman customers in this language. It was this language that later formed the basis of modern Greek. You probably know that Koine is also called the language of the New Testament, since virtually all early texts, from the first and second centuries, are written in it.

The priests continued to examine the scrolls.

“Were you able to find any records in Latin?” Ippolit inquired.

Giovanni looked at him calmly and replied:

“Maybe in the future we'll find something in Latin, but our funding has been cut, and excavations are progressing extremely slowly.”

“We'll take care of the funding, but you'll hand over all the scrolls you find to the Vatican. We won't have any trouble reading them. As I've already mentioned, we have a professional lab with

the best equipment, thanks to which we've been able to decipher thousands of manuscripts from all over the world."

Signor Ponti said nothing, merely pointing to one of the scrolls, which was severely damaged and only a small portion was legible. The professor explained that this manuscript, numbered Scroll 2, dated to 27—28 AD, was inscribed on the scroll. Deacon Thomas pulled it closer and began translating aloud.

Scroll 2

The 14th year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius. Oplontis.

(7 lines are impossible to make out)

...Before Greek class, I went to the studio, where I continued sculpting. This was my sixth sculpture; like the previous ones, I destroyed the fifth, and then began sculpting a new one from the same clay. It seemed to me that it had improved in my absence; perhaps I had done everything correctly, and the clay had taken the correct shape. Today, I worked on the sculpture a little more, determined to perfect it. The woman's voice, audible only to me, continued to prompt me, and I continued working. When the time came, the teacher came for me, and we went to class.

The sun was shining brightly, and although my vision had improved slightly since the guest's arrival, I still couldn't open my eyes in the sunlight. On the way, I told the teacher that I'd already destroyed several sculptures that hadn't turned out quite as I'd hoped. I like things to be just right, and if there's even the slightest flaw, I re-wet the clay and, as soon as it softens, make a new one.

I'm currently in Greek class. I can already read and even write. My eyes get tired quickly, but I continue to learn and tinker.

Ippolit stared intently at the deacon, who was trying to convey the ancient text's meaning in his own words. Finding nothing of interest in any of the scrolls, the priest pushed them toward the professor.

— You can keep it for now.

Giovanni carefully rolled them up and said:

"I told you that you won't find anything important here, you'll only waste precious time that could be spent in prayer."

Ippolit looked at the professor with displeasure and said sternly:

"The Holy Church knows best how to manage our time. If the cardinal himself, the chairman of the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology, sent us here, then it means that we are more pleasing to Our Lord Jesus here." Glancing at the rolled-up scrolls, Hippolytus added, "I suppose I don't need to remind you that we are the first to know about all discoveries?"

Giovanni remained silent.

— How long will it take? Are you retrieving scrolls from the library?

"We're working extremely carefully, because the walls could collapse at any moment. I can't risk people's lives. If nothing serious happens, I think we'll be able to reach the library in a week, maybe even two."

Once again approaching the window, Ippolit said:

"I will need to return to the Vatican to report on the scrolls and the progress of the excavations, and then inspect other archaeological work in Rome, Naples, and the surrounding area to ensure that no heresy is uncovered, even by accident. Deacon Thomas will remain here and oversee the excavations. You may store the vessels and other antiquities at the site, and continue to record all information about them in the archaeological journal, but immediately hand over any manuscripts found to Thomas."

Returning to the table, Ippolit, turning to the professor, said:

— Signor Ponti, could you leave us for a while, I need to talk to the deacon.

The professor left the van and headed toward the excavation site. Katrin, who had been worried about Signor Ponti the entire time, immediately rushed to his side:

— Well, Professor? Will you give them the scrolls?

Looking at the van, inside which Ippolit was explaining something to the young deacon, Giovanni said:

“I am a professor of archeology, and my mission is to tell contemporaries about the past, and no threats will force me to compromise my principles.”

— I fully support you, Signor Ponti.

Looking around, Katrin said barely audibly:

“While you were in the van, we managed to retrieve several more scrolls. They are badly damaged.”

“Wait until one of the priests leaves the excavation site, and then quietly take the scrolls to my van. I’ll try to carefully open them and read them.”

— Will you clarify their dating?

“No, we can’t take anything to the lab. If the priests find out we’ve removed scrolls from the site without their knowledge, they’ll order all work stopped and bring in a new team of archaeologists who will follow their every instruction. They’ve decreed that we must hand over all recovered scrolls to the Vatican, or more precisely, to the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology.”

— Professor, aren’t you afraid?

“I’ll carefully open them, read them, make copies, and then hand them over to the Vatican. That way, we won’t break the rules and can continue the excavations. Our goal is to get to the truth, literally and figuratively. Do you really think I’ll let them or anyone else stop us?”

Katrin nodded approvingly.

When Hippolytus left the van, Deacon Thomas opened the Bible again and continued reading. Periodically, he put the book down and went to the window to observe the progress of the excavations.

As evening fell, all the workers left the site and went to rest. The deacon stayed overnight where he was, and Giovanni headed to his van, where he usually worked until late at night. To complete the translation of the scroll by morning, he decided not to return to his apartment in Rome, but to spend the night in the van. As soon as the deacon’s light went out, the professor carefully removed the new scrolls Katrin had mentioned, marked one with the number four, and began reading and translating.

Scroll 4

The 14th year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius. Oplontis.

Scroll of Herodotus in praise of the Pleroma.

At the request of my teacher, I compiled my own version of events in the Pleroma from ancient Greek sources, and also drew a diagram of the Aeons that once resided in the higher spiritual world. These records should help seekers of truth better understand the story of the Fall and the subsequent coming of the Savior.

The more I study the events of the Pleroma and Kenoma, the more I find similarities with stories in Jewish religious Scripture. Perhaps this is why our great teacher says that Scripture is true, but the priests misinterpret it. Abba loves to repeat that truth is one and all religions have a single source, but this knowledge is cloaked in different garments in each people. Therefore, our goal as Gnostics is now to remove these garments and give humanity true knowledge of the higher spiritual worlds. This new teaching, Gnosticism, founded by our spiritual leader, must be preserved for future generations, along with the Pentateuch, which Moses received on Mount Sinai. The teacher calls these teachings brothers, elder and younger, who are called to help and complement each other. But despite the fact that they have a common source, descended from the same father, until a certain point, these teachings will be hostile to one another.

By studying my notes, you will learn what events occurred in the spiritual worlds, the Pleroma and the Kenoma, that led to the emergence of this material world. You will also be convinced that everything that happens in the material world is a distant resemblance to events in the Kenoma. And the story of the expulsion of the first humans from the Garden of Eden is an allegorical recreation of events in the higher spiritual world, the Pleroma.

That's why the teacher likes to quote Hermes Trismegistus in his sermons: "As above, so below." In other words, events in our world mirror those in the higher worlds, and knowing how they unfolded there, one can easily predict their development in the material world.

And in confirmation of this ancient phrase, as well as the fact that all teachings basically speak of the same thing, Abba quotes the words of King Solomon from the book of Ecclesiastes: "There is nothing new under the sun," that is, everything that has happened and will happen in the material world has already happened in other, higher worlds.

But since the material world is at the farthest point from the Pleroma and Kenoma, there is so much violence in it and the same events take on such crude features.

The blame for this lies with the Creator of this world, the Demiurge, whom the teacher likes to compare to a theater director. The Demiurge strives to replicate, or rather, create a semblance of, the higher spiritual world, but he cannot succeed. He has already destroyed the worlds he created several times — in the theatrical language our spiritual mentor so loves to use — he dispersed the troupe and tore down the sets. But then he recruited new actors to perform the same great performance on the old stage.

To better understand those events, the teacher explains: The Pleroma is Rome, the capital of the great Roman Empire, while our world is one of the empire's smallest cities, a remote province, or even a village within that province. In Rome, magnificent buildings were erected — the forum, the circus, the Theatre of Balbus, the Theatre of Pompey, and other impressive structures — and the inhabitants of that village, though they had never visited the imperial capital, are said to try to recreate a distant likeness of them. If a building in Rome rises twenty paces above the ground, there it would rise, at best, two.

After the Demiurge created a simulacrum of the Pleroma — paradise — and the Kenoma — the material world, he decided to create man from the dust of the earth, in other words, from matter. During the process of creation, to animate the first man, the Demiurge implanted a soul within him. This is why it is said that man combines both material and spiritual natures; more accurately, the spiritual is imprisoned by the material. Man inherited his bad qualities from the first nature, also called matter, and his good qualities from the divine soul, imprisoned by the Demiurge in the human body. The material and the spiritual are in constant conflict with each other, forcing man to choose between good and evil. But we, Gnostics, people of a higher, spiritual nature, unlike those of the spiritual, voluntarily descend into the material world. We are guests here, and our goal is to rescue and awaken the queen soul, a particle of which fell into this world and resides within each of us.

When the queen, having consumed the salvific gnosis — that is, having discovered secret knowledge — awakens and returns to the higher worlds, this world will be destroyed, just as the human body is destroyed after the soul leaves it. This is why the soul-nature placed by the Demiurge in the human body is called the queen-soul, for only her presence here gives continuity to this world, enlivens it. During the queen's exodus from the material world to the Pleroma, she will be accompanied by Gnostics. Besides them, people of the soul-nature — the righteous from various nations — will also be saved. However, unlike the Gnostics, they will not go to the Pleroma, but to the eighth heaven, also known as the Heavenly Jerusalem, while the material world will be destroyed.

I was greatly honored to be near my teacher and to study with him. His name is known far beyond the borders of Judea, and even in Rome, the capital of the empire, everyone has heard of him, for he is a great miracle worker and prophet who attained the highest levels of wisdom.

We wholeheartedly believed his predictions about good and bad times for the Roman Empire, which was now on the rise. He also believed that it would abandon paganism and found a new world religion.

The Teacher repeated more than once: although this teaching, Gnosticism, unlike religions, will be hidden for a long time, at the right moment, in two thousand years, it will rise from the ashes like a phoenix.

That the Scripture might be fulfilled

Diagram of the Pleroma and Kenoma from the scroll "Symposium Sirim"

History of the Pleroma and Kenoma

1. The Beginning of the Pleroma

In the beginning was the Unbegotten Father, also called the First Father. He had many other names, including the First Principle, the One, the Silence, Bythos, the Bottomless, the Abyss, or the Depth. This unbegotten, primordial, and perfect Aeon existed long before all things came into being. The First Principle had a mate, called Sige (Silence), also called Ennoia (Thought).

Even though the incomprehensible First Father remained silent all this time, love overwhelmed him, which is why Love is one of his names. At some point, wanting to share this wonderful feeling with someone else, he decided to create his own offspring of Aeons.

Wishing to bestow upon the Aeons the best the Creator had within himself, he placed the seed of his future offspring in the womb of Sige, after which Sige emanated from herself the first pair, the syzygy of the Aeons. These were Nous, also called the Only Begotten, the Beginning of Beginnings, and the Father of Aeons — in other words, the root of all Aeons, since from him all subsequent Aeons descend. and Alethea.

This was the first tetrad, the four highest Aeons:

The First Father and Sige (Silence);

Nus (Mind) and Alethea (Truth).

After some time, the second pair of Aeons, Nous and Aletheia, wishing to emulate the First Father in all things, emanated from themselves a new pair: Logos and Zoë. Logos is considered the beginning of the Pleroma, the Aeons, and all subsequent creations.

Logos and Zoe in turn produced Anthropos and Ecclesia.

This is the second tetrad:

Logos (Word) and Zoe (Life);

Anthropos (Man) and Ecclesia (Church).

Together they formed the first eight Aeons, the Ogdaod.

Having produced the pair Anthropos and Ecclesia, Logos and Zoe emanated ten more Aeons, which made up five pairs.

Here are their names:

Bitios (Depth) and Mixis (Mixing);

Ageratos (Eternal Youth) and Genosis (Unity);

Autophyes (Essential Nature) and Hedone (Pleasure);

Akinetos (Immobile) and Syncrasis (Mixture);

Monogenes (Only Begotten) and Macaria (Happiness).

The pair Anthropos and Ecclesia also emanated from themselves six pairs, twelve Aeons, the last of which are Teletos and Sophia.

Here are their names:

Parakletos (Comforter) and Pistis (Faith);

Patrikos (Father's) and Elpis (Hope);

Mettricos (Motherly) and Agape (Love);

Ainos (Praise) and Synesis (Intellect);

Ekklesiastikos (son of Ecclesia) and Makariotes (Beatitude);

Teletos (Desired) and Sophia (Wisdom).

2. Events in the Pleroma

These fifteen pairs, thirty perfect Aeons, constituted the Pleroma, the fullness and integrity of the First Father. Of all the Aeons, only Nous, the Only Begotten, could enjoy the Creator's boundless majesty. He was also granted the honor of being initiated into the mysteries and plans of the First Father. To all the other Aeons, the First Father remained invisible and incomprehensible.

The descendants of Nus reverently fulfilled the commandments they received, the main one of which forbade not only approaching the First Father, but even thinking about him once again, since his greatness was incomprehensible to the descendants of Nus.

With each generation, the Aeons drifted further and further from the Source, the Root of all things, and despite the prohibitions, they secretly desired to know more about the Creator of all things, the First Principle. The descendants of Nous were tormented by questions: who is the source of all Aeons? Why are they born in pairs? How did they end up in the Pleroma? And why did the First Principle reveal itself only to Nous?

Despite all these questions the Aeons asked themselves, they displayed humility, and none of them intended to violate the prohibition, until one day the youngest of the Aeons, descended from

Anthropos (Man) and Ecclesia (Church), whose name was Sophia (Wisdom), desired, despite the prohibition, to know the First Principle. Becoming proud, she abandoned her mate, Teletos, and, driven by passions, rushed toward the incomprehensible First Father, the Source of all.

Sophia was driven by pride, not love, as she thought. She was convinced that her action would elicit admiration from the other Aeons, who were hesitant to do something similar, fearing they would violate the prohibition.

Despite all obstacles, in her quest to comprehend the greatness of the First Father, she pressed ever further. She almost reached the Source, but the Inner Limit (Oros), guarding the Creator's peace, stopped her. It reminded Sophia that the First Father was incomprehensible and returned her to Teletos.

3. The appearance of the younger Sophia, Sirim

Although Sophia returned to her mate, her action had consequences. In her quest to unite with the incomprehensible Progenitor, she produced a formless essence, previously unknown in the Pleroma, something that an Aeon without a mate can produce. Sophia attempted to conceal this essence, also known as a miscarriage, fearing that her imperfect creation would be expelled from the Pleroma.

Upon learning of Sophia's formless fruit, the Aeons were terrified, thinking that such offspring awaited them as well. The Pleroma, where the Aeons were born in pairs from male and female essences, was engulfed in turmoil. The harmony that had reigned since its founding was disrupted, and since Sophia, in a fit of passion, had violated the prohibition and given birth to a child without a partner, it was decided to banish the younger Sophia from the Pleroma.

Upon learning that her child was about to be banished, Sophia tried to protect it and begged the Progenitor for forgiveness. But since she had violated the prohibition and given birth to a formless being, forbidden to remain in the Pleroma, her prayers were not accepted. To appease the Aeons, who were terrified by the sight of Sophia's child, the Progenitor produced another Aeon, neither paired nor female, also called the Cross. The Aeon Cross, unlike Oros, fulfilled the duties not of the inner Limit, guarding the chambers of the Progenitor, but of the outer Limit, that is, it was to protect the entire Pleroma and the Aeons within it from the outer imperfection, the Kenoma.

The outer Limit cleansed Sophia of her passions and separated from her the formless miscarriage, also called Sirim. After these events, the purified Sophia remained in the Pleroma and was returned to Teletos, while her child, the younger Sophia, Sirim, was led beyond the Pleroma, or, as it is also said, cast down into the Kenoma. To further protect the Aeons from imperfection, the Progenitor commanded the outer Limit to ascend the Cross erected at the entrance to the Pleroma and guard the approaches.

4. Events in Kenoma

During her fall, Sirim saw the light of the Pleroma and imprinted it on her memory forever. Remaining in the void and darkness, in a place called Kenoma, she suffered greatly, longing to return as soon as possible.

In order to restore order in the Pleroma, the First Father gave instructions to Nous and Aletheia to emanate a new pair of Aeons, whose names are Christ and the Holy Spirit.

They were called upon to calm the Aeons, restore order to the Pleroma, and subsequently care for its integrity. Christ and the Holy Spirit once again reminded the inhabitants of the Pleroma of the laws of the Progenitor and His incomprehensibility, and also informed them that this very incomprehensibility is the foundation of the reigning order, integrity, and eternity of the Pleroma.

Having accepted the guidance of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Aeons regained their peace, and only Sophia continued to pray to the Progenitor for forgiveness. Over time, the other Aeons inhabiting

the Pleroma joined her prayers, and the all-merciful Progenitor took pity on Sophia, promising through Nous that in the future her child would return to the Pleroma and be united with its mate.

The thirty Aeons rejoiced at this news and, wishing to express their gratitude to the Origin, decided to create a collective Aeon in His honor.

Each gave the best they had, and thus, to the glory of the Creator, a perfect Aeon was created, named Irenaeus. This Aeon was not paired, but only male, as its counterpart was the younger Sophia, Sirim. Angels were also born with Irenaeus, who were to accompany and protect him everywhere. This common fruit of the Pleroma was also called Logos, Christ, High Priest, and Savior, for he was destined to find Sirim in the future, save her, and then return her to the Pleroma.

The formless, powerless Sirim, who was in Kenome, did not know that her mother had been forgiven and that a new Aeon, Irenaeus, had been created for the glory of the First Father and for her salvation.

5. Design of Sirim

After Christ and the Holy Spirit had restored the integrity of the Pleroma, they were given another mission. They were to descend into Kenoma to give form to the younger Sophia.

Arriving in Kenoma, also known as the desert and the Kingdom of Darkness, Christ discovered the younger Sophia, unformed. She crawled along the ground, unable to even rise due to her nature. Christ formed Sirim, also known as the passions of the elder Sophia, after which she took the form of a female Aeon, but not a paired one. In the future, uniting with the purely male Aeon, Irenaeus, they would create a new, perfect pair of Aeons. Having completed their mission, Christ and the Holy Spirit hastened to return to the Pleroma.

The younger Sophia, having become an almost perfect Aeon, began to seek those who had given her form, and rushed after Christ and the Holy Spirit into the Pleroma, but the outer Limit, guarding the approaches to the Pleroma, blocked her path and ordered her to return to Kenoma.

Sirim found herself in darkness once again, the light of Christ having departed from her. Feeling lonely, afraid, and sad, she wept bitterly, calling out to those who had formed her. The Pleroma took pity on Sirim and, to console her, sent to her the “collective fruit” of the Pleroma, the Aeon Irenaeus, accompanied by twelve angels.

Arriving in Kenoma, Irenaeus reshaped the Sirim, but this time in accordance with gnosis. He then separated from the Sirim the passions that oppressed it and created from them the root of all subsequent creations.

6. Creation of the Universe, the material world, all living things and man

After Irenaeus left her, the purified Sirim began the process of creation from the passions separated from her, emanating three elements: hylithic (material), psychic (soul) and pneumatic (spiritual).

Retaining the spiritual element for herself, she created her son, the Demiurge, the Creator of the Universe, from the soul element. He then performed all subsequent creations from the two natures — soul and material. Pneumatic nature was incomprehensible to him, and so he knew nothing of his mother, the younger Sophia, considering himself the Supreme God.

Secretly instructed by his mother, the Demiurge began the process of creation. Separating the two elements — the spiritual and the material — which had previously been united in Kenoma, he created from the spiritual element the seven heavens, archons, archangels, and angels. Once the spiritual worlds and the archons ruling them were formed, the Demiurge began creating the material world from the hylithic element.

Behind all this was the plan of Irenaeus the Savior, which Sirim carried out through her son.

Having completed the process of creation, the Demiurge took his place above the seventh heaven, where his throne was located. He became proud and declared himself the Creator of the

Universe, proclaiming, “I am God, and there is none else besides me.” Since the Demiurge was still unaware of his mother’s existence, unable to see or understand the spiritual due to his spiritual nature, he was even nicknamed Samael, which translates from Hebrew as “Blind God.”

Sirim, also called Mother, Jerusalem, the younger Sophia, and Ogdoad, since she resides in the eighth heaven, continues to invisibly guide her son. The eighth heaven is also called the Celestial Jerusalem or the middle place, since Sirim, who resides there, is located between the universe created by the Demiurge, below, and the Pleroma.

7. Man. Three kinds of human beings (the threefold nature of man)

(9 lines are impossible to make out)

...The lifeless body of the first man lay in the Garden of Eden until the Demiurge decided to breathe a soul, that is, a spiritual element, into him, thereby reviving him. This man is called by different names in different cultures, but we know him by the names Adamas or Adam.

Man, created by the Demiurge, dwelt in paradise. He combined the psychic (spiritual) and hylithic (material) elements, until the younger Sophia, unbeknownst to the Demiurge, imparted to him the pneumatic (spiritual) element. Those in the know call this a seed or a ray of pneumatic light.

Having learned of this, the Demiurge became inflamed with jealousy towards the man who, unlike him, was awarded the pneumatic element, the spark of light of the Pleroma, and expelled him from paradise into the material world.

Thus, man, endowed with three elements: pneumatic, psychic and hylithic, found himself in the material world.

These three elements are also commonly referred to as the threefold nature of man or the three human genera.

These three genera are:

The Hylisks (material) are those in whom the hylithic element predominates. These are material people, followers of the Prince of this world, the Devil. They cannot be saved by virtue of their nature.

Psychics (spiritual beings) are people of all religions who follow the Holy Scriptures and the commandments received through the prophets. When they leave this world, their actions may merit a place between heaven and hell: the righteous go to heaven, and the sinners to hell. They have freedom of choice and salvation through righteousness.

Pneumatics (spiritualists), also called Gnostics, are those who follow the spark of light of the Pleroma received from the Sirim. Pneumatics are saved by virtue of their spiritual nature.

8. Savior. The Mission of Christ, Irenaeus. Redemption

The goal of the Pneumatics in the material world is to shape the soul’s nature through gnosis, so that this nature awakens within a person, grows like a seed, and ascends to the Higher Worlds. After this seed matures thanks to specialized knowledge, gnosis, the younger Sophia will leave the eighth heaven and enter the Pleroma, where her bridegroom, Irenaeus, will await her. By uniting, they will create a new pair of Aeons.

The spirits of the Gnostics will follow the younger Sophia into the Pleroma.

The Demiurge will take his mother’s place in the eighth heaven. Following him, the souls of the righteous from various nations, those who lived in accordance with the commandments and Scripture, will enter there.

And the third, hylithic element will be destroyed by the all-consuming fire along with this material world.

This is the account of the events in the Pleroma and Cenome by Herodotus, son of Angels.
That the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Chapter Two

Giovanni was so engrossed in translating the scroll into Italian that he didn't notice it was past one in the morning. After saving the file with the translated text on an external drive and naming it "Gnostic Myth," he deleted everything from his computer and headed home to Rome, rather than spend the night in the van as he had originally planned. Hiding the drive in a safe place where no one could get to it, Giovanni didn't even lie down; after drinking a cup of coffee, he headed back.

Arriving at the excavation site that morning, the professor hurried to Katrin to tell her the contents of the scroll, but was disappointed to see a young deacon standing in the van window. Despite the early hour, Thomas was awake and attentively observing the progress of the work. After apologizing to Katrin, Giovanni headed toward him. Stepping inside and greeting Thomas, the professor remarked:

— You woke up so early.

"I try to wake up at dawn so I can pray. I even had time to inspect the excavations and ask your colleagues if they've made any progress in their search for the scrolls."

"I assure you, there's nothing interesting here. You'll just be wasting your time."

"I've been ordered to oversee the excavations, and I have no right to judge whether the scrolls you've found are of any value to the Vatican. Since I've been sent here, it means that at this particular moment in time, the Church and God need me here. Understand, humility and submission are part of my service, and I fully appreciate the importance of the mission entrusted to me."

This was not the first time that Giovanni had noticed the deacon's sincere faith, diligence and responsibility.

"Come on, I'll buy you some coffee," he offered Thomas. "Unlike you, I'm not used to waking up at dawn, and I need a pick-me-up."

— Thanks, but I don't drink coffee. Only tea.

"I didn't know that they had already managed to classify coffee as an invention of the Antichrist," the professor tried to joke.

Thomas didn't smile. Realizing the deacon disapproved of such humor, the professor silently walked to the water cooler, filled the kettle, turned it on, and called the deacon to the table. Thomas sat down and carefully placed the leather-bound Bible on the table.

"Here is your tea," said the professor, handing the cup to the deacon.

Thomas thanked him, took the cup and took a small sip from it.

In turn, taking a sip of invigorating coffee, the professor asked:

You're so young, and you're already serving in the Vatican. How did you manage to do it?

"My uncle held a high position there. I've only been serving for a short time, translating texts in the library."

— Are you from a religious family?

"No, I grew up in a secular family, but under my uncle's influence, I realized how wrong my parents were in straying so far from Jesus. I decided to return to the Lord to pray for my own and their sins before Him."

— Have you done something serious?

Each of us bears our own cross. In the Gospel of John, chapter eight, there's a story about how the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to our Lord Jesus and were about to stone her. They asked Jesus what they should do, wanting to justify their actions and absolve themselves of responsibility for the woman's possible injuries. But the Lord ignored them and continued writing. When they again approached him, asking if they could stone the woman for her sins, our Lord Jesus left the letter and, looking at them, said, "He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her." Then he continued writing.

The professor, although he knew the story very well, listened attentively to its retelling from the lips of the deacon, who continued:

“And then each of them thought about their lives, and one by one, letting go of the stones, they all left that place. Only Jesus and the woman he had told not to sin again remained.

After a pause, Thomas added:

“This story shows that each of us is sinful, since we came into this world to face trials. In other words, everyone bears their own cross. But if you’re asking about my past, worldly life, I didn’t have time to do anything terrible, although I can’t call myself righteous. Seeking the Lord, serving — that’s my inner calling. It’s been ringing within me since childhood and has only grown stronger with each passing year. Now I can’t even imagine how I used to live without God in my heart, without the Bible, without prayer, without community, without church, and I’m glad I’ve had the privilege of serving the Lord. Know this, Professor, Jesus came into this world for each of us, to save humanity, and if you ever want to come to Him, the Lord’s doors are always open; it’s never too late.”

“I’m already over forty, and at that age, people usually have pretty set beliefs. I’m an atheist, and all the stories about Jesus’s earthly life are nothing more than myths to me.”

To the professor’s surprise, the deacon took his words calmly. After a brief pause, he said:

“Everyone has the right to their own point of view, but remember one thing: if you ever want to enter the bosom of the church, call upon Jesus, or confess, the door to the Lord is always open.

“I doubt I’ll find this information useful. It would be a miracle if someone like me ever came to faith, wanted to pray, and even more so, confession. You might be surprised, but as a youth, I reread the Bible many times and, reflecting on religion, couldn’t find an answer to one rather paradoxical question. No matter how many priests I spoke with, no one could really answer it.”

The deacon listened silently to Signor Ponti, who was walking around the room with a cup of coffee.

— What is the question?

“And the question is, how can one crucify God? God, as I understand it, is omnipotent, the Creator of the Universe, and yet in the Gospel story, he is crucified. Perhaps you will answer that it is not God himself, but his son, as he is also called. In that case, how can God the Father allow his son to be crucified?”

Looking closely at the professor, Thomas replied:

Jesus came down to earth to save this world. He gave his life for us all. This is mentioned in several places in the Gospel.

“I didn’t expect to hear any other answer,” Giovanni said calmly. “But has anything changed in the world since the crucifixion? Has there been less violence and war? Don’t you think there are powers in heaven or in this world greater than or equal to God’s? That’s the only way to explain the crucifixion of his son and all the injustice that exists in this world.”

— You know, one of the outstanding early Christian writers, Tertullian, born in 155, coined the phrase: “Credo quia absurdum est” (“I believe because it is absurd”). He rejected all allegorical interpretations of Scripture, considering them heretical, and adhered only to the literal meaning. Therefore, he openly opposed the Gnostic schools, so popular at the time, and called the teaching they extolled — the allegorical interpretation of Scripture — heresy.

Giovanni suddenly remembered the Gnostic scroll he had translated the night before, and was surprised that even in those days there was an irreconcilable struggle against the followers of this esoteric teaching, but Thomas’s voice interrupted his thoughts:

Tertullian, back in the second century, answered your question about the Savior’s crucifixion and resurrection; you can find the information online. He reproached anyone who doubted the veracity of the events described in the Bible for a lack of faith. He liked to repeat that if someone has difficulty understanding the Creator’s plan, it doesn’t mean there is no plan; it’s just that a person needs more faith in each specific case. We humans shouldn’t seek answers or allegorical meanings, but rather

believe in the truth of Scripture, no matter how absurd it may seem, since we are not given the ability to understand the higher plan. You understand, Professor, that this question torments you, and if doubts overwhelm your soul, the cause lies in a lack of faith. Put your trust in the Lord, believe in Him with all your heart, and doubts will immediately disappear. Religion and prayer will help you find answers to all your questions.

“I don’t believe in any of this: Jesus, religion, prayer. I’m convinced that the life of Jesus is nothing more than fiction, and even if there was such a person who was the model for Jesus, the real him would have been very different from the Jesus described in the Gospels. As for religion, and not just Christian religion, it has always served as a tool in the hands of kings and rulers, helping them, through the clergy, keep the people in obedience.”

The deacon tried to remain calm and listened patiently to the professor.

“Thomas, just think about it: dozens of gospels were written, of which only four are recognized as canonical. I’m convinced that even those four contain numerous later insertions that describe the story of Jesus from birth to ascension, in other words, they deify him.” Looking at the deacon, he continued, “If the Vatican had any compelling arguments for the existence of Jesus, wouldn’t they have presented them? Then all the doubts of skeptics would be dispelled, and religion would have many more followers. But, alas, there is no compelling evidence, and Scripture is full of contradictions, which is why religion demands blind faith.

Enlightened thinkers have always denounced biblical texts, despite the fact that in the Middle Ages, dissent was severely punished. And as for your quote, I agree that religion is a matter of faith, since no one can either prove or disprove the existence of Jesus and his miracles. But I continue to wonder why, out of the many religions — theistic, pagan, sectarian, and so on — the Roman Empire chose Christianity. Perhaps they had some sort of conspiracy or secret message, which, upon opening, convinced them of the truth of Christianity and converted to it, or perhaps Constantine the Great received some indisputable documents describing the life of Jesus.

“He had a vision...” Thomas began to answer, but the professor immediately interrupted him:

“I don’t believe in all these stories about visions. We live in the twenty-first century, when practically everything that was once considered a miracle has found a scientific explanation. This was something more than a vision, and what exactly, I just can’t figure out. This whole story raises more questions than answers, but I’m convinced of one thing: Jesus had a prototype, some famous person who lived long before the events described in the Gospels, or precisely during that time. A close examination of Jesus’s biography reveals similarities with the lives of many gods who were worshiped hundreds, even thousands, of years before the advent of Christianity. Take, for example, Dionysus, who was also born of the god Zeus and a mortal woman, turned water into wine, descended into Hades, and much more.” And such stories of gods born from earthly women exist among many peoples of the past, and therefore for centuries there has been a version that the Roman Empire created the same god in order to strengthen its power through religion.

“I’ve heard more than once that Jesus’s biography is similar to the biographies of other ancient gods. This isn’t true; if it is similar, it’s only in a few places.”

“I didn’t even mean that, but rather that there was a real person who performed all these miracles before the coming of Jesus and who could have led the people whose lives are described in the Gospels. Be that as it may, I don’t understand what forces made Christianity the main world religion. The Jews were in exile all this time and had no influence on the Roman Empire, fighting for their existence in different parts of the world. I also doubt that Jesus, if he even existed, was a Jew: the Roman Empire would never have proclaimed a Jew as its god. In Jewish literature, Jesus is even called Jesus, son of Pander, or Jesus, son of Panther, directly indicating that he was the son of a Roman legionary named either Pander or Panther.”

“This is all fiction, which has nothing to do with reality. Our Lord Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary from the Holy Spirit. At that time, the Most Holy Theotokos was already betrothed to Joseph

the carpenter. And the questions you ask have been raised many times in the past, like the question of the crucifixion and resurrection, which was answered back in the second century. You should become more familiar with the life of Jesus Christ given in the Gospels.”

“Deacon, you may disagree with me, but the apostles, who were literate — a rarity for that time — would never have followed Jesus as he is described in the Gospels, indecisive and calm. There was a surge of messianic thought at the time, and many declared themselves the saviors of humanity, from the leaders of small spiritual sects to the leaders of the rebellion against the Roman Empire, supported by the Jewish clergy. But be that as it may, Christianity is considered the main religion, and Jesus is considered a god, and how this came about, no one can answer.”

Looking at the deacon, who was listening to him with such amazing calm, the professor added:

“Forgive me for being so harsh. I’m sure you’re not particularly pleased to hear all this, and I admire your composure.”

“You have accumulated many questions that torment and haunt you, and I wanted to give you the opportunity to speak out. All these emotions and doubts are dictated solely by a lack of faith in our Lord Jesus, and as soon as you believe in Him with all your heart and soul, these doubts will disappear.”

The professor remained silent. He decided to change the subject and, looking at the Bible lying in front of Thomas, asked:

“Why do you read Scripture on paper instead of on a tablet? We’re in the twenty-first century, the age of technology.”

Placing his hands on the Bible and either stroking it or cleaning it of dust with one of them, the deacon answered:

Despite the technological advances, I prefer the printed version, especially since this edition is written in ancient Greek. Moreover, this Bible has special significance for me, as it was left to me by an uncle who recently passed away. He served as the rector of a church in a small seaside town. He believed that the Gospels, written by the apostles in Greek, could have lost their true meaning during the translation into Latin. As a child, I would go to visit him every summer, and even then, he instilled in me an interest in ancient Greek and Latin. This continued until he was transferred to the Vatican. Then I continued studying these languages at university.

Reminiscing about his childhood, Thomas felt a little sad.

“This Bible has a special meaning for me. After I learned to read and understand a little ancient Greek, my uncle made me an Italian interlinear translation of this edition so I could always look up the meaning of unfamiliar words. I’ve just started rereading the Bible again to refresh my memory of ancient Greek.”

Looking at Giovanni, Thomas said:

“I understand that my presence does not bring you much pleasure, but Father Ippolit and I are carrying out the cardinal’s decree, and this is part of our service.

The professor was interested in talking to Thomas, and he also wanted to give the archaeologists more time to extract the scrolls, so he continued the conversation:

— Thomas, it turns out that you were drawn to the church from childhood and did not follow in your parents’ footsteps, as can be concluded from your words?

“Yes, that’s true. I grew up in a farming family, where talking about religion was frowned upon. My father was hostile to Christianity and other religions, but the reasons that influenced his worldview remain unknown to me. As for me, I was ordained a deacon three years ago, when I had just turned twenty-two. I’ve always been drawn to God, ever since childhood. Perhaps it was my uncle’s influence and his vivid exposition of biblical stories on those summer evenings in my childhood, or an inner calling, but whatever the case, I chose the path of service.

— How did your loved ones react to your choice?

My mother passed away when I was five, and after that, my father and I barely spoke, even though we lived under the same roof. He is hostile to anything religious, and I don't particularly want to remember it. My father says that God is in the heart and that a person doesn't need to pray or be baptized to be righteous, but I am convinced that this is not true, and I also believe that only a religious person can be good and righteous. The Gospel of John quotes Jesus as saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." From these lines, it becomes clear that only those who have chosen the path of Jesus, our Lord, can see the true path. Now, only God dwells in my soul, and I serve Him with all my heart.

Thomas was moved by his stories of his conflict with his father and his journey to God. Meanwhile, Giovanni, reflecting on his childhood, said:

"I grew up in a secular family, where the question of religiosity was never even raised. My parents met in university and carried their feelings throughout their lives. They treated everyone with respect and lived a happy life... My parents insisted that I read the Bible, believing it was a must-read for everyone. The Bible left an indelible impression on me as a beautifully written myth about God, Paradise, the Fall, and man. Over the years, seeing all the injustice around me and in the world in general, I became even more convinced of this. Although I have since reread the Holy Scriptures many times."

"Religion is truth. And you should know that the church forbids reading sacred texts out of idle curiosity."

"With all due respect to you and religion, I do not share this point of view. Scripture belongs to people, to history, and not to a certain segment of society that decides who reads it. I am convinced that the Bible should not be taken literally, and that it conveys a completely different meaning than the one later ascribed to it by religious leaders. Like the enlightened of the past, I believe that it addresses not the external, but the internal world of man. And if you are interested in my opinion of Jesus, I am convinced that if he ever existed, he was an adherent of one of the early Christian, Jewish mystical sects that interpreted Scripture allegorically. This teaching was later distorted and simplified, and Christianity arose from it."

The deacon did not react in any way, and, looking at him carefully, the professor asked:

— Want an example? Doesn't the Gospel say, "The kingdom of God is within you"? If that's true, then why are so many churches and temples being built? Perhaps Jesus meant it literally and didn't desire all these stone structures? Be that as it may, I consider this phrase to be the most important in Christianity, because it directs a person's gaze not to the outside world, not to those around them, but first and foremost to themselves, so that each of us can build this kingdom within.

After a pause, the professor added:

"That's what my parents taught me: a person, regardless of laws and commandments, must understand within themselves what is good and what is bad, and follow that throughout their entire existence on earth. Be honest with your inner god — we call that conscience. They lived long and happy lives with such convictions and never harmed anyone, despite their secularism. I believe the Gospel refers specifically to this inner work of self-improvement, not prayer and churchgoing."

I'm skeptical of all these stories and arbitrary interpretations of Holy Scripture. You've probably heard the words, "Outside the Church there is no salvation," because our Lord Jesus is the head of the Universal Church. Millions, if not billions, of people around the world attend church daily and offer prayers, because they value community, being close to Jesus. Is anyone forcing them? No, it's their inner calling; they know that salvation can only be found in the Church of Christ. If you've read the Bible, you probably remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ from the Gospel of Matthew: "I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," and also: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." That's why priests teach that only in the Church does the sacrament of union between man and God take place. Even from these brief explanations, you can understand the fallacy of your beliefs.

— So, it turns out that non-religious people a priori cannot be respectable?

“This statement is not mine, but that of the priests, whose words and wisdom I completely trust.

“You rely on the opinions of priests, but I rely on my own experience. I’ve met many different people in my life, and it’s impossible to say definitively which of them is more righteous — the unbelievers or the religious — since liars can be found everywhere. I’ve always believed, and still believe, that religiosity is no guarantee of morality, and certainly doesn’t give the right to consider everyone else sinners. Conscience is the best judge, an inner arbiter, to which we must appeal when making decisions. In our history, you’ll find many people far removed from religion who have done far more good for this world than...”

Giovanni fell silent.

“Professor, there’s no point in questioning what Scripture says. Here and when I return to the Vatican, I will pray that you come to the truth...” Thomas rose from his chair, looked toward the excavations, and asked, “When will you begin extracting new scrolls?”

“I think tomorrow or the day after. But, as I already said, you won’t find anything interesting there. The Gospel of Luke says that Jesus began preaching at the age of thirty, after being baptized by John. Where Jesus was before that, no one knows. Some sources indicate that before he was thirty, he was in Alexandria and other Egyptian cities. So, he arrived in Judea in 30. And the scrolls are dated to 27—28, and that’s Oplontis, not Rome or Egypt. With all due respect to religion, few people knew about Jesus back then, and it’s unlikely they would have written about him here, on the shores of the Bay of Naples. If Jesus had performed some miracle on Roman territory or managed to stand out from the crowd, there would certainly have been records of him, but no matter how much we searched, in both Jewish and Roman sources, we couldn’t find anything.” In fact, people began to talk seriously about Christianity as a religion only three hundred years later, in 313, when Constantine the Great proclaimed freedom of religion throughout the Roman Empire.

“You’re mistaken, Professor. Gospels have survived written in the second, third, and even first centuries AD, long before the ‘Milan Agreement’ reached in 313. Before religious freedom was proclaimed, Constantine the Great, also called the first Christian emperor, had a miraculous vision — namely, a cross — and subsequently ordered Christianity made the official religion of the Roman Empire. But this is not a matter for debate, just as the historicity of Jesus is not a matter for debate, since these facts are beyond dispute. And we attend all excavations where evidence of the earthly journey of our Lord Jesus may be found, even indirectly, in order to present them to the people.”

“Thomas, I see you’re a sincerely religious and intelligent young man; such people always inspire admiration. You can follow the progress of the work as much as you like, but I’m convinced you’ll find nothing about Jesus, either here or at any other excavation site overseen for so many years by the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology. Isn’t it clear that the earthly journey of Jesus described in the Gospels is simply a myth, a fabrication of the Church Fathers?”

“Professor, everyone is entitled to their own opinion, and I’m not going to argue with you. You have a superficial knowledge of our Lord and His earthly journey. If you ever come to the Church and begin not just reading but studying the Bible, you will have no doubt about the existence of Christ. And if we’re talking about evidence for the existence of our God, Jesus, there’s plenty of it in each of the Gospels. They were written by different authors and in different places, yet all the biographies of Jesus have only minor differences. And even all the vaunted science, including archaeology, has still not been able to disprove the fact of God’s existence.

The deacon fell silent and stood by the window again, watching the archaeologists at work. Giovanni, realizing that his opponent was sensitive to any criticism of religion and unwilling to even entertain the idea of its mythological component, decided to end the discussion.

— Sorry, Thomas, but I need to go to the excavations.

“Of course, Professor. I’ll join you soon to assess the progress of the work on site. Incidentally, Father Hippolytus is expecting us at nine o’clock tomorrow morning at the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology. We need to leave early to avoid missing the appointed time.”

Giovanni offered to drive to Rome in his car, then left the room. The deacon opened the very same Ancient Greek Bible his uncle had given him and continued reading.

A few hours later, Signor Ponti entered the room with one of the scrolls he had translated during the night, number 7. He explained that the manuscript was compiled in the 14th year of Tiberius’ reign, that is, in 27 or 28 AD. As soon as the professor left the van again, Thomas carefully unrolled the scroll and began to study it.

Scroll 7

The 14th year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius. Oplontis.

Scroll of Herodotus in praise of the Pleroma.

That morning, as usual, I went for a stroll around the estate and, passing by the garden, decided to stop by the workshop, where Dion was still diligently sculpting. Hearing a knock, the boy asked who it was, then invited me inside to look at his creation. The sculpture was quite beautiful for a seven-year-old, almost perfect. I asked if he had sculpted it himself. Apparently, my question slightly offended his pride, but after a pause, he said: of course, he did. Do you see anyone else here? He shared with me that sometimes the voice of God appears to him and tells him what to do and how to do it, what needs to be corrected, and Dion, heeding this voice, continues diligently working on the sculpture. And sometimes he leaves work, and when he returns the next day, the sculpture looks even more perfect. He repeated that these are not miracles, but his skill. Dion also told me that since the teacher's arrival, he's improved, although his vision hasn't fully recovered. During lessons with the teacher, he now not only listens but can also write for a while, although his eyes quickly tire, and sometimes his vision fades again until the morning.

Leaving the workshop, which is located in the lower garden, I was about to turn back when I saw the boy's mother, Portia, the mistress of the estate, coming toward me. She looked agitated. After greeting me, Portia suggested a stroll through the garden. I didn't immediately ask the reason for her concern and followed her into the garden, which repeatedly struck me with its extraordinary beauty. Portia didn't visit the estate often, spending most of her time in Rome. Taking the opportunity, I thanked her for her hospitality and then asked:

— How does Dion sculpt so well?

Glancing towards the workshop where her son was working, Portia said:

"Dion tries very hard, but sometimes I think his excessive pursuit of perfection can only do harm. I help him as much as I can, I guide him, but as you can see, I don't often get to spend time with my son."

She paused and continued:

"Dion is too proud, and sometimes, to avoid hurting his ego, I hide in the studio while he's working and offer him some advice. And when my son leaves the studio, I make a few adjustments to the sculpture. It's important to me that Dion succeeds in his endeavors, and I've noticed that he's already doing well on his own, although he still lacks self-control. You've probably noticed that the boy is overly emotional. He strives to create the perfect sculpture, and if he doesn't like even a little bit, he breaks the finished piece and starts sculpting a new one from the same clay. The only thing that's important is that my son doesn't get bored with the creative process and abandon the studio."

"Today Dion told me about an invisible helper, a voice from heaven, now everything has become clear to me," I said with a smile.

"Yes, I try to help him invisibly, to guide him. Sculpture is an ancient art. I mastered it at a young age, and even now, when I have free time, I continue to sculpt in my studio in Rome."

Portia paused, admiring the newly blossomed lily buds, and then continued:

"You know, there's a certain magic to sculpture that's impossible to convey. You craft, you shape, but no one knows what the end result will be. In this way, you're like a creator who creates every day, striving to make this world a better place. We all imitate him or the renowned masters of the past, whose majestic statues adorn Rome and other major cities of our empire, but all we manage to achieve is only a vague resemblance. Dion perfects his craft with each passing day, and I believe he'll succeed."

“Yes, the boy clearly has talent. He’s doing exactly what he was created for. The teacher says that every person has a purpose, a mission for which they were born, and if they’ve found their path, it’s a great blessing. According to the teacher, sin isn’t breaking certain laws or commandments, but rather straying from one’s earthly mission.”

“And what mission did he prophesy for you?” Portia asked.

“The Abba is convinced that I must become the bearer of a new teaching. I must write it down and thereby resurrect it from the ashes.”

“How interesting,” Portia said thoughtfully.

“Simon says that the Greek religion, like the Hebrew Scriptures, could have lost its true meaning because there were many philosophers and religious figures who interpreted certain laws based on their own beliefs. That’s why we strive to revive true Greek teaching and unite it with Scripture, so that seekers of truth can tap into primordial wisdom.”

After thinking for a moment, I added:

“You know, when I hear stories of people in remote areas trying to replicate the majestic Roman sculptures, albeit on a smaller scale, I can’t help but recall my teacher’s words about the material world, which even in secret teachings is called the world of ‘Echoes,’ because it was created not in the image of Kenoma itself, or even a remote likeness, but based on a verbal description. That’s why the resulting imitation of Kenoma isn’t the best — so much violence and injustice.”

This can also happen with a true teaching, which each person then begins to interpret in their own way, and their followers write down notes based on these incorrect judgments. Thus, the teaching can gradually lose its original meaning. Simon calls this chain of transmission of incorrect knowledge from teacher to student “the blind leading the blind.” In other words, the world is imperfect because the true teaching has become distorted over time, hidden behind many layers, and only seekers of truth, peeling them off one by one, can truly understand it.

— So it turns out that salvation lies in the secret teaching about the creation of the universe?

“Yes, that’s true. Only it can lead the soul out of the cycles of reincarnation and grant salvation. This secret knowledge is practically lost, although fragments of it have been preserved in mystical Greek teachings such as Orphism and the Jewish esoteric school of Da’ath. And to give people this forgotten knowledge, this saving gnosis, the teacher founded Gnosticism. To give an example of the importance of true knowledge for humanity, based on your story with the sculptures, then, unfortunately, the further a sculpture is from its source, the more people have passed on their impressions of the original they once saw, the less it resembles it. In my life, I’ve encountered all sorts of things: sometimes a statue was reproduced from a verbal description, and the one who sculpted it never even saw the original, and sometimes the one who described it never saw it either.” This is what happened to our world, which was created in the image and likeness.

Looking at Portia, I added:

“It’s good that you’re looking after your son and helping him. He’ll definitely succeed, but I just can’t understand why he calls you ‘woman’? At first, I even thought you weren’t his real mother.”

Portia chuckled:

“Many people who haven’t met our family for long think so. I gave birth to him alone, as my husband was away on business. After Dion was born, he developed vision problems; the bright sun seemed to burn his eyes, and extraneous sounds and the din of the streets caused him to panic. When I realized that Rome, where it’s noisy and crowded, would be difficult for him, I bought this estate with a garden in the suburbs of Naples and hired a nanny and a tutor to raise him. So it happened that Dion has been raised from an early age by a nanny, whom he calls by name, and he sees me very rarely and calls me not ‘mother,’ but ‘woman.’ I look forward to the time when my son grows up, gets stronger, sees better, and is no longer afraid of noise. Then he can return to the capital and settle in our estate in the heart of Rome. I am ready to leave everything I have to Dion, even my workshop.”

“But it could take too long for that to happen. Why don’t you tell the boy that you’re his mother? I think he, like all of us, yearns for parental warmth, although he may not show it.”

Portia, remembering her mother, whom she had not seen for a long time, said through tears:

“It’s not time yet. I can’t be around my son for long right now. It’s better for him not to know he has a mother, because every time we’re separated, he’ll suffer even more. But wherever I am, I will always protect my child and won’t allow anyone to harm him.”

— It must be hard for you in Rome alone, without your husband?

“My husband holds an important post; he serves the Roman Empire. I used to accompany him, but now I’m forced to remain in Rome. I often write him letters, and sometimes I send messengers if I need to convey something important verbally.”

Remembering my visit to the capital of the empire, I said:

“I really enjoyed Rome. I’ve been there twice and hope to go again if Simon lets me accompany him.”

Hearing the wizard’s name, Portia said:

“We are grateful to Simon that, after leaving our estate in Rome, he came here and is with Dion. Although many influential people wanted him to remain in the capital. Imagine, having learned that Simon was living on our Roman estate, people from various cities of the empire continue to come there.” arrive to see the magician in person. We even had to put up a sign that Simon the Miracle Worker had left the estate and Rome in general.

“That’s precisely why the teacher decided to settle temporarily in Oplontis. He enjoys long periods of reflection, being alone, and he really likes it here.”

“Long before your arrival, when Simon was still in Judea, all the Roman nobility had heard of his miracles, since he had healed the daughter of the former prefect of Judea, Valerius Gratus, from deafness and dumbness. News of this spread throughout the Roman Empire, and in the capital they began to call him Simon Magus, and sometimes even Zeus. Everyone dreamed of meeting him, of seeing him soar high above the earth, walk on water, and perform other miracles. I wrote to my husband about this more than once. Despite all the stories, many thought such a man didn’t exist or that the tales of his miracles were fiction, until they saw it with their own eyes in the Roman Forum.

Portia thought about something and then asked:

— Tell me, you probably know that he is famous as a miracle worker and that he can even heal lepers?

— Yes, of course, I know about this, despite the fact that I have only been accompanying him for two years.

— Then maybe you could tell me why he doesn’t completely heal Dion, but only temporarily alleviates his suffering?

“Only the teacher knows. Perhaps the time has not yet come for Dion to fully see the light. I heard Simon, speaking with the boy, promise that when the time comes, he will leave this estate and go to your estate in Rome, where he will be able to see the beauty of the Eternal City with his own eyes. A teacher does not make empty promises.”

My words calmed Portia, and she said:

“Be that as it may, the child is better off when Simon is around. I’m glad they got along. Dion calls him Magus, a kind man, and even Jupiter.”

— Yes, that’s true.

“You know,” Portia said thoughtfully, looking off into the distance, “when Simon spoke at the Roman Forum, the entire city would gather, and even the Emperor himself would come to witness his miracles. The common people especially admire the way Simon turns water in a jug into wine and gives it to them to drink. But now the Magus has become less of a public figure.” The woman looked at me. “Do you know why?”

“In recent months, the teacher has preferred solitude; perhaps he’s preparing for an important event, which is why he came here. However, several times a month, Abba still goes to Rome to visit Pompey’s theater, the chariot races, or to spend time in the baths, which are not particularly crowded and are mostly frequented by noble Romans.”

“You mentioned the Roman nobility, and I remembered something I’ve been meaning to ask. Rumor has it that Simon avoids contact with common people, treats them with disdain, and teaches his followers the same.”

“That’s not entirely true. As far as you know, we, his followers, are not particularly wealthy, yet Simon continues to instruct us. Yes, the teacher treats noble and wealthy people with special respect, but, as Abba asserts, the greatest value in a person is the spark that resides within each one. This spark sparkles in proportion to the individual’s path to secret knowledge. According to the teacher, only Gnostics and wealthy people, who may or may not be enlightened, are worthy of this inner light. When Gnostics or nobles are near each other, the sparks, parts of this fallen goddess, shine even brighter, as if rejoicing and flaring like embers in the wind. But in a crowd, among simple, ignorant people, this light slowly begins to fade. Sometimes, to make things clearer, Abba speaks not of the spark, but of the queen-soul, or the goddess herself, who resides within each of us and awakens to the light of that very spark. This is why it is said that in the ignorant, or as they are also called, “dark,” the queen-soul sleeps, while in the enlightened, enjoying this higher light, she is awake. And when the goddess encounters such light in someone else, she rejoices with greater intensity, as if she had seen a loved one. But if she encounters darkness, ignorance within someone, she is saddened, and the light gradually fades. This is the reason for Simon’s selective communication.

There’s a story in the Jewish secret teaching of Da’at that I really like. It says that if two people meet and become friends, an angel is born, a symbol of this friendship. When they’re together and happy, the angel rejoices, but when they part, the angel is sad. Portia, have you ever met someone and suddenly remembered them years later? It’s that same angel, who, over time, loses strength and breathes her last breaths, who reminds you of them. This story can vaguely explain the joy that fills the souls of those with an awakened spark when they are together.

“How interesting... I also heard that Magus avoids contact with the Jewish priests, believing they are not ready to accept his new teaching based on Scripture. Upon learning that Simon preached Gnosticism, they even demanded the miracle worker’s execution, but they only succeeded in having him expelled from those lands.”

“The teacher wasn’t expelled from Judea; he left it himself, having completed his mission in those lands. We live in a momentous time, when many nations are praying for the arrival of a savior. The Jews await their messiah, and Simon asserts that the future savior will be none other than his messenger. He will come to this world to impart new knowledge to people, and also to create a new world religion, based on Greek mystical teachings and Jewish Scripture, the origins of which we are at.

— Why then do the Jews not accept Simon’s teaching, since it is based on Scripture, and continue to reproach him for not observing the Jewish commandments and dietary requirements, despite the fact that he calls himself a descendant of one of the tribes of Israel?

“Yes, the teacher eats all kinds of meat, fish, and poultry, and doesn’t hide it. Simon likes to repeat that the commandments don’t apply to him, and he’s allowed us to break them, even the strict Jewish fasts and dietary taboos, as long as he’s with us. The teacher says that Gnostics are saved by knowledge, not by commandments.”

I even witnessed the teacher visiting pagan temples in Rome and other cities. I want to point out right away that he doesn’t pray in them, but rather goes to admire the interior decoration and architecture, or, as he himself says, to soak up the spirit of the place. We are not given the power to comprehend his great wisdom. Since Simon performs such miracles and has acquired a secret name, it means that higher powers favor him, and we must follow the teacher’s instructions.

Portia listened to me attentively and then said:

“Be that as it may, the visit of such a guest is a great honor for us. I am well aware of the attitude of the Roman nobility toward Simon, since I myself am descended from the Julio-Claudians. Many in the capital would consider it an honor not only to shelter Magus, but simply to communicate with him. I am confident that he will succeed, and the teachings he founded will capture the hearts of people throughout the world. Dion is very glad of his presence in Oplontis and says that when a good man is nearby, his suffering fades and his eyes, at least temporarily, stop hurting so much.

Portia looked at me intently and said:

“You probably noticed my agitation when we met. I didn’t want to disturb Magus, but I want you to dissuade him from visiting Rome today. The thing is, I often have prophetic dreams, and last night I dreamed that a horse would go berserk upon seeing Simon and attack him, and innocent people could get hurt.”

“The teacher said he was going to the capital today to attend the chariot races. Perhaps you dreamed of the races themselves, where Simon would be a spectator?”

— No. It will be after the races, on the way back.

Seeing Portia’s anxiety, I said:

— After our conversation, I will go to the teacher and will definitely convey your words to him.

Having calmed down a little, Portia asked:

“Tell me, is Simon expecting someone? In my dream, I saw someone else arriving at the estate soon, and there would be three new saucers at the Friday table.”

“No, we’re not expecting anyone except that very messenger, whose name is known only to the teacher. But when the Son of God will arrive, and whether he will arrive at all, I don’t know.”

After thinking for a moment, I added:

“Perhaps you’re talking about the two guests who arrived here this morning from Judea. They somehow learned that Simon was in Oplontis and wanted to buy his blessing. Yes, people from all over the world often come to his performances and ask for money to teach them the art. These two from Judea didn’t believe the story about his execution, searched for him for a long time in Rome, and then ended up here. We’re not expecting anyone else; at least, the teacher didn’t tell me so.”

“I dreamed of a rider who was thrown by that same horse when he saw Simon, and of two others who helped him up. Then these three entered our garden and, falling as seeds, became large trees.”

Looking at the beautiful trees growing in the garden, Portia added:

“Trust me when I say that three will arrive by this Friday. If two are already here, then another will be arriving soon. My dreams never lie to me.”

To calm Portia down, I said:

“The teacher says that dreams must be interpreted with great caution. For most people, they mean nothing, and only for those who have done certain spiritual work can they prove prophetic. But even for great prophets, dreams have not been given a definitive interpretation. Therefore, since ancient times, people have spoken of the dangers of interpreting dreams, even those that seem prophetic, since through some, God may speak, and through others, the devil. And only time will tell whether a prophecy was true or not.

“I don’t often share my dreams, but I decided to tell you to protect people from danger. I am well aware of Simon’s wisdom, and of course he will decide for himself what to do. If the Magus insists on traveling to the capital, you will certainly inform me. I will send a messenger ahead of you so that the servants can prepare the Roman estate in time, should the miracle worker wish to spend the night in the capital.”

I nodded approvingly. Portia looked off into the distance and said thoughtfully:

“How lucky you are to be near Magus. Some say his power comes from God, others from the devil, but one thing is certain — Simon possesses indescribable strength. He levitates, heals lepers and the mute. I heard he even managed to resurrect several people.”

— Yes, they say things like that too.

— How does he do it? Perhaps you could share it with me?

— I don't know myself.

“They say he's been given a secret name. As his closest disciple, you probably know it too? Perhaps you can help Dion?”

“Unfortunately, this name can only be used in extreme cases. Simon performs all these miracles not for idle amusement, as many might think, but so that people will believe in the truth of his words and so that the future savior can find him in this world. If the name appears in someone else's possession, it loses its power.”

“So you won't shed any light on his secret?” Portia drawled, disappointed. “I thought he would have shared it with you, as one of his closest followers. If Simon won't even let you in, I'll certainly never know.”

“He's saving that for the Son of God. As for our acquaintance, as I've already said, I've only been following him for two years. Simon was attracted by my education and knowledge of languages. Greek is my native language, as I am a representative of Jewish Hellenism and was raised on Greek philosophy, and I learned Hebrew and Aramaic when I first arrived in Judea ten years ago. Initially, I received a religious education, but its limitations became too narrow for me, and I began to study the esoteric teaching of Da'at from the sages of Galilee. In one of the scrolls, I even described this secret Jewish teaching. Later, like other Hellenistic Jews, I tried to connect Scripture with Greek philosophy. Having learned of Simon the Wonderworker, who preached about the Pleroma, I came to Samaria to hear a sermon on saving gnosis and witness miracles, and then followed him.

Moving from city to city, we had long conversations, and seeing my knowledge of Greek culture and the Pentateuch, Abba praised my Mother of God and allowed me to record his teachings and stories of miracles. I write all my notes in Greek, for the Gnostics of the future. I should note that I am not a devoted follower of Simon, but a seeker of truth, but I cannot explain what the teacher does. Simon the miracle worker is spoken of throughout the Roman Empire, but at first I didn't believe it and thought it was nothing more than a myth, until I saw it with my own eyes.

“How many names does he have? Some call him Simon the Samaritan or Simon the Wonderworker, the Greeks call him Zeus, the Romans call him Jupiter, Magus, or Faustus, and I've even heard some disciples call him Abba or Eli.”

“You are right, the teacher is called by different names, even Zeus, since Simon and Helen, the first thought of Nous, the Father of the Pleroma, for the sake of liberating which he descended into this world, now symbolize Zeus and Athena.

— That's why you installed a statue of the chief of the Olympian gods at the entrance to his home?

“Yes. Every arrival is screened, and if, when asked whose statue it is, they answer “Zeus and Athena,” not “Simon and Helen,” they will not be admitted to the teacher. The Gnostics know that Nous (Mind) himself descended into Simon's body to rescue his first thought, Ennoia (Thought), from this world. Once, they danced in a dance of love and created all things beautiful in the higher spiritual worlds, but at some point, Ennoia escaped to create on her own, only to be captured by her own creations.

She was captured by the archons she once created, and now wanders this world in search of a Savior. However, Simon is revered as a god not only by his followers, but also by many who witnessed his miracles and those he healed, who understand that such things are only possible for a god. Most Romans, however, enraptured by his miracles, call Simon “the Auspicious,” “the Miracle Worker,” and most often, “the Magician.”

To clarify for Portia the meaning of the various names of Simon the Samaritan, I added:

“And the address “Eli” translates from Hebrew as ‘my god.’ We sometimes also call him “Abba,” which translates from Hebrew as ‘father,’ since Simon personifies the father of the Pleroma in Gnostic

history, the very same Nous, and is also the spiritual father for all his followers. But only his closest disciples address him this way; others are not permitted to do so.

— What do you need to do to study with Simon and become his follower?

“The Abba isn’t teaching anyone now, but rather sending people to read his notes or those made by his students. He’s been avoiding people lately, and has become overly suspicious. I asked him why, and the teacher replied that he was afraid of being mistaken about his savior. But Simon speaks very highly of you. You’ve donated your estate and are making generous donations for Helen’s release from Tyre.”

“Then perhaps, while I am in Oplontis, I will be able to come into contact with Gnosticism through you.”

“I’ll ask Simon. I don’t think he’ll mind, since you looked after us in Rome and even here. If Abba agrees, I’ll tell you in detail about Gnosticism and the tests prospective students undergo before not only meeting Simon but even beginning their training.”

— Tell me more about the teacher. What is Magus like in everyday life?

Abba spends most of his time alone, contemplating Helen. As I’ve already said, for him she symbolizes Ennoia, also called his first thought. Simon often relates in his sermons that this first thought, Helen, having descended into the material world, was captured by the archons and now resides in Tyre, from where he must ransom her and return her to the higher worlds, to the Pleroma. The teacher claims that in previous incarnations she was the very same Helen the Beautiful, because of whom the Trojan War occurred. According to another version, Helen symbolizes the universal soul. Having descended into this world, she disintegrated into the many souls with which people are endowed. These souls are also called sparks in various teachings. These sparks are present in everyone. I’ve already told you that the teacher generally avoids ordinary people, as the awakened Helen, also called the Queen Soul, resides only in Gnostics, as well as in the noble, wealthy, and powerful. During his interactions with them, he can see her distant reflection, a memory of that very first Thought. Simon says that not everyone succeeds in awakening the Queen Helen within themselves; some are granted this honor by birth or noble descent, while others are granted it through their diligence and perseverance. The Abba asserts that everyone should strive to awaken the Queen Soul within themselves, but this requires great spiritual work, long and regular fasting, overcoming vices, and being modest and moderate in their desires. But all these precepts are only for spiritual people.

Looking carefully at Portia, I continued:

Even though people hold Simon Magus in great reverence and hang on his every word, sometimes it seems to me he himself doesn’t believe what he says. When we remain in a small circle and ask the teacher about reward in the next world, about heaven and hell, he mocks us, insisting that we should live in the present, enjoy each day, and not think about the future. But when listeners appear, especially if they are noble and wealthy, he becomes completely different. Even the stutter that appears when he is very nervous disappears. A miraculous transformation occurs that is simply inexplicable. It’s as if the teacher is replaced, as if the holy spirit, of which he so often speaks in his sermons, has entered into him. Simon seems to glow and easily charms everyone. You listen to all this, observe, and even though some time ago he laughed and urged us to drink wine, eat meat, poultry, and fish, have fun and enjoy life, you believe him even more strongly. I don’t know how to explain it, and sometimes I watch from the outside and wonder if it’s him or the Holy Spirit.

Portia listened with bated breath to my story about the great magician and preacher Simon, and I continued:

“In the presence of nobles, he speaks sincerely and convincingly of the reward for good deeds in the next world, of how their offerings will go toward rescuing the goddess imprisoned in this world, and you believe him just as sincerely, reluctantly. They give Simon a multitude of gold coins, and he collects them and says he will certainly ransom Helen from Tyre with the money. But now he has

become less social, devoting himself to contemplation and allowing everyone to read his manuscripts, even though people offer generous rewards for meeting with him. Simon tells his disciples that the era of the Father is ending and the era of the Son is about to dawn, to whom he will hand over the reins of this world, while he himself will set off to ransom his Helen from Tyre.”

Portia seemed ready to continue listening to my stories about the miracle worker from Samaria, but it was approaching midday, and after excusing myself, I headed to Simon’s. As I approached his dwelling, I saw the servants already preparing the carriage for the journey to Rome.

I immediately told the teacher about Portia’s warning. The abbot listened to me but assured me that the dream was false and perhaps sent to ruin his plans. Simon saw some kind of sign, so we will definitely go to Rome today and even attend the chariot races. Now I will finish writing these lines and follow the teacher. This will be my third visit to Rome, the beautiful, eternal city.

Having finished reading the manuscript, Thomas decided to say his prayers before bed and, removing scroll number 5 from the table, took out his Bible. The professor, in the adjacent van, continued working despite the late hour. He studied and translated the manuscripts, then saved them on his computer. When the texts of three or four scrolls appeared in the “Gnostic Myth” folder, he transferred the files from his computer to an external hard drive, later hiding them in his Rome apartment. As he studied the manuscripts, Giovanni became increasingly imbued with Gnostic teaching. He did not regard Gnosticism as the ultimate truth, but saw it as a logical, allegorical explanation for the events described in the Bible.

The deacon’s introduction to Gnosticism was much more difficult. After reading the scroll and praying, he fell into such a deep sleep just before dawn that he didn’t even hear the alarm clock ringing at six in the morning. Thomas had the dream that had haunted him since childhood.

A five-year-old boy sits by his mother’s bedside. With her right hand, which holds her wedding ring, she clutches a necklace with a cross. They wait for their father and the priest to arrive. It’s raining heavily. The boy runs out into the yard to call for help, but there’s no one there. The woman, still waiting for the priest, passes away. Returning to the room, the boy sees that neither the wedding ring nor the necklace with the cross are gone. The boy sits by the bed and cries bitterly, clutching his knees. At that moment, his father returns, but he is alone, without the priest.

Signor Ponti waited outside, and when the clock struck 6:15, he knocked on the van’s door. When he received no answer, he went inside. A scroll lay on the table, and the deacon slept soundly but restlessly. Approaching, the professor said quietly:

— Thomas, Thomas, are you okay? Wake up, we have to go.

The deacon woke up in a cold sweat and muttered that he would soon be ready.

Chapter Three

At the appointed time, the professor and the deacon arrived at the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology. Their office was located in the very center of Rome, in the building of the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology. Having handed over the discovered scrolls to Hippolytus, the professor reported on the progress of the work. The priest was pleased with both the excavations and the findings and ordered Thomas to continue to oversee the process and the professor to hand over all the discovered manuscripts to the deacon.

After leaving the building, Thomas and Giovanni decided to have lunch at a nearby restaurant. After ordering, the professor asked the deacon :

“You’re not your usual self today. Did the dream affect you that way?”

Thomas was silent, staring at the tablecloth and remembering the dream. The professor continued:

“Yesterday you started talking about your family, your childhood, your youth, but I still couldn’t understand what prompted you, an educated man, to take the path of religious service? I’ve always been interested in what drives people to take this step. Is it a conscious choice, circumstances, or a spiritual impulse?”

Giovanni noticed that the deacon did not like the question, but nevertheless he began to tell:

“As I already said, my uncle, my mother’s older brother, was a priest; I showed you his Bible. My mother, against the family’s wishes, married a farmer, a simple man who was much older than her and, moreover, did not accept all this religion. He demanded that my mother also not perform rituals and not celebrate church holidays. My mother outwardly resigned herself to it, but when we were left alone, and she often talked to me about the importance of religion and its truth.

At this moment the waiter came with the ordered dishes, and Thomas fell silent, and then continued his story:

“When I grew up, she began to persuade my father to try going to church and praying, but he was terribly opposed. He said a person could be honest and just even without religion. Looking back, I’m increasingly convinced he wasn’t always like that; people aren’t born hating religion — some are driven to it by events in the past, while others turn away from it on their own. Perhaps he encountered unscrupulous priests along the way.”

Lost in his memories, the deacon fell silent again. They began eating, and when their initial hunger had been satisfied, Thomas finished his story:

“My father and I hardly ever communicate now. He tends to his vegetable garden in the village and crafts things out of wood. Something happened a long time ago that, with each passing day, increasingly created a barrier between us, and even though we lived in the same house, we barely spoke to each other. This morning, when you woke me, I had a dream that has haunted me since childhood.”

— When I got into the van, you were muttering, “Mom, the priest will be here soon. I’ll go look for him...” Is this something from the past that’s haunting you?

Thomas remembered the dream again. He hadn’t had it in a long time, and now the nightmare had returned. Maybe yesterday’s conversation about his parents had had an effect, or those damn scrolls.

“It’s a long story, and it’s hard for me to remember it.” He sighed and sipped the dark berry drink from a small glass. “That night, I stayed in the house with my mother, and my father went to fetch a priest. My mother was dying and wanted to go to confession. But my father returned a few hours later alone. We never discussed it, but I sometimes think he didn’t go because of his anti-religious principles or because he was afraid of the storm. I could never forgive him for not fulfilling my mother’s last wishes that night. After her death, he never visited a church to beg forgiveness for her

sins in earthly life. A week later, he sold the horse and carriage, saying he no longer needed them since they only went into town together, burned all her belongings, and got rid of her jewelry. He probably wanted to forget her as quickly as possible, to make sure nothing would remind him of her again.

The professor put his instruments aside and listened attentively to Thomas, who, looking at the rain pouring outside the window, continued his sad story:

I gave it a lot of thought, and after graduating from university, I told my father that I wanted to pursue a career in church service. He didn't try to dissuade me, only said I was always welcome on the farm. I'm glad I chose this path, and I continue to believe that my mission on earth is to serve. Moreover, by joining the church, I have the opportunity to pray for my mother's life in heaven. That rainy night, I couldn't help her in any way, only sat by her bed and cried, so now I want to fulfill my duty to her. You probably won't understand this, but I'm convinced, or at least I want to believe, that my prayers warm her there, in heaven.

— Do you believe that there is something after this life?

— Absolutely. The soul is eternal, and, having completed its earthly journey, it goes to heaven.

The professor, convinced that human life is limited to its earthly existence, didn't question the deeply religious Thomas's words. After a moment's thought, he asked:

— Do you see your father?

"Even though it's hard for me to do this, I visit him every few months. We must forgive our neighbors and make peace with them — that's what the church teaches. Following this, I try not to judge my father as much as possible, even though I still can't forgive him."

— How many years have you been serving?

"A little over three years. I'm grateful to God for that choice and to the church for accepting me. If it weren't for religion, I don't know how I would have survived that experience. Only my faith in Jesus sustains me and gives me strength."

The professor also remembered his childhood and his parents who had left this world, and noted:

"I was never given a choice; I was told: study whatever you like and choose your own path. Even as a child, I reread the Old and New Testaments several times. Putting aside all the contradictions, one could say that the Old Testament is more or less clear — there is an Almighty, and everything happens according to His will. But the New Testament raises more and more questions for me year after year. From childhood, I wondered how Christianity managed to capture the minds of billions of people? How, having arrived in Judea at the age of thirty, an unknown Jesus managed to so quickly find disciples and become the incarnation of God? Who baptized John, if he later baptized Jesus, and who taught him this rite? And much more. I hope I haven't offended your religious feelings?" the professor asked politely.

"No, go on. I served in the church, and I had to answer all sorts of questions from parishioners, and sometimes, at the request of priests, questions people asked online. The bishop says that even there we must fight for the souls of the faithful."

"Thank you. Then I'll ask you a question that still haunts me. How could a man be born of a virgin in the material world? Do you find that logical? Is such a thing even possible in the material world? And what about the crucifixion and resurrection? Yesterday you said that the son of God descended to earth to save us, and that with his sacrificial crucifixion he saved the world. Rationally speaking, we don't know if people were ever in any danger, and even if they were, it's not a given that this crucifixion saved humanity. Doesn't all this sound like a myth? And isn't there some ancient story hiding behind all of this?"

Giovanni pulled his cup of cold latte closer to him and looked expectantly at Thomas.

"Professor, the priests of the past have given exhaustive answers to your question about the crucifixion and your other questions. You read it literally and perceive it as man created from flesh and blood, but God thinks differently; we are not given the ability to comprehend His plan."

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