

P R E F A C E

1. The making of Wagner's 'Parsifal'

Wagner's opera 'Parsifal' was extremely long in gestation. When on July 26, 1882, it had its first night in the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth (under the Jewish conductor Levi), the composer had forty years of preparation behind him. Way back in 1843 he had already composed an oratorio called 'Das Liebesmahl der Apostel'; this was based on the idea that is equally central in 'Parsifal', Wagner's version of the Last Supper. At some moment or other the composer had become acquainted with Wolfram von Eschenbach's romance of chivalry, 'Parzival' (ca. 1210). Needless to say that Wagner transformed the bard's ideas in order to suit his own intentions. He even denigrated the medieval poet and his work. He found Wolfram an immature person who had understood nothing of the true and real contents of his own work.

In 1845 a few fragments for a future opera were sketched. Four years later Wagner began working on a drama to be called 'Jesus of Nazareth'; he never completed this. Although intensely occupied with other musical dramas, in particular with the Ring and with 'Tristan und Isolde', the Parsifal-theme kept him enthralled. The first drafts of a text date from 1857. But in a letter to Mathilde von Wesendonk, he sighed that he could not and would not go on with the project. "Today I take my leave of this senseless plan." He indeed abandoned it for about twenty years but took it up again in 1877 after he had completed 'Der Ring des Nibelungen'.

He then began writing, within the time of five weeks, the poem which was to become the libretto. In 1879 the composition was virtually

ready, but it took Wagner another year and a half to refine the score so that it would perfectly match the special acoustics of the Festspielhaus. On January 13, 1882, Cosima Wagner could note in her diary that the opera was ready. When it was performed half a year later, the public saw and heard Wagner's last opera on the stage and at the same time the greatest triumph of his music.

2. An outline of the contents

The scene of the first act is the castle of Monsalvat surrounded by a sacred area, a 'haram', as the Moslims would call it. In the castle itself two holy objects are kept, the lance which pierced Jesus' side on the cross, and the chalice of the Last Supper, surnamed 'the Grail'; legend (but not Scripture) has it that in this chalice the blood that streamed from Jesus' side on the cross was caught.

Both the lance and the Grail have been brought to Monsalvat by King Titurel. When the opera begins he is still living, although very old; he has abdicated the throne in favour of his son Amfortas. This Amfortas, the reigning king, is an invalid; he is suffering from a festering wound in his side that will not close. Long ago he marched out from the castle to heathen country to fight the dark enemy of the Grail, Klingsor, the magician. During this expedition he was seduced by the wild woman Kundry. This enabled Klingsor to get hold of the Holy Lance and to injure Amfortas in his side. Now the king is lying on his sick-bed in the castle; only an 'innocent fool' (der reine Tor), enlightened by compassion ('durch Mitleid wissende'), will be able to heal him.

When Parsifal appears (from nowhere) in the sacred domain, Gurnemanz, an old knight and, so to speak, the historian of the knights of the Grail, tells him all this. The young man is allowed to witness the ritual in the castle hall but this does not make an impression on him; he is still too immature. Instead of trying to become a Grail knight, he prefers leaving the castle in order to combat Klingsor.

On his way to Klingsor's castle, in Act Two, he meets a crowd of adorable Flower Maidens who attempt in vain to seduce him. Now

Kundry appears, still Klingsor's willing servant; she discloses to Parsifal his descent and his name (which he did not know until then). Her learns that Gamuret, his father, fell in battle in Arabia before his son was born. His mother was called 'Herzeleide', Heart's Sorrow. She tried to guard her child from the fate of his father but time came that he left her and made his way into the world. This broke her heart and she died. The news of her death is announced to the young man by Kundry. She also explains to him the meaning of his name : 'Parsifal' is 'Fal parsi', the 'innocent fool'.

The wild woman almost succeeds in seducing Parsifal; she gives him a long and ardent kiss on the mouth. But then he too feels a wound, a wound in his heart, and he pushes her aside. Suddenly he realizes that he is destined to work redemption; Kundry will be the first to be saved by him.

On the battlements of his castle Klingsor appears who sees Kundry escaping him. This wicked man is a former knight of the Grail himself; incapable, however, of keeping his vow of chastity he has been expelled. Now he is burning to take his revenge on the knights. Discovering Parsifal he throws his spear - the Holy Lance - at him, but the young man succeeds in catching it. With the Lance he makes the sign of the cross over Klingsor's realm of evil which disappears into nothingness. Is it a sign of the times that in the last two performances I saw, one in the Music Theatre at Amsterdam and the other in the Flemish Opera at Antwerp, this sign of the cross was not made?

When the third act begins it is ten years later. Titurel has died in the mean time. King Amfortas is still an invalid but the possession of the Sacred Spear makes Parsifal his designated successor. When Parsifal arrives after his long absence, it is Good Friday, the appropriate day for the celebration of the Grail ritual. But Amfortas refuses to officiate, he desires to die, and the castle is plunged into the deepest gloom.

Gurnemanz informs Parsifal of this deplorable situation. Seeing the spear in the young man's hands, he understands how much he is changed. The old knight therefore creates him a knight and immediately after that anoints him as king. The first act of the new king is to deliver

Kundry of the curse; this he performs by baptizing her. This scene is accompanied, or rather carried, by the incomparably beautiful music of the 'Karfreitagszauber', the Good Friday Magic.

Parsifal now enters the castle hall (for which the cathedral of Siena served as the model). There the mourning ceremony for Titurel is taking place in the course of which Parsifal cures Amfortas by touching the ailing king's side with the Holy Lance. "Be whole, absolved, and atoned!" Amfortas silently cedes his throne to Parsifal who immediately changes the mourning ceremony into the Grail ritual. He takes the chalice from its shrine, shows it to the kneeling knights, and blesses them with it.

Wagner has always been great in closing scenes, the entry of the gods into Valhalla at the end of *Das Rheingold*, Wotan drawing the fire circle around the sleeping Brünnhilde's body in the final scene of the *Valkyrie*, the burning Valhalla tumbling down into the waters of the Rhine in the *Twilight of the Gods*, and here the majestic score of the last scene. When I heard it a few weeks ago in the Music Centre Vredenburg at Utrecht in a brilliant concertante performance under Edo de Waart, the public, utterly overwhelmed, forgot to applaud.

3. What 'Parsifal' is not

There has been much discussion on the fundamental meaning of 'Parsifal'. There were and are interpreters who detect a racist ideology in it. In their view Parsifal is the blond Aryan hero who delivered Jesus of his tainted Jewish blood. Proponents of this theory had to admit that this racism was preached in veiled mystical terms. For this reason this opera should have appealed to Hitler who, just like Wagner, was fiercely anti-Semitic and a racist. However, it seems impossible for me to detect the supposedly racist background of this work; its hero is neither blond nor Aryan, and there is not even the slightest reference to anything Jewish. This theory is in fact 'hineinterpretiert' into the opera, inferred as it is from the historical fact that Wagner indeed wrote some profoundly anti-Jewish tracts.

Another and more popular interpretation is that this opera must be understood as a Christian work. The French author Romain Rolland even went so far as to speak of 'the fifth Gospel'. It must be admitted that, seen superficially, the work contains a number of specifically Christian elements. There is much talk of redemption and salvation, there is a baptism, the sign of the cross is made, there is some sort of a eucharistic meal, the climatic scene takes place on Good Friday, and so on.

Then there are the two great symbolic objects, the Sacred Spear and the Grail. But exactly at this point doubt begins to set in. Jesus' side was indeed pierced by a Roman soldier with his lance, but nobody knows what happened to this weapon. That this soldier was called Longinus and that the spear was preserved as a sacred relic is pure legend. And wholly legendary is the chalice, the Grail : the Gospel authors do not mention that Jesus' blood was caught in a vessel.

In matters like these we begin to move away from the Gospel texts and from orthodox Christianity. It is significant, moreover, that Jesus Christ is not once mentioned by name in the libretto; isn't this a curious thing in a 'Gospel'? In fact he is referred to only rarely, and then as Saviour and Redeemer. Nothing at all is said of his life, with the exception of references to the Last Supper and his death on the cross.

Still more divergent from Christian orthodoxy is the eucharistic meal in the great hall of Monsalvat. Whereas, according to Roman-Catholic dogma, by means of the sacral and institutional repetition of Jesus' words at the Last Supper, bread and wine are changed into his Body and Blood, just the reverse takes place in the castle hall. At the end of Act I the squires and knights, assembled for the ritual, sing : "Blood and body of that holy gift ... now turn for your refreshment into the wine poured out for you, into the bread that feeds you today". How anybody can make a Christian drama out of this is a mystery to me.

4. The anti-female trend of this opera

The Knights of the Grail form a closed and secluded community with esoteric characteristics, centred around the symbols of Spear and Grail.

The sacred area in the middle of which Monsalvat is situated resembles an Indian (Buddhist) 'asrama' or hermitage, while, as Carl Suneson writes, "the Knights of the Grail represent Indian ascetes rather than Christian temple servants" *. The community is all-male, the knights having vowed chastity. The tenor of the libretto is strongly anti-female, even anti-sexual. The great representative of femininity is Kundry.

Wagner found her, or rather her name (Cundrië) in Wolfram's poem, for his Kundry is really an amalgam of the ambivalent traits of this Cundrië and of Mary of Magdalen : human and animal-like, wild and subdued, sinful and longing for forgiveness, all in the same person. When she first enters the scene, she looks like a witch with her long, loose hair and her girdle of snake skins. 'The wild woman', Gurnemanz calls her; "I never do good", she says of herself. And indeed, Amfortas is incurably ill just because he has sinned with this wild woman. Klingsor, her master, names her 'primeval witch, rose of hell' and says that she has formerly been Herodias, the murderous woman who instigated the death of John the Baptist.

So all that is bad is concentrated in Kundry, culminating in her sexual magic. "I well know the spell that forever binds you to serve me again", Klingsor assures her, or in other words, sex is the fatal instrument of the evil one. But when she tries her art on Parsifal she fails. The same happens to the Flower Maidens, who are also servants of Klingsor, when they attempt to overwhelm him with their erotic attractions. There is a radical opposition here between sex and eroticism on the one hand and purity and chastity on the other. When King Ludwig II of Bavaria asked the composer why chastity is needed for acquiring knowledge and pity, he only answered that this is 'a terrible secret'.

* Carl Suneson, *Richard Wagner und die indische Geisteswelt*. Leiden, 1989 (translated from the Swedish by Gert Kreutzer), p. 89.

5. The realms of the Good and Evil

The personification of this purity is Parsifal. It is remarkable that Wagner changed Wolfram's 'Parzival' into his own 'Parsifal'. According to the composer, the meaning of this name is 'the Innocent Fool'. That this a false etymology did not bother him at all. He found it in Joseph von Görres' edition of 'Lohengrin' (1813) in which this scholar suggests that 'Parsifal' is derived from the Arabic 'pars or parsh fal' i.e. the pure or poor fool *. It is because of his innocence, his purity, that he will ultimately replace Amfortas and become the new king of Monsalvat. Here we have the dualistic opposition of purity and impurity, of innocence and guilt, of sinlessness and sin that is so dear to the Gnostic heart.

Equally conspicuous is the radical opposition of Evil and the Good, made apparent in the absolute contrast of the realms of Klingsor and Monsalvat. The castle lies in a large clearing in a forest that is 'shady and solemn but not gloomy'; the clearing itself is a pleasant, open landscape with a background of gently rising flowery meadows. This landscape is at its most beautiful on Good Friday, for then the 'Karfreitagszauber' takes place. "Now all creation rejoices." And Parsifal exclaims : "Never did I see so fresh and charming the grass, the blossoms and the flowers, nor did they smell so sweet of youth or speak with such tender love to me". This beauty and this youthful force of nature must not surprise us because Monsalvat is 'the realm of the true faith'.

Klingsor, on the contrary, lives 'secluded in a valley' in the direction of a rich heathen land, by which Moorish Spain is meant. However, he has succeeded in turning the desert into a garden; natural beauty in this garden (tropical vegetation, luxurious display of flowers) is not the gift of the Creator but the product of black magic. In it "women of infernal beauty bloomed", the Flower Maidens. It is all artificial. When Parsifal has caught the Spear in its flight and made the sign of the cross with it over Klingsor's magic garden, his "castle sinks as if by an

* See Suneson o.c. 88.

earthquake". The garden swiftly withers into a desert; faded flowers are strewn on the ground. The triumph of the Good over Evil is complete.

6. Redemption

This brings us to a still more important theme, that of Redemption. When the play opens, the purity of the Grail Knights is not unsullied. Gurnemanz has to admit that Klingsor has succeeded in ruining 'full many of us'. His principal victim is King Amfortas who lies ailing in the castle. Hence the importance of water in this opera, the purifying element par excellence. Already in the very first scene we see Amfortas carried to the bath he has to take every day in order to find relief for his suffering. In Klingsor's garden there is no water whereas in the stage-directions for the Monsalvat area a spring is expressly mentioned. In the last act Gurnemanz and Kundry bring Parsifal to this well. Here the woman washes the hero's feet, and the old sage sprinkles his head with water from the fountain. "Then let him be free of stain, and the dust of lengthy wanderings now be washed from him." In other words, the water from the 'holy spring' washes away the whole past and prepares the hero for the future.

Redemption and salvation are key-words in this opera. The name of the castle is already a pointer, 'Monsalvat' = Mount of Salvation. At first there is only talk of relief for Amfortas, but then we hear from Gurnemanz that he is "anxiously imploring some sign of salvation". During the first ceremony in the castle hall the youths seem to answer him when they sing of 'the great Redeemer, the Saviour'. It is only after Parsifal's victory over Klingsor and the subsequent disappearance of his magic garden that Redemption becomes fully possible. It is destined for human beings but no less for nature. In fact, nature is redeemed before Kundry and Amfortas. This is the real significance of the Karfreitagszauber. "Thus all Creation gives thanks, all that here blooms and soon fades, now that nature, absolved from sin, today gains its day of innocence."

7. Parsifal the Redeemer

As the play proceeds it becomes increasingly clear that the Redeemer is not Jesus Christ but Parsifal. Or rather, the first Saviour was Jesus whose place is gradually taken over by the young hero. It takes a long time (the ten years of his wanderings in unknown regions) for Parsifal to recognize this role. During his passionate encounter with Kundry he says something remarkable. "The Saviour's lament I hear there, the lament, ah, the lamentation of his profaned sanctuary : 'Redeem me, rescue me from hands defiled by sin'." Here Jesus the Redeemer is declared powerless and the work of salvation incomplete; a second Redeemer is needed who will save the first one.

When Parsifal has pushed off Kundry, he at once knows that he is this second Redeemer. "I offer redemption to you in your sin", he says to her. When he enters the Grail precincts after ten years for the second time, he announces to Gurnemanz : "I dare think myself ordained". He is then duly anointed as king. He expresses his new self-consciousness to Kundry by telling her : "Believe in the Redeemer!". After having baptized Kundry, he performs his great task by touching Amfortas' side with the Holy Spear.

The opposition between Parsifal and Amfortas - the contrast is often overlooked - is of a dualistic nature. Amfortas succumbed to Kundry, Parsifal rejected her. Amfortas gambled away the Holy Spear, Parsifal regained it. Over against the effectual Parsifal who goes straight to the point stands the depressive, sickly Amfortas who feels inclined to give up everything. No wonder that the young hero becomes king in Amfortas' place.

7. Redemption and knowledge

Redemption and knowledge are closely interconnected. The Redeemer is someone who possesses knowledge. In the first scene Amfortas says that he awaits somebody who is 'enlightened through compassion' ('durch Mitleid wissend'); this person will be 'the pure fool' ('der reine Tor').

That the future Redeemer must be a 'fool' means that he must be bare of all common knowledge, whether of a practical or of a scholarly kind. What he needs is a very special, an esoteric knowledge. That Parsifal lacks all common knowledge is proved by the fact that he does not know who his parents are nor even his own name. "Such a dullard I never found before, save Kundry!", the astounded Gurnemanz exclaims. He does not realize yet that it is precisely this dullness that makes Parsifal capable of performing his redeeming work.

The erotic encounter with Kundry convinces him that it is not 'carnal knowledge' that he needs. As soon as he has snatched the Holy Spear from Klingsor's hands, he understands that redeeming knowledge will be his lot. It even dawns upon him that he himself will be the Redeemer. "But one weapon serves, only the Spear that smote you (Amfortas) can heal your wound ... O Blessed be your suffering that gave pity's mighty power and purest wisdom's might to the timorous fool (des reinsten Wissens Macht dem zagen Toren gab)."

8. A neo-Gnostic drama

The attentive reader will have remarked by now that with Wagner's opera 'Parsifal' we are in the presence of a (neo-)Gnostic work full of dualistic elements. The world of the opera is totally different from the ordinary walks of life, peopled as it is with a priest-king and his hieratic knights, with a magician and his demoniac female servants, and with Parsifal, 'der reine Tor'. When Parsifal returns to Monsalvat, he tells Gurnemanz that he left a very imperfect world behind him. "Through error and the path of suffering I came ...; battles and conflicts forced me from my path." But now he comes to bring perfection to the brotherhood of the Grail; Monsalvat will become the new and definitely healed world.

Life in the castle bears no resemblance whatsoever to our day-in day-out existence; it is wholly centred on the performance or non-performance of the sacred ritual. Parsifal who has scarcely any connection with ordinary humanity is virtually a Messiah, acting as a Redeemer

and spending salvation. His redeeming power is the consequence of the knowledge he possesses. This is the most telling Gnostic element in this opera.

9. Hitler and Wagner's music

It was in the night of March 7, 1936. In the train that hastened on through the dark Ruhr region, spectrally illuminated by flaming blast-furnaces, Adolf Hitler sat. Germany's Führer had just experienced one of his great moments of triumph; he had visited the reoccupied Rhineland, everywhere applauded by enthousiastic crowds. Now he was returning to Munich and pensively leaning back in his seat he ordered that a record of the overture to 'Parsifal' should be played. In the deep silence that followed he said, as if to himself : "Aus Parsifal baue ich meine Religion" ('out of Parsifal I build my religion'), and then : "nur im Heldengewand kann man Gott dienen" ('only in a hero's garment can one serve God') *.

Bring a hundred historians together and ask them whether they have ever seen Wagner's Parsifal. Ninety of them will tell you that they never go to an opera at all. Of the ten others eight will answer that they love opera but loathe Wagner. The remaining two may profess to be Wagner fans but the first, by some strange chance, has never seen Parsifal; the other has but it was twenty-five years ago, so he does not remember much of it. This explains why not one of the historians who occupied themselves with Hitler - Bullock, Fest, Maser, Toland, Görlitz, Gisevius, you name them - pays any attention to this remarkable utterance.

Hitler, it is well-known, was a Wagner fan if there ever was one. He simply adored this composer's music, just as he venerated the Wagner family. That sly and witty girl Friedelind, granddaughter of

* Hans Frank, Im Angesicht des Galgens. Deutung Hitlers und seiner Zeit auf Grund eigener Erlebnisse und Erkenntnisse. München-Gräfeling, 1953, p. 213.

Richard, twisted the great Führer of all the Germans round her little finger. Hitler's Wagner adoration is a sufficient reason for countless music-lovers to abhor Wagner as much as they detest Hitler. The usual comment is that both were rabid anti-Semites. It is generally considered that Wagner's musics tended to make Hitler hysteric and aggressive.

Instead, Wagner's music had a soothing, a relaxing influence on the Führer. The friend of his youth, August Kubizek, testified to this. "When he listened to Wagner's music he was a changed man; his violence left him; he became quiet, yielding, and tractable. His gaze lost its restlessness; his own destiny, however heavily it may have weighed upon him, became unimportant. He no longer felt lonely and outlawed and misjudged by society * . This is confirmed by Ernst ('Putzi') Hanfstaengl, Hitler's friend in Munich after 1919, a very wealthy and cultivated man, and a famous drawing-room lion. On Christmas Eve 1924 Hitler had Hanfstaengl play the record of the 'Liebestod' in 'Tristan und Isolde'. After this, Hanfstaengl declared, he was as if transformed; suddenly, he was relaxed, as so often when hearing Wagner, almost merry **. Would Hitler had listened more frequently to Wagner!

Hitler loved opera, in particular the operas of Richard Wagner. 'Lohengrin' was his first opera ever, in 1901 when he was no more than twelve years old. We know for certain that he saw Wagner's 'Rienzi' in November 1906 in the opera theatre in Linz; it made an enormous impression on him. During his first visit to Vienna, in May 1906, he made the acquaintance of 'Tristan und Isolde'. Visits to the famous opera houses of the Austrian capital during the first year of his stay there - 1908 -, made the list fairly complete, although other Wagnerian operas were to follow. Wagner never bored him; many a Wagnerian work he saw

* August Kubizek, *Young Hitler. The story of our friendship.* London (1954), p. 143 (shortened translation of 'Adolf Hitler, mein Jugendfreund'. Graz, 1953).

** Ernst Hanfstaengl, *Zwischen Weissem und Braunem Haus. Memoires eines politischen Aussenseiters.* München, 1970, p. 163/164.

dozens of times. Some libretti he knew by heart; he could whistle or hum many Wagnerian motifs, as he often did.

Among his great favourites was Parsifal; it is ascertained that he saw it in the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth in 1933. Sometimes he acted as a Parsifal-exegete. During the Wagner festival of 1936 he was overheard remarking to Goebbels with whom he sat in the restaurant how much more beautiful Parsifal would be, if the Flower Maidens were to perform stark naked in it. This would become possible as soon as Nazism would have produced a superior human race *.

10. Hitler's identification with Parsifal

What attracted Hitler so strongly in this opera? Parsifal did not know who his father was; his father had disappeared and died before he was born. The idea of a fatherless boy brought up solely by his mother struck a deep chord with him. He had not greatly loved the Alois Hitler to whom he owed his life; this gruff, unpleasant, authoritarian man died when his son was thirteen years old. Unconsciously he must have wished that the father had died much earlier so that he could have remained alone with the mother he adored. It could easily be argued that Klara Hitler's influence on the young man was very much greater than that of his father.

Hitler's relation to his beloved mother was not unequivocal. If it is true that he adored her, it is equally true that he manipulated her, sometimes in his usual brutal way. She knew all the time that she could not keep him, her one and only love. For she had never loved her callous husband Alois, twenty-three years older than she was, and whose third wife she became when she was already made pregnant by him. In the spring of 1907 it became clear that her son would be off to Vienna as soon as he could. Klara fell ill, cancer was diagnosed, and a breast was amputated.

* Friedelind Wagner, *The Royal Family of Bayreuth*. London, 1948, p. 129.

In spite of the condition of his mother, eighteen-year old Adolf departed for the capital in September 1907. His mother stood weeping at the top of the staircase of their house in Linz-Urfahr. But go he did. In October a neighbour notified him of the fact that his mother's condition was rapidly deteriorating. He returned and saw her die in December. When all was over, he returned to Vienna. In my opinion his mother lost the will to live when she recognized in her son the same heartlessness her husband had always shown her. Then she really became 'Heart's Sorrow'.

It is not impossible that Hitler never had a clear conscience about the way he had treated his mother. He had adored her, he continued to venerate her almost religiously (while forgetting his father), but he had also maltreated her. Was he not, at least partly, guilty of her death? Did it touch a sore spot in his heart when he heard Gurnemanz speak to Parsifal of "your mother whom you deserted, and who now frets and grieves for you"? And was this reproach not also directed at him : "You did not consider her woe, her desperate grief, when you finally did not return and left no trace behind"? And did not Parsifal's outcry : "Mother! Sweet, dear mother! Your son, your son it was who killed you!", also refer to him?

There is still more. Whereas father Alois did not believe in his recalcitrant son, his mother did, to such an extent that Helm Stierlin felt justified in calling Hitler 'the delegate of his mother' *. It is not, of course, as if she foresaw that her son would once become Führer and Reichkanzler of the German Reich. But she was convinced that he would become a great painter - this in contrast to her husband who had not for a moment believed in the artistic capacities of the boy. This comment of hers is deeply significant : "Adolf will find his way through the world, without pardon (rücksichtslos), as though he was alone in the world" **. One feels compelled to state that Hitler inherited his identity from his mother, not from his father.

* Helm Stierlin. Familienperspektive. Frankfurt a.M., 1975. P. 73/74.

** August Kubizek, Hitler, mein Jugendfreund. Graz, 1953. P. 158.

In Parsifal's mother Herzeleide Hitler saw another woman who wanted for her son something quite different from what her husband had seen as his future. "To shield you (Parsifal) from like peril (as had felled his father - F.), she deemed it her highest duty's task. She strove to hide and shelter you safe afar from weapons and from men's strife and fury." It is Kundry who revealed this to the hero as well as what his name (= his identity) is. It was, indeed, his dying father who had chosen this name for his still unborn son, but it was transmitted to him by his mother through Kundry. "Parsifal? Once in a dream my mother called me that."

There is a period in Hitler's life that is strikingly similar to a time in Parsifal's life. After his first visit to Monsalvat, Parsifal disappears, only to return ten years later. It is not disclosed where he has lived all those years. But when he came back, he knew what he had to do and was ready to do it. It must not surprise us that precisely at that moment his name (his real identity) is revealed to him. Hitler left Linz for good in 1908. Then followed five empty years in Vienna plus an equally aimless one in Munich. Next came the four bloody years on the front. In November 1918, when Hitler was being treated in a military hospital at Pasewalk in Pomerania for a blindness caused by gas, it suddenly dawned upon him, almost in a vision as he later described it, that he had to become a politician. He then was ready to perform the (still unspecified) task his mother had had in mind for him. And just as Parsifal encountered a desperate situation in the castle, Hitler started his career in the chaotic turmoil of the German revolution years 1918-1919.

11. Hitler-Parsifal as the Redeemer

The many Christian, or rather pseudo-Christian, elements in this opera must have appealed strongly to Hitler. It is true that, since he was sixteen years old, he longer practised the Roman-Catholic faith in which he had been raised (by his mother, not by his non-practising father). But it would be a very grave misunderstanding to assume that he now became totally irreligious. Nothing would be more beside the mark! It

was only in 1937 that he declared himself entirely rid of 'the religious notions of his early years'. It was only then that he could fully develop his new Parsifal-religion.

However, he always remained nostalgic for the solemn rituals of the Roman-Catholic Church. He rediscovered them in this opera : bread and wine, blood and water play a great role in it, just as the chalice of the Last Supper. Then there was Kundry's baptism and Parsifal's anointment as king. The most characteristic ritual element is, of course, the eucharistic feast in the great castle hall. It had a still greater impact that Parsifal more and more assumes the traits of a Messiah. It is not only that is he literally called 'redeemer', but a dove descends on him, reminding us strongly of what happened when Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan.

There are many proofs which show that Hitler too saw himself as a Messiah, a Redeemer, identifying himself with Jesus Christ and gradually putting himself in his place. He wanted, he said on Christmas Eve 1928 in Munich, "to bring to an end the work that Jesus had begun, but that he had not completed". "From our movement redemption emanates", he said in October 1923 ^{*}, "this has almost become a new religious creed." One feels justified to detect identification with Jesus Christ in these words : "I will be crucified if it is believed that I have not fulfilled my duty", or when he wrote that "Christ had been the greatest fighter against world Jewry" ^{**}.

Redemption from what? Adolf Hitler suffered all his life from the idea that he had Jewish blood in his veins. The immediate cause of this fear was that Hitler's father Alois was an illegitimate child. Born in 1837, he was named Schicklgruber after his mother Maria Anna; it was only in 1887 that he could adopt the name Hitler (a corruption of the name of the man in whose family he had been raised, Johann von

* Joachim C. Fest, Hitler. Eine Biographie. Frankfurt a.M, 1973. P. 263.

** Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (I), 1924. P. 227.

Nepomuk Hütler). Alois' mother never disclosed the identity of the begueter. Adolf did not know it neither did her grandson.

There ran persistent rumours that the man had been Jewish - rumours that, however false and tendentious, Hitler feared might be true. Since we perfectly know what he thought of Jews and Jewish blood, he must have felt oppressed and anguished by this idea. "We all are suffering from the disease of the mixed, tainted blood", he said to Hermann Rauschnig *, "how can we purify and redeem this?" Since we may be certain that Hitler saw himself as the principal victim of this corrupted blood, we can infer that he applied the closing words of the Parsifal-drama : "our Redemeer redeemed" to himself. For he too needed redemption. He must have been fascinated by the opposition between the unadulterated blood of the 'pure fool' and the corrupted blood of King Amfortas. He even called this, in that same conversation with Rauschnig, 'the real subject of this profound drama'.

12. Dualism

This brings us to another element in 'Parsifal', namely its dualism. There is hardly another opera of Wagner in which the composer demonstrated his dualistic philosophy of life so palpably as in his last one. The basic unbridgeable opposition is that between the sacred region of Monsalvat and Klingsor's magic garden. Connected with this opposition is that of the innocent Parsifal and the thoroughly evil Klingsor. This appealed to Hitler who thought just as dualistically as his venerated Wagner. It would have pleased him that Parsifal proved able to destroy his enemy, together with his realm, through the sign of the cross. Did he not possess a cross of his own that would annihilate this wicked world, the swastika?

* Hermann Rauschnig, Gespräche mit Hitler. Zürich/New York, 1940. P. 216/217.

13. The role of knowledge

The essential question, not only in 'Parsifal', but also in Hitler's ideology, is how the redemption was to be achieved. Certainly, not as in Christianity by grace, by Jesus' expiatory death on the cross. This would have made Hitler dependent on God's grace and the redemptive deed of somebody else. No, redemption is brought about by knowing, by knowledge. Parsifal begins as somebody who is unknowing, even as a 'fool', but gradually he becomes 'knowing'. The first thing he discovers is who he is himself. For this drama is also the story of the discovery of identity, of a personal, a finished identity that Hitler himself so painfully missed.

In the final scene in which Parsifal is acting as the officiating High Priest, he says that he has now acquired 'purest wisdom's might' ('reinsten Wissens Macht'). Hitler understood perfectly well what that meant; identifying with his hero, he called the congregation of the Knights 'the brotherhood of the knowing' *. Speaking of 'knowledge' and of 'those who know', both Hitler and Wagner harked back to that ancient and powerful ideology of the first centuries of our present era, the Gnosis, Christianity's oldest and most obstinate opponent. With the spread of secularism since the days of the Enlightenment, the Gnosis again acquired control of the European genius.

The substantial elements of the Gnosis - election, élitism, dualism, ascent, utter rejection of this wicked world, victory over evil, and above all, redemption through knowledge - all return in Wagner's opera. It is for this reason that Jeziorkowski called it 'the Pontifikalamt (solemn High Mass) of the bourgeois Gnosticism of the end of the nineteenth century" **.

* Rauschning ib.

** Klaus Jeziorkowski, *Empor ins Licht. Gnostizismus und Licht-Symbolik in Deutschland um 1900*. In : *Eine Iphigenie rauchend. Aufsätze und Feuilletons zur deutschen Tradition*. Frankfurt a.M., 1987. P. 156.

14. The road to the Gnosis

In Chapter II of Volume VII I described the development through the ages of the terms 'gnosis' and 'gignoskein', the ordinary Greek words for knowledge and knowing. From Homer and Hesiod through all the poets and philosophers of the Hellenic and Hellenistic civilizations, these terms always denoted a special brand of knowledge. This knowledge has nothing to do with the sort of knowledge we can acquire by means of experience or study or training. The Greeks used several other words for practical knowledge and the like. There always adhered a special aura to gnosis and gignoskein which lifted them out of the common range of meanings. This was an aura of intuition, sudden insights, revelation of mysteries, and sometimes of a knowledge with a special power, that of redemption.

In Chapter IV of Volume VI as well as in Chapter I of Volume VII I sketched the road to the Gnosis, the several stages that finally led to its dawning as a full-blown ideology in the first century AD. In the last centuries before the birth of Christ many elements of this ideology were already plainly discernible.

Of course, I emphasized naturally, first and foremost, that specific meaning of knowledge, a knowledge of a superior and uncommon kind, spontaneous, esoteric, and even divine. Connected with this is the élitism that was common to so many Hellenistic scholars and philosophers, that jealously guarding of the secrets of the guild against the vile curiosity of those who were doomed to remain unknowing. Some philosophical circles closely resembled secret societies with an esoteric character. In order to join them, the adept often had to undergo a ritual of initiation. Initiation was very much en vogue in that period; one need only think of the mystery religions that flourished in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.

There was much esotericism in the schools and sects of the Hellenistic world. The general idea of those who considered themselves elect and initiated was that their insights were of a superior order, far beyond the ken of ordinary people, insights that were not derived from

the world that is common to all of us but that were revealed to the chosen.

This almost inevitably led to a stern dogmatism and to the absolute incapability to see anything of value the spiritual positions of other persons or groups, even in those of similar schools of thought. By the same token we find mysticism, a predilection for mysteries, for number theories, for magic, for theosophic speculations. The consequence of this is the contempt in which rational history and all kinds of historical evidence are held. All these elements we find back in the Gnosis proper.

15. Is a definition of 'Gnosis' possible?

How comfortable it would be if only we had a clearcut definition of the concept 'Gnosis', so that, with its help, we could easily distinguish what is Gnostic from what is not! It should preferably be a simple definition, easy to handle, for instance one with only one lemma and no more than one or two sublemmata. But alas! such a yardstick does not exist. Gnoseologists do not agree on what is the main characteristic of the Gnosis. Is it the redeeming Knowledge? The Fall? The Saviour? The elect? The rejection of the world? The eschaton? Its dualism?

The problem is that not all systems dubbed Gnostic display all these features, and or tend to emphasize them in different ways. For instance, most systems fiercely reject the world and view it as doomed to destruction. But in other systems or a milder climate prevails; the present world, after the departure of the redeemed to the luminous upper world, is allowed to subsist, albeit in a state of blissful ignorance of the existence of a better world.

There is, however, one Gnostic element on which all scholars agree : its dualism. This does not mean that these scholars all consider dualism the distinguishing feature of the Gnosis. But to quote Karl Prümm : "One should always insist on a metaphysical foundation of dualism as the true characterization of what Gnosis is" *. To put it as

* Prümm, Gnosis 12, note 2 (see Bibliography).

succinctly as possible, all Gnostic systems are fundamentally dualistic. A long time after I had completed this preface I read Couliano's fine book on the dualistic Gnosis* (see Bibliography); I see that he takes exactly the same position. "The only correct **description** of Gnosticism consists in stating that it represents a group of **dualistic** systems ... **Dualism**, therefore, is the unique and the most general of the features that apply to Gnosticism in its entirety ... Gnosticism is **always** dualistic and makes use of **dualistic myths**" (his emphases).

Simple as this may seem, it, nevertheless, presents two problems. The first is that this thesis is not reversible : whereas Gnostic systems without exception are dualistic, by no means every dualistic system is Gnostic. In the volumes of this series that have appeared so far, we have reviewed many dualistic ideologies which could certainly not be regarded as 'Gnostic' does.

The second problem is far more formidable. The attentive reader will have remarked at once that the statement : all Gnostic systems are dualistic, is, in fact, a *petitio principii*, a circular argument. We start from the premise that we know what 'Gnostic' means; this we do by using the term 'Gnostic' in the beginning, instead of at the end of our argument. This is a false assumption : we still have to determine what 'Gnostic' is. Therefore, we are not allowed to use the concept 'dualism' to detect out Gnostic systems.

We can solve our first problem by defining what kind or kinds of dualism are meant in Gnostic systems (even granted that we presume to know what 'Gnostic' is). We saw in the Prüm text quoted above that this scholar qualified the term 'dualism' by adding 'metaphysical'. This is indeed correct but it is not enough. Gnostic systems are always poised on two kinds of dualism. First, there is metaphysical dualism : the upper world, the Pleroma, is essentially different from and opposed to the nether, material world, the cosmos. This is a horizontal dualism. Next there is anthropological dualism, one between the elect, the chosen, the redeemed, the Gnostic pneumatics, and the hylics, the matter-people,

* Couliano, *Les gnoses* 167/168 (see Bibliography).

who will not be saved. This is a vertical dualism, but only present in the nether world.

In both cases my definition of dualism applies : that of two opposed and irreconcilable principles or systems or groups of people or even worlds, with no intermediate terms connecting them, while one of them is seen as inferior to the other. In the first case, that of metaphysical dualism, we have to do with relative dualism since the nether world is dependent on the upper one; the cosmos does not lead a sovereign existence. Whether in the second case, that of anthropological dualism, the dualism is relative depends on the system we are dealing with. In some, even in most systems, the pneumatics and the hylics, the Gnostics and the others, the elect and the massa damnata, are opposed in the most absolute way. But in certain others it is possible for a hylic to become a pneumatic Gnostic. The Valentinians interpose a third group between the pneumatics and the hylics, namely the psychics, the soul-people. This does not really do away with the anthropological dualism, because the intermediate group is destined to disappear : psychics become either pneumatics or hylics.

We may be allowed to conclude that the term 'dualism' becomes more workable by terming it 'metaphysical-anthropological'. As far as I know, there are no non-Gnostic dualistic systems that are both horizontally and vertically dualistic, metaphysically and anthropologically. I think that in this we have a divining-rod useful for detecting Gnostic systems. If we do this we may avoid using the word 'Gnostic' right at the start of our argument. We could then say : any system with this double dualism differs basically from all others that do not contain it, whether dualistic or not, but is of one group with all others in which it occurs.

16. Gnostic dualism

However important and influential the Gnosis was in the history of mankind and as a subject of the history of religions, I should not concede it the ample space it is getting in this work if it were not viscerally dualistic. Gnostics prosper on radical oppositions; with them it is always

either - or, with nothing in between. Metaphysically there is the opposition of the good God who, however, remains a 'deus absconditus', a hidden god, and the bad Demiurge with his helpers who created the world.

Then there is the ethical dualism of Good and Evil. Once again this a question of either - or; in Gnostic ideology there are, as in Jesus' parable, no fields where the wheat is growing together with the tares. If one is not entirely good, then one is entirely bad. This leads to yet another opposition, that of the 'massa damnata', the great mass of people who unwittingly go to their doom, and the few elect who will be redeemed by the possession of Knowledge. In fact, the Knowledge is the redemption.

The world in which we live, our factual, historical world, is evil from the time of its inception. As Peter Sloterdijk says, Creation and Fall are identical in the Gnostic vision; the world as such is fallen, wicked, doomed *. It cannot be saved, it cannot be recreated, there will be no new heaven and new earth, it will be destroyed. Hans Jonas has explained that the Gnosis must be not be seen as 'revolutionary' in the traditional sense of the word . According to modern political use of this term, 'revolution' signifies a radical endeavour to replace an existing socio-political situation that is judged unsatisfactory, by another, ideal or at any rate much better, situation. But in this kind of revolutionary activity the Gnosis proves totally uninterested.

It might, says Jonas, rather be called, 'reactionary', because this attitude with regard to the present world can easily urge people to refrain from attempts to ameliorate their situation. But if we see in 'revolution' an attitude that wants to lift the world off its hinges, then, he concludes, the Gnosis is eminently revolutionary **. The true Gnostic

* Peter Sloterdijk, Die wahre Irrlehre. Über die Weltreligion der Weltlosigkeit. In : Weltrevolution der Seele. Eine Lese- und Arbeitsbuch der Gnosis von der Spätantike bis zur Gegenwart. Herausgeber Peter Sloterdijk/Thomas H. Macho. 1991 Artemis & Winkler Verlag. P. 39.

** Hans Jonas, Gnosis I 148, where he spoke of an "Umwertung".

may say, with a line of the German poet Friedrich Rückert : "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen" ("I have done with this world"), and state as his ideal, with Rückert again : "Ich bin gestorben dem Weltgetümmel und ruh' in einem stillen Gebiet! Ich leb' allein in meinem Himmel" ('I am dead to the bustle of this world and repose alone in a tranquil domain living alone in my heaven') * .

For Gnostics, the world as it exists is something negative. This prompted Sloterdijk to speak of the Gnosis as 'negative psychology' - a psychology that develops into psychotherapeutics, in so far as it is an attempt to disengage the elect from the hypnotic power of the world. The 'pneuma', the divine spark in man, must be liberated and shown the way back to the primal godhead. Gnosis, knowledge, is in fact 'knowledge of the way'. But one can only set foot on this way if one realizes that man is utterly lost, imprisoned and hypnotized by this world as he is **. A corollary of this sentiment is the typical Gnostic individualism. Gnostics were only intent on freeing the divine spark in their own souls; they could not care less what happened to others. The idea of a 'people of God' that is current in Judaism and Christianity, or the related idea that we should love our neighbour like ourselves was completely alien to them.

Redeemed, fortified, and protected by Knowledge, the pneuma will unflinching find its way back through all the spheres that envelop the world, past all the wicked archonts, even past the bad Demiurge, to arrive safely in the realm of the hidden God who, as the negation of all that exists, of all that we see and do and are, at the same time is an un-God.

* This poem was set to music by Gustav Mahler.

* Sloterdijk o.c. 46-48.

17. A short summary of what the Gnosis teaches

I hardly ever meet anyone who is knowledgeable about the Gnosis; this even applies to highly erudite persons, including classical scholars. Nearly all of my readers, therefore, will be treading in this volume on virgin soil. This is one difficulty, but it is fairly minimal when set against the deeply esoteric nature of Gnostic writings being esoteric to a degree. They are not destined for laymen but only for the initiated; they are couched in opaque, sometimes impenetrable language. I have done my best to make Gnostic doctrine accessible to the reader; if the matter I am bringing sometimes will be found difficult to understand, I am afraid I cannot help it. I am, I believe, sinning by simplification rather than by making things more obscure than they are. I hope the reader will be helped by the graphs of the Gnostic systems to be found at the end of the book. Furthermore I will here set out the main lines that are common to all, or nearly all Gnostic systems.

It will, I feel, help the reader if he bears in mind that in the Gnosis a circular course is followed : it all starts from God, out of God, and returns to God, into God. The apex of the whole system is the prime godhead who has no name and is in fact unknowable; he is often called the Father of the All, although he is not the creator of the world. Under him is the Pleroma, or Fullness, the upper, celestial world, emanating from him but not containing him. This celestial world is peopled with celestial beings (powers, aeons, emanations) who are divine entities partaking in the essence of the prime godhead and are united with each other in a common identity. What kinds of aeons there are, and how many, differs from system to system, but usually their quality deteriorates the greater the distance from the first godhead. This explains why some cosmic or metaphysical catastrophe, usually called the Fall, or Error, is liable to take place in the lowest part of the Pleroma.

However different the reports about this catastrophe may be, they always amount to the fact that some part of the divine essence, of the Light, becomes enclosed in the nether world, the cosmos. This nether world is divided from the Pleroma by an almost impassable barrier.

Originally there is only formless matter there. Once again accounts differ as to how the cosmos is modelled from matter, but all of them take it for granted that the cosmos was not the creation of the first godhead. Usually there is a world-maker in his own right, a Demiurge. Often he has co-rulers, the archons. At best, the Demiurge is ethically neutral, although invariably ignorant, which makes him bungle things, but more often he is wicked and evil-intentioned. The result is that the world is not a happy place to live in.

This would pose no problem at all, were it not for the sparks of Light that are imprisoned in matter, that is to say, in human bodies. In human beings this spark is called the Pneuma, the Spirit. These particles must not be destroyed together with the world. It is the task of the Saviour, sent by the prime godhead, whoever this Redeemer is, or whatever he is called, to collect these sparks of light and bring them back to the Pleroma whence they originate. For this it is necessary that at least a number of people should be saved from the grip of matter and the Demiurge; the means to effect this is Knowledge, knowledge of a superior kind that is, about the prime godhead and the Pleroma. Not many people want to become acquainted with it.

Those who accept the Gnosis are free from matter and imperfection and evil now; in fact they are already pleromic beings. What happens to them is that they realize that they once were god, part of god; this realization makes them god again. When they die, they leave soul and body behind, but their Pneuma, their Spirit, which is in fact the spark of Light, surges upwards through all the lower spheres, to become one again with the prime godhead.

17. How and why the Gnosis originated

Space is created for a religious or metaphysical dualism, for dualism, of the Gnostic type, for the Gnosis, when a dominating religion, an established and acknowledged religious system, begins to vacillate and loses its foothold in society. In foregoing volumes it has been related that this is what happened to the Olympian system. This process already started

during the great classical period and accelerated in Hellenistic times. It is safe to say that in the last centuries before our era hardly any educated person still believed in the Homeric divinities, although, for reasons of socio-political expediency, their official cult still continued. The old faith had been relegated to the position of a literary heritage and a superstition that simple people still clung to.

But educated people no less than simple folk were also open to alternative religions, ranging from the mystery religions that were very much in vogue, to astrology, magic, and occultism. Or they underwent the impact of new philosophical systems, of the several philosophical doctrines of Hellenism, even including the most radical scepticism. Many of these trends, as Chapter III of Volume VI has amply shown, were dualistic to a degree, while gnosticizing tendencies too were not rare in this period.

The historical situation was not really conducive to stability. Though Alexander's great conquests had opened vistas of a new civilization, very little came of it. His successors relentlessly fought each other, his empire split up into inimical parts, every strip east of the Euphrates was lost. In the west loomed the Roman Empire, in the east its Parthian counterpart, both steadily encroaching upon the ever shrinking Hellenistic domain. There never originated a really Hellenistic culture, a harmonious amalgam of Hellenic and non-Hellenic civilizations; the Greeks proved viscerally incapable of overcoming their inveterate, age-old anti-barbarian attitude. In the process the polis, once the safe harbour of the Hellenes, lost almost all of its significance which was to lead to desorientation. The unavoidable result was an individualism which sometimes came perilously close to anarchism; the more respectable citizens retreated into self-complacency and political indifference. All this is described in Chapters I and II of Volume VI.

18. Two lines of transmission and where they converged

In Chapter I of Volume VII I described a great number of constitutive elements that went into the making of the Gnosis. These elements, I

wrote, can be arranged along two lines of transmission, a western one starting from Greece, and an eastern one beginning in Iran and India. In the Hellenistic world, after the campaign of Alexander, when east and west became politically intertwined, these lines began to converge. We have no absolute certainty regarding the exact locality where these electric currents sparked off enough energy to give birth to the Gnosis. In all probability, to quote myself further, this happened in the Syrian region comprising Phoenicia, the hinterland east of Phoenicia called Coelesyria, Samaria, and Palestine. It was there that the great religions met and competed with each other : Judaism, Samaritanism, the Qumran sect of the Essenes, early Christianity, and pagan religions, including the official Olympian creed, the Hellenistic ruler cult, elements, moreover, of Egyptian and Mesopotamian religions, and the mystery religions. There indeed the situation was rife with syncretism. And the Gnosis is exactly this : a syncretistic religion, original but at the same feeding on many other creeds.

19. A Gnostic-dualistic spiritual climate

In fact, the whole spiritual climate of that time was Gnostic-dualistic to the core. Gnostic ideology, with its inherent dualism, began to take shape in the doctrine of Simon Magus, a Samaritan who was the contemporary of the Apostles, and in that of his successor Menander, another Samaritan, and perhaps also in the teaching of Saturnilos, a Syrian. Cerinthus, an independent Gnostic, came from Asia Minor, but he was a Jew. The Gnostic-dualistic texts of the so-called Pseudoclementina have in part a Judaeo-Christian background. The founder of the Carpocratian sect, Carpocrates, with his precocious son Epiphanes, originated a system that showed relations (albeit rather vaguely) with Judaism and early Christianity. These systems, all of them moving within a Judaeo-Christian ambit, are described more fully in Chapter III of Volume VII. With Carpocrates who was born in Alexandria we leave the Samaritan-Syrian orbit and move to Egypt. The present volume will be devoted to ideologies that originated in that country.

19. The position of Judaism and Christianity

It is a curious thing that Judaeo-Christian ideology proper has no part in these developments. In that wide sea of Gnostic-dualistic trends, tendencies, opinions, speculations, systems, the Old and New Testaments and the Talmud stand out like a rock. All three of them present fundamentally homogeneous views of life. However, one of my points is that there exist no systems that are seamlessly homogeneous from one end to the other. The Judaeo-Christian ones are no exception to this rule in that they too show rifts and fissures, antagonistic and even dualistic tendencies. The interested reader may find this elaborated for the Old Testament in Chapter II of Volume IV, for the New Testament in Chapter IV of Volume VII, and for the Talmud in Chapter VI of that same volume. In the end it was the Judaeo-Christian rock on which the Gnosis foundered.

20. The Gnosis on its course through the ages

Together with Christianity, but not in unison with it, the Gnosis competed for the hearts and minds of men. Great Gnostic schools of thought came into being, like those of Basilides, Valentinus, and Marcion, to mention only the most important. The last great Gnostic system was Manichaeism founded in the third century AD by the Iranian prophet Mani. It obviously touched a chord with people, the best-knowing adherent being Saint Augustine who around 370 was an ardent Manichee. It was already a sign of the changing times that Augustine converted to Christianity. The Gnosis steadily lost ground until it was finally superseded by the Christian faith.

But the Gnosis, with its visceral dualism, did not disappear from the scene. By no means! It subsisted underground, it continued its course through the ages in streams deep under the surface, to re-emerge suddenly from time to time. Such manifestations were, for instance, Bogomilism and Catharism during the Middle Ages. There were powerful

gnosticizing elements in the German mysticism of Tauler and Meister Eckehardt, and still more in that of Jakob Boehme around 1600. From then on a neo-Gnosis began to develop, acquiring more and more momentum in the course of the last centuries. We need only think of modern science which has all the characteristics of mysteriosophic knowledge.

Is this neo-Gnosis slowly but certainly becoming a world religion, as Gilles Quispel dubbed it? Or rather, an anti-world religion? Will it attempt to, will it succeed in taking the place of orthodox Christianity which seems so very much on the wane? In the Preface of Volume VII I sketched the contrast between a neo-Gnostic ideology and biblical Christianity in the form of a comparison between the world of the High Priest Sarastro and that of the simple birdman Papageno. Seemingly the triumph is for Sarastro but Mozart's sympathies obviously were with Papageno. This volume I began with an analysis of Wagner's 'Parsifal' in which a neo-Gnostic ideology triumphantly appears. It tried to show how this creed was adopted by Adolf Hitler, the Gnostic dualist par excellence. He attempted to succeed where the great Gnostic prophets of Antiquity had failed, for he tried to make the triumph of the neo-Gnosis complete by breaking into splinters the rock on which the Gnosis had foundered sixteen centuries ago.

At the end of this work I have to thank some persons without whose help I could not have completed it. Dr. J.C.M van Winden, emeritus-professor of the Greek of Late Antiquity in Leiden State University, read and commented upon Chapter I and saved me from some errors. Dr. J.R. Dove, a retired associate professor of English and American literature living in Amsterdam, corrected, as always, my English courteously and accurately. We had many a chat 'over coffee', not only about this book but also about a great many other subjects. My daughter, Dr. Th.A.M. Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine, who has a family of four on her hands, besides having a job, and my other 'general reader', Dr. A. Budé, went through the whole text with their usual care and provided me with a number of clever and useful notes. To my great regret Dr. Budé has

notified me that he is no longer able to act as a 'general reader'. I am deeply in debt to him for all he did for me in the course of so many years; let him remain assured not only of my immense gratitude but also of my lasting friendship. My wife Anneke brings up the rear; she always very carefully corrects the last version but one for typing errors; she was also a great help with the preparation of the diagrams of Gnostic systems at the end of the book. Finally, Mr. J.C. Gieben, friendly and businesslike as ever, saw this book through the press. To all of them I feel very grateful. But I alone assume full responsibility for the whole work, for its contents as well as for its typography and lay-out.

Volume IX is in preparation and will continue the argument on the Gnosis. After a final chapter on the Nag Hammadi Library it will shift the scene from Egypt to Asia Minor, to Marcion, the Mandaeans, and Mani and his Manichees.

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