

Sexuality and Knowledge. The Relationship between Carnality and Salvation in the Apocryphon of John

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Introduction

In several of the Nag Hammadi texts procreation plays a central part in the cosmogonies. One prominent conceptual model in the *Apocryphon of John* is the model of procreation and birth. This model is persuasive, pervasive, powerful and plastic. It appears frequently, especially at turning-points in the narrative.

In the *Apocryphon of John* two themes are interwoven with each other - the procreation of divine and human beings and processes of cognition/salvation. The relationship between procreation and knowledge is the theme of this paper. The special focus of the paper is how meanings taken from the source domain of procreation and birth give a special emotional impetus to its target domain, which is the developing of salvatory knowledge, and further, how the transfer of meanings from the source to the target tends to leave the source-domain devaluated. In the *Apocryphon of John* the language of emotions is primarily figurative - sexual desire is described by means of myths, metaphors and metonymies. How does this text address and manipulate emotions by means of cognitive processes?

In the *Apocryphon of John*, the first creation is by the Father who generates his Thought/Barbelo; the Father and his Thought/Barbelo generates the Son/Christ; Sophia generates the demiurge; the demiurge generates Cain and Abel by Eve; Adam generates Seth; and the Angels generate sons by the daughters of men. Different acts of procreation mirror and oppose each other on different levels of being. There is an alternation between passages about sexual procreations and passages where divine/human characteristics - to some degree personified - are called into being and put in place.

The Apocryphon of John and the three births above

The *Apocryphon of John* exists in four versions, two long and two short (II/IV and III/BG). In the Nag Hammadi codices it is always the introductory text of the codex in which it appears. In addition Irenaeus retells an earlier version of this treatise.

The *Apocryphon of John* has a frame story about John who is given secret knowledge by Jesus after his resurrection. Jesus teaches John about the creation of the divine world, the material world and human beings, and he teaches him about salvation.

According to the instruction of Jesus, the highest god is a monad (*monas*) and a unity (*monarchia*). The main point in the description of this god is that he cannot really be described - he is transcendent, ineffable and not possible to grasp. However, it is difficult to stick to a consequent apophatism, the god of the *Apocryphon of John* is characterized by a rich vocabulary of laudatory terms, going on through several pages.

The father generates Barbelo

The father exists alone from the beginning. He perceives his image in "the pure light-water which surrounds him." His thoughts "becomes a work (*ouhob*)", which means that it goes from potentiality to reality. In codex II and IV the Father puts "his desire (*ouosje*) in his [water]-light" (II 4:24-5), suggesting a sexual dimension to this myth¹. The sexual dimension is absent in BG and III. The first creation is described both as the Thought of the father and his image and as a female divinity called Barbelo. The meaning of the name Barbelo is not clear, but it has been suggested that it derives from a Hebrew word, meaning "the daughter of the lord". In codex II she is called "the womb (*metra*) of everything" (II 5:5). She is "the Mother-father (*metropator*), the first Man, the Holy Spirit, the thrice-male, the thrice-powerful, the thrice-named androgynous One (II 5:5-9). Barbelo is equipped with divine attributes or eons - hypostasized divine qualities.

Several qualities are given to this entity - thought, foreknowledge, indestructibility and eternal life - pertaining to cognition and eternal duration. This is tedious, but in no way exceptional for religious cosmologies where one of the aims is to get the categories in place. Edmund Leach has pointed out that "in primitive

¹ In a well-known papyrus from the Ptolemaic period, the Bremmer-Rhind papyrus, we find one of the traditional Egyptian creation-motifs, known as far back as in the Pyramide texts: "I (Ra) was the one who copulated with my fist. I masturbated with my hand. I spewed from my own mouth. I spat out Shu, and I sputtered out Tefnut." This motif is far removed from the motif we encounter in the Apocryphon of John because the Egyptian motif is so explicitly physical, while the motif in the Apocryphon of John is so explicitly about cognitive processes. All the same, one could argue that the paradigm of the father who generates a new creature by himself in a sort of spiritual birth presupposes an implicit autosexual model.

society” many ritual and mythological sequences recapitulate ”the creation of the world and that this act of creation is mythologized as a list of names attached to persons, places, animals and things. The world is created by the process of classification and the repetition of the classification of itself perpetuates the knowledge which it incorporates”. (Leach 1979:231). It is perhaps unnecessary to add that this also holds good for not-so-primitive societies. In the list of the *Apocryphon of John*, however, abstractions and divine persons rather than animals and things are listed. It is a recurring trait in these texts that actors are presented both as divine persons and as abstractions - and that they waver between these categories.

The father generates the Son with Barbelo/Barbelo bears the Son

This spiritual couple, the father and his Thought Barbelo, conceived a son. The conception is described slightly differently in the various versions of the *Apocryphon of John*:

And Barbelon gazed intently into the pure light. And turned to him and gave birth to a spark of light, but he is not equal in greatness. This is the only-begotten One, who came forth from the father, the divine Self-Generated the first-born Son of all the father’s (sons), the pure light. (III 9:10-18).

Barbelo gazed intently into him, the pure light. She turned herself to him and gave birth to a spark of blessed light, but he is not equal to her in greatness. This is the only-begotten One, who came forth from the father, the divine Self-Generated the first-born Son of the All of the Spirit of pure light. (BG)

And he looked into Barbelo with the pure light which surrounds the invisible Spirit and (with) his spark, and she conceived from him. He begot a spark of light with a light resembling blessedness, but he does not equal his greatness. This was an only-begotten One of the Mother-Father who had come forth; he is an only offspring, the only-begotten One of the Father, the pure Light. (II)

That while Barbelo gloried in them and looked into the majesty and took delight in him in conception (*et conceptu delectatam in hanc*), she gave birth to a light similar to him. They say that this is the beginning of all light and generation (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.29).

Barbelo either gazes intently into the Father (BG and III) or the Father looks into Barbelo with his spark (II) and she conceives from him (*she ouo*, originally a botanical metaphor). Either she gives birth to a spark of light (BG and III) or the Father begets a spark of light (II). There is an ambiguity in III and BG in that Barbelo

gives birth to (*shpo*) the spark of light at the same time as it is said that the Son comes forth (*oyonh ebol*) from the father. The impression is, however, that it is the procreative activity of the father which is made essential in this text. The product of this birth is the Son. He is "his only offspring, the only-begotten One (*monogenes*) of the father, the pure light" (II 6:14-18). The father is called "the divine self-generated" (*autogenes*). The Son resembles the blessed light, but is not equal to the Father in Greatness.

Irenaeus suggests an erotic dimension to the myth - Barbelo "took delight in him (the father) in conception."² Irenaeus is perhaps sexing the narrative up, while the primary sources "sex" it down? It varies in the two traditions (BG/III and II/IV) whether Barbelo or the father does the initial "gazing" which results in the conception and birth of the Son. Common to the different versions is that the procreative process is lifted up from the lower parts of the body to the head and is concentrated in the divine gaze³. The procreative process consists of gazing - turning to - giving birth, or, gazing (with spark) - conceiving - begetting.

Barbelo is further characterized as male and "virginal" which suggests an interest in downplaying her female element. The sexual aspect is, except for in Irenaeus, rather vague. Instead this process of conception and birth is dependent on vision and cognition which distinguishes it from "normal" procreations and births. After the Son is born, he is anointed with Christhood/goodness (*Xristós/(Xrestós)*) so that he became perfect (*teléios*). The story continues with the son being equipped with eons. This suggests a second procreation, and further stresses the Father-Son link at the cost of the Mother-Son link. One may think of the anointing as a forming of the Son similar to how, according to Aristotelian thought, the seed of the father forms the baby at the conception. This type of forming by means of an anointing follows after the first forming and is on a higher level. The birth of the Son by means of Barbelo is not sufficient for his creation, he has to be anointed by the Father. The male seed is usually the formative principle, here the anointing is presented as the final forming of

² *delecto* means both "to allure from the right path, to entice away, to seduce" and "to delight, please, charm, amuse". (*In hanc* (?)).

³ In the *Trimorphic Protennoia* there is a superior metaphorical system which is auditive: Silence-Thought-Voice-Speech-Word. In this case an auditive metaphorical system is linked to a procreative metaphorical system. The attaining knowledge has become an erotic process where the ear has been developed into an erotic organ through which a spiritual fertilization takes place. In the present text Sophia's (sleeping)-partner is called *symfonos* in two of the versions (III and BG), using the conceptual domain of speech to describe the close relationship between a spiritual couple. (cf Gilhus 1994).

the son, the act which makes him perfect. In this way the forming is done in two stages and the father is the real giver of life.

On the one hand we have a divine "nuclear family", a trinity consisting of father, mother and son, a rather pale and abstract variety of a type of divine "family" which was not unusual in the Mediterranean, seen for instance in Chronos/Rhea/Zeus or Osiris/Isis/Horus - to mention two examples. On the other hand we have a religio-philosophical system with essentialized qualities. These things are muddled - philosophical abstractions are described in a language of procreation and birth, procreation and birth are used as metaphors and analogies for divine cognitive processes, resulting in the creation of the world.

The procreation and birth, which are described, are "normal" in the way that there are both a father and a mother involved, but rather "abnormal" because Barbelo is derivative and secondary. It does not seem as if she contributes much in the conception of the Son, the mother is the passive element (cf. Eumenides 274.665-71, in Smith 1988:X). This is in consonance with ancient medical theories. The female element is inferior to the male - independent of whether Hippocratic theories of both male and female procreating seed or the Aristotelic theory according to which only the male produced seed are predominant.

More strange is the harping on the maleness and androgyny of Barbelo. Androgyny and maleness are laudatory terms which are used to describe a spiritual ideal. In several cases where androgyny is included, the female part is incorporated in a way that virtually wipes it out.

Why a male womb in which creation takes place? Shouldn't wombs be female? One answer is that the maleness of the womb is due to the fact that we are talking about metaphysics and abstractions, not gynecology and "real" events. A blending between different source-domains has taken place, a blending which reflects that metaphors transcend reality and make it more powerful. Perhaps a more pertinent answer to why the womb is male is that the female womb has other things to do than giving birth to spiritual entities. These other things include the bearing of the polluted world of nature and physical existence⁴.

⁴ There are in reality two cosmogonic wombs in the Nag Hammadi texts, the one is the spiritual womb of original creation, the other is the polluted womb of nature (*The Paraphrase of Shem*). The first has a tendency to be connected to a mother who is male and androgynous as it is in the *Apocryphon of John*.

Sophia generates the demiurge

The second level of cosmogonic conception is connected to Wisdom- Sophia, the lowest of the eons in the transcendent world. In addition to the *Apocryphon of John*, informations about this mythical figure are found in the *Nature of the Archons* and the *Origin of the World*, which are related texts belonging to the same codex as one of the versions of the *Apocryphon of John* (codex II).

Sophia does something which is not according to the original plan: "She wanted to bring forth a likeness (*eine*) out of herself." In other words she wanted to create alone without the consent of her male counterpart (*synzygos/symphonos*). According to III and BG, "she brought forth because of the *prounikos* which is in her" (III 15:2-3; BG 37:10-11), codex II says because of "the power (*tchom*) which is in her" (II 10:1). *Prounikos* means "sexual knowledge". In the ancient debate between Hippocratics and Aristotelians about whether and to what degree the mother had the ability to create likeness, this text has clearly taken its stand.

The product which came forth was imperfect (*ateleston*) and had a different form (*morfe*) because she had created him without her consort (II 10:3-5). He is not similar to the Mother (*Sophia*), but has another form, with the face of a lion and a snake. In codex II he is a snake with a lion's head. His eyes are "fires of lightening which flash".

Sophia installs her son on a throne and hides him with a cloud - away from the other eones, because she has created him in ignorance. Here he creates for himself his own place and an eon with blazing fire. Ialdabaoth is a creator-god, a demiurge. When he is starting his creative enterprise he "copulated with Ignorance, who is with him, and begot the authorities which are under him"... (III 16:7-9; BG 36:4-7)⁵.

In the first part of the description of Sophia's procreation in the *Apocryphon of John* the stress is on the cognitive dimension. The conception came about because Sophia thought a thought out of herself. In the second part of the description, however, III and BG stress that "she brought forth (*toke/eine ebol*) because of the

⁵ In the *Nature of the Archons*, the demiurge is called "a misformed abortion" (*houhe*). Here it is said that "what she (Sophia) had created became a product in the matter, like an aborted fetus. And it assumed a plastic form molded out of shadow, and became an arrogant beast resembling a lion. It was androgynous, as I have already said, because it was from matter that it derived." (94:14-19). Richard Smith makes a pertinent remark, that it makes sense that this creature is androgynous because sexual differentiation is the result of formation (Smith 1988:351). In the *Origin of the World*, the demiurge is born as "an aborted fetus - since there was no spirit in it." (99:25-26). Only afterwards is it "formed into a likeness" by Sophia and made to rule over matter (100:1-5).

sexual knowledge (*prounikon*) which is in her". Because she has made the demiurge without the consent of her partner, he has no form. Lack of form means lack of a form which is human: Ialdabaoth has the face of a lion and a serpent, and eyes shining with fire.

According to Hippocratic theories a woman cannot conceive without a man, though most Hippocratic theories have difficulties explaining why women, who according to the Hippocratics could produce their own seed, cannot produce parthenogenetically (Dean-Jones 2001:161). Some say that if seed from only one parent vitalized the material in the female uterus it would produce a mole (*mylé*), an undifferentiated fleshly lump, rather than a foetus (ibid. 161). According to Aristotle (*History of Animals* 10. 638a22-5) these moles "are neither animals (*oute zoon*).... nor yet in-animate (*oute apsychon*) as in the case of wind eggs."

When the formative principle is weak, the result is subhuman or an animal (*Generation of Animals*, 771b28-772b25). Aristotle defines the female as "a deformed male" (*Generation of Animals*, 737a28). She does not possess a perfect form and cannot pass such a form to her offspring. (cf. Dean-Jones 1994:182). Aristotle especially discussed monstrosities (*teras*), that which is not normal. It is when the material which comes from the female is not mastered by the formative power of the seed, that the most material or animal (*zoon*) substance remains. (*Generation of animals*, 769b). Then one may get creatures which have the heads of others - "a calf has a child's head or a sheep an ox's head".

In a Platonic treatise from the 2. century CE labelled "Whether what is carried in the womb is a living being" (Pseudo-Galen), it is said that: "As the marks of imperfect seed, either in terms of quantity or in terms of quality, are inherited, whether they result in more or less limbs, or in the forms of other animals, in the same manner perfect and clearly formed seed possesses the perfect pattern of living being." (p. 177 in Kapparis 2002:209).

So far medical theory. But Ialdabaoth is a mythological creature, not a baby. Things which are not possible in reality are possible in myths. Mythological creatures may clearly be born parthenogenetically without a father and all the same develop into vigorous, though malformed, creatures.

There are parallels: In the *Theogony* Hera begets Hephaistos as a response to Zeus giving birth to Athena, while in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, the birth of Athena makes Hera giving birth to Typhon. Hephaistos is crippled, Typhon is a

terrifying monster. Typhon's lower part consists of bodies of snakes, he appears as a demon of storm, whirlwind and earthquakes, is associated with fire and is in one myth said to be thrown into the abyss (as the demiurge is in the *Nature of Archons*). In Egypt Typhon is identified with Seth. Similar to Typhon, who was the enemy of the Olympics, Seth is the enemy of Osiris. The point is that births which are solely female go wrong, while male births may succeed.

Accordingly the Sophia/Ialdabaoth theme is analogous to or a structural equivalent to a well-known mythological theme. And similar to how Ialdabaoth is a caricature of JHWH, there is also a special connection from Typhon/Seth to the Jews. Manetho says that the Jews in Egypt worshipped this Seth/Typhon (Lancellotti 2000:217-18), and they were sometimes polemically called "Typhonics". (Frankfurter 1998:212). The point here is not to say that Ialdabaoth is Typhon or genealogically connected to him (he may be, but we lack material to show it), only to point at the existence of a common cultural knowledge: Divine parhenogenetic births produce monsters.

While Hippocratic theories did not recon on it being possible for females to produce children alone, in myths it was possible. But as no formative principle was present, the product did not resemble its parent, on the contrary, the result was formless, namely an abortion/animalian hybrid. The result of Sophia's conception without her partner can be described as a pathological birth.

The Apocryphon of John and the three births below

Ialdabaoth generates Cain and Abel by Eve

Sexuality is explicitly connected to the demiurge Ialdabaoth and to the realm below, especially to the serpent. In all versions it is said that "the serpent appeared to them (Adam and Eve) for sexual desire."

A turning-point in the *Apocryphon of John* is the creation of humans and the introduction of sexuality. In the Father's creation of Barbelo and Sophia's of Ialdabaoth - there was a creative urge, but no real desire for a partner. Officially sexuality did not yet exist (though, I will argue, it is implicitly present in all the procreations above), and when it finally comes into being, it is masterminded by the

demiurge⁶. According to the *Apocryphon of John* it is the serpent who taught Adam and Eve "to eat from the wickedness (*kakía*) of sexual (*sporá*) desire (*epithumia*)."⁶ (II 22:12-14). In BG it is Eve who is taught by the serpent (BG 58:4-6).

Ialdabaoth sees the virgin Eve, who appears at Adam's side, and he wishes to create children by her - he wants to "raise up a seed (*sperma*) from Eve" (III 31.); BG 62:7). He defiles her and produces two sons, JHWH with a bear face (*arkos*) and Elohim with a cat face (*mou*). They are also called Cain and Abel. Sexual intercourse continued due to the chief ruler. He planted sexual desire in Adam (III and BG) or in "her who belonged to Adam" (II). In other words, the codices disagree slightly about who is to blame (cf. Gilhus 1983). In codex II copies are produced through intercourse (*synousia*).

We note in passing that Ialdabaoth, who is an animalian hybrid, produces animalian hybrids as his sons, which was to be expected, considering the formative power of fathers and the fact the father in this case is a mixture of lion/serpent/human.

Is it sexuality which is the basic evil in this text or the raising of children? Note that Sophia's "sin" is not sexual desire (even if she is sometimes called *Prounikos*), but rather the urge to create. When she creates, she does it without a partner. What is the main problem? Is it because the sexual act binds those who perform it to the material world or because giving birth produces new souls or binds old ones in the world? Is it meaningful in this text to divide sexual desire and the procreation of children? Plato, for instance, distinguished between the procreative urge and sexual appetite.

On this point a third entity must be introduced. That is *antimimon pneuma*. *Antimimon pneuma* means a counterfeit spirit, a spirit which is imitated, an anti-spirit or opposing spirit. It appears with this Greek name in BG and codex III while the long version of the text in codex II and IV tends to use a Coptic designations - *pneuma etsjes*, "the despicable spirit" or *pneuma etsjbbiaeit*, "the different or changed spirit". This is a rather mysterious entity which appears at least eight times in the *Apocryphon of John* (Böhlig 1968; Tardieu 1984:334-335; 337-39).

⁶ In Genesis there is a god who creates by his word (Gen 1), but he also forms by means of earth as he did when he formed Adam out of dust of the ground (Gen 2:7). JHWH does not use sexuality as a device in his creation of the world and human beings, but he is not negative towards procreation and human sexuality. On the contrary, he commands that human beings should "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth..." (Gen 1:28).

The first time it appears in the *Apocryphon of John* is when Adam is equipped with a material body. Then it is said "They made a form once more (cf. Gen 2:7 LXX), but from earth and water and fire and spirit, that is from matter and darkness and desire and their counterfeit spirit." (III 26:14-19). The second time is in connection with the Tree of Life which in reality is a tree of desire and death (cycle of begetting-life-death): "I shall teach you what is the mystery of their life, namely their counterfeit spirit from within them in order to lead astray, so that he (Adam) might not know his perfection." (BG 56:12-27).

The counterfeit spirit is further present in the passage just referred to when sexual desire leads to copies of bodies being reproduced: "And in Adam he (Ialdabaoth) planted sexual desire (*sporá epithymía*) so that through his essence he gave birth to their copy by means of their counterfeit spirit". (III 31:23-32:3) The last part of the *Apocryphon of John* consists in questions from John and answers by Jesus. Here we learn that salvation depends on whether the Holy Spirit or the counterfeit spirit dominates a person (III 34:9-35:10).

Finally, the question is raised where the *antimimon pneuma* comes from? (III 36:16-17). Before Jesus answers John he goes on and on with other things and when the reader thinks that the author has forgotten the question, Jesus finally tells that when the angels tried to seduce the daughters of men so that they might raise offspring (cf. Gen 6:1-4) and did not have any success, they introduced this counterfeit spirit which is an imitation of the real spirit (III 15-20) and managed to seduce the daughters of men and raise children by them: "They took them and begot children out of darkness by means of their counterfeit spirit. And they closed their hearts and became hard through the hardness of the counterfeit spirit until now." (III 39:5-11).

It seems as if this *antimimon pneuma* usually appears in connection with sexuality and the raising of children. This spirit may personify the sexual drive leading to sexuality and intercourse, which is the opposite of the spiritual drive leading to knowledge and salvation. There is a stress on the polarity between the Holy Spirit, whose function is to give spiritual knowledge and instruction, and the counterfeit spirit, whose function is to arouse sexual desire and procreate children. Alastair Logan says that this spirit is "responsible both for human reproduction and for their lack of spiritual perception" (Logan 1996:272).

In the *Apocryphon of John* there is an opposition between the two trees in Genesis, the Tree of Life which is the tree of sexuality and the cycle of life and

death, connected to the serpent and sometimes to woman, and also to the *antimimon pneuma*, while the Tree of Knowledge is connected to spiritual awakening, gnosis, and an eagle which is Jesus

Adam generates Seth

Seth is a saviour in some of the Nag Hammadi texts, and like Adam he exists as a heavenly prototype. The procreation of Seth is special. After Ialdabaoth had produced Cain and Abel by Eve, Adam "recognized the likeness of his own foreknowledge (*prognosis*). He begot the likeness of the Son of Man and called him Seth" (II). In BG Adam "knows the essence (*ousia*) which is like himself and procreates Seth". The version in codex III seems corrupt. Here Adam "recognizes his own lawlessness (*anomia*) and procreates Seth". How does Adam do it?

With the caution that one should not make mythological entities into persons, the fact that these entities may have some sort of ideal or typological standing with social groups and thus relate to sexuality, asceticism and real families, may make it interesting to try to phantom what is meant when it is said that Adam "recognized the likeness of his own foreknowledge" and begot the likeness of the Son of man - *i.e.* Seth. This procreation is different from the ways sexual procreation otherwise operates. Remember: "In Adam he planted sexual desire so that through this essence they gave birth to their copy by means of their counterfeit spirit".

Is the point with this conception of Seth that it happens without passion? Dale Martin has an interesting article called "Paul without passion" where he discusses the Stoic ideal of *enkráteia* in relation to sexual intercourse (Martin 1997). If it is without or with a minimum of passion, who is without passion? Since females may conceive without desire is it especially the female partner who should not be sexually aroused? (Both BG and II mention that desire has been planted in Eve as a strategy to bind the souls in the material world.). Is it the spiritual image which Adam concentrates on when he has intercourse with Eve and when Seth is conceived as the "likeness of the Son of Man?" According to ancient natural historical lore a woman thinking of her lover when she has intercourse with her husband may produce a child which resembles the lover (see for instance the *Gospel of Philip* 112). Is this the technique behind producing spiritual children, thinking of the spiritual image? According to Pythagorean ideas, immortal souls were brought into existence by means of high-quality sexual intercourse. The pythagoreans were procreationist for the sake of

producing high-quality children, while some of the Christian fathers were procreationist because of their negativity towards sexual desire (see especially Gaca 2003). One could ask if the rather cryptic statements about Seth's conception should be interpreted in Pythagorean direction. Supporting this idea is also a statement in codex II (which has already been quoted): "And he (the demiurge) produced through intercourse the copies of the bodies, and he inspired them with his counterfeit spirit." (II 24:29-31). Whether children are conceived when the parents are inspired by heavenly spiritual images or by the counterfeit spirit seems to determine the result.

The angels procreate children by the daughters of men

The demiurge and his angels sent angels to the daughters of men that they might raise offspring from them. The angels changed their appearance to the likeness of their husbands, since "as their husbands they filled them with spirit which mixed with them in the darkness that stem from evil." (II). They took them and begot children out of the darkness by means of their counterfeit spirit.

Paradigms of procreation and conceptual metaphors

We have distinguished between six paradigms of procreation:

The Father (Autogenes) generates Barbelo/Thought

The Father (Autogenes) and the Mother (Barbelo/Thought) generate the Son (Monogenes)

Sophia, without her synzygos, generates Ialdabaoth

Ialdabaoth and Eve generate Cain and Abel

Adam and Eve (?) generate Seth

Angels and the daughters of men generate children "out of darkness"

Characteristic for several of the Nag Hammadi texts is a hierarchy of creation which goes from unity to multiplicity, from pureness to contamination. There is a downward movement of creation and a hope of salvation and there is a parallel between the conception of this world as initiated by a pathological birth and humans as imperfect creatures. Some of the paradigms which have been discussed above are positive ideals, others are not. The goal is to be born in the right way and to be a son.

Conception number five mirrors number two: Like the spiritual father procreates the Son, Adam procreates Seth.

When we compare the three births above with the three births below, we find that sexuality has a vague existence in the world above, and that it exists in a mixture with cognition and seeing. In the world below sexuality is created as a device to keep humans in the material world. Sexuality is connected to Ialdabaoth, his angels, and the serpent. Sexual desire is implanted in human beings and makes them produce copies of themselves. In the world above, however, generative processes are mixed with cognitive processes so that one is at the same time talking about the creation of divine beings and processes of cognition. This makes a cross-fertilization between models of generation and models of cognition endlessly possible.

The conceptual domain of sexuality/procreation/birth is used to describe processes of cognition⁷. When procreative processes are applied to describe soteriological cognitive processes, it means that there is a metaphorical relationship between sexuality/procreation and knowledge/salvation. Metaphorically speaking UNDERSTANDING IS FERTILIZATION/INSEMINATION and SALVATION IS BIRTH. To be a son, conceived by the Father and born through the spirit is a prototypical ideal.

These metaphors are successful because they seem natural in their new context. Cicero says about a successful metaphor that "it had not invaded into an alien place but had migrated into its own" (Cicero, *Brutus* 274, in Innes 2003:7), which means that the metaphor makes the unfamiliar familiar and thus naturalizes what is strange and not natural at all. This "migration into its own" implies that the readers are "tuned in" on that type of metaphorical language so that it feels natural to speak about attaining spiritual knowledge in the terms of procreation and birth.

Sexuality/procreation used to describe processes of knowledge/salvation can also be characterized - with a concept taken from Lakoff and Johnson - as a "signature-metaphor" because it is innovative and gives the metaphysics of the *Apocryphon of John* and related texts a distinctive character.

When sexuality and procreation are used to explore processes of spiritual begetting and of attaining knowledge and salvation, one reason is probably that an abstract and difficult process is made more easy to grasp by something which seems to be easier to understand. It is thus a pedagogic point to combine these domains.

⁷ Denise Buell has pointed out that procreation was "firmly established as a metaphor for the transmission, acquisition and production of knowledge." (1999:50).

There is further a historical background - or rather historical backgrounds - to the intersection of the domains of procreation and intellectual "production". In Plato there is a correspondence between degrees of being and degrees of knowledge, similar to the one we find in Christian texts. There is also a Platonic background for using generative language for generating ideas as well as babies (Diotema in *Symposium*) and for opposing them to each other. Both types of generation are in *Symposium* further connected to the idea of human immortality. Ideas about Wisdom as a female spiritual being with whom God creates are present in Jewish texts. And probably more important, in the story about Adam and Eve in Genesis there is a link between receiving knowledge and becoming sexual beings.

Light and seeing

When BG says about the Father that "The spring of the Spirit poured forth from the living water of the light" (BG 26:19-21), a complex metaphor with several conceptual domains are involved. The use of light in this myth is in agreement with one of Plato's ideas, which is that the causal source of knowledge is light and that KNOWING IS SEEING. Knowledge is also more directly linked to procreation when it is connected with the process of seeing, implying the Platonic visual model of light-thing-image-shadow. In other words, procreation and visualization are combined in one metaphor/myth.

In the second paradigm of procreation, that of the Father and Barbelo, the son is conceived by means of the gaze - Barbelo gazing intently into the Father or the father looking into Barbelo. In this case, eyes have developed into sexual organs and the gaze has replaced genital sex, constituting a sort of *scopophilia*. But in opposition to *scopophilia*, the gazing in the Barbelo-myth leads to conception and birth (cf. Miles 2005). In this case the domain of seeing has been blended with the domain of procreation and birth⁸.

When spiritual beings reveal themselves it is usually done in a kind of illumination. The prototypical human form is shown to the world below by means of an illumination. And when a spiritual helper is sent to Adam, it is in the form of a

⁸ Margaret R. Miles has in a recent article relating to Augustine and his use of Plato's theory of vision pointed out: "Vision connects viewer and object, establishing a two-way street on which, as the viewer sees the object, the object travels back along the visual ray to imprint itself on the memory. The visual ray theory has long been superseded by more accurate accounts of the physics of vision, yet, as an account of the experience of vision, it has validity." (Miles 2005:323).

luminous reflection (*ouepinoya noyoein*) called Life. This female helper is a teacher of knowledge, knowledge being linked to light and spiritual conception.

In codex II it is said about Sophia that her deficiency is shown to her when "the brightness of her light diminished. And she became dark because her consort had not agreed with her." (II 13:15-17). She is corrected when finally her husband comes to her. There is a linking between Sophia who created because of her sexual desire, alone, in ignorance and her becoming dark. Sexuality, ignorance and darkness come from different conceptual domains, but are intertwined in this conceptual blending.

While ignorance is linked to darkness and sexual desire, it is also linked to fire which seems to be conceived of as an earthly opposite of light. The eon of the demiurge shines with a luminous fire and his eyes are shining with fire. In short his preferred element is fire. This is in agreement with a more general metaphor which says that EMOTION IS HEAT (OF FIRE), where the focus is on the intensity of a situation, based on the experience that intense situations produce body heat. The demiurge is closely connected to fire which is in accordance with him being an inventor of and ruler of sexual desire. Lust and anger are the two emotions which especially takes recourse to the conceptual metaphor, EMOTION IS HEAT (OF FIRE) (Lakoff 1987:380-416; Kövecses 2000).

An other prominent conceptual domain for lust is LUST IS HUNGER. I would suggest that this domain is closely connected to how the Tree of Life in the *Apocryphon of John* is described as a tree of desire, procreation and death, and to how the tree offers its fruits for eating: "Its root is bitter and its branches are death, its shadow is hate and deception is in its leaves, and its blossom is the ointment of evil, and its fruit is death and desire is its seed, and its sprout in darkness. Those who *taste* from it, their dwelling place is Hades and the darkness is their place of rest." (II 21:30-22:2). Later it is said that the serpent "taught them to *eat* from wickedness of sexual desire and destruction" (II 22:12-14).

There is a gradual decline of being and knowledge in the cosmogony of the *Apocryphon of John* and related texts. There is at the same time both a continuum from spirit to matter and a sharp polarization with several oppositions:

light#darkness

light#fire

seeing#blindness

knowledge#ignorance

being saved#carnal generation

spiritual longing#sexual desire

It is possible to move between the conceptual domains which these opposites presuppose and to combine them rather freely.

Metaphors and emotions

Lakoff and Johnson have repeatedly stressed that the system of conceptual metaphors "is shaped to a significant extent by the common nature of our bodies and the shared ways that we all function in the everyday world" (1999:245). They generalize metaphorical processes and reveal that common and ordinary metaphors and more unusual and/or spectacular metaphors obey the same rules. They do not specifically discuss procreation/sexuality/birth as a source-domain for metaphors. However, sexuality and procreation are basic human (and animalian) functions which are natural, obvious and emotionally invested. I would suggest that the emotional impetus is at least equally important as the intellectual/cognitive when this source domain is used and that there is a systematic linking between ideological meanings and sensual/emotional meanings.

Mark Turner says that "Blended spaces do cognitive work in the strongest sense. They provide inferences, emotions, and novel actions, and consequently leave their mark upon the real world." (1996:74). In Lakoff and Johnson's pioneering contributions to metaphor theory the fundamental relational and emotional significance of bodies being in the world is basic. Lakoff in his *Women, Fire and other Dangerous Things* (1987: 380-416) and Kövecses in his *Metaphor and Emotion* (2000) have especially studied the figurative language of emotions. One of their discoveries is that in English, the conceptualization of lust is primarily done by two metaphorical source domains - fire/heat and hunger/eating. Another result is that the figurative language of emotions seem to rest on universal or near-universal conceptual domains. This seems reasonable because it is based on physiology and human embodiment - though of course a figurative language of emotions will have local variations and developments. As for Egyptian descriptions of love/lust. in magical papyri, (which is a good source), fire/heat as well as hunger/eating, illness, madness and animalian behaviour are used as source domains.

In this connection it is also pertinent to remind of Victor W. Turner's model for symbols, according to which the meanings of the symbol are polarized at respectively an ideological and a sensory pole (Turner 1967). At the sensory pole are concentrated those significata that may be expected to arouse desire and feelings. At the ideological pole are the values and norms that guide and control persons as members of social groups and categories. In this way norms and values become saturated with emotions. It is the combination and integration of ideological and sensory meanings that keep the symbol alive and active.

Sensual and ideological meanings are interconnected in complex ways which give sensual depths, persuasive power and social significance to ideas and cognition. Sexuality and procreation are basic facts of life which furnish whatever they come into contact with with an interesting and attractive context. The more "hot" (sexy) process of procreation has an emotional impetus which it lends to the more abstract process of cultivating souls and attaining knowledge. In her recent book Gillian Clark poses a rhetorical question: "...if you can sell anything with sex, does that include abstinence?" (Clark 2004:69).

Generally it is few things that sex does not sell. In the *Apocryphon of John* and a lot of other Christian texts with an ascetic outlook sex sells abstinence and asceticism. The domain of sexuality/procreation/birth is further used to sell social relations and institutional power⁹. This is perhaps not so strange, taking in consideration the character of ancient Christian ideals. In the words of Robin Lane-Fox: "Thanks to Christian perfectionism, the map became dotted with something quite new; arsenals of sexually frustrated readers, stretching from Egypt to the coast of Scotland" (Lane-Fox 1994:148).

How are sexuality and procreation similar to cognition and salvation? Generally speaking all aspects of procreative processes are not exploited, and one conceptual domain is only partly mapped on another. The full biological process of sexuality/procreation/birth consists of sexual activity, conception, pregnancy and birth. In the social world the birth of a child is, in addition, followed by postnatal

⁹ When texts talk about the development of knowledge in sexual terms, and at the same time speak about the generation of sons and about the relationship between spiritual fathers and spiritual sons, these things do not only refer to spiritual matters, but may refer to church-hierarchies and church politics as well. These things have recently been interestingly discussed by Virginia Burrus in relation to Athanasius, Ambrose and Gregory of Nazianz (2001) and by Denise Buell in relation to Clement of Alexandria (Buell 1999).

rites¹⁰. Sexuality is, of course, not only part of procreation processes, but one of the modes of human biological expression more generally. In this text the birth element is strongly focused and the link between copulation and birth is direct and close. Only some aspects of a source domain are normally utilized. Kövecses calls it "partial metaphorical utilization" (Kövecses 2000: 81). Originally a similarity is seen/constructed which means that single elements in two domains are paired, while the purpose affects which of the potentially innumerable similarities and relations that are chosen. In the *Apocryphon of John* conception and birth are linked immediately to each other with no pregnancy between the two events. It is also important that meanings taken from the source must not be in conflict with the target. In the real world births result in roughly similar numbers for boys and girls, but in gnostic mythology the child is usually a boy.¹¹

Metaphors and reality

The blending of the domains of sexual/procreative processes and cognitive/salvatory processes are complicated, not least because these processes are complex. Which aspects of the domain of procreation does the *Apocryphon of John* utilize in the metaphorical comprehension of fall and salvation? Which characteristics are highlighted and which are hidden? Religions apply metaphorical language and use metaphors to describe reality in ways which do not admit their metaphorical character.

Some of the acts of creation in this text happen in the transcendent realm and can be interpreted as philosophical or epistemological processes, but they finally have material consequences. So on a certain point there is a transformation when, abstractions become entities and spirit turns into matter. There is a deliberate vagueness in whether these texts are speaking metaphorically or pretend to describe an ontology more directly. The exact point of this transformation is not easy to discern. How are we going to understand this first creation? Are we talking about divine entities or about abstract qualities? When it is said about Barbelo that she "becomes actual", *r oyhob/sjope noyhob*, the step from potentiality into reality has definitely taken place.

¹⁰ Postnatal rites are not seldom drawing meanings from the conceptual domain of sexual activity, conception, pregnancy and birth.

¹¹ There are exceptions, for instance Norea in the *Nature of the Archons*.

A blending may have consequences for the original domain which has been projected onto another domain. There is a complex connection between spiritual knowledge and carnal knowledge in Christian texts. Sexuality/procreation and knowledge/salvation label processes which in these texts are closely related and interact with each other. The domain of knowledge and the domain of procreation work in both directions - to know is to conceive and to conceive is to know¹². In the *Apocryphon of John* this concept is drawn in cognitive direction - especially in codex II where it is said that when Adam "recognized the likeness of his own foreknowledge, he begot the likeness of the Son of Man" (which is Seth).

It seems as if the two types of processes, that of cognition and that of generation, lay close to each other in the conceptual universe of early Christianity. One illustration of the conceptual closeness of these processes is the myth of the serpent of Genesis which in Christian interpretation seems equally well suited to convey carnal knowledge as it is to convey spiritual knowledge - its role and function depends on which text one consults. The *Nature of the Archons* has a serpent which is a spiritual messenger and who gives Adam salvatory knowledge, while the *Apocryphon of John* has a serpent which "taught them to eat from the wickedness of sexual desire that he (Adam) might be useful to him" (22:12-15). Both texts are found in the same codex in the Nag Hammadi library (codex II).

Using metaphors is talking about one kind of thing in the terms of another and understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another. Or as in the case of procreation and cognition, blending two domains and speaking of both in the terms of each other. When terms are used metaphorically they say something about the target domain which they are used to characterize, but they also say something about the source domain from which they have been taken. Mark Turner says: "Inferences, arguments, ideas, and emotions developed in the blend can lead us to modify the initial input spaces and change our views of the knowledge used to build those input spaces." (1996:74).

In the case of the *Apocryphon of John*, which is dependent on a whole line of development, a reevaluation of the source has taken place, because the target and the source are in an opposition to each other. The *Apocryphon of John* applies the conceptual metaphor of sexuality/procreation/birth to understand cognition/salvation,

¹² Sometimes also epistemological language is used to characterize sexuality, as when Adam "knows" (*sooyn/ginoskein*) his wife Eve. (Genesis 4.1; II 91.13 - cf. *Stromateis* 3.17 and Hippolytus *haer.* 5.25).

but in the main does not interpret procreation as such in a positive light. Spiritual begetting is better than physical begetting, or the two types of begetting are conceived of as mutually exclusive. Physical begetting is presented as an obstacle to developing spiritual knowledge. The Tree of Life is opposed to the Tree of Knowledge and linked to the cycle of biological birth and death. Sexual intercourse is created by the demiurge Ialdabaoth and planted in Adam or in Eve (dependent on which codex we read). It continues from then on and secures the reproduction of bodies.

A critical objection to the text's own conclusions on this matter is that it really was the Father who set the example for sexual procreation (He had it with Barbelo). When this indisputable fact is hidden it both shows that texts are rather sovereign in interpreting their own messages, revealing something, denying others. But it also shows how seamlessly procreative language has been transferred from its own domain into another.

When anybody gives in to their sexual desire in this text, children are always the result. Barbelo, the Son, Ialdabaoth, Cain and Abel, Seth, the children of the daughters of men. Procreation inevitably leads to birth. In *Symposium* Diotema says to Socrates, "All men are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and in soul: on reaching a certain age our nature yearns to beget" (*Symposium* 206 C). A main point in *Symposium* is that there are better ways to obtain immortality than through begetting babies.

This drive towards begetting something else than babies is ancient, as well as the idea that a spiritual birth is better than a physical, and also that a male birth is better than a female. The *Apocryphon of John* has obviously made these thought its own.¹³

Consequences

Divine beings are on another conceptual level than living beings, having a fictional existence as figments of the human mind and culture. Consequently, when we are describing such creatures as if they generate thoughts or children, we are taking categories from the human/animalian world to apply them on something quite different. Within religious world views divine beings and their relations are routinely

¹³ D. Buell points out that in the late second century conversion made the Christian movement grow, while "an argument for human procreation as a means of Christian self-perpetuation receives virtually no attention" (Buell 1999:33, note 5.)

used as models for humans. Usually, as in the *Apocryphon of John*, there is an alleged continuity between the level of the divine and the level of humans.

In the *Apocryphon of John* the domain of sexuality/procreation/birth is usurped for processes of divine creativity, of cognition, and of salvation, which implies that the domains of vision and seeing, of cognition and thought and of procreation and sexuality are blended. At the same time the more obvious meanings of the domain of sexuality/procreation/birth are dramatically de-evaluated. The Father's conception of the Son both affirms and denies itself as a sexual conception. One is moving in a hierarchy where the "real" things are seen as shadows of their derivations. These metaphors represent a paler version and a spiritualization of the sensory meanings - it is a sort of carnality which denies its own carnality. By doing this there is also created in the *Apocryphon of John* and related texts a sort of tension or nerve which contributes to making the narrative going. There is a wavering between an abstract and a realistic understanding of processes in the transcendent world.

When the conceptual domain of procreation is used to describe metaphysical procreation, there is a transfer of positive values from the one to the other: metaphysical sexual behaviour is good, physical sexual behaviour is bad. Different conceptual domains are used to describe metaphysical sex and worldly sex. Metaphysical sex takes place by means of seeing (and hearing). Attaining knowledge in this text is a sort of spiritual sexuality, in comparison physical sex is more like spiritual adultery. Analogous to sex being described as eating in relation to the Tree of Life, developing knowledge is described as eating in relation to the Tree of Knowledge.

Still it is a possibility that the *Apocryphon of John*, like several other ancient Christian texts, allows sexual intercourse to take place when it happens for the sake of generating babies. The quality of the conception, however, is dependent on the sexual act being carried out with a view to heavenly images and models. Only in this way may devoted couples manage to give birth to the souls of the elect.

Generally in the *Apocryphon of John* the sexual urge is transferred from the lower parts of the body towards its upper parts, from the genitals to the eyes (and ears), and from the world below to the world above. This transferring makes it suitable for ascetic consumption. It may seem strange that sex is used to sell

asceticism, but taking in consideration that asceticism is deeply dependent on its relations to sexuality, probably nothing sells it better.

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