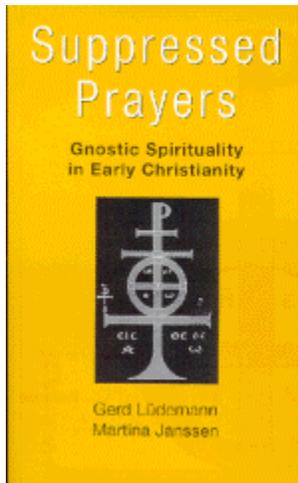


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Lüdemann, Gerd and Martina Janssen

Suppressed Prayers: Gnostic Spirituality in Early Christianity

Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 1998. Pp. 174, Paperback, No Price Available, ISBN 1563382504.

Philip L. Tite

Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University,
Montréal, QC Canada H3A 2A7

In this short volume, Lüdemann and Janssen offer a supplement to *Heretics: The Other Side of Early Christianity* (SCM Press and Westminster Press, 1996) by collecting a selection of primary texts on gnostic spirituality. The selected texts are organized according to five thematic topics, each of which walks the reader through the spiritual development of a gnostic. The topics include: The Unknown Father (pp. 17-56, emphasizing the use of negative theology within Gnosticism); Salvation and Return (pp. 57-119, presenting examples of the awakening of the soul through saviour figures, the call to awaken, death and ascension, and sacramental processes including hymns of thanksgiving); Hostility with the Church (pp. 120-123, merely offering brief selections of polemics from Epiphanius, Minucius Felix, and Irenaeus); and Additional Material (pp. 124-147, where Lüdemann and Janssen supply further texts on the preceding topics). Brief introductions contextualize the selections as well as the broader topics. Translations are free, based upon existing translations, and are meant to offer students easy access to the sense of the texts. This edition originally appeared in German (*Unterdrückte Gebete: Gnostische Spiritualität im frühen Christentum* [Stuttgart: Radius Verlag, 1997]) and has been expanded and translated by John Bowden.

As a pedagogical tool this could be a helpful volume. The standard English translation used in classrooms remains *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson and therefore some comparisons between these two works may help to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of *Suppressed Prayers*. One key strength of this

volume over *NHLE* is its thematic organization. Whereas *NHLE* offers entire texts, this volume allows students to immediately focus upon specific topics with various textual examples, highlighting similarities and differences within gnostic sources. This advantage, however, also limits the student from struggling with an entire text, exploring interpretative challenges inherent in reading complex, esoteric texts as well as noting the particularity of each text as a whole. A second advantage of this volume over *NHLE* is the metric presentation of many of the selections. For example, The Prayer of the Apostle Paul (*NHC* I, 1), which Lüdemann and Janssen see as a prayer within a sacrament of dying (p. 35), is presented in metric form, thereby highlighting more forcefully than the *NHLE* the sacramental (indeed poetic) nature of this text. A third advantage of this volume is the broad selection offered. Not only are selections drawn from the Nag Hammadi Codices, but we are also given selections from *Pistis Sophia*, *The Books of Jeu*, *Odes of Solomon*, *The Acts of John*, *The Acts of Thomas*, Hermetic and Mandaean sources, as well as two second-century inscriptions discovered in the Via Latina both of which may have Valentinian features.

A fourth point of comparison between this volume and *NHLE* is the introduction to Gnosticism offered. Whereas *NHLE* offers a full discussion of the Nag Hammadi find (James M. Robinson's introduction to the discovery, the state of the manuscripts, and their importance to the academic study of Gnosticism) as well as the modern significance of Gnosticism for religious studies (Richard Smith's "Afterword" in the third edition), *Suppressed Prayers* offers a more concise presentation of Gnosticism (pp. 11-16) in which Gnosticism is treated as a "religious current which reached a climax in late antiquity" with a primary interest in *gnosis* as self-knowledge of the soul's heavenly origin (p. 11). Gnosticism is presented as a syncretistic product of elements drawn from "Judaism, from Greek religion and philosophy, from Near Eastern thought and Iranian religion" (p. 12), which divides into monistic and dualistic types. No discussion is given to the perennial debate over the origins of Gnosticism nor to the definitional quandary over the very category "Gnosticism" (e.g., Michael Allen Williams's *Rethinking "Gnosticism"* comes readily to mind and should have been incorporated during the preparation of the English edition). Even the brief introductions to the selections lack the extensiveness of the *NHLE* or the Brill critical editions. A final criticism of this volume is the lack of discussion of spirituality. A more extensive discussion of the mystical and sacramental themes raised in the selections within the larger context of late antiquity would have been welcomed. Such a discussion would have allowed the authors to give readers some insight into the social dynamics involved in the emergence and practice of gnostic rituals, as well as the important link between sacraments and ethics (as demonstrated, e.g., in Michel Desjardins' *Sin in Valentinianism*). The brevity and polemical focus of the fourth topic results in a lost opportunity to explore such dynamics in these texts. (For example, Lüdemann and Janssen could have moved beyond their discussion of the reactionary polemics of the Fathers to gnostic spirituality and built upon Klaus Koschorke's work on the *Interpretation of Knowledge* to present students with the contest of social power between differing factions of a Christian community and how

those dynamics link to spirituality, sacraments, and theological developments. Gnosticism, instead, is rendered a mere philosophical current of thought to which early Christians reacted negatively, rather than as complex and diverse social phenomena.)

My criticisms aside, this volume does offer a readable and helpful selection of works which can function as a ready supplement not only for Lüdemann's *Heretics*, but also for such overviews of Gnosticism as Kurt Rudolph's *Gnosis*, A. H. B. Logan's *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, and Riemer Roukema's *Gnosis and Faith in Early Christianity*. In conjunction with *NHLE* this volume makes accessible a wide range of primary sources for students to struggle through and instructors to design a course structure around.

REVIEW: Suppressed Prayers: Gnostic Spirituality in Early Christianity, by Gerd Ldemann and Martina Janssen. By Philip Tite. Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels. By Nicola Denzey Lewis. Cosmic Eschatology and Christian Platonism in the Sethian Gnostic Apocalypses Marsanes, Zostrianos, and Allogenes. By Dylan Burns. Monastic origin of the Nag Hammadi Codices.pdf. Brewer, M. (1999) Suppressed prayers: Gnostic spirituality in early Christianity. Expository Times, 110 (11). p. 370. ISSN 0014-5246. (The full text of this publication is not currently available from this repository. You may be able to access a copy if URLs are provided) (KAR id:17124). The full text of this publication is not currently available from this repository. You may be able to access a copy if URLs are provided. There were gnostic Jews, gnostic Christians, etc. But, in that they very often latched onto Abrahamic traditions with that same intertestamental influence, then yes, they also had much of those things I mentioned above in common, just with their own cosmological flair that we often point to as central to Gnosticism.  Mohammed went through much the same transformative process in the early days of Islam. He at first believed his revelations were the fulfillment, and the true interpretation, of both the Jewish, and the Christian, messages, but after his preaching was rejected by both the Christians and the Jews (who were both quite numerous in 7th century Arabia, on the fringes of the Byzantine Empire), he turned to violent conquest of and rapid conversion of.