Summary

Woman Wisdom and Dame Folly. Wisdom as biblical principle of creation and opposing meaning-perspectives in hellenistic judaism, gnosticism and early christian thinking

This study is about the Wisdom, as she is revealed in the bible. But also her enemy, Dame Folly, gets much attention. I speak about Woman Wisdom, as described in the bible and describe how there has been reflected on her in hellenistic judaism, gnosticism and early christian thinking. The central question is: how is Wisdom as biblical principle of creation in opposing views of hellenistic judaism, gnosticism and early christian thinking re-interpreted and what were the consequences for the thinking about the meaning of being and (the origin) of evil?

In christian philosophical thinking the bible is not a handbook, but it has the first and last word in answering preliminary and fundamental questions. In this book questions about the original and contemporary unity of our reality are central. In the bible one can find answers to these questions, but in hellenistic judaism, gnosticism and early christian thinking attempts were also made to answer these questions. These answers are necessarily given out of faith. It is important to distinguish between knowledge out of faith or idea-knowledge on the one hand and theoretical knowledge on the other hand. Theoretical knowledge of the ‘idea’ is not possible. In theoretical knowing it’s all about definitions, but compared to a definition an idea goes deeper. It is not possible to have theoretical knowledge about God, but idea-knowledge is possible to attain. In my speaking about Wisdom, I’ve tried to do justice to the canonical character of the bible. Whether one agrees with the view on the bible as a canon or not, fact is that from the beginning – when parts or the whole of the old and new testament originated – people came to acknowledge the bible as such. In hellenistic judaism, gnosticism and early christian thinking – views opposing the biblical view on Wisdom – the same texts were being chosen as authoritative. In hellenistic judaism and gnosticism there was a protest-exegesis of the canon, while in early christian thinking an attempt was made to think in line with the biblical canon. While the old testament was accepted as part of the canon in early christian thinking, the language and narrative character were not well understood. It is my conviction, that when one thinks in a philosophical way about the content of the bible, one has to do justice to the old testament stories.

A biblical view on Wisdom

Before creation there occurred a very special event: the bringing forth by God of Wisdom. This implicates a non-existence and an origin of the Wisdom. Calling Wisdom a creature is not right, because it is also revealed that God creates through her and also centres the creation in her. I share the view of Origenes, that Wisdom is ἀγένητος (uncreated) as well as γενητός (created). Viewed from the creation Wisdom is ἀγένητος because she is creator, but viewed from the perspective of God Wisdom is γενητός, because she was brought forth. The creation of Jahweh God begins with Wisdom. At the same time Wisdom is also the principle of Gods works. Wisdom is the principle of creation. Proverbs 8 is not about a supra-temporal or non-temporal or eternal entity. The hebrew word that is often translated as ‘from eternity’ (עֶדֶן) is not about a fixed time, but it is an indication of time. Wisdom is present as ‘actor’. ‘Watching’ and ‘instrumental working’ are mentioned. Wisdom is the instrument of God in creation. A harmonious situation is described, wherein Jahweh God brings forth his Wisdom and creates through her and by her and in her. John 1 is referring to the same event: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and god was the Word. This was in the beginning with God.” God and the Word were being together before the world existed. Then
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the Word was an independent entity, to be distinguished from God. About the ‘how’ of this relationship John says nothing. But it is made clear that the Word exists before the world and is in the sphere of God. When it is said: “and god was the Word,” the predicate ‘god’ is emphatically put first. The meaning is, that the Word is god/divine by being with God. Grammatically correct is the translation: “and god (or divine) was the Word.” John says, that the Word is participating in the divine life, without being wholly identical with God. Not only the prologue of John, but also the so-called Christ-hymns have to be read with the old-testament wisdom-literature in mind. In Paul’s first ‘Christ-hymn’ (Romans 11.33-36) it appears, that God in his creating has worked out of his Wisdom, has created through him and has somehow centred his creation in his Wisdom. Similar thoughts are to be found in Colossians 1.15-17, the second hymn. The ‘bringing forth’ of the Wisdom by God, ‘as the first of his works’ is the background of Paul’s speaking of Christ as ‘the firstborn of the whole creation’. But speaking in connection of the Wisdom (or Son of God or Christ) as ‘brought forth’ or ‘having become’ does not mean that the Wisdom can’t be creator (better: co-creator) at the same time. Paul distinguishes Jesus sharply from God when he says: “He is the Image of the invisible God.” Christ is the visible representative of God, who is invisible. The term ‘image’ implies, that the ‘original’ – that is God – is present in the ‘image’, while at the same time it is stressed, that God is only visible in his Image, but he himself is transcendent to his creation and invisible. God is in sofar immanent to his creation as he shows himself in the Wisdom. Emphatically Paul says that in Christ/the Wisdom everything has been created. But Paul says also: “All things have been created through him and for him.” That means, that the creation finds its goal in Christ. Because God has created everything in him, everything finds its unity in Christ.

“In a beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1.1). The beginning that is meant here is not an absolute beginning. Before the creation of heaven and earth by God there was the creation, better: the bringing forth of the Wisdom. Thereafter heaven and earth were created by Jahweh God and his Wisdom/Son. Most likely the heaven is the world of angels, which was a harmonious entity. The angels jubilated when the earth was created (Job 38.7). According to Ezekiel 28 Satan was a main-figure in the world of angels. Satan abided as cherub close to God on the holy mountain. He was created good, because it is said: “You were perfect in your ways, from the day you were created until wickedness was found in you…” (cf. John 8.44). The wickedness was a rebellion out of hubris against God the Most High. In Isaiah 14 words of Satan himself seem to be cited in which the purpose of his rebellion against God is becoming clear: “I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount at the northside. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.” The hubris exists in ‘wanting to be as God’ and be ascended above ‘the other angels’. There is no explanation for the fall of Satan and several angels with him. The words of Isaiah 5 can be applied to this situation. Jahweh God is expressing his astonishment and indignation about the origin of evil; he expected good fruits, but his work brought forth foul fruits. When in Genesis 1 the Spirit of God is mentioned, who is ‘hovering’ (מרחפת), a word that means ‘moving backwards and forwards’ in the sense of ‘trembling’, the indignation about the hubris of Satan and the first reaction of God is expressed. It implies an activity of movement in reaction to the origin of evil and an intended judgment, combined with protection against evil. Satan is thrown down onto the earth and ‘was cast out as a profane thing from the mountain of God’. Because of the fall of the morningstar/cherub the situation on earth becomes ‘chaotic and void and darkness upon the flood’. Explicitly I reject the thought, that this situation is just about an unformed and void earth, which is not contrary to God’s intentions.

“And God said: ‘Let there be light.’ And there was light and God saw the light, that it was good. And God divided the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1.3). The light was good, but the darkness is not, but is fought against as a terrible enemy of God. There is also a fight against
the waters and a ‘firmament’ is made, which is called ‘heaven’. This firmament is a solid partition between the heaven and the earth according to Ezekiel 1.22. God isolated the heaven completely from the earth and from that moment on he is in diastase to his creation. Creating is not synonymous with dividing, but in the re-creation, as is written about from Genesis 1.3 onwards, there is a segregating activity by God nonetheless. However majestic the tenure of Genesis 1 is, the background of these dividing actions is the enormous battle against Satan and demonic chaos-monsters. They were not defeated definitively – that will happen in the future. But their room for manoeuvre has been limited and restricted. In a canonical approach of the bible it is important to note, that in Revelation 21.1 is written: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.” The sea will disappear with death and hades in the lake of fire. The division between light and darkness and earth and sea in Genesis 1 is called good, but is not according to the purpose of creation. From Genesis 1.2 onwards God is withdrawn in a ‘heaven in the strict sense’, that is to say, in a separated and isolated location, in diastase to the earth. It was Woman Wisdom who fought against Dame Folly during the creation-days. It was also the Wisdom through whom everything was created. It was Jahweh God who created – that is the main message on many pages of the old testament – but in the new testament is revealed, that he has done nothing in his creation without his Wisdom/Son. Life on earth is centred in the Wisdom of God, but in a very special way that is the case with human beings. Of Adam it is said, that he is created by God “in our image” and “after our likeness.” The dust of the ground and God’s breath, by which man became a living soul, are mentioned. Nothing is said about a body and a spirit, next to which there is a soul as a separate aspect of the human being, on the contrary, man in his totality is soul, made alive by God’s own breath. The word dust has in it the idea of fragility, ephemerality and death. The first Adam had a ‘psychic body’ (σῶμα ψυχικόν). Adam did not receive a soul, but he became a living soul. The σῶμα ψυ- χικόν has to do with the mortality of Adam, which does not mean that he had to die, but that he could die. This limitation of the first human being had nothing to do with the imperfection of man, but at the same time his life was not the life that God had meant it to be. In the garden of Eden man had to be put to the test and if he had ‘succeeded’, he would have received a ‘spiritual body’ instead of a ‘psychic body’. Before the fall of man, God came into the garden of Eden to be with man, but after the fall God is absolutely transcendent to his creation – not ontologically, but hamartiologically. To man two ways were presented: the way of Woman Wisdom or the road of Dame Folly, symbolised in the tree of life or the tree of knowledge of good and evil respectively. I reject the opinion, that the free will of man necessarily implicates the possibility of choosing for evil instead of good. Man could have chosen for the good and could have resisted the temptations of the snake and then it would have been possible for God to come on earth, to be ‘all in all’. But the mystery of rejecting Gods love by a creature has repeated itself in the fall of man. By his choice for the knowledge of good and evil man lost something very essential: the likeness of God. The consequence and effect of the fall is, that God has withdrawn permanently from the earth and has come in a sharp diastase to his creation. He is not longer able to communicate with man without mediation, because sin has had great effects on the whole of humanity and creation as a whole. After the fall, man is however still ‘image of God’, although this image has been harmed. By listening to the temptations of Satan, the whole world is under the control of the evil one. From that moment on Satan is ‘prince of this world’ and ‘god of this age’. Before the fall, man ruled over the earth, after the fall Satan is doing that. Adam and Eve have chosen the way ‘apart from God’ with serious consequences. This is something that can’t be understood. The consequences are mentioned in Romans 5.12: as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, all people sinned and are sinning. Death is ruling and because of that all people are sinning. But not only man, but the whole creation is corrupted by the fall of man and is experiencing the sin as a curse, from which it wants to be
freed. Because everything is created in Wisdom and man is created in a special way ‘in’ Wisdom as his centre of being, the fall of this man has had enormous consequences for the whole of creation: pain, fear, illness, suffering and death entered the world.

Creation on the subject-side has been damaged severely, but the creation-order is not perverted in the centre. The creation-order is maintained by Wisdom, but because of the rule of Satan the creation is perverted – deep in the creation-structures. Redemption is realised at the moment that Wisdom becomes human, humiliates herself and is going the way of obedience and direct confrontation with Satan until death. The struggle between Woman Wisdom and Dame Folly repeats itself, but in her incarnated state Wisdom is much weaker. She is tested by Satan, as the first Adam – but in a desert instead of a garden. Wisdom humbled herself and was incarnated as Christ “obedient to death, even death on a cross.” Foolishness from the perspective of the world, wisdom in the eyes of God, who has “exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of all things in heaven and all things on earth and all things under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Wisdom in hellenistic judaism

In the intertestament period there was a form of protest-exegesis in the so-called Henoch-tradition and an attempt to think positively in line with the oldtestamentic wisdomliterature in the books Jesus Sirach, Baruch and Wisdom of Solomon. In the Henoch-tradition there was an acute syncretisation of judaism. The authors of Jesus Sirach, Baruch and Wisdom of Solomon have challenged and disputed this syncretism and tried to do justice to the old testament wisdom-scriptures. In their fight against the syncretistic judaism they made use of greek-philosophical ideas. Aristoboulos and especially Philo have chosen greek-philosophical thinking as a starting point, with as a consequence an acute hellenisation of judaism. In my view syncretism is a fusion of elements of opposing beliefs. The religions of Israels environment formed in the core a unity, that’s why interaction of non-biblical forms of religiosity is not the same as syncretism. These religions were not essentially different from each other. From the beginning these religions were very attractive to Israel, but the radical fusion of the mythologies of these cultures with the beliefs of israelites/jews is unique for the intertestament period. That’s the reason I speak of acute syncretisation.

According to the Henoch-tradition it is knowledge brought by angels that caused evil in the world, while according to the old testament the origin of evil has to do with the sin of man. The main characteristic of the Henoch-tradition is a resistance against two fundamental notions in the revelation of God: the sin of man and the impossibility to have a relationship with God out of own strength, because of that sin. In the bible sin mainly has to do with the longing of man to be autonomous, to determine what is good and evil, ‘to be as God’. In the alternative vision this is not sin. The phrase ‘fear of Jahweh is the beginning of knowledge’ is a despised principle in the Henoch-tradition. ‘To be as God’ as a goal is typical of syncretistic judaism. Getting heavenly knowledge, often from angels, is an essential part of this syncretism. The origin of evil is emphatically placed outside (the responsibility) of man. The ‘protest-exegesis’ of the Henoch-tradition was opposed to the reformed judaism since Esra. Especially in Samaria and Egypt this tradition developed in a hellenistic way to a form of ‘gnosis’. This was characterized by a belief in a trinity, a dualism of body and soul, and the conviction that the human soul was originally divine. The ultimate goal of human beings is, according to these jews in line with Plato, “becoming equal to god as far as possible.” Samaritan and egyprian jews saw Jahweh more and more as absolutely transcendent, the principle (ἀγέννητος) of all. On a lower level they postulated under this supreme God two principles, which connected the ontologically transcendent God to the creation. The supreme God did not create out of himself and there was no relationship between him and matter, but he was the father of the creator-god. Egyptian ideas about the divine fused with jewish-greek ones and produced
gnosis, characterized by the belief in the equality of God and the human spirit or soul, alienation of the divine origin by external factors (evil powers and materiality) and redemption through (esoteric) knowledge.

The book Jesus Sirach attempts to do justice to the oldtestamentic wisdom-literature. There is in chapter 24 a deliberate reflection on the wisdomhymn of Proverbs 8. It is said, that Wisdom’s origin is in God, but that she is distinct from God, while she has been created, and in a special way related to Israel as the torah. The book Baruch is an anti-hellenistic writing, in which still more emphatically the exclusive role of Wisdom as torah is stressed. In opposition to the Henoch-tradition, it is said that every attempt to find Wisdom apart from God – that is autonomous or by angels – is an impossibility. In a more greek-philosophical way the book Wisdom of Solomon is also opposed to the syncretism of the Henoch-tradition. After God had created Wisdom, she became a worldsoul, immanent to the cosmos. It is not easy to have a relationship with Wisdom. The difficulty is mainly caused by the material body of human beings. But there is revelation. Explicitly opposed to the Henoch-tradition it is said, that “no one has traced out what is in the heavens. Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given Wisdom and sent your holy Spirit from on high?” It is God, who did let Wisdom, ‘maker of all things’, give knowledge to people – for that no Henoch in heaven is necessary. And the revelation of Wisdom is, that she originates in God and is distinct from God, that she had her part in creation, that she is the foundation and centre of creation, and that she is closely related to the Spirit of God and immanent to creation (clearly distinct from the transcendent God).

As in the books Jesus Sirach, Baruch and Wisdom of Solomon, Aristoboulos and Philo also tried to think in line with the old-testamentic wisdom-literature. But there is a fundamental difference. Their way of thinking is meant to be diametrically opposed to the syncretistic reflections on Wisdom, but they went far in fusing greek-philosophical notions with the message of the old testament. Their thinking formed an acute hellenisation of judaism. God can’t manifest himself in the cosmos, because he can’t be located in one place. He is transcendent and at the same time present everywhere. If God wants to show himself, he is doing that in his power, but it is stressed by Aristoboulos that God and his power are not the same. God shows himself in that power. God is ontologically transcendent to his creation and can’t work directly immanently, but only by his strength, the Logos. No longer is there an exegesis of old testament wisdom-literature, but an allegorical interpretation. Philo was strongly influenced by Aristoboulos and is also anti-anthropomorphic and uses the allegorical method and denies every form of corporeality or affects by God. God is intelligible and pure ‘Spirit’ (Nous) and can’t be known by human beings. Because of his corporeality it is difficult for man to imagine God non-corporeal. Knowledge of God is only possible, when human beings participate in the spiritual, intelligible, that is non-corporeal, sphere of God. Man can achieve some knowledge of God, because he possesses the Nous and he is created as ‘image of God’. This ‘image of God’ is the model or the Word of God, not God himself, according to Philo. This model stands in a manner of speaking between God and man and is the Logos. This ‘world-creating’ Logos is compared with an architect, as is the Wisdom in Proverbs 8. She looks at God, but is also producing. This thought is combined by Philo with Plato’s description of the demiurg, who looks first at the intelligible world in an intellectual way and after that produces. Philo calls this Logos the instrument as well as the image of God. In the words of Philo, the Logos is used by God as an instrument when he created the world. God is not directly the fundament of all that exists, but indirectly through the Logos. Philo always makes a clear distinction between God and his Logos. The Logos is brought forth first by God and has been given the privilege of being on the border between creator and creation. The Logos is not ἀγένητος – only God is –, still he is not γενητός either and because of that he has received the title ‘god’. Although Philo assumes an absolute distance between God and man, it is possible
to have knowledge of God because in a certain way the Logos of God is immanent in man. But in approaching God in his \( \text{ους} \), there is a unification in communio at most, not in unio. This is due to the incompleteness and imperfectness of man, which is not – as in the bible – caused by sin, but by his materiality.

**Wisdom in gnosticism**

Like there was a polemic against the old testament wisdom-thinking in hellenistic judaism, there was also a polemic against the new testament vision on Jesus as incarnated Wisdom. And just as in the old testament, a syncretism originated, that is to say a fusion of elements of contraring beliefs, and hellenisation – a melting with religious-philosophical notions. Gnosticism is a form of ‘protest-exegesis’ of the new testament vision on Jesus. While the new testament is based on the old, this polemic in gnosticism is also directed to the old testament. The new testament message of Jesus Christ as Wisdom incarnated, has led to a polemic by Simon. He started a process, that I call the acute syncretisation of christianity. Under the influence of Simon ‘gnosis’ became ‘gnosticism’, Woman Wisdom became Dame Folly. Syncretistic groups, mainly in Samaria and Egypt, have responded to the christian belief. Within these groups on the fringes of judaism, there was a form of syncretism that I call ‘gnosis’. An important example of this ‘gnosis’ is the *Corpus Hermeticum*. When in Samaria the gospel was preached, this happened in the context of ‘gnosis’. I define ‘gnosis’ as: A broad, primarily religious movement, secundarily philosophical, characterized by syncretism and eclecticism and the conviction, that human beings are on the deepest level divine, but by external factors (evil spiritual powers or materiality and corporeality) alienated from their divine origin, from which knowledge gives redemption.

The *Corpus Hermeticum* is an important product of ‘gnosis’. Every text of the bible, which is cited or reflected on in the *Corpus*, is combined with the non-biblical startingpoint: “Who knows himself, knows the All.” Because this knowledge implies a divine origin in a heavenly region, the material man on earth is inferior. Yet nowhere in the *Corpus* there is an absolute dualism between the earthly life of man and his heavenly essence, as in later ‘gnosticism’. Approaching God is approaching oneself. Redemption is becoming one with God and leaving behind all corporeality. There is no mention of sin or evil in the *Corpus*, but of an ontological structure of reality that is imperfect. Because the perfect being brings forth another being out of itself, this is less perfect and sometimes imperfect, because it is not identical with the perfect being from which it originated. The world lacks perfect being, according to the *Corpus*, and that’s the reason God is at a distance. But by knowledge (\( \text{γνώσις} \)) man is able to be delivered from the world. In the *Corpus* death is viewed as a transition, a καθαρσία, which removes the guilt of birth. Man is born corporeal and must perish, although at last God himself is responsible for the origin of earthly man. There is no ‘gnosticism’ yet, because God has not created a body with evil motives. It was God’s intention to create a material man. But he has given this man the possibility to gain \( \text{γνώσις} \), as a prize to win. The answer to the question: “But why, Father, has God not given everyone \( \text{ους} \)?” is: “It was his wish, my son, to show this to human beings as a prize to win.” Man must, in a mainly rational way, with the utmost exertion win the purely spiritual and perfect existence (redefinition).

The gospel preached in Samaria provoked a vehement response by Simon. In the samaritan ‘gnosis’ originated a development to ‘gnosticism’ because of Simon. My definition of ‘gnosticism’ is: A very colourful way of thinking, according to which the absolute transcendent God produced a divine world with which man is related, a tragical ‘fall’ occurred in this divine world – a fall external to man – with as a result the coming into being of a demiurg or unknowing creatorgod, who alienated man from his divine origin, but for which redemption in the form of esoteric knowledge is given, so that man can return to his divine origin, first in earthly man, eventually completely after dying physically. Notions as ‘wanting to be as God’ and the denial of concrete human guilt in the origin of evil are again central in ‘gnosticism’. In ‘gnosticism’ the main problem is the ori-
gin and existence of evil. Unlike the Henoch-tradition, ‘gnosis’ and Philo’s philosophy, ‘gnosticism’ relates the origin of evil to a fall in the divine world. This is not a fall in the world of angels, as in the bible, but in many gnostic scriptures the fall of Wisdom is described. Woman Wisdom is in reality Dame Folly, who has created autonomously and arbitrarily and caused evil to be. Man is alienated from God because of Sophia. Characteristic for Simons ‘gnosis’ is the opposition between God and evil demiurgical angels, the contempt of the physical and material, and salvation by γνῶσις. In Nag Hammadi-texts this is put in words still more radically, especially in the Apocryphon of John. Creation was an evil act and the creator is an evil god. Jahweh – in the form of Jaldabaoth, an abortion of Wisdom – is demonised and Wisdom accused of hightanded and autonomous action, without approval of God. On the deepest level the message of ‘gnosticism’ is a nihilistic one. Salvation is destruction of the existing creation and the returning of the divine part of man to its origin (redefinition).

‘Gnosticism’ is seen as acute syncretisation of christianity, in which mythological and angelological notions of the Henoch-tradition are fundamental again. This ‘gnosticism’ is not ‘hellenisation of christianity’, but a syncretisation of christianity’. In an eclectic way greek-philosophical ideas are used, but ‘gnosticism’ is not a philosophical, but primarily a religious opinion opposed to the biblical message. At first sight it is dubious make one person founding father of ‘gnosticism’, because there are many forms of gnosticism. Still, in a religious-scientific sense Simon can be called a ‘model-figure’ of gnosticism. The simonianism shows, that the thesis of Von Harnack that gnosticism is the acute hellenisation of christianity is not correct. Simonianism was certainly an opposing movement contrary to christianity, but there was no simonianised or hellenised christian belief. There was a samaritan ‘gnosis’, already in existence before the origin of christianity. As soon as there was contact with christian belief, in a sharp, polemical way this ‘gnosis’ responded. Samaritan and jewish-egyptian syncretistic speculations, known in the Henoch-tradition, were radicalized in simonianism. The supreme God is absolutely transcendent and exists ‘in three’. In the context of christianity, Simon is the first person who speaks of a triad or even a trinity. Below the supreme God there are according to Simon/simonianism two heavenly beings. One of them is called ἐννοια, the other is not named explicitly, but can be deduced. Simon taught that he “appeared to the jews as the Son, descended in Samaria as the Father, but came to the other people as the holy Spirit.” The Son was in the original teaching of Simon ‘the second thought’ (ἐννοια δεύτερα), and his female companion ‘the first thought’ (ἐννοια πρώτη). And there is a supreme God, who has brought forth these ‘thoughts’. This simonian trinity is of non-christian origin. Already existing (samaritan and egyptian) triads/trinities formed the background of this first trinity in christian context. Because not only in gnosticism, but also in contemporaneous philosophy (mainly the philosophy of middle-platonism and Plotinos) a trinity was important, this trinity became an essential christian dogma, although gnosticism as such was rejected.

Wisdom as principle of creation, as written about in the bible, was radically altered in hellenistic judaism and gnosticism. While the bible says that through and in Wisdom everything is created and because of that the whole cosmos is centred in Wisdom, in hellenistic judaism and gnosticism the physical aspects of reality were excluded from that creation. On the other hand the spiritual aspects of creation were extremely valued and the biblical border between God and creation cancelled for the πνεῦμα of man. While according to the bible man lost his ‘likeness to God’ because of the fall, in hellenistic judaism and gnosticism man is in his spirit equal to God. The spirit or soul is of divine origin and in the material sphere imprisoned. God is not transcendent to his creation because of sin, but because of materiality, corporeality and more and more – that is to say, in the development from ‘gnosis’ to ‘gnosticism’ – because of evil spiritual powers, responsible for the physical creation. Knowledge of the own divine origin is the salvation of man. God is not in diastase to his creation in a har-
matiological way because of sin, but in an ontological way. The earth is not evil because of man, as is emphatically said in the bible, but is imperfect because of a structural lack of (divine) being. “Since the deficiency came into being because the Father was not known, therefore, when the Father is known, from that moment on the deficiency will no longer exist,” is a central notion in gnosticism.

Wisdom in early christian thinking

Gnosticism is fought against by christians. Firstly, filled with indignation christians rejected the thought, that Wisdom is the cause of the fall (in sin). Secondly, christians denied that the Creator is bad and the origin of evil. In the third place christians emphatically posed against gnosticism that human beings have to be redeemed by God. Every form of self-redemption is rejected. But some central notions of gnosticism were nevertheless adopted in early christian thinking. 'Thinking in three' was taken over by the churchfathers and the distinction between God and Wisdom, as is written about in the bible, disappeared. An origin in time of the Word was denied and an eternal existence in and with God assumed. The struggle with gnosticism is determinative untill Chalcedon for the way(s) of thinking about the relationship between God and Wisdom. Untill Chalcedon the churchfathers have had in common with gnosticism the opinion that the essence of the object that has to be saved and reunited with God, is identical with the essence of the subject that saves and reunites with God. This basic idea makes it necessary that God himself has become human with the purpose of bringing the divine back to God. Redemption has not become necessary by evil caused by Wisdom. Contrary to gnosticism the churchfathers stick to the opinion of the fall of man, although the fall of angels is also seen as a fundamental fact. God and Wisdom have nothing to do with sin. But at the same time the churchfathers are explaining the origin of evil with the thesis that God is the only perfect being and everything outside him is necessarily less perfect, because it shows a deficiency. Contrary to the demonised Jahweh (Jaldabaoth) of the gnostics, the churchfathers develop the doctrine of an immutable, sovereign God – using middle- and neo-platonic concepts. The creation has a planned and determined growth toward God. In a platonic-aristotelian way a vision develops in early christian thinking, in which there is a clear distinction between a transitory, material and a godly, rational side of reality. As a consequence of overstressing the spiritual, the psychic is less pure and the corporeal and material side is disqualified as imperfect. The σῶμα ψυχικόν, characterized by corporeality, must disappear and after redeification transform in the σῶμα πνευματικόν. The temporarily, inconstant world is imperfect and man has to be delivered from it and brought in an eternal, immutable, spiritual sphere. Evil is, from the point of view of especially Irenaeus and later Augustinus, a necessary imperfection. In line with Plotinos’ philosophy Augustinus sees evil as a consequence of the ontic structure of reality. When the perfect God creates a different reality, this creation can only be less perfect. The churchfathers thought they did justice to the biblical view on evil in developing an alternative for gnosticism. It is my opinion that they were mistaken.

It is my conviction that gnosticism is not an acute hellenisation of christianity, as Von Hannack said. Nevertheless I think he was right in saying that around 130 with the adoption of greek-philosophical ideas by the apologists, the first stage of the hellenisation of christianity began, that caused the origin of dogmas. From the apologists onwards the platonic view on time is the starting point, which made it impossible to say that there was a time that the Son was not, while at the same time it was said, that the world came into being through the Son. Time starts with creation, so that everything that has been said in the bible about what was before creation is ‘timeless’ or ‘eternal’. God exists in an eternal present, and nothing temporarily can be said about him. The middle-platonic concept of transcendence has led early christain thinkers to the opinion, that ‘from eternity’ in Proverbs is meant as timeless. While
the Logos came out of the Father, he is one with the Father and has no beginning as the Father has no beginning. A second firm conviction is, that God is unchangeable. This means a radical changing of the biblical message. In essence, early christian thinkers thought that a non-biblical (philosophical) view on God could be the criterium to determine what bibletexts really mean. When biblewriters ascribe to God emotions, this is not literally true. God is described in the bible in an anthropomorphic way, but in reality God has no feelings like human beings. It is impossible that God really was delighted when he brought forth Wisdom. The same is true for the reaction of God when evil originated: feelings of astonishment, indignation and anger have nothing to do with God. Irenaeus says, that God knew evil would originate and that it was a part of Gods plan. This has to be, because God is unchangeable. In the same way Origenes says that God knew before creation, ‘from eternity’, that the world would be perverted and therefore he has no remorse. There is a tendency in early christian thinking to focus on the almight of God and take evil less seriously. Eventually evil is reformulated as ‘absence of good’. In Plotinos’ as well as in Augustinus’ thinking this occurs in opposition to gnosticism, in which evil got a lot of attention, with as a consequence a belief in an evil creator-god. Augustinus speaks of evil as “an absence of the good (privatio boni).” In creation there is a deficiency, an absence of good, but God was aware of that when he created heaven and earth. When the originally good angel, who became Satan, was created, God foresaw the evil he would do. But he also knew of the good that would be the result of all his evil. Augustinus says explicitly, that God made evil part of his creation, even that he embellished his creation with antitheses. It is unthinkable, that God could be surprised by the origin of evil.

**Philosophical thinking about Wisdom as a principle of creation**

The biblical view on Wisdom is radically contrary to opposing perspectives in hellenistic judaism and gnosticism. But also in early christian thinking there was a turning away from the biblical view on Wisdom. While in the ‘philosophy of the cosmonomic idea’ christian thinkers have tried to ‘reform’ philosophy and turn back to the biblical view on Wisdom, they have not succeeded when it is about the origin of evil. Although I share the perspective of creation, sin and redemption with the ‘philosophy of the cosmonomic idea’, it is my opinion that the consequences of sin and the fall of Satan/Adam are not fundamentally considered. A real reflection on the consequences of evil is absent in this christian philosophy and the consequence is, that thinking of redemption has also been far too superficial.

In the ‘philosophy of the cosmonomic idea’ the biblical Wisdom is thought of in an idea-manner and Wisdom is described as ‘the law as border between God and the created reality’. This means in the first place, that there is a strict distinction between God and created reality. Secondly, God stands above the law, but the created reality is subjected to the law. Even after the devastating disruption of creation, it is still in essence a cosmic order and because of that knowable. This ‘law’ is in my opinion the Wisdom. This ‘law’ or ‘Wisdom’ is not perverted by sin and evil and this is the reason, that scientific, trustworthy knowledge is possible. The ‘law as a border’ is not just a frontier between God and creation, but also a connection and intermediary between God and creation. The law can be seen as the presence of God in creation, but on the other hand it is clear, that this law is a firm frontier, not to be crossed by humans. In his heart every human being is directed to and centred in the law, but it is impossible to transcend this law/Wisdom. Coming to the border between God and his creation, there is a meeting in the heart between God and man, but this is a ‘asymmetrical’ one: humans can’t cross the border, God can. In the ‘philosophy of the cosmonomic idea’ it is rightfully said, that this ‘law’ is equal to Wisdom, in whom everything is created. This is a form of idea-knowledge and it is impossible to reflect on this in a theoretical and scientific way. Reality centred in Wisdom means, that everything is in principle subject to philosophical and scientific study. But reality centred in Wisdom itself is strictly speaking no subject to science and phi-
losophy. It is however possible to speak about Wisdom, when one is prepared to philosophize to the extremes. This happens when one asks about the origin and unity of the reality and when the question is asked what is the sense of being.

Being created in Wisdom means that the characteristic feature of creation is that it has meaning. Dooyeweerd says: “Meaning is the being of all that has been created.” The creation is a totality of meaning and nothing in that totality is ‘independent or autonomous’. Only by transcending the cosmic reality or the speciality of meaning, it is possible to attain an actual view of totality. One has to find a standpoint which transcends the special modal aspects of creation and this fixed point Dooyeweerd calls the archimedean point, which is the same as ‘the law as border between God and creation’. In the process of directing the philosophical thought in the idea towards the totality of meaning, the archimedean point can be found, but then the discovery is made that the view of totality is not possible apart from a view of the origin or ἀρχή of both totality and speciality of meaning. Meaning cannot exist by itself, but implies an ἀρχή, an origin which creates meaning. All meaning is from, through and to an origin, which cannot itself be meaning. In my opinion this is a very important thought of Dooyeweerd. Man is created in Wisdom, the Image of God. When human beings are searching for the origin of creation, in all non-biblical philosophies the ἀρχή is supposed to be immanent to creation or to have an origin within the modal aspects of the cosmos. In the christian philosophy one is searching for a fixed point, from which in the course of philosophical thought one is able to form the idea of the origin of all in the Wisdom. I am interpreting Dooyeweerd’s views in a manner that is totally mine and this interpretation is put into words, that he did not use and probably did not intend. But it is my opinion, that what Dooyeweerd says about ‘meaning’, ‘law’ and the archimedean point have to do with the Wisdom. The Wisdom is the ‘meaning’ of all that has been created, but implies an origin which creates meaning, the ἀρχή of the totality of meaning, that is to say Jahweh God. The Wisdom is the border between God and creation and also relates them to each other as intermediary, but Wisdom is not the same as God and of course not equal to creation.

I reject the view of transcending, because the Wisdom is at the same time ‘the law as utmost border between God and creation’. In the ‘philosophy of the cosmonomic idea’ is often spoken of the temporality of creation. Creation exists ‘in time’, but also refers to a ‘supra-temporal’ dimension, which is her centre and unity. Terms as ‘immanent’ and ‘transcendent’ are in the ‘philosophy of the cosmonomic idea’ almost synonymous with ‘temporal’ and ‘supra-temporal’ respectively. I reject this way of speaking, because in the end the origin of this thought is the platonic timeview, according to which time originates when the world originated. In my opinion, biblical speaking is different: before the creation of heaven and earth Wisdom originated because of Jahweh God. Before the creation of heaven and earth there is according to the bible a time, when the Wisdom was not. Then Wisdom was brought forth and came into existence and God created in Wisdom heaven and earth. In my view the distinction between ‘temporal’ and ‘supra-temporal’ must be erased, because humans, but also Wisdom, are totally ‘temporal’. Temporal reality is referring to and is an expression of that what is beyond it. The coherence of all the aspects of creation finds its expression in each of them and also points beyond its own limits towards a central totality, which in its turn is expressed in this coherence. But I deny the possibility of transcending the creation. At best man comes to the utmost borders, but beyond these (created) frontiers it is impossible to go. Humans are not transcending the cosmic order, only the ἀρχή transcends everything. Humans are not going beyond the law and that law is ... the Wisdom. I prefer speaking of supra-modality over speaking of supra-temporality of human beings. In his heart man participates in Wisdom, who is at the same time transcendent and immanent to creation and behind whom exists Jahweh God, the origin and destination of the all. The Wisdom is
not in the same way temporal as humans, but still Wisdom is temporal, because she is also finding her expression in God and points beyond herself to God.

When one says, that meaning is the being of all that has been created, the consequence can be that all things have meaning, because everything is centred in the Wisdom. As in early Christian thinking, in the ‘philosophy of the cosmonomic idea’ it is said that from the beginning it was predetermined that Christ had to redeem and save humans. The creation was not perfect, but had a deficiency. This has led to the opinion, that in essence meaninglessness is impossible, even with regard to evil. Strictly speaking, the ‘philosophy of the cosmonomic idea’ with its startingpoint: ‘meaning is the being of all that has been created’, offers no room for ‘meaninglessness and absurdity’ and the horrible reality of evil is undervalued. Meaning is dependence and non-selfsufficiency, according to Dooyeweerd. In his thinking it is impossible that someone beside and opposite to God exists in an independent and selfsufficient way.

And in essence I agree with him. To make evil independent as an autonomous power opposed to God, as happens in gnosticism, is not biblical. The ‘philosophy of the cosmonomic idea’ does not allow an autonomous power opposite to God. Satan is also a creature, originally good, but which had become evil. His power, that he was allowed to maintain after his fall, cannot become operative beyond the limits in which it is bound to the divine order of meaning. Too optimistically Dooyeweerd speaks of Gods grace and underestimates Gods curse. Despite all sin and evil, God maintains his creation, which still is an order of meaning. In the ‘philosophy of cosmonomic idea’ the dynamis of sin can unfold itself only in subjection to the religious concentration-law of human existence. However much attention is given to the sin of humans, the superhuman power of evil received far too little attention in the ‘philosophy of cosmonomic idea’.

A real Christian philosophy has to think in line with the biblical message, including the literature on Wisdom. It is necessary to think about the problem of evil, because philosophy originated in part in a struggle with that problem. In my opinion that evil has also damaged the structures of creation, so that not just the subject-side, but also the object-side – the side of the law, that is Wisdom – is perverted. When in the ‘philosophy of cosmonomic idea’ it is said, that evil is not operative beyond the limits in which it is bound to the divine order of meaning, for me the problem is that evil is in essence thought of as being part of the meaning of creation. When one does not allow the thought that evil can be operative outside of and contrary to the divine order – that is Wisdom – in the end evil is underestimated as a negation of good (privatio boni). It is my conviction that the opposite view, that is an understanding of evil as operative outside meaning, is defendable; also in the framework of the ‘philosophy of cosmonomic idea’. It is then necessary to choose as startingpoint the biblical view on sin, with as a consequence death. In my opinion Heidegger was right in describing human existence as a ‘being to death’, but he did not understand fully the relationship between death and sin. The Jewish philosophers Rosenzweig and Buber did.

Rosenzweig has started his philosophy by reflecting on ‘death’, as biblical history starts with death. In his way Rosenzweig stresses – but less philosophically pure than in the ‘philosophy of cosmonomic idea’ – that there is a border between God and creation (and man and world) and that border will exist in eternity. The Old Testament is fundamental for a real understanding of the relationships between God, world and man. It is all about the connections and relationships between God, world and man. According to Buber and Rosenzweig, the world is a medium or intermediary between God and man. It is impossible to ignore the world – that is the big mistake of especially gnosticism, but also hellenistic Judaism and early Christian thinking. The dialogue with God can only take place in the world. Rosenzweig asks his readers to think in line with the Old Testament and reckons more with evil than in the ‘philosophy of cosmonomic idea’. According to Rosenzweig, it’s God’s love that brings finally redemption and makes an end to death: “Because love is stronger than death.” On the other hand, love is closely related to anger when it comes to judging the evil and sin – the anger of a
injured God, who has shown so much love to his creation, but has been rejected. Evil as such is incomprehensible to God and this means that gnosticism, originating in a factual existential fear, is dangerous, because it pretends to overcome evil by a ‘knowing’, a rational view on evil. One has to live with and endure evil and has to be cautious not to see evil in a ‘logical’ way as part of the created totality. From the start, christians have understood that gnosticism is the antithetic attempt to give an alternative to the biblical view on evil. In the struggle with gnosticism evil was declared to be ‘non-existent’ or even to be part of Gods creation-plan. This early christian thinking and gnosticism had in common the conviction that it is possible to know and understand evil, while it is my firm conviction that the bible shows that even God himself does not understand evil and is not able to do so, because “God is light and in him there is not at all darkness.” Every thought about an functional antithesis between good and evil is contrary to this biblical message.

If one thinks about evil, every philosopher is standing before an abyss and is unable to solve this terrible problem. I share the opinion of Dooyeweerd, that speaking of evil is not possible when one neglects or rejects the biblical view on evil. But I think it would have been better if Dooyeweerd had chosen as starting-point the warning of Calvin: “Let the church not be wise in an autonomous way and not invent anything, but let her border and wisdom be to stop theorizing where the bible is saying no more.” When it is about the fall and redemption, it is impossible to go beyond what the bible is saying about those subjects. This is not the same as ‘repeating what the bible says’, but can be an essential ingredient of further philosophical thinking. Evil is an overwhelming, terrible reality, that has damaged and perverted creation in its foundations. When it is about evil, but especially when one speaks of redemption of evil, only a ‘narrative philosophy’, that has its startingpoint in the biblical stories, is doing justice to the antithesis of good and evil. It is not possible to gain theoretical knowledge of creation, evil/fall and redemption, but only knowledge out of faith or idea-knowledge. Facts about evil and redemption are only to be found in the bible. In speaking of redemption the philosopher must not think autonomously, but he is obliged to let the bible be directive in his thinking. The story-teller does not want to tell how things were in reality different, as is the main message in hellenistic judaism, gnosticism and early christian thinking – but also in part in the ‘philosophy of cosmonomic idea’. But in a real biblical view on Wisdom one has to (re)tell what really happens. In the opinion of this story-teller time is an important reality. What God has done, is doing, and will do, what has happened to and in the world, what is happening to humans and whatever things they will do, is temporal. In a christian philosophy it is impossible to abstract from concrete time, even if the subject is Gods deeds.

The biblical message is about a world, that is an existence in need, for which there is a promise: redemption. Man can already in this undelivered and incompleted creation be redeemed, but the world has still to be delivered. The world will be completed when God and humans will be one. God wants the salvation of the earth, because only then and there he will be present. Because of sin, death is a fate and a punishment, that every human being has to endure, but man can be delivered from fear of death by Christ. Humans are not delivered from death, but there is by Christ victory over fear of death. Death is immanent to human existence and also christians are experiencing death as negative. Paul says: “While we are in this body, we groan with the sense of being oppressed: it is not so much that we want to take something off, but rather to put something on over it; so that what must die may be swallowed up by the life.” At the same time he says: “Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?” Being delivered from death removes death’s sting, that otherwise keeps humans bound in fear. But “the whole creation has been groaning as with the pains of childbirth.” All of creation is longing for the moment, that Jahweh God is no longer in diastase to his creation, but comes on earth. The world is a medium between God and man and when the world has been saved, the dialogue with God can again take place in the world.