

Method as Necessity – The Superstructure of Gnosticism in I. P. Culianu Analysis

Stelian Manolache

Priest PhD Associate Professor,
University Ovidius, Constanța, Romania
stelian81stely@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: The disconcerting diversity of mythological contents conveyed by the literature related to ancient Gnosticism was a sufficiently prohibitive factor for all attempts at integrated analysis, systematization, or theological-historical evaluation of the origins and evolutions of this. Against this background, accurately locating the methodological limits of previous analytical attempts, I.P. Culianu managed, resorting to a radical paradigm shift, to establish a new way of researching gnosis, identifying and operationalizing a method capable of overcoming a good part of the difficulties previously recorded. Given the exceptional significance of this perspective of exploring the mythological contents of gnosis, our study aims to evaluate the Romanian scientist's method, paying close attention to its theological significance precisely because ancient Gnosticism's religious dimensions are indisputable and, implicitly, defining.

KEY WORDS: Mircea Eliade, I.P.Culianu, invariants, Gnosticism, binomial

Preliminaries

Studying the modern research on Gnosticism structure and results – practically debuting with *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (1907) of the German theologian Wilhelm Bousset – I. P. Culianu will remark the recurrent difficulties in the attempts to identify the distant origins of the mythological infrastructure of Gnosticism (Rotaru 2005a, 250). Subsequently, he will

remark the failure of the traditional historical approaches in explaining how Gnosticism gained its present philosophical-theological profile. Culianu considered that all the attempts to localize gnosis's original space – as a mythical narration and particular theological system – are inoperative. One reason could be the fact that all the possible solutions were already tested: the ancient Persia – Wilhelm Bousset, Richard Reitzenstein, Rudolf Bultmann; Judea after 70 dC – Birger A. Pearson, Robert M. Grant, Jean Daniélou, Greece – Simone Pétrement, Adolf von Harnack, Samaria – Jarl E. Fossum, and Egypt– M.E. Amelineau. Moreover, the complete lack of theological homogeneity of the particular gnosis and the contradictory character of their founding mythological facts limit the possibility of interpretation and explanation as syncretic religious phenomena, determined by the interaction and reciprocal influence of specific theological systems (Culianu 2015, 85-88; Culianu 1995, 77-80; Petrement 1996, 189-190; Manolache, 200, 30).

Thus, the temptation to offer imperative syncretic valencies to Gnosticism and connect it to other prominent ancient religions (Rotaru 2005b, 234-236) – under the pretext explaining it more coherent and complete - will represent, in I. P. Culianu's opinion, only the result of a sum of methodological errors. Gnosticism will represent only an independent historical entity, from a theological point of view, and must be perceived and analysed only with the guarantee of its originality in relation with other historical entities (Culianu 1995, 80).

The invariants – an attempt to systemize

In the first phase - *Les gnoses dualistes d'Occident. Histoire et mythes*, 1990 -, Culianu considered using the so-called invariants a solution suitable enough to allow – especially from Ugo Bianchi's systematic perspective – the identification and quantification of the fundamental theological particularities of the ancient Gnosticism, and even the individualization of the main categories. Shortly after – *The Tree of Gnosis. Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism*, 1992, Culianu changed his perspective so much that he doubted even defining and using the research invariants (Culianu 1995, 32-33; Culianu 2005, 90). We present the main stages in developing the exhaustive analytical instrument Culianu considered the researchers should use.

a) Even if the initial sense of the invariant concept belonged to linguistics, Claude Lévi-Strauss considered it among the central founding units to a systematic level. He used it the theological space to analyze theological myths, as a distinct feature, capable of separating and individualizing (Levi-Strauss 1978, 252-253). Considering the gnosis, the product of a phenomenological attitude more than the polymorphous expression of a particular theological-philosophical perspective (Petrement 1996, 187-188), Hans Jonas (*Gnosis und spatantiker Geist*, I, 1934) filters the rich Gnostic literature to highlight the invariants. He considered the invariants as essential common factors in the doctrine of all particular gnosis, to a moral-ethical level, highlighting the fundamental contents and individualizing concerning any theological-philosophical systems. Therefore, considering the syncretic character as undisputable (Manolache 2000, 30-31), Hans Jonas presents the following distinctive features of Gnosticism:

- It is *dualist* in a theological sense, by putting creation in connection to the successive autonomous action of two distinct entities, which are nor necessarily antagonistic and co-eternal, and not necessarily transcendent (Ugo Bianchi) (Culianu 1995, 23); rigorously, we can distinguish between the radical dualist type and the moderate type; the first one corresponds to systems as Zoroastrism and Manicheism, which put the world and the man to the intersection of two ontologically equal divinities' actions, still opposed and irreconcilable because they represent the good and the evil (Culianu 2015, 89);
- It is anti-cosmic, presuming that the world matter is irreversibly evil; the evil is consubstantial to the immanent Universe – a creating action's finality of a limited and ignorant pseudo-divinity (Harnack 2017, 71);
- It postulates the existence of a structure built on an aeons' world – the so-called vertical scheme, because a specific Gnosticism's dependence on Platonism – even Philonism, as Adolf von Harnack believes – requires a progressive transition from transcendence to immanence (Culianu 2015, 89); in fact, the vertical scheme is the invariant mostly permitting the development and endless multiplication of the fantastic narrations specific to gnosis (Harnack 2017, 70), pretending they can connect – in a Platonic sense – to a good divinity, which transcends a material world with a consequent evil constitution.

b). Hans Jonas's approach was completed by adding other invariants, aiming to consolidate this ancient Gnosticism analysis method. For example, Hans-Martin Schenke will add the invariant represented by consubstantiality, respectively the ontological identity between the good divinity and the human soul. From this perspective, the man appears as superior to the world, especially to his Creator – the Demiurge Demiurgul (Culianu 1995, 138); this means negating the anthropic principle because humans do not belong to this world and do not obey it (Culianu 2015, 89). Consubstantiality assimilates the simultaneously platonic and Gnostic theme of the soul imprisoned in the body (*sôma – sêma*); following a universally big mistake in the aeons' "inter-space", which does not belong to the human world, the man becomes exiled in the part of the world formed by the same rudimentary substance as his body. (Culianu 1995, 137; Burkitt 2008, 43-53).

Also mentioning Carsten Colpe's contribution to the extension of the distinctive features' content area, we highlight that "the completion" of their structure belongs to Ugo Bianchi (*Il dualismo religioso: Saggio storico ed etnologico*, 1958), who created what H.-R. Patapievici calls the complete expression of Gnosticism's research using invariants (Culianu 1995, 351). Thus, the Italian scholar nominated a series of doctrine and moral-ethical particularities among the invariants, as the antecedent sin, the Anti-Somatism, the Metensomatosis, the Encratism, the Docetism, and Vegetarianism (Culianu 2015, 90), considering that they are specific to Gnosticism as a whole and can individualise Gnosticism among other religious systems or philosophical visions.

Another notable endeavour in finding the distinctive feature of gnosis belongs to Elaine Pagels, who suggested (1979) the possibility to define the feminism of gnosis as invariant, an "ecclesiological" feature opposable to the men's prominent role in Churches and Synagogues. In her argumentation, Elaine Pagels invokes the significant, even determinant, oppositions women had had in the Gnostic communities, starting with the increased numerical proportion ending with women's access to cultic-sacramental leading positions – teacher, evangelist, priest, prophet, or even bishop. (Pagels 1999, 108-110).

The invariants critique

Examining the invariants' theological content, I. P. Culianu will observe that they can individualize Gnosticism only concerning the traditional forms of Judeo-Christian theology (Culianu 2015, 90). Moreover, numerous juxtapositions on the themes from other religious and even philosophical systems diminish drastically their capacity to describe gnosis exclusively and, implicitly, separate it from other theological-philosophical visions.

On the other hand, after a more in-depth analysis, the Romanian scholar will remark on the invariants' limits in their theological conformity with the real Gnosticism. Some particular gnosés tend to evade from the doctrine areal of the particular distinctive features, presenting opposing characteristics compared to those presumed. Each invariant will behave differently when used to analyze Gnostic systems, resulting in levels of accuracy and analytical relevance too little homogenous; their use in an uncritical manner generates inevitable imprecisions and ambivalences.

a). We will present as follows the most important landmarks of I. P. Culianu's critique of the invariants and their analytical relevance (Culianu 2015, 89-91; Culianu 1995, 82-83):

The Dualism – an immediate evaluation of the dualist thinking's coverage reveal that not only the gnosis credit evil with an ontological causality, which is hypostasized – most frequent by the Demiurge, but also a series of other non-Gnostic religions – Zoroastrism, Manicheism, Orphism – and great philosophical systems (Empedocles, Heraclitus, and especially Plato and Plotin). In these circumstances, although dualism is practicable recognizable in all gnosis (Petrement 1996, 190-191), as proved by Adolf von Harnack and Hans Jonas, its definition as the specific feature becomes problematic. Due to the possibility to distinguish Gnosticism only partially – even if a significant feature, its functionality as a delimitation and particularisation instrument appears as considerably diminished.

The Anticosmism – although dominant, the world description as consequently evil does not refer to the ensemble of Gnostic interpretations in the field because, in an example, the Valentinians perceive the world as simultaneously good and evil. At the same time, the *Tripartite Tractate* considers the world rather good than evil (Culianu 2015,174); the same Anticosmism also appears in other dualist religious systems, as Manicheism,

Bogomilism, or Catharism; thus, invalid as a variant for the entire Gnostic areal and interfering with other religious systems, the Anticosmism cannot be considered a distinctive characteristic, despite the credit given to it by Ugo Bianchi, who took in consideration the capacity to distinguish between the Platonic and Neoplatonic pro-cosmic dualism and the Anticosmic dualism;

The antecedent sin – by defining the antecedent sin as invariant and describing it as the disastrous event before the creation of man and determining its estranging condition, Ugo Bianchi intended most of all to distinguish between Gnosticism and the teachings of the Church (Culianu 2015, 27); we appreciate that the antecedent sin can individualise the Gnostic thinking better than the Dualism and the Anticosmism, being, due to its increased filtering capacity, closer to that the concept of invariant should mean, mainly because it allows the delimitation of Gnostic systems from Platonism, Neoplatonism, and Zoroastrism;

The Docetism - I. P. Culianu analysis the Docetism as a possible invariant starting from Ugo Bianchi's attempt to consider it as definitory in relation with the entire Gnostic thinking; in the end, the Romanian scholar remarks the appearance of an unsolvable difficulty. The particular gnosis reveals the apparent antagonism between the Docetists, who consider that the Saviour's resurrected body is different from the sacrificed body (Cerint, Baslide, Ipolit, a.o.), and Phantasiasts, who state that Christ never had a human body, but an apparent body (Saturnin, Marcion). Therefore, the difference between Docetism and Phantasianism blocks the establishment of a distinctive feature of this type;

Consubstantiality and *The Vertical Scheme* – frequently present in the Gnostic systems and expressing two categories of significant particularities, consubstantiality and the vertical scheme will have the destiny of other invariants because they are also present in Platonism; implicitly, they will be able to individualize gnosis only in relation with Judaism, Christianity and, eventually, concerning Zoroastrism, Orphism and the two Cathar dualism systems;

The Feminism – I. P. Culianu also invalidates the invariant proposed by Elaine Pagels (G. Koch identified a similar feature to the radical Cathars in Languedoc). He observed that the presumed sacramental qualities and responsibilities (bishop, priest, or prophet) assumed by women do not meet the necessary general characteristics. This type of situation is instead

a minority, even isolated as frequency. The presumed extended access of women to various sacramental-liturgical dignities in the Gnostic communities appears to Culianu as completely lacking historical sustainability and the example of the prophets Maximilla and only confirm the rule of the patriarchate of the gnosis (Pagels 1999, 110).

b) In a context where similar reasoning can be applied to all the other invariants, I. P. Culianu will conclude (1992) that “Bianchi’s attempt to formulate a genetic hypothesis based on a number of distinctive features became extremely” (Culianu 2015, 91), so their use can be relevant only if they are applied to predetermined sequences of Gnostic writings (“on an individual text or texts class.”). The essence of this conclusion resides in the invariants’ incapacity to fulfil, to acceptable standards, their function of a method for theological exploration and diagnosis. Practically, I. P. Culianu criticizes the analytical attempts based on the use of invariants for their incapacity to overcome an intrinsic methodological deficit, created and fed by the following complementary elements:

- ✦ The ambivalence created by invariants toward the requirement of permitting the apparent separation from other contemporary theological-philosophical systems, not only from the Christian and Judaic Orthodoxy; in other words, although the descriptive area of the invariants exceeds the doctrine of the Gnostic teachings, the invariant cannot be the distinctive features claimed by their supporters
- ✦ The so-called incomplete inference or the insufficient degree of generality of many proposed invariants (eventually with the exceptions represented by the dualism and the antecedent sin). The majority of the distinctive characteristics, presumed to be general, are not found and used by the Gnostic systems’ totality; moreover, specific characteristics, as the anticosmism, are, not once, substituted by their reverse, the procosmism or the libertinism.

In essence, I. P. Culianu highlights the difficulties in the attempts for the invariants’ use to localize what is theologically specific to the Gnostic systems concerning their theological-philosophical environment. Thus, Culianu believes that there is an impossibility to highlight authentic, distinctive characteristics that accurately describe the specificity of gnosis (Culianu 2015, 90-92; Culianu 1995, 47). The immense solutions diversity

proposed by particular gnosés for the significant theology interrogations and philosophy (Hoeller 2003, 19-20) and for their moral-ethical practices (because “the gnosis could be considered a dramatic representation of the human condition.”) (Petrement 1999, 203) will compromise the analytical use of the invariants. The relevance of each Gnostic invariant will be marked to its annulment by the risk to be constitutive for other religious or philosophical thinking systems.

The necessary character and the optimal profile of the method

Related to the invariants’ limits, I. P. Culianu concentrates on founding a fundamental new analytical method, capable of allowing an adequate theological diagnosis of the particular gnosés. To mark methodological progress, any analysis procedure must overcome the deficiencies of the previous attempts, meaning to individualize the Gnosticism as a whole better and facilitate the preoccupations for the systematization and classification of the particular gnosis.

a) To create favorable circumstances for this desiderate, I. P. Culianu starts from a series of theological observations and conclusions, capable of ensuring superior certitude to the future method:

- ✦ The particular gnosés coagulate by integrating/ cumulating/ synthesising (Manolache 2000, 57) preexistent mythological data/ sequences/ themes; their provenience is universal, including all the ancient spirituality centres (Iran, Egypt, Samaria, Judea, Greece, India, and others). Implicitly, the architecture of the ancient Gnosticism will assimilate and reflect a good part from what his contemporary world assimilated as mythology and soteriologic aspects in theology and philosophy (Eliade 1992, 359-360);
- ✦ Any analytical construction aiming to explore the essence of Gnosticism must assimilate its appurtenance to counter-culture because “the Gnostic discovers himself totally estranged from his culture and rejects all the cultural institutions and norms.” (Eliade 1992, 362-363); thus, paradoxically, the theological content of the particular gnosés will oppose in general to the theological-philosophical environment where it manifests. However, it remains connected to it from the perspective of the fundamental mythological facts/data.

Consequently, the analysis of ancient Gnosticism cannot be based only on its research as an integrated system of mythological sequences, the localization of its origins, or the discerning of the external forming influences. Thus, I. P. Culianu believes that reaching the desiderate of analytical attempts for the gnosis requires a fundamental paradigm change, as proceeding and perspective of the starting point.

b) Starting from these premises (i.e. the methodological novelty and the redefinition of the analytical foundation), I. P. Culianu formulates his method for the understanding, explanation, and a detailed description of the Gnostic speculative systems. To find the *mathesis universalis* (H.-R. Patapievici) which is perfectly compatible to the specificity of gnosis, the Romanian scholar will reject the historicist and comparative approaches and will adopt the identification and formulation of the “rules for the generation of the system”, that “combination” specific to the Gnostic thinking, prevailing on the mythological contents and their temporal evolution (Manolache 2000, 57).

Treating Gnosticism as a conglomerate of mythological facts and data subsumed to some significantly changing scenarios (theogonic, cosmogonical, anthropogenic, soteriological, etc.), I. P. Culianu aims at identifying the mechanism for the birth and construction of Gnosticism, disregarding the historical and geographical circumstances of each gnosis. To function and offer valid conclusions, this mechanism must concomitantly be:

- *Universal* – able to explain, sustainably and exhaustively, the Genesis and configuration of the theological-philosophical configuration of each particular gnosis;
- *Quantifiable* – to result from the operationalization of a set of simple, immediate and logically valid rules.

At this point, I. P. Culianu will identify the mechanism as the reason, the human thinking, because, “once started”, it “will automatically produce infinite variants (of particular Gnostic systems), which are perfectly predictable starting from a simple logical analysis.” (Culianu 1995, 32-33). Moreover, by considering thinking as the generating mechanism, the Romanian scholar believes that he also identified the modality to coherently and logically explain and describe Gnostic mythologies’ diversity. Thus, the thinking will gain in its relation to Gnosticism, a value of usage, generating

mechanism and explaining the principle, beyond details and historical-mythological landmarks.

I. P. Culianu considers the man's tendency – physiologically and neurologically justifiable – to preponderant reason based on the computational logic of the bundles of oppositions. He will consider that the elementary oppositions as true/false, white/black, or positive/negative, always observable, not only that establish the abstract sphere of reasoning and logic constructions, but also disseminates the incidence in the different spheres of social, cultural and religious acts and facts. To a level of history and philosophy of religions, the recurrence of mythological data “polarisation” and their placing in opposable theological relations was already highlighted by Robert Hertz – 1909, T.O. Bidelman – 1961, and others. Mircea Eliade “...connected the (religious) dualism and the binary classification systems, as right/left, up/down, day/night.” (Eliade 1992, 189-191) so I. P. Culianu's thesis that “Gnosticism [...] had no other origins than the human mind.” (Culianu 2015, 93) Partially appears in connection to other significant scientific research. With the “quality” of being universally acknowledged and perceived as an antagonist and irreconcilable, the elementary oppositions gained a “social and mental consistence” that generates the terms of the universal polarity good-evil. Once this cognitive threshold is reached, the development of the dualism - subsequently of the Gnosticism – evolved in an accelerated manner, until the good terms coagulated, due to the “negative experience of the world”, and became norms for men and society, “with the aim to preserve the man and his interiority despite the hostile world.” (Culianu 2015, 43).

The bundles of oppositions as *mathesis universalis*

How will thinking be able – operating in terms of a simple *mind game*, as I. P. Culianu wrote – to determine the extreme diversity of the Gnostic systems? Alternatively, is it possible for the human mind “facing multiple choices.” (Culianu 1995, 339) to be the ultimate causal and decisive factor of the immense Gnostic mythology?

a) As answers, we will underline that the generating mechanism using the bundles of oppositions requires placement in a minimal mythological

frame, a starting point in later development and a source for elementary theological-philosophical building elements. This mythological context is for all the Gnostic systems the Genesis, especially its cosmogonical and anthropogenic sequences; they will not be through the traditional Judeo-Christian exegeses, but in an entirely antagonistic manner – the reverse exegesis of the Holy Scriptures. This hermeneutic will deny the ecosystemic intelligence – presuming that the world’s Creator is the good and transcendent God. It will also deny the anthropic principle – considering the man is not anymore consubstantial with the world, and the world estranges the man from his real condition and vocation. Practically, Gnosticism, outside the mythology revealed at some point, will be founded on a particular endeavour of reversed exegesis, denying the ecosystemic intelligence and the anthropic principle. Thus, a dramatic situation appears when “everything interpreted by the Old Testament as good will be interpreted as bad by the Gnostics, and viceversa”. So, the Creator will be a bad Demiurge, Can a “representative of the real transcendence”, and the Serpent as the Saviour or as Logos (Culianu 2015, 158-162). The range of interpretations generated by the reversed exegesis is extensive. The Book of Genesis transforms, in this type of interpretation, in a “game board.” (Culianu 2015, 335-336), where, after an analytical exercise at the University of Chicago (1987), I. P. Culianu distinguished approximately 50 distinct exegeses (many completely antagonistic) for the themes in the first two chapters of Genesis (Culianu 2015, 335).

As a result, using the reversed exegesis of cosmogony and anthropogony for the Genesis, Gnosticism will coagulate its own “scriptural base” – the Holy Scriptures read in a key opposed to the Judeo-Christian key, followed by the building of systems.

b) I. P. Culianu observes that starting from the immediate results of the reversed exegesis, “the game on the theme of Genesis is easy to follow and it is entirely and exclusively a logic game (Culianu 2015, 335-336), re-combining and re-arranging the sequences.” (Culianu 1995, 163). Related to the operational content, we highlight the following aspects:

- As concrete finality, the reversed exegesis applied to various relevant themes/acts/characters in the Genesis will lead to elementary and autonomous mythological-theological sequences; these sequences, formally and logically opposable (good Creator/ evil Creator, good

world/evil world, Serpents' good action/Serpent's evil action) are the "primary material" for the generating *mind game*, tending to explore and exhaust all the possible solutions for the logical interpretation of the biblical text in the limits of the two fundamental "negations" of the ecosystemic intelligence and the anthropic principle;

- ✦ The completely autonomous elaborated logic sequences will enter, pushed by the subjectivity of the Gnostic heretics constructing a speculative mythology (Culianu 1995, 158), an avalanche of combinations and re-combinations, generating individual Gnostic systems.

I. P. Culianu observes that, for each mythological-theological sequence, the Gnostic system will have two interpretation options in the form of two opposable/antagonistic logic contents. Therefore, each sequence (bundle of oppositions) – *si* will appear as a binomial of options (S_{i1}, S_{i0}), from which the Gnostic will always choose just one, S_{ij} , where $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$ and $j = 0, 1$. In the end, the "formula" of any Gnostic myth will be the composition, using the juxtaposition, of the autonomous sequences S_{ij} , respectively $S_{1j}, S_{2j}, S_{3j}, \dots, S_{nj}$. they will not enter in the composition only as "isolated units" – individual sequences s_{ij} , but also as prefabricated "construction elements" – $S_{1j} \wp S_{2j} \wp \dots \wp S_{kj}$, where $k < n$, with the theoretical possibility to choose the sequences and their (evil/good) "sign." (Culianu 1995, 162). Vertically arranged, the sequences s_{ij} will take the form of a tree – the tree of gnosis *i*, a plastic description of all the systems possible to obtain by combining a predetermined number of logic "bricks". On the other hand, we observe that the Holy Scripture as a whole is the "game board" of the sequences – bundles of oppositions; any motif, theme of character interpreted in two antagonistic modes can become an elementary mythological sequence – *si*, which will generate a binomial of logic operations (S_{i1}, S_{i0}). The interpretation of the biblical sequence *u* complete opposed manners is little relevant because the binomial (S_{i1}, S_{i0}), are logic products and do not necessarily claim a valid theological base or the hermeneutic rigour. Therefore, the fundamental Gnostic principle of denying the ecosystemic intelligence in the reversed exegesis of Genesis 3: 9-11 (*"And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him: Where art thou? [...] And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat,*), founds the essential opposition omniscient God/ ignorant Demiurge. Less

intelligible are the reversed exegeses transforming the Serpent in a positive (good) character, starting from Genesis 3: 4-5. (“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”), or those who conclude that Christ was not resurrected in the body because the two disciples did not recognise the Saviour when they travel to Emaus (Luke 24: 15-31).

This process of generating Gnostic systems “tends to continue until the exhaustion of all (logic) possibilities.” (Culianu 1995, 163). The lack of attestation for a particular combination variant of sequences does not mean that this is less attractive, accessible, or coherent. It only means it was not active until that moment. The potential character of some combination variants (forming a “virtual mythology”) reveals the time limitation of the generating logic mechanism. Moreover, despite the “generating process has no, theoretical limits”), constraints caused by the “socio-intellectual structure of the epoch” can operate in practice., adding to the barrier created by the traditional Judeo-Christian interpretations of the biblical references for the creation.

Conclusions

Detaching from the invariants’ method and formulating a new *mathesis* for the approach of gnosis, I. P. Culianu intends to formulate a method capable “to permit us to navigate equally right to the microscopic level of the textual variants to a macroscopic (systemic) level.” (Culianu 1995, 47). Therefore, in his understanding, the new method for the analysis of gnosis has all the imperative qualities, taking into consideration the following aspects:

a) the bundles of oppositions are immune to the diversity of Gnostic myths, which made possible the finding of authentic invariants; implicitly, I. P. Culianu can substitute the concept of “essential feature” of gnosis with “the notion of myth range or logical tolerance range.”. Thus, a system that, for example, considers the Serpent’s work “good” will be equally legitimate in a Gnostic sense to a system describing the Serpent’s intervention as “evil”;

b) the analysis using the bundles of oppositions transcends the issues – proved to be indissoluble – of the search for the origins of Gnosticism and the evidence of the forming influence of various mythologies (also explaining

this myths' universality because the source is in "the logical structure of data forming the Gnostic problem.") (Culianu 2015, 355);

c) any Gnostic system contains the capacity to multiply through the simple mental game of activating/ not activating the logical operations in the rows of successive operations; thus, the Gnostic myths "are not just transmitted and are the result of a continuous process of continuous re-elaboration, tending to deplete all the logic possibilities present *in nuce* in each of their sequences." (Culianu 1995, 170);

d) the extreme diversity of Gnostic systems, capable of halting even the release of authentic, distinctive features, becomes perfectly explainable with the help of bundles of oppositions; they will describe all the Gnostic aspects, historically attested or virtual, as "the result of concretizing the logic possibilities from each sentence in each individual version of a myth"; thus, the activation of a binomial (S_{i1} , S_{i0}), will generate two particular Gnostic systems; in case of two binomials, (S_{i1} , S_{i0}), and (S_{j1} , S_{j0}), we are in the presence of 4 potential systems, while for n binomials, 2^n particular gnosis will be generated, already forming autonomous historical-religious categories.

References

- The Bible or The Holy Scripture*. 2004. Bucharest: Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Roumanian Orthodox Church.
- Burkitt, Francis K. 2008. *Biserica și gnoza. Un studiu asupra gândirii și speculației creștine din secolul al doilea (The church and the gnosis. A study of Christian thought and speculation in the second century)*. Bucharest: Herald Publishing House, translated by Alexandru Anghel.
- Culianu, Ioan Petru. 2015. *Arborele gnozei (The Gnosis Tree)*. Iași: Polirom Publishing House, second edition, translated by Corina Popescu.
- Culianu, Ioan Petru. 1995. *Gnozele dualiste ale Occidentului (The dualistic gnoses of the West)*. Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House, translated by Thereza Petrescu.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1992. *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase (History of religious beliefs and ideas)*. Chișinău: Universitas Publishing House, second volume, translated from French by Cezar Baltag.
- Harnack, Adolf von. 2017. *Istoria dogmei. Introducere în doctrinele creștine fundamentale (History of Dogma. Introduction to fundamental Christian*

- doctrines*). Bucharest: Herald Publishing House, 3rd edition, translated by Walter Fotescu.
- Hoeller, Stephan A. 2003. *Gnosticismul. O nouă concepție asupra străvechii tradiții asupra eului interior (Gnosticism. A new conception of the ancient tradition of the inner self)*. Bucharest: Saeculum Publishing House, translated by Daniela și Agop Bezerian.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1978. *Antropologia structural (Structural Anthropology)*. Bucharest: Political Publishing House, translated from French by I. Pecher.
- Manolache, Stelian. 2000. *Dualismul Gnostic și maniheic din perspectivă teologică (Gnostic and Manichean dualism from a theological perspective)*. Pitești-Brașov-București-Cluj-Napoca: Paralela 45 Publishing House.
- Pagels, Elaine. 1999. *Evangeliiile gnostice (The gnostic gospels)*. Bucharest: Herald Publishing House, translated from English by Walter Fotescu.
- Pétrément, Simone, *Eseu asupra dualismului la Platon, la gnostici și la maniheeni (Essay on dualism in Plato, Gnostics and Manicheans)*, 1996, Bucharest: Sympozion Publishing House, translated by Ioana Munteanu and Daria Octavia Murgu.
- Rotaru, Ioan-Gheorghe. 2005a. *Istoria filosofiei, de la începuturi până la Renaștere (The history of philosophy from the beginning until the Renaissance)*. Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press.
- Rotaru, Ioan-Gheorghe. 2005b. *Aspecte antropologice în gândirea patristică și a primelor secole creștine (Anthropological Aspects in patristic thought and the first Christian centuries)*. Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press.