

The Thunder, Perfect Mind (b)

CODEX VI (CG VI.2:13,1-21,32)

I was sent from the Power
And I have come to those who think upon me.
And I was found among those who seek after
me (13, 2-5).

Look at me, you who think upon me;
And you hearers, hear me!
You who are waiting for me, take me to
yourselves.
And do not pursue me from your vision.
And do not make your sound hate me, nor your
hearing.
Do not be ignorant of me at any place or any
time.
Be on guard!
Do not be ignorant of me. (13, 5-15).

For I am the first and the last.
I am the honored and the scorned,
I am the harlot and the holy one.
I am the wife and the virgin.
I am the m[oth]er and the daughter.
I am the members of my mother.

I am the barren one and the one with many
children.

I am she whose marriage is multiple, and I have
not taken a husband.
I am the midwife and she who does not give
birth.
I am the comforting of my labor pains.

I am the bride and the bridegroom.
It is my husband who begot me.
I am the mother of my father and the sister of
my husband.
And he is my offspring.
I am the servant of him who prepared me and I
am the lord of my offspring.
But he is the one who be [got me] before time
on a day of birth and he is my offspring in time,
and my power is from him.

I am the staff of his power in his youth and he
is the rod of my old age.
And whatever he wills happens to me.

I am the incomprehensible silence and the
much remembered thought.
I am the voice of many sounds and the
utterance (logos) of many forms.
I am the utterance of my name (13, 15-14, 15).

Why, you who hate me, do you love me
And hate those who love me?
You who deny me, confess me,
And you who confess me, deny me.
You who speak the truth about me, tell lies
about me,
And you who have told lies about me, speak
the truth about me.
You who know me, become ignorant of me;
and may those who have been ignorant of me
come to know me (14, 15-25).

For I am knowledge and ignorance.
I am shame and boldness.
I am unashamed, I am ashamed.
I am strength and I am fear.
I am war and peace (14, 26-32).

Give heed to me (14, 32-33).

I am the disgraced and the exalted one (14, 33-
34).

Give heed to my poverty and my wealth.
Do not be haughty to me when I am discarded
upon the earth,

And you will find me among [those] that are
to come.

And do not look upon me on the garbage-
heap and go and leave me discarded.

And you will find me in the kingdoms.

And do not look upon me when I am discarded
among those who are disgraced and in the least
places,
And then laugh at me.
And do not cast me down among those who are
slain in severity (14, 34-15,14).

But as for me, I am merciful and I am cruel (15,
15-16).

Be on guard!
Do not hate my obedience,
And do not love my self-control in my
weakness.
Do not forsake me,
And do not be afraid of my power.

Why then do you despise my fear
And curse my pride? (15, 16-24).

I am she who exists in all fears and boldness in
trembling.
I am she who is weak, and I am well in pleasure
of place.
I am foolish and I am wise (15, 25-31).

Why have you hated me in your counsels?

(Is it) because I shall be silent among those who
are silent,
And I shall appear and speak?

Why then have you hated me, you Greeks?
Because I am a non-Greek among non-Greeks?
(15, 31-16, 3).

For I am the Wisdom of Greeks
And the Gnosis of non-Greeks.
I am judgment for Greeks and non-Greeks.
I am the one whose image is multiple in Egypt.
And the one who has no image among non-
Greeks.

I am she who has been hated everywhere and
who has been loved everywhere.

I am she who is called Life and you have called
Death.
I am she who is called Law and you have called
Lawlessness.

I am the one you have pursued, and I am the
one you have restrained.
I am the one you have scattered and you have
gathered me together.
Before me you have been ashamed and you
have been unashamed with me.

I am she who observes no festival and I am
she whose festivals are many.
I, I am godless and I am she whose God is
multiple.

I am the one upon whom you have thought
and whom you have scorned.
I am unlearned, and it is from me they learn.

I am she whom you have despised and upon
whom you think.
I am the one from whom you have hidden
and to whom you are manifest.
But whenever you hide yourselves, I myself
will be manifest.
For whenever you are manifest, I myself [will
hide from you.

Those who have [...]
[...]
[...] senselessly

Take me [...] [underst]anding out of pain,
and receive me to yourselves out of
understanding
[and] pain.
Receive me to yourselves out of disgraceful
places and contrition.
And seize me from those which are good even
though in disgrace.
Out of shame, receive me to yourselves in
shamelessness.
And out of shamelessness and shame, blame
my members among yourselves.
And come forward to me, you who know me
and who know my members.
Establish the great ones among the small first
creatures.

Come forward to childhood and do not
despise it
because it is little and small.

And do not bring back some greatnesses in parts
from smallnesses,
for the smallnesses are known from the greatnesses.

Why do you curse me and honor me?
You have wounded and you have had mercy.

Do not separate me from the first ones whom you
have known.
And] do not cast anyone [out
and do not] bring anyone back [...]
...brought you back
and ... [kno]w him not (17,4-18,5).

[I...] what is mine
[...] I know the fi[rst ones] and those after them
know me.
But I am the [perfect] mind and the repose of the [...]

I am the gnosis of my seeking, and the finding
of those who seek after me.
And the command of those who ask of me.

And the power of the powers by my gnosis
of the angels who have been sent by my logos,
And the gods in their seasons by my command,
And it is with me that the spirits of all humans
exist,
and it is within me that women exist.

I am she who is honored and praised and who
is
despised scornfully.
I am peace and because of me war has come to
be.
And I am an alien and a citizen.
I am substance and she who has no substance.
Those who come into being from my synousia
are ignorant of me,
And those who are in my substance know me.

Those who are close to me have been ignorant
of me
And those who are far from me have known
me. (18, 6-35).

On the day when I am close to [you, you] are
far away [from me
And] on the day when I [am far away] from
you, [I am] [close] to you.
I [am] [...] within.
[I..] of the natures.
I am [.....] of the creation of spiritsrequest
of the souls. (18, 35-19, 8).

[I am] restraint and unrestraint.
I am union and dissolution.
I am the abiding and I am the loosing.
I am descent and they come up to me.
I am the judgment and the acquittal.
I, I am sinless and the root of sin is from me.
I am desire in appearance and self-control of
the
heart exists within me.

I am the hearing which is attainable to
everyone and the ungraspable utterance.
I am a non-speaking mute and great is my
multitude of utterances (19, 9-25).

Hear me in softness and learn from me in
harshness. (19, 25-27).

I am she who cries out,
And I am cast out upon the face of the earth.
I prepare the bread and my mind within.
I am the gnosis of my name.
I am she who cries out and I am the one who
listens.

I appear an[d...] walk in [...] seal of my [...]...[sign] of the
I am [...] the defense.
I am she who is cal[led] Truth. And violence
[...]
(19, 28-20, 8).

You honor me [...] and you whisper against
[me].
You who are defeated,
judge them before they pass judgment against
you.
For the judge and partiality exist within you.
If you are condemned by this, who will acquit
you?
Or if you are acquitted by him, who will be
able to

restrain you?

For what is inside of you is what is outside of you.

And the one who molded you on the outside has made an impression of it inside of you.

And that which you see outside of you, you see inside of you.

It is manifest and it is your garment.

Hear me, listeners, and be taught my utterances, you who know me! (20, 9-28)

I am the hearing that is acceptable in every matter;

I am the utterance that cannot be restrained.

I am the name of the voice and the voice of the name.

I am the sign of writing and the manifestation of difference.

And I ...

[3 lines missing]

[...] light [...] and [...]

[...] listeners [...] you.

[...] the great power.

And [...] will not move the name.

[...] the one who created me.

But I shall speak his name (20, 28-21, 11).

Behold, then, his utterances and all the writings that have been completed.

Give heed, then, listeners, and you also, angels,

And those who have been sent,

And you spirits who have arisen from the dead, (21, 12-18).

For I am the one who alone exists,

And I have no one who will judge me. (21, 18-20).

For many are the sweet forms that exist in numerous sins

And unrestrained acts and disgraceful passions, and temporal pleasures,

Which are restrained until they become sober

And run up to their place of rest.

And they will find me there,

And they will live and they will not die again (21, 20-32).

Notes

This translation is based on the edition of the Coptic text by G. W. MacRae, Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2-5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4, ed. D. Parrott, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979, 231-55, with critical reference to the English translations of G. W. MacRae, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. J. M. Robinson, 271-277; and B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, NY: Doubleday, 1987, 80-85. The poetic arrangement of the text is adapted from the translation of R. Unger, "Zur sprachlichen und formalen Struktur des gnostischen Textes 'Der Donner: der vollkommene Nous,'" *Oriens Christianus* 59 (1975) 78-107.

Thunder, Perfect Mind (NHC VI, 2) presents the revelation discourse of a female divinity who speaks alternately in firstperson statements of identity ("I AM") and second-person address. The text's parallelism of structure, together with its extensive use of antithesis, paradox, and other literary devices, point clearly to its poetic or hymnic character. B. Layton has argued persuasively that the paradoxical and often outrageous pairing of antithetical terms in the "I AM" statements of Thunder can be read as a complex identity riddle to be solved by the knowing or "gnostic" reader. At the same time, attention to various features of the text as a whole suggests that it is not only the mystery of the speaker's identity, but the relationship between the divine speaker and her human hearers that forms the exegetical crux of the text.

Thunder focuses attention on the hearers' relationship to the divine speaker not only through its alternating structure of first-person proclamation and second-person address, but also through its metaphorical imagery of kinship and gender, its references to the audience's responses to the divine, and its claims about the speaker's role in the operations of language and intellect. Its persistent, uncompromising use of paradox pushes its hearers to relinquish the apparent sense of its words and to seek the hidden meaning of individual utterances and of the discourse as a whole. Finally, by locating the divine in the "voice" and "hearing" of the text, it leads its hearers or readers to find the divine within the text and within themselves, and so to discover themselves within the divine. In such an interpretive movement of letting go and finding, of becoming sober and being found, the text's final words suggest, the reader "goes up" to the salvific "place of rest," "finds" the divine persona revealed in the text, and "enters into" a state of living and not dying again.

Thunder's conception of salvation does not conform to the more familiar "Gnostic" image of a transformative movement or 'conversion' from blindness to vision, deficiency to fullness, or ignorance to gnosis. Rather, Thunder presents an understanding of salvation that comes through the interpretive process of grappling with the language of the text and confronting the paradoxical nature of the divine within the antitheses of ignorance and gnosis, weakness and power, shame and honor, death and life. At the same time, Thunder forges a sharp distinction between those who merely hear the words of the text and those who hear the divine voice with gnosis, that is, between those who remain ignorant and those who come to know the divine in the fullness of her complexity and mystery. Those who hear the utterances

of Thunder with gnosis enter into salvific relation with the divine through the interchange of divine utterance and divine hearing, manifested within the symbolic world of the text and within themselves. "Thunder, Perfect Mind" may thus be interpreted not only as a title for the text, but as a name for the divine speaker, her thundering utterances, and her place of dwelling within those who hear her voice and know her mystery with the salvific gnosis and hearing of perfect mind.

Setting in Ancient Mediterranean Religions

While Thunder resembles many other ancient texts in various ways, its distinctive combination of features is virtually unmatched in the religious and philosophical literature of antiquity. In form, Thunder's first-person proclamations of identity ("I AM") parallel most directly the aretologies of the goddess Isis. Yet the text's alternation between first-person identity statements and second-person address bring it closer to the form of the philosophical sermon or diatribe, familiar from the monologues of biblical Wisdom (e.g., Prov 8, Sir 24, Wis 7-8, 1 Enoch 42). In addition, Thunder combines these literary modes with rhetorical features, such as paradox and antithesis, which are more characteristic of the Greek riddle.

In content as well as form, the closest parallels to Thunder are found in the hymnic speeches of female divinities in other Nag Hammadi texts, especially those of Pronoia (in Ap. John II,1:30,11-31,28); Protennoia (throughout Trim. Prot. XIII,1); Sophia Zoe, the "Eve of Life" (in Orig. World II, 5:114, 8-15); and the spiritual Eve in The Gospel of Eve (Epiph., Pan. 26.3.1). Yet unlike most of these divine discourses, the utterances of Thunder have no narrative or epistolary setting. They appear as unmediated divine speech, addressed directly from the divine to her human hearers or readers.

There is no general scholarly consensus on the social or historical setting of Thunder. While scholars agree that the text exhibits no explicitly Jewish or Christian elements, its imagery resonates with a variety of sources, including Jewish and Christian Wisdom, Isis traditions, Middle Platonism, Stoicism, and with other Nag Hammadi texts, especially those designated "Sethian" and "Valentinian." Thunder may profitably be read in relation to all of these texts and traditions as a revisionary poetic work that puts forward a distinctive perspective on the nature of the divine and her relation to humankind.

Language, Date, Author, Provenance, and Manuscript

Thunder, Perfect Mind exists only in the Coptic version found at Nag Hammadi (NHC VI, 2:13, 1-21,32). The author, date, and place of composition are unknown, but a cultural milieu like that of second-or third-century Alexandria is plausible. In any case, it is clear that the text was originally composed in Greek well before 350 C.E., the approximate date of the Coptic manuscript. The surviving text is relatively well preserved, with minor damage near the top of the first four pages (13-16) and somewhat more serious damage on the first ten lines of the remaining manuscript pages (17-21).