In this article I would like to demonstrate how a very ancient theological concept emerged unexpectedly through the mediation of the Platonic tradition almost simultaneously in the twelfth-century Latin West and in a remote oriental context, and how these two later developments of the same set of ideas can clarify each other and their common roots.

At the outset it is worth making some observations concerning the use of the early Christian writings in this study, which scholars of the previous generations almost indiscriminately called “gnostic” thus using the term by which, as was noted by A. DeConick, they attempted to reconstruct “an umbrella religion called ‘Gnosticism,’ a religion which in fact did not exist.” Furthermore, as R. G. Hall indicated, “the terms ‘Jewish,’ ‘Christian,’ and ‘gnostic’ are notoriously slippery when applied to texts from early in the second century. The Odes of Solomon, with their close relationship to the Hodayot from Qumran, on the one hand, and to later gnostic literature, on the other, would belong equally in studies of ancient Jewish hymnody, early Christian prophecy, and the origin of gnosticism. The Gospel of John belongs as clearly in a study of Gnostic origins as in a study of Christian origins and is Jewish to such an extent that one of the biggest issues it faces is being put out of the synagogue.” Finally, A. Golitzin highlighted the problem noting the “re-evaluation of apocalyptic literature, Christian origins, and the analysis of Gnosticism” for which scholars “had begun to look to more proximate (as opposed to distant Iranian), Jewish sources.”

As this scholar observed, “we can find a striking instance of this shift in the respective — and stunningly different — analyses of the Acts of


Thomas offered by Gunter Bornkam in the early 1960s for the first edition of W. Schneemelcher’s anthology, The Apocryphal New Testament, and, thirty years later, by Han Drijvers for the second edition of the same anthology, where the change in direction is practically absolute. Bornkam sees nothing but ‘Gnosticism’ and Iranian motifs in the apocryphon, while Drijvers barely breathes the word, ‘Gnostic,’ and does so chiefly in order to dismiss it and insist instead on the fundamentally Jewish-Christian character of the document, including the justly famous ‘Hymn of the Pearl,’ which Bornkam had seen as totally devoid of Christian elements.”3 In a footnote A. Golitzin quoted H. Drijvers, who wrote about the “Hymn of the Pearl” as “one of the most beautiful products of Syriac literature.”4

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In a series of articles A. Orlov studied an interesting feature in the “Merkabah” tradition, namely, the encounter of the visionary’s own self in the form of a “face.” In a pseudepigraphon Ladder of Jacob5 Jacob beholds the divine Glory as “the Face of God.” This Face appears to be as well Jacob’s heavenly counterpart. Similar visions are described in the pseudepigraphical literature as referring to Moses and Enoch.6 A. Orlov highlights the importance of the theophanic role of God’s Glory-Kavod in these accounts, “These features of both Enochic accounts, entertaining the idea of the heavenly twin, point to the importance of the vision of the Kavod in the process of acquiring knowledge about the heavenly counterparts of the visionaries.”7


