The discovery of a large collection of Gnostic writings,\textsuperscript{1} far from having solved some of the problems concerning the Gnostic phenomenon, appears to have multiplied them. Before the Nag Hammadi find, scholars were almost completely dependent on the heresiologists for their knowledge of Gnostic sects and teachings. Even much of the primary material such as the Epistle of Ptolemy to Flora\textsuperscript{2} and the Naassene Hymn\textsuperscript{3} we owe to the Church Fathers' liberal policy of quoting extensive excerpts from the heretical material available to them.

Three Gnostic manuscripts had been found in Egypt before the Nag Hammadi Library came to light. These are the Codex Askewianus,\textsuperscript{4} the Codex Brucianus\textsuperscript{5} and the Codex Berolinensis 8502.\textsuperscript{6} The first two have been known for two centuries but the best known parts, the two Books of \textit{Pistis Sophia}, are so bizarre and esoteric that, had they been typical of Gnosticism, it could never have been the threat to the church which the orthodox Fathers claimed it to be. The tendency has been to consider these works a decadent or aberrant form of Gnosticism,\textsuperscript{7} perhaps coming

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\textsuperscript{2} Epiphanius, \textit{Panarion} xxxiii.3–7.

\textsuperscript{3} Hippolytus, \textit{Refutatio V},10,2.

\textsuperscript{4} Carl Schmidt, \textit{Pistis Sophia} (Copenhagen 1925).


\textsuperscript{6} Walter C. Till, \textit{Die gnostischen Schriften des koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502} (Berlin 1955) and Carl Schmidt, \textit{Die alten Petrusakten im Zusammenhang der apocryphen Apostelliteratur nebst einem neu entdeckten Fragment untersucht} (Leipzig 1903).

\textsuperscript{7} Hans Jonas, \textit{The Gnostic Religion} (Boston 1963) p. 40.
from a time when the church had won the battle against Gnosticism and had isolated the remaining pockets.

Codex Berolinensis 8502 is of a different character and it would have stimulated a new look at the evidence presented by the heresiologists had not various mishaps and two world wars delayed its publication. The report by Carl Schmidt in 1907 on Irenaeus and his sources in *Adv. haer.* I,29 already indicated that one of the tractates in 8502, the Apocryphon of John, had finally given us a place where the accuracy and method of the earliest of the great heresiologists could be tested. However, the full text and translation of 8502 did not become available until 1955 and was soon overshadowed by the first publications from the Nag Hammadi find, the Gospel of Truth, and the Gospel of Thomas. With such important new material available, and more in the offing, a full evaluation of the Codex Berolinensis was postponed.

One effect of the advance report by Carl Schmidt was that the evidence of the Fathers was no longer thought to be automatically suspect. Ever since the rise of critical historical scholarship the heresiologists' description of their opponents' teachings had been considered to be of dubious value. This was not simply due to a 19th century anti-theological bias and sympathy for the heretical underdog, but was based on the polemical nature of the heresiological writings. Eugène de Faye, the great student of Gnosticism from the early part of this century, represents this attitude. He completely discounts the value of the reports of the Church Fathers except when they are giving information about sects of their own time with which they had had contact. He advocates that the early history of the sects should be ignored unless we have corroboration from authentic remnants of Gnostic writings.

To be sure, the evidence presented by the heresiologists does not inspire the present-day historian to great confidence. If the reports agree it is usually due to the dependence of the one Father on the other. Clearly Hippolytus, Epiphanius, and the later heresiologists did not have in-

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