

PLEROMA: A STUDY IN CONTENT AND CONTEXT

The object of this paper is to show, from both a study of content and context, that there is no integral relationship between the so-called technical or gnostic use of the word πλήρωμα as it is found in the second-century Christian heretical sects and the use of the word in the New Testament.

The method employed in this essay is as follows. Firstly an attempt will be made to define and explain the technical use of the word. This will involve us in an examination of some of the extant material of the second-century Gnostic sects. Secondly, by means of a brief examination of sources that both pre- and post-date the first Christian century, we shall demonstrate that there is a non-technical use of the word that was fairly widespread in this period. In the third section of the essay we will expound all the NT verses which contain the substantive πλήρωμα. The fourth and final section will be concerned with the use made by the Gnostics of the actual verses examined in the third section of the essay. In this fourth section we will attempt to prove what we believe the second part of the essay will suggest, and the third part will offer as at least a quite acceptable alternative explanation, that the use of the term πλήρωμα in the NT is not in any way related to the use of the same term by the heretical sects.

I

With one important exception πλήρωμα does not occur in Gnostic literature with any great frequency: we should note, however, that the volume of extant Gnostic material is comparatively small and it is possible that if more of the writings of the earliest Gnostics had been preserved we might have found that the term occupied an even more important place than at present appears.¹ The term does not seem to have been used by Basilides, there being no reference to the term in the discussion of his system by either Irenaeus or Hippolytus. It is possible, though by no means certain, that the term was used by Cerinthus and/or the Nicolaitans. In his discussion of both, Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III. 11, 1, refers to 'pleroma', though in his earlier reference to the doctrine of Cerinthus, *Adv. Haer.* I. 26, 1, the term is not

¹ This suggestion admittedly does raise problems in that the phrase 'the earliest Gnostics' is, to say the least, very ambiguous. As yet there is no agreement regarding the beginning of Gnosticism proper (as opposed to the more general 'Gnosis'). The suggestion itself is put forward in slightly stronger terms ('probably') by J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London, 1879³), p. 330. Lightfoot wrote of course before the discovery of the Nag Hammadi writings; but even the discovery of this source does not do more than substantiate the doctrine of the Pleroma that has already been adduced from the Apologists.

mentioned. Since no mention of the term is made by Hippolytus in his discussion of either the Nicolaitans, *Refutatio* vii. 36, 3, or Cerinthus, *Refutatio* vii. 33, 1, it is likely that the term was not part of the system of either and that in *Adv. Haer.* iii. 11, 1 it owes its origin to Irenaeus himself, presumably under the influence of his earlier discussion of Valentinianism.² The term does appear, though not with any great frequency, in the Naasene hymn as preserved by Hippolytus, *Refutatio* v. 6, 3–11, 1. It is doubtful though if the term can be classified as 'technical' in this instance.³ The word was used by the Docetists, however, with the full weight and significance of a *terminus technicus*.⁴

The one exception to which we have already alluded is Valentinianism, for whom the doctrine of the Pleroma was the essential part of their system. Before attempting to explain the significance of the Pleroma for the Valentinians two very necessary and important points should be made. Firstly, the great majority of our references to the doctrines of this school are to be found in the works of Irenaeus and Hippolytus, and therefore we must expect these references to be biased and even polemical in kind. Secondly, we must note that within the Valentinian school there was not total agreement in either theology or terminology. With reference to these differences as they applied to the doctrine of the Pleroma, Jonas⁵ aptly comments: '... (the) wealth of the doctrinal differentiations can be seen from the fact of the development of the pleroma alone; we have in Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Epiphanius and the *Excerpts from Theodotus* no fewer than seven versions... which in part diverge considerably and reveal great independence of thought.' But even allowing for the differentiations, it is still possible to construct a picture of the Valentinian Pleroma from the sources that are available to us. In the beginning was the Forefather (also known as Pre-beginning and Primal Cause)⁶ who, perhaps together with his consort Ennoia (Grace, Silence),⁷ generated the first pair of aeons, Nous, described by the Valentinians as the 'Only Begotten', and its consort Truth.⁸ From this first pair of emanations were generated Word and Life who in turn generated Man and Church.⁹ These first eight emanations – if indeed Forefather and Ennoia can be called emanations¹⁰ – were known as the Ogdoad. From Word and Life were

² Cf. *Adv. Haer.* i. 1, 1–8, 6.

³ The use of the term shows every indication of being related to, if not based on, the use of πλήρωμα in John i. 16; cf., for example, *Refutatio* v. 8, 30 (referring to the saying of Moses in Deut. xxxi. 20): τοῦτο... ἐστὶ τὸ μέλι καὶ τὸ γάλα, οὗ γενοσαίμενος τοὺς τελείους ἀβασσιλεύτους γενέσθαι καὶ μετασχεῖν τοῦ πληρώματος. τοῦτο... ἐστὶ τὸ πλήρωμα, δι' οὗ πάντα [τὰ] γινόμενα γεννητὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀγεννήτου γέγονε τε καὶ πεπλήρωται. On the use of the term by the Naasenes cf. J. Ernst, *Pleroma und Pleroma Christi* (Regensburg, 1970), pp. 47 f.

⁴ Cf. *Refutatio* viii. 10, 3.

⁵ *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, 1958), p. 178.

⁶ *Refutatio* vi. 29, 5; cf. *Eugnostus* 74 f.

⁷ *Adv. Haer.* i. 1, 1; *Panarion* xxxi. 5, 2; *Excerpta* 22. 7; cf. *Eugnostus* 73 f.

⁸ *Adv. Haer.* i. 1, 1; *Panarion* xxxi. 5, 5; *Excerpta* 6. 1; *Gospel of Truth* 16. 36; *Rheginus* 46. 24.

⁹ *Adv. Haer.* i. 1, 1; *Refutatio* vi. 29, 7; *Gospel of Philip* 11; *Eugnostus* 86. 15.

¹⁰ According to *Refutatio* vi. 29 f. the original pair are not included in the total of 30, this number being made up by the addition of two extra aeons, Christ and Holy Spirit.

generated ten additional aeons and from Man and Church twelve aeons and so came into being the total of 30 aeons which together comprised the Pleroma.¹¹ Within this Pleroma there was both unity and estrangement; unity in that the relationship within each pair of aeons is itself described as a 'pleroma',¹² and division in that only Nous could know the Forefather; to all other aeons he remained both invisible and incomprehensible.¹³ From this well-known description we are able to form a definition of the Gnostic (Valentinian) Pleroma which we might render as follows: 'It is the standard term for the fully explicated manifestation of divine characteristics whose standard number is thirty and which together form a hierarchy and constitute the divine realm and, at the same time, it stands to describe the relationship that is inherent in the divine realm.' Without relating detail we can say that the division which existed in the Pleroma was the direct cause of a crisis within the divine realm, a crisis that was essentially the disturbance of the natural order inherent in the Pleroma. This crisis led to a 'fall' of the last-created aeon, Sophia, the consequence of which was the birth of ignorance.¹⁴ The ultimate, and for our purposes of consideration most important, event in Valentinianism was the restoration of the unity within the Pleroma that had been disturbed by the 'fall' of Sophia. This restoration was achieved by the emergence of two new aeons, Christ and Holy Spirit,¹⁵ who together consolidated and strengthened the Pleroma and at the same time served as a means whereby the aeons were restored to their original order.¹⁶ Each element of the Pleroma, with the consent of Christ and Holy Spirit and the approval of the Forefather, then contributed his greatest asset to produce 'the most perfect beauty and star of the Pleroma, its perfect fruit, Jesus, whom they also call Saviour and Christ and Logos, after his father, and All, because he is derived from all'.¹⁷

It is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to establish or even trace the historical sources which contributed to the Valentinians' choice of the word Pleroma to describe the divine world. It may be pertinent though to ask the question which of necessity stands before this, namely, why did the

¹¹ The number 30 is accounted for in at least two different ways by the Valentinians: either by the 'hidden' years of Jesus between his birth and the commencement of his public ministry, or by the sum total of the hours of the workers in the vineyard (1 + 3 + 6 + 9 + 11). In both instances the figure is associated with that which is not generally known. Cf. *Adv. Haer.* I, 1, 3.

¹² *Excerpta* 32. 1: 'Ἐν πληρώματι οὖν ἐνότητος οὐσης ἕκαστος τῶν αἰώνων, ἴδιον ἔχει πλήρωμα, τὴν συζυγίαν. ὅσα οὖν ἐκ συζυγίας, φασί, προέρχεται, πληρώματά ἐστίη, ὅσα δὲ ἀπὸ ἐνὸς εἰκόνας. Cf. Heracleon, Fragment 18 on John iv. 16-18 in Origen, in *Joh.* XIII. 11.

¹³ *Adv. Haer.* I, 2, 1; *Eugnostus* 71 f.

¹⁴ *Refutatio* VI, 31, 1; *Adv. Haer.* I, 2, 2; cf. *Rheginus* 45. 15-20.

¹⁵ But see p. 385 n. 10 above.

¹⁶ *Adv. Haer.* I, 2, 5 f. According to *Refutatio* VI, 31, 5 f. another aeon, the Cross, was produced in order that the deficiency that had occurred within the Pleroma might not be made known to the perfect aeons. The Cross also separated that which was outside the Pleroma from the Pleroma itself, and was believed to contain in itself the thirty aeons at one and the same time.

¹⁷ *Adv. Haer.* I, 2, 6. Translation from W. Foerster, *Gnosis* I (ed. R. McL. Wilson) (Oxford, 1972), p. 130. Cf. also *Refutatio* VI, 32, 2.

Gnostics use this term? One possible answer to this question was supplied by R. A. Markus,¹⁸ who suggests that the answer is supplied by Hippolytus. In Hippolytus we find the bipolar character of the wholeness stressed. This wholeness is seen in sexual terms; completion requires the coming together of a couple. Each pair of aeons constituting the Pleroma is a male-female pair and this pairing itself constitutes a subordinate Pleroma. Markus cites as evidence for this *Excerpta* 30:2, 31:1 f., 32:1-3, 33:3. Now it is certainly true that Hippolytus does stress the sexual character of the emanations, and it is equally true that the Pleroma-relationship between the aeons is significant; but it is doubtful whether these facts alone are sufficient to explain the Gnostics' choice of the word, particularly since the additional evidence supplied by Theodotus is of doubtful value since on all counts Theodotus represents quite a developed form of Valentinianism. It may be that a more profitable line of investigation is one that gives due consideration to the parallelism that exists between the Gnostic idea of the Pleroma and the Stoic concept of the universe as a place where nothing that is empty is extant. The possibility of this line of inquiry producing results is enhanced by the knowledge that the Stoics were among the first, though by no means the only writers, to use *πληροῦν* or *πλήρης* in contexts where the words quite obviously conveyed the idea of an inherent unity. Examples of this use of the words will be given in the second section of this essay.

Before leaving our considerations of Pleroma in the Gnostic systems it is pertinent that we refer to another as yet unsolved problem, namely the relationship between Valentinianism and the Gospel of Truth. We have already referred to the formation of the Pleroma, the crisis within the Pleroma and its attendant consequences and to the ultimate restoration of the Pleroma as perceived in Valentinianism. It is surely not coincidental that sayings which allow a similar kind of development to be understood are found in the Gospel of Truth. These sayings are¹⁹ 22:27: 'It was a great marvel that they²⁰ were in the Father without knowing him' and 17:5-10: 'The All turned to him from whom it had proceeded. The All was within him, the inconceivable, incomprehensible, who is more precious than any thought, while not knowing the Father produced anguish and fear.'²¹ The majority of scholars accept that the Gospel of Truth has close connections with the writings of the Valentinian school²² and it is unlikely that this thesis will

¹⁸ 'Pleroma and Fulfilment', *VC* VIII (1954), 192-224, esp. pp. 202 f.

¹⁹ English translations from Foerster, *op. cit.* II, 59 and 56 respectively.

²⁰ It is not absolutely clear to whom 'they' refers. The reading in Foerster suggests that 'they' are to be identified with those who had received - or committed - error. K. Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth* (London, 1960), p. 81 n. 166, suggests that the impersonal 'they' is intended.

²¹ Cf. Grobel, *op. cit.* p. 39 n. 20-2. The All = *πᾶν* = τὸ πᾶν. This refers either to all things in the universe or to all things in the higher sphere. We take the latter meaning to be intended.

²² Cf. Foerster, *op. cit.* II, 54. Irenaeus reports in *Adv. Haer.* III, 11, 9 that the Valentinians had a writing which they called 'Gospel of Truth', but there is as yet no conclusive evidence which would identify the document found at Nag Hammadi with that referred to by the Apologist.

undergo much alteration as a result of future debate. Now the Greek loan-word πλήρωμα occurs 11 times in the Gospel,²³ and in light of the comments made above we would expect that it would refer to the divine realm – or totality – of the aeons. But this does not seem to be the case because in the majority of instances²⁴ the word appears to refer to either ‘totality’ or ‘fullness’ in a way not radically different from the way that the same word is used in John i. 16.²⁵ Someone in the future may well ask why it is that there is apparently a turning away from the established Gnostic use of πλήρωμα in this later Gnostic (Valentinian) writing.

II

The non-technical use of the word πλήρωμα is much in evidence in the ancient world. It signifies that which ‘fills out’ something, such as the contents of a building, a cup or even the human body;²⁶ in the transferred sense the term is frequently used to denote the crew, cargo or even the fighting complement of a ship.²⁷ Perhaps the most common use of the term in secular literature is in the sense of ‘complete’ ‘full-total,’ ‘completeness,’ ‘perfected life,’ ‘full of goodness (or any other abstract quality)’.²⁸ In view of what we have already said about the Valentinian Pleroma, it is interesting to find that in the secular usage the word also in some instances carried with it the idea of an incipient unity, as for example when it is used to denote the number of citizens, traders, etc. who make up and are necessary for the continuation of a township.²⁹ The word also occasionally is used to denote the completeness or even the completion of a building.³⁰ In summary fashion we may say that in secular literature the term is used to signify (i) the content of an object, (ii) the fullness, completeness, unity, inclusiveness or perfection of something, and (iii) the complement of an object. But it should be stressed that the meanings or significances of the term as it appears in secular literature are in no way clearly delineated. Any difference in meaning that may have once been intended in the non-technical use of the term is now no longer clearly discernible.

In Philo the word occurs in instances which, though few in number, do not differ substantially from the various secular uses already described. He uses the term to denote the contents, material or spiritual, with which an

²³ xvi. 35, xxxiv. 30, 36, xxxv. 5, 29, 36, xxxvi. 10, xl. 33, xli. 14, 16, xliii. 16.

²⁴ Grobel, *op. cit.* p. 35 n. 8, argues that the references ‘most likely’ Gnostic are xli. 14 and xliii. 16. To these the present author would add xvi. 35.

²⁵ So Grobel, *loc. cit.*

²⁶ Cf. for example Euripides, *Ion* 1412, *Cyclops* 208, Hippocrates, *Aer* 7.

²⁷ Herodotus 8:45; Plato, *Critias* 119 B.

²⁸ Cf. for example Aristophanes, *Vespaes* 660; Appian, *Mithridates* 47: 185; Herodotus 3:22.

²⁹ Aristotle, *Politics* 3. 13-4. 4; Plato, *Republic* 2, 371.

³⁰ *Greek Inscriptions* II (ed. N. Koehler), II, 224.

object can be filled, thus he can describe the contents of the Ark as 'Pleroma';³¹ he also uses the term to denote totality.³²

The Stoic philosophers were certainly at home with the thought or general understanding of a 'filled' space. In view of our brief survey of the secular material one would quite naturally expect that this thought or idea would be expressed by πλήρωμα. But this is not the case. In no passage in the Stoic philosophers is this thought reproduced with this word. The term only occurs in the form πληροῦν or else the adjectival πλήρες; in both instances the terms stand as the negation of τὸ κενόν.³³ We have already noted that in both the secular literature and in Philo πλήρωμα suggested not only the thought of 'filling' or 'completion', but also carried with it the idea of unity. The same is true in general for the occurrences of πληροῦν or πλήρες in Stoic philosophy where both terms frequently stand in association with ἠνῶσθαι.³⁴

πλήρωμα also occurs quite frequently in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the most important tractates in this regard being 12 and 16.

In tractate 12 πλήρωμα stands in close relationship to ζωή and κόσμος. In the world death has ceased to exist and simultaneously the Father has willed that not only all things in the Cosmos, but also that the Cosmos itself should be a living being.³⁵ The worldly-immanent god (ὁ δεύτερος θεός) is described as ὁ δὲ σύμπας κόσμος οὗτος, ὁ μέγας θεός, καὶ τοῦ μείζονος εἰκῶν . . . πλήρωμά ἐστιν τῆς ζωῆς. In this instance πλήρωμα must signify the entire world, in so far as it is a living entity (ζῶον), animated and unified by means of the divine principle. Further examination of the tractate reveals that the formulae τὸ ἓν, τὸ πᾶν, τὰ πάντα, κόσμος, πλήρωμα and even θεός are interchangeable and consequently do not change from this initial meaning; it is only in the reciprocal association that this sense of 'totality' of 'fullness' arises. In tractate 16, a tractate which actually carries the title *περὶ οἰκονομίας τοῦ πλήρωματος*, the monistic pantheism that was evident in tractate 12 is further developed, particularly with respect to the πλήρωμα concept, with emphasis on the antithesis between the 'One' and 'all things'. The theme of the author is the unity between these two entities: every part is One and all parts are in the One and the One is in all parts. As is obvious from the text, the universe, which is both 'One' and 'all', is not πληθός but

³¹ *De Vita Mosis* 2. 63. F. Mussner, *Christus, das All und die Kirche* (Trier, 1955), p. 49, understands this reference to mean 'hugely full', but in view of *De praem. et poen.* 11:65, where the word occurs in the phrase γενομένη δὲ πλήρωμα ἀρετῶν, this is unlikely. It is more likely that in 2:63 the term is intended to convey the idea of completeness or great quantity.

³² *De praem. et poen.* 18: 109.

³³ As, for example, the comment of Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 1. 21, 5: ἄλλὰ ἀνάστασιν εἶναι καὶ πεπληρωσθαι πάντα καὶ μηδὲν εἶναι κενόν. Cf. also Aet. *Placita* 1. 18, 5-20. 1, as cited by Ernst, *op. cit.* pp. 10 f. The conception of a filled-world is developed by Philo in *Leg. alleg.* III. 4 and is also found in *Corpus Hermeticum* 16:3.

³⁴ Diog. Laer. VII. 140; Galenus, *De differentia pulsuum* 3:6, as cited by Ernst, *op. cit.* p. 11.

³⁵ The same association of pleroma, cosmos and life is also found in *Asclepius* 29 f.

πλήρωμα. These are not the only occurrences of the term in the *Corpus*, but they are the most significant and the most informative. The concept appears to be a development of the monistic pantheism of the Stoics, but at the same time one cannot ignore that a dualistic tendency is also present which itself may point towards the beginning of the Gnostic understanding of the term. A second important observation can also be made at this point: inherent in the use of the πλήρωμα concept in the *Hermetica* is the idea of unity.³⁶

Our brief examination of πλήρωμα in this section allows us to conclude that there was a widespread non-technical use of the term that was current prior to, during and later than the first Christian century.

III

We can now turn our attention to the use made of the term in the NT. πλήρωμα occurs seventeen times in the NT, and in ten of these instances the term needs little or no explanation and the question of a possible Gnostic influence does not arise. The problem of Gnostic association is, however, more pertinent in the remaining seven occurrences, all of which are to be found in the epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians. It is with these texts that the bulk of this section will be concerned. But first we must comment briefly on the ten unquestioned usages of the term.

(i) Mark ii. 21 (par. Matt. ix. 16; Luke v. 36) οὐδεις ἐπίβλημα ῥάκουσ ἀγνάφου ἐπιράπτει ἐπὶ ἰμάτιον παλαιόν· εἰ δὲ μή, αἶρει τὸ πλήρωμα ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τὸ καινὸν τοῦ παλαιοῦ, καὶ χεῖρον σχίσμα γίνεται. Here the general sense is obvious: the new and the old are irreconcilable – the new cannot be used to repair old forms. The more specific sense of πλήρωμα is less obvious. The most likely interpretation, following Lohmeyer,³⁷ is that πλήρωμα is synonymous with ἐπίβλημα, and thus has the sense of 'that which completes or restores'.

(ii) Mark vi. 43 καὶ ἦσαν κλάσματα δώδεκα κοφίνων πληρώματα. Here the sense of πλήρωμα is given by Matt. xiv. 20 where the substantive is replaced by the adjectival πλήρης. The term in Mark vi. 43 must then mean 'full'.

(iii) Mark viii. 20 πόσων σπυρίδων πληρώματα κλασμάτων ἦρατε. The same meaning is intended here as in Mark vi. 43; πλήρωμα has the same significance as πλήρεις in the previous verse and quite obviously describes the state of 'fullness' which the baskets attained.

(iv) John i. 16 ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν. This is the only occurrence of the term in the Johannine writings. Here its meaning is dependent upon πλήρης of v. 14. It is best to understand the adjective

³⁶ The same conclusion is also reached by Ernst, *op. cit.* p. 15, Markus, *op. cit.* p. 201 and J. Dupont, *Gnosis* (Paris, 1949), p. 468.

³⁷ *Das Evangelium des Markus* (Göttingen, 1959), p. 61.

in *v.* 14 as modifying λόγος and, by implication, μονογενής, and so to understand the πλήρωμα of *v.* 16 as referring to the richness of the divine Logos.³⁸

(v) Rom. xi. 12 εἰ δὲ τὸ παράπτωμα αὐτῶν πλοῦτος κόσμος καὶ τὸ ἥττημα αὐτῶν πλοῦτος ἔθνῶν, πόσῳ μᾶλλον τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῶν. Here πλήρωμα stands in antithesis to ἥττημα and therefore must have the significance of 'full strength', 'entire complement'. It is also possible, in view of xiii. 10, that the term could mean 'complete fulfilment'. If this is so we would translate: 'when they (the Gentiles) completely fulfil the will of God'. But the former possibility is to be preferred on the basis of the proximity of this verse to xi. 25 where the obvious sense is 'totality'.

(vi) Rom. xi. 25 ὅτι πῶρως ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν ἄχρισ οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθη. As we suggested above, πλήρωμα here can hardly carry any other significance than that of 'totality', 'full strength' and is quite positively equivalent to πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (Rom. i. 5).

(vii) Rom. xiii. 10...πλήρωμα οὖν νόμου ἢ ἀγάπης. The intended sense here, in line with other Pauline statements which express the same idea without resort to the πλήρωμα term,³⁹ is that of 'fulfilment', 'summation'.

(viii) Rom. xv. 29 οἶδα δὲ ὅτι ἐρχόμενος πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν πληρώματι εὐλογίας Χριστοῦ ἐλεύσομαι. The language is vague but the sense is that Paul expects that both he and his hosts will share in the superabundant blessings of Christ. The same thought is expressed in a somewhat stronger fashion in I Thess. i. 5.

(ix) I Cor. x. 26...τοῦ κυρίου γὰρ ἡ γῆ καὶ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῆς. This citation of Ps. xxiii. 1 (LXX)⁴⁰ provides evidence as to the frequent similar use of πλήρωμα in the LXX.⁴¹ The obvious meaning here is 'totality', 'all that is in it'. It is possible that in the Greek-speaking world the OT citation would be understood as 'superabundance' or 'excess'.⁴²

(x) Gal. iv. 4 ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, and similarly Eph. i. 10 εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν. Both passages use πλήρωμα in exactly the same way, though it is likely that a theological distinction is intended with the change from χρόνος to καιρός. Irrespective of this, the sense intended in both texts is such that πλήρωμα must indicate 'completeness'.

The interpretations we have suggested for the above passages are not the only ones possible, to be sure. But it is significant that, with the possible

³⁸ A different view is expressed by R. Bultmann, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St John* (Oxford, 1971), p. 65, who argues that πλήρωμα here should be interpreted with reference to the pantheistic cosmology of the gnostic systems. But in view of the frequent OT references to 'fullness' as 'the fullness of grace, mercy' etc., as in Pss. v. 8, li. 3, lxix. 17, this view is to be rejected.

³⁹ Cf. Gal. v. 14; Rom. xiii. 8. In both instances the same idea, that of fulfilling the Law, is expressed by πληρόω, thus suggesting that Paul does not differentiate theologically between the two concepts.

⁴⁰ Cf. also Pss. 1. 12, lxxxix. 11, xcvi. 11 and Jer. viii. 16, where similar phrases occur.

⁴¹ πλήρωμα occurs some thirteen times in the LXX: I Chron. xvi. 32; Ps. xxiii. 1, xlix. 12, lxxxviii. 11, xcvi. 11, xcvi. 7; Eccl. iv. 6; Cant. v. 12; Jer. viii. 16, xxix. 2; Ezek. xii. 19, xix. 7, xxx. 12. The term translates the MT מִלְּמָוֶה and מִלְּמָוֶה.

⁴² Cf. Ernst, *op. cit.* p. 68.

exception of Bultmann's comments on John i. 16, there is no suggestion by any major exegete that the use of πλήρωμα in any of these texts is in any way related to the normal use of the same term in the Gnostic literature. The same cannot be said, however, for the occurrences of the term in either the Ephesian or Colossian epistles. In these letters the exact meaning of the verse in question as well as, more particularly, the πλήρωμα concept is much discussed and in each case a Gnostic interpretation is only one of the possible solutions offered by exegetes. It is convenient to list these well-known texts at this juncture. They are:

Col. i. 19 f. ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν.

Col. ii. 9 f. ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς, καὶ ἔστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι.

Eph. i. 22 f. καὶ αὐτόν ἔδωκεν κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, ἣτις ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου.

Eph. iii. 19 γυνῶναί τε τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς γνώσεως ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα πληρωθῆτε εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ.

Eph. iv. 10–13 ὁ καταβὰς αὐτός ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβὰς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα. καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους... πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ... εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

With regard to Col. i. 19 and its near-parallel ii. 9, it needs little prompting to see, in the light of our earlier discussion of πλήρωμα in its Valentinian context, that the author of the epistle may have been setting out, or using traditions which set out, a doctrine that we would now describe as Valentinian, or, conversely, he may well have been consciously using the technical language of earlier Gnosticism or of Gnostic traditions, as a polemic against this selfsame heresy. Of these two possibilities the latter is more likely in view of the reference to σωματικῶς in ii. 9 which could be interpreted as 'organized into one body' and thus be intended as a deliberate counter to the Gnostic concept of the Pleroma as comprising a series of different, if not entirely separate, entities. But a much simpler exegesis can be equally well supposed for both passages – of Christ it is uniquely true that the entirety of God's nature resides in him. In this case σωματικῶς may mean nothing more than 'in a bodily person' and then of course it would refer to the historical Jesus. This interpretation is supported by the fact that πλήρωμα frequently carried with it the concept of unity in its use by the secular authors. If this is so in Colossians, then the word is applied to Christ in order to clarify and describe his unique relationship with God; a use not dissimilar to that which underlies John i. 16.⁴³

⁴³ The parallelism between these two texts is noted by many exegetes; cf. for example G. Delling, 'πλήρωμα', *T.D.N.T.* vi, 303 f.; C. F. D. Moule, "Fullness" and "Fill" in the New Testament', *S.J.T.* iv (1951), 78–86, esp. p. 82; Ernst, *op. cit.* pp. 69 f.

Eph. i. 23 presents its own particular problems of both translation and exegesis which we can summarize as follows: πλήρωμα: does it have active or passive significance?; πληρουμένου: is it passive, middle or middle with active significance?; and, finally, what is the relationship of τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν to the rest of the verse, that is, is it to be taken in an adverbial or adjectival sense? All these separate problems demand solution if an adequate exegesis of the verse is to be offered.⁴⁴ If we accept a translation such as the one put forward by C. F. D. Moule⁴⁵ and read 'God gave Christ to be Head over all things to the Church, which is his body, and to be the fullness of him (that is, God) that filleth all in all' then there is an obvious parallelism to the Valentinian description of Jesus as the perfect fruit of the Pleroma, that is, the one in whom is gathered together the unity of the Pleroma. Although Moule does not accept a Gnostic interpretation of this text, Schlier, who offers a translation not very different, does make a very positive identification of the πλήρωμα term here, as well as in Colossians, with Gnosticism. He writes:⁴⁶ 'Von der Sache her und speziell von der Verbindungs- und also Erlöser-Urmenschvorstellung her ist kein Zweifel, dass der Begriff Pleroma ein neues Zeugnis für den 'gnostischen' Sprachgebrauch des Epheser- (und Kolosser)- briefs ist'. But another interpretation which does not allow this parallelism to exist is equally possible, namely that proposed by J. A. Robinson⁴⁷ and followed by R. Yates and the present author, which takes πληρουμένου as passive, πλήρωμα as a noun with mainly active significance and τὸ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν as adverbial and equivalent to the classical παντάπασιν. The sense is then that the Church is the completion of Christ (πλήρωμα being taken as in apposition to σῶμα and not to the αὐτόν of the previous verse).⁴⁸ The objection that this interpretation normally meets, namely that it supposes a Christ that is in some way deficient, is answered when we further interpret this verse in light of the Jewish doctrine of Inclusive Personality.⁴⁹ The same theological interpretation can be given to Eph. iv. 13: 'When all the saints have come to the unity which is their destined goal (that is, to a community unified in – and by – faith), then Christ will have been completed.' The thought here is that the Church in so far as it is both the instrument and medium of the πλήρωμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ

⁴⁴ For a survey of the problems and their possible solutions cf. R. Yates, 'Ephesians 1:23 – A Reconsideration', *E. T.* LXXXIII (1971–72), 146–51. This article is a condensation of the same author's unpublished M.Litt. thesis of the same title, Cambridge University, 1969.

⁴⁵ So 'A note on Ephesians 1:22, 23', *E. T.* LX (1948–49), 53; "'Fullness" and "Fill"', *op. cit.* pp. 82 f.; *Colossians and Philemon* (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 169 ff. In the last-mentioned note Moule is less certain of this interpretation of Eph. 1. 23 than in the earlier works. Moule totally rejects the possibility of any Gnostic influence lying behind this text although his translation itself does not seem to exclude this possibility.

⁴⁶ H. Schlier and V. Warnach, *Die Kirche im Epheserbrief* (Münster, 1949), p. 110; cf. also his *Brief an die Epheser* (Düsseldorf, 1971?), p. 97.

⁴⁷ *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London, 1903), pp. 42 ff., 255 ff.

⁴⁸ See n. 44 above.

⁴⁹ The same idea of inclusive personality is expressed more clearly in Eph. ii. 6, 22.

is the sphere which serves both to cause the completion (πλήρωμα) of the universe and the increase (τέλειος) of the corporate body.

Eph. iii. 19, particularly in view of the use of εἰς and the presence of γνῶσις in the text, certainly can be interpreted in line with Gnostic ideas. But it is also quite possible that what the author intends here is not essentially different from that which he says in iv. 8-13. This interpretation is considerably strengthened when it is seen that ἵνα πληρωθῆτε εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ is intended as both the summation and consequence of the two previous ἵνα clauses (*vv.* 16, 18). Here as in iv. 8-13, the theme is 'growth' or 'increase'. The significance of εἰς is important: it emphasizes the fact that there is both 'journey' and 'objective'; the requirement for the former is πίστις and the latter is nothing less than the τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ, the completion that God offers.

The situation that we have reached thus far is that we have defined πλήρωμα in its technical or Gnostic (Valentinian) sense and at the same time have shown that the non-technical use of the term also has a long history. In the third section we have demonstrated that it is quite possible, on exegetical grounds alone, that it is the non-technical sense that is present in all the debated texts in Ephesians and Colossians. The point is perhaps beyond comprehensive proof but we believe that at least we can demonstrate that the greater probability does in fact lie with the non-technical use of the term. With this intention in mind we now turn briefly to an examination of the use made of the NT πλήρωμα texts in the extant Gnostic literature.

IV

From the extant literature it appears that the only NT πλήρωμα text definitely used by the Gnostics was Col. ii. 9, though it is possible, but less certain, that they also used Col. i. 19. There is no evidence that the Gnostics ever used the Ephesian πλήρωμα texts.⁵⁰ The texts appear as follows in the Gnostic literature:

Adv. Haer. i. 3, 4

That the Saviour who is from All is himself Everything they would find indicated in the expression 'Every male that opens the womb': he was everything and opened the womb of the desire that belonged to the aeon who fell into passion and which was banished from the Pleroma. They also call this the Second Ogdoad... And for this reason, they affirm, Paul said plainly 'He is the All', and again, 'All things are unto him and from him are all things', and again, 'In him dwells the entire fullness of the Godhead' (ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος) and 'All is summed up by God in Christ'. Thus do they interpret (these passages) and others in the same way.

⁵⁰ The same cannot be said for the epistle in general; cf. for example *Excerpta* 7:4, 42:1, 43:5; *De Resurrectione* 45:24-8.

Adv. Haer. 1. 12, 3

There is great contention among them about the Saviour as well. They say that he came into being out of all, and for that reason is called the Well-pleasing, since it pleased the entire Pleroma to praise the Father through him (διὸ καὶ Εὐδοκητὸν καλεῖσθαι, ὅτι πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα ἠϋδόκησεν δι' αὐτοῦ δοξάσαι τὸν Πατέρα).

Ex. Theod. 31. 1

But if he who came down was the good pleasure of the Whole (εὐδοκία τοῦ ὅλου ἦν), for 'in him was the entire Pleroma in bodily form' (ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα ἦν σωματικῶς) – and himself suffered. . .

Refutatio v. 12, 4 f. (with reference to the Peratae)

And they say there came down from on high, from the unoriginate being, the first division of the world, when the time was otherwise complete, in the time of Herod. . . a three-natured man called Christ, having three bodies and three powers, possessing in himself the complexities and powers proceeding from the three parts of the world. And this, he says, is the meaning of the saying 'The whole fullness determined to dwell in him in bodily form' and in him is all the godhead of the trinity divided as aforesaid. (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα εὐδόκησε κατοικῆσαι ἐν αὐτῷ σωματικῶς καὶ πᾶσά ἐστιν ἐν αὐτῷ ἢ θεότης. . .)

Refutatio VIII. 13, 1 (with reference to Monoimus)

Now unity, the single stroke, he says, is also the number ten: for this power of the single stroke, the letter Iota, is also the number two, and three, and four, and five, and six, and seven, and eight, and nine, and so up to ten; for these, he says, are the numbers, so many ways divided, that reside in the simple, incomposite, single stroke of the letter Iota. This is (the meaning of) the saying 'For the whole fullness was pleased to reside in the Son of Man in bodily form' (ὅτι πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα ἠϋδόκησε κατοικῆσαι ἐπὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου σωματικῶς). For, he says, these compositions of numbers (deriving) from the simple incomposite single stroke of the Iota have become bodily substance.

In *Adv. Haer.* 1. 3, 4 it is notable that σωματικῶς is absent from the reference to Col. ii. 9. This is because the Colossian text is, according to Irenaeus, used by the Valentinians to prove that the Saviour is derived from Aeons and that the Saviour is himself everything. The text is not used explicitly to prove that the totality of the Pleroma was present in Christ. The use of πλήρωμα in *Adv. Haer.* 1. 3, 4 is then dependent upon the Colossian passage, though with the significant change of emphasis. *Adv. Haer.* 1, 12, 3 conflates Col. i. 19 and ii. 9. But again here there is a weakening of the πλήρωμα concept; no longer does the πλήρωμα dwell in Jesus, but instead it praises the Father through the aeon the Saviour, who is also called Well-being.

Ex. Theod. 31. 1 also seems to depend on a conflation of the two Colossian passages, but even so there is again a weakening of the πλήρωμα concept inasmuch as the text omits any reference to κατοικέω. The citations from Hippolytus also seem to depend on a conflation of the Colossian texts. Here in fact the evidence is stronger in that both the Peratae and Monoimus

seem to combine key words which are found in the distinct though related sayings in Colossians, as well as having similar word order. This could well be explained as a result of a tradition which grew up in dependence on Colossians.⁵¹ The fact that in *Refutatio* x. 10, 4, where the views of the Peratae are summarized, the Colossian text appears as ἐν ᾧ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς indicates not only that Hippolytus knew Col. ii. 9 but also that in the earlier citation, v. 12, 4, the reference is to a conflated version of Col. i. 19 and ii. 9 which was used by the Peratae.⁵²

The use made by the Gnostics of the Colossian texts coupled with the fact that they do not appear to use any other of the fifteen NT πλήρωμα texts suggests to this author that the Gnostics failed where many an NT exegete has succeeded: they failed to recognize incipient Gnosticism in these πλήρωμα texts. The NT use of the πλήρωμα term is then without exception related to the use of the term in secular literature; in no instance is the NT use of the word in any way related to or influenced by Gnosticism.⁵³

P. D. OVERFIELD

New Test. Stud. 25, pp. 396–398

A SUPPOSED SYNAGOGUE INSCRIPTION

Investigating possible analogies to the remarkable address in II John 1: ἐκλεκτῆ κυρίᾳ, I lit upon the book of B. Lifshitz, *Donateurs et fondateurs dans les synagogues juives. Répertoire des dédicaces grecques relatives à la construction et à la réfection des synagogues* (Cahiers de la Revue Biblique, 7), 1967. The inscription no. 35, pp. 36–7, from Amastris (today Amasra) in Paphlagonia, runs as follows: Θεῷ ἀνεικίτῳ καὶ τῇ κυρίᾳ προσευχῇ εὐξάμενος καὶ ἐπιτυχῶν ἀνέθηκα Αὐρήλιος Πρωτόκτητος εὐχαριστήριον. Lifshitz gives this translation of the text: 'Au Dieu invincible et à l'honorable prosequue, Aurelius Protôktétos, qui avait fait un vœu et avait vu sa demande exaucée, a dédié (cela) en témoignage de reconnaissance.'

⁵¹ So F. Borsch, *The Christian and Gnostic Son of Man* (London, 1972), p. 66.

⁵² Cf. O. Michel, 'οικοδομή', *T.D.N.T.* v, 154. Michel says that Col. i. 19 and ii. 9 'obviously belong to the fixed liturgical and kerygmatic stock of the community'.

⁵³ Part of Rom. xi. 25, though significantly not the actual πλήρωμα clause, is cited in *Ex. Theod.* 56: 3 ff., and Eph. iv. 9 is cited at vii. 4 and xliii. 5 and is alluded to in ii. 1 and iv. 2; but again in no instance does the reference include the clause ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα (Eph. iv. 10b).