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The Uniqueness of "The Thunder: The Perfect Mind"

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The Uniqueness of "The Thunder: The Perfect Mind"

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Although it is included in The Nag Hammadi Library, a complete collection of Gnostic Scriptures, *The Thunder: The Perfect Mind* is unique in its style and composition and some scholars even debate its classification as Gnostic. Regardless of its philosophical influences, this distinctive work contains both timeless principles and culturally defined statements that legitimize its analysis and consideration as a worthwhile piece of literature."



Katie Kreutter

The Uniqueness of “The Thunder: The Perfect Mind”

Although it is included in The Nag Hammadi Library, a complete collection of Gnostic Scriptures, *The Thunder: The Perfect Mind* is unique in its style and composition and some scholars even debate its classification as Gnostic. Regardless of its philosophical influences, this distinctive work contains both timeless principles and culturally defined statements that legitimize its analysis and consideration as a worthwhile piece of literature.

The text is filled with ambiguity on multiple levels. At first consideration, the term “Perfect Mind” in the title seems to reflect traditional Gnostic thought in the belief that one can be enlightened by accessing secret wisdom and knowledge available only to select persons. However, as scholar George W. MacRae states, its context within the entire title references the highest god “in Greek myth, in the Hebrew Bible, and elsewhere” (The Nag Hammadi 296).

This broad allusion to a variety of cultural situations also suggests, as MacRae contends, that the body of work “contains no distinctively Christian, Jewish, or Gnostic illusions and does not seem clearly to presuppose any particular Gnostic myth” (The Nag Hammadi 296). According to scholar Douglas M. Parrott, the phrase “Perfect Mind” seems to be indicative of “the Stoic notion of cosmic Pneuma, the active, intelligent element in all things” (296). While the text is written entirely in the first person, the speaker is not identified apart from obscure references to a female individual, and there appears to be no indication of the audience to whom it may have been intended. Nevertheless, Parrott maintains that there exists a commonly held belief that this female speaker is in fact “a combination of the higher and lower Sophia figures found in Gnostic literature” (296). Indeed, the text does seem to contain several parallels to the “Sophia” (wisdom) literature of the Old Testament and apocrypha in its style, which is at times paradoxical, and use of couplets. While the text speaks of a higher entity with the phrase “I am the one whose God is great,” it also contains the statement “I am the one who alone

exists, and I have no one who will judge me” (303). It also incorporates numerous “I am” statements that parallel the gospel of John, even though the figure of Jesus is never referenced. These statements are often antithetical to one another, such as the phrase “I am knowledge and ignorance” and “I am the whore and the holy one” (297, 298). MacRae proposes that these seemingly contradictory phrases may have been intended by the author to assert “the totally otherworldly transcendence of the revealer” (296).

While the purpose of this book is not overtly described in the text, it is evident that the author is addressing a particular culture and setting in history with references to Greeks, barbarians and Egypt that are at times quite passionate. For instance, the speaker questions why she has been hated by the Greeks, and declares herself “the judgment of the Greeks and of the barbarians” (299). The text never clarifies exactly to whom the term ‘barbarians’ applies, although it is apparent that this group is associated with the Greeks and their opposition to the speaker in some capacity.

Although the majority of this text seems to describe the nature of the speaker, there are a few passages that seem to articulate general principles for living, much like the Old Testament book of Proverbs. For example, the speaker specifies that “what is inside of [a person] is what is outside of [a person]” and what is seen inside is seen outside (302). This principle seems to reflect one of Jesus’ sayings that declared a person’s treasure will be where a person’s heart is located. In other words, the condition of a person’s inner being will directly impact their outer being and their ability to function in relationship with others in society.

There are many components of *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* that allow for a complicated and thought-provoking text that warrants careful consideration in an effort to better understand its deeper meanings. While I cannot begin to fully comprehend the text, I recognize in its vagueness key principles and ideas that reflect a particular culture and that are influenced by other patterns of philosophical and religious thought. In my opinion, the text exemplifies well the nature of God’s wisdom as incomprehensible and magnificent, much like the book of Proverbs or the Wisdom of Solomon. I feel that it is necessary to examine non-canonical texts in order to better understand the development of Scripture and how the thoughts of the ancients can still illumine and share insight today.

Work Cited

Robinson, James M., editor. *The Nag Hammadi Library: The Definitive Translation of the Gnostic Scriptures Complete in One Volume*. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990.