

early Christians might have interpreted the arguments of Hebrews concerning the priesthood.²²⁶⁶

- E-238** Sterling notes the high regard given Philo's writings by early Christians, "who preserved about two-thirds of his known corpus."²²⁶⁷ Legends of contact between Philo and the Christian community were preserved by Eusebius,²²⁶⁸ and at least one pseudepigraphal document purported to relate his (extremely implausible) conversion.

For a largely negative analysis of possible influences of the Greco-Roman mysteries on Paul's baptismal theology, see Wedderburn.²²⁶⁹ Johnson is more open-minded in his exploration of possible relationships between Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian initiations. He acknowledges:²²⁷⁰

... four basic approaches to the study of earliest Christianity in the context of the mysteries. The first is to ignore them completely and pay attention only to Jewish antecedents... The second is to recognize the pervasiveness of mystery practice and language, but refuse to grant it any influence for nascent Christianity, reserving that for later "Catholic" development... The third is to subsume early Christianity into the mysteries more or less completely²²⁷¹... The fourth [Johnson's position] is to be fundamentally open to the ways in which the symbolic worlds of the mysteries and Christianity may have intersected, without demanding causal connections in the strict sense and respecting the distinctiveness of the diverse cults.

- E-239** Regarding the fate of Jewish mystical groups such as those found at Dura, Goodenough writes:

... from direct evidence we know nothing; but it would seem that the leaders of this Judaism from the sixth to the eighth centuries had a great change of attitude. They learned Hebrew... [and as] they did so, they could for the first time learn to pray in Hebrew, to read the Scriptures in Hebrew, and to study the rabbinical writings... At the same time, they not only stopped using the symbolic vocabulary..., but, wherever possible, destroyed it by clipping out the offensive forms... Christians preserved Philo and many Jewish apocalyptic books, but the medieval Jews so neglected the great mass of literature that Greek- and Iranian-speaking Jews must have produced in the whole ancient world that from Jews we have no trace of it left at all... It remains to be seen whether medieval Jewish *Kabbalah*... represents a survival and amplification of this more general Jewish mysticism, or was freshly created by the influence of medieval Christian mystics, or came down from *Merkabah* beginnings, or, as I suspect, was in some way a mixture of all these.²²⁷²

- E-240** Ulansey characterizes Mark's account of the opening of the heavens at Christ's baptism²²⁷³ and the rending of the temple veil at his death²²⁷⁴ as constituting a powerful symbolic *inclusio* bracketing the entire gospel, and underscoring the message that the way opened by Christ is now available to all men.²²⁷⁵ In this connection, Nibley writes:²²⁷⁶

The *Gospel of Philip* depicts the rending of the veil not as the abolition of the temple ordinances, as the church fathers fondly supposed, but of the opening of those ordinances to all the righteous of Israel, "in order that we might enter into... the truth of it." "The priesthood can still go within the veil with the high priest (i.e., the Lord)." We are allowed to see what is behind the veil, and "we enter into it in our weakness, through signs and tokens which the world despises."²²⁷⁷

MacRae finds the *Gospel of Philip* passage Nibley cites:²²⁷⁸

... interesting for the way in which it weaves together biblical exegesis of many different passages from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The guiding image of this picture is the notion of passing into the sanctuary of the temple, that is to say, passing into the heavenly presence of God, by crossing through the veil by accomplishing the rite of the bridal chamber. The *Gospel of*

2266 M. Barker, *Who was Melchizedek*.

2267 G. E. Sterling, *Philo*, p. 297.

2268 Eusebius, *History*, 2:17, p. 50.

2269 A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism*, especially pp. 90-163.

2270 L. T. Johnson, *Religious Experience*, pp. 84-85 n. 72.

2271 See a refutation of this position in J. Z. Smith, *Drudgery*.

2272 E. R. Goodenough, *Summary*, p. 198.

2273 Mark 1:10.

2274 Mark 15:38.

2275 D. Ulansey, *Heavenly Veil*.

2276 H. W. Nibley, *Message 2005*, p. 444.

2277 See W. W. Isenberg, *Philip*, 85:1-20, p. 159.

2278 G. W. MacRae, *House of Revelation*, pp. 185-186.