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## II SOME TEXTS OF ENCRATITE AND GnosticIZING ORIGIN.

In this section we discuss a number of texts in which Plato's view on the relation between marriage (as procreation) and immortality is contradicted or rejected—without, however, being explicitly referred to. All these texts date from the christian era, though there may be doubts about the specifically christian origin and character of some of them.

1. *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* (APTh).

The Acts of Paul were probably written towards the end of the second century by a priest from Asia Minor, who was anxious to increase Paul's popularity among the Encratites by whom he was disliked for his advice to Timothy (1 Tim. 4, 2-3).

In the APTh the preaching of St. Paul is characterized as "the word of God on continence and resurrection" (λόγος θεοῦ περὶ ἐγκρατείας καὶ ἀναστάσεως 5). It is both encratic and eschatological. His opponents, Demas and Hermogenes, accuse him of depriving young men from their wives, and young maidens from their husbands (12). This was the encratic ideal; its motivation was eschatological: "You have no part in the resurrection unless you remain pure, and do not spoil the flesh, but keep it pure" (12). The author is apparently trying to give his own version of 1 Cor. 7; this is also clear from the Beatitudes in ch. 5 and 6, where we have two unmistakable allusions to this pauline text: "Blessed are they who possess women as if they do not possess them," and: "Blessed are they who for the love of God have left the worldly fashion" (τοῦ σχήματος τοῦ κοσμικοῦ, cf. 1 Cor. 7, 31). But the relation between continence and the eschaton has undergone a very significant change: whereas in 1 Cor. 7 continence is motivated by the nearness of the Parousia, and the passing away of the fashion of this world, in the APTh it is not so much the coming of the end of this world and of that which keeps it going (marriage) which makes continence an urgent thing, but the resurrection is presented as the otherworldly remuneration for those who keep their flesh pure; continence has become a condition of the resurrection<sup>7</sup>. There lies also a typically encratic radicalization in the fact that the resurrection is reserved to those who have practised continence. This encratic teaching of Paul is further elucidated in ch. 17 where he says that God sent him in order that he should snatch man away from corruption (φθοράς) and impurity (ἀκαθαρσίας) and from all lust (ἡδονῆς) and death (θανάτου); all these terms seem to refer to sexual intercourse in marriage. As continence leads to resurrection, so (sexual) lust and impurity pave the way for death and corruption.

To Paul's encratic teaching Demas and Hermogenes oppose a radically different view; they say to Thamyris, to whom Thecla was given in marriage: "And we shall teach you on the resurrection, where of he (scil. Paul) says that it will take place, that it already has taken place in the children that we have, and that we rise by the knowledge of the true God". The idea that the resurrection has already taken place, is not new: it is stigmatized as the heresy of Hymenaeus and Philetus in 2 Tim. 2, 18. But whereas this NT passage remains vague on the nature of this resurrection, the author of the APTh, who must have had this text in mind, gives a twofold interpretation: first, there is a resurrection, that consists in having a posterity, and secondly, man rises in reaching the knowledge of the true God. The former thesis is the exact counterpart of the 'pauline' (= encratic) claim that the *future* resurrection is only for those who abstain from procreation. The second we seem to be entitled to call a specifically gnostic view, as attested by the heresiologists<sup>8</sup>. So Paul's

7. cf. P. NAGEL, *Die Motivierung der Askese in der alten Kirche und der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, Text. u. Unters. 95, Berlin, 1966, p. 27-28.

8. Ir. A.H. 2, 31, 2; Tert. *De Resurr.* 19 and 22; *De Praescr.* 33, 7, where the opinion is ascribed to the Valentinians; Hipp. fr. syr. 1, GCS 1, p. 251.

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