Chapter 7 – “Treasures in the Heavens”  
[Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Vol.1, Ch.7, p.171-188. [From The Old Testament & Related Studies.]  
As Christianity has been deesschologized and demythologized in our own day, so in the Fourth Century it was thoroughly dematerialized, and ever since then anything smacking of “cosmism,” that is, tending to associate religion with the physical universe in any way, has been instantly condemned by Christian and Jewish clergy alike as paganism and blasphemy. Joseph Smith was taken to task for the crude literalism of his religion—not only talking with angels like regular people, but giving God the aspect attributed to him by the primitive prophets of Israel, and, strangest of all, unhesitatingly bringing other worlds and universes into the picture. Well, some of the early Christian and Jewish writers did the same thing; this weakness in them has been explained away as a Gnostic aberration, and yet today there is a marked tendency in all the churches to support the usual bloodless abstractions and stereotyped moral sermons with a touch of apocalyptic realism, which indeed now supplies the main appeal of some of the most sentimentally successful evangelists.  
Over a century ago, J. P. Migne argued that the medieval legends of the Saints were far less prone to mislead the faithful than those scientifically oriented apocrypha of the Early Church, since the former were the transparent inventions of popular fantasy that could never lead thinking people astray, while the latter by their air of factual reporting and claims to scientific plausibility led the early Christians into all manner of extravagant speculation, drawing the faithful astray in many directions. To appreciate the strength of their own position, Latter-day Saints should not be without some knowledge of both these traditions. Since the “cosmist” doctrines have been almost completely neglected, here we offer a look at some of them.  
The canonical writings and the Apocrypha have a good deal to say about “treasures in the heavens.” If we compare the “treasures” passages in a wide sample of these writings, including those of Qumran, Nag Hammadi and the Mandaeans, it becomes apparent that “treasures in the heavens” is a part of a much larger picture, a “cosmist” view of the plan of salvation that was rejected by the official Christianity and Judaism that emerged triumphant in the Fourth Century but seems to have been prevalent throughout the Near East in an earlier period. There is no better approach to the study of this strange and intriguing doctrine than an examination of the Treasures in Heaven. We begin with the surprising fact that the Treasures in the Heavens were not allegorical but real.  
That the life-giving treasures of the earth, particularly the golden grain that was anciently kept in a sacred bin, really comes from the sky is apparent to everyone. The miracle of the bounties of heaven literally pouring from “the treasure-houses of the snow, . . . the terrible storehouses” is an awesome sight and a joyous one. But without a benign intelligence to administer them, the same elements that bestow life on man can wreak frightful destruction; hence it is plain that a measure of knowledge, skill, and benevolence is necessary to convert the raw elements into useful gifts. Thus when one speaks of treasures in the heavens, one means not only the vast secret chambers of the rain, snow, and hail, but also the deep hidden wisdom and the power necessary to control them; God’s treasury is a source not only of the elements that sustain life but also of the light and knowledge that endow them with that power.  
The life-giving fusion of divine wisdom with primal element is often described in religious texts as a fountain, as “the overflowing waters which shine” coming from the “treasure-chest of radiance” along with all the other shining treasures. “Thou hast established every fountain of light beside Thee,” says Baruch, “and the treasures of wisdom beneath Thy throne hast Thou prepared.” The concept is more than a figure of speech; “the heavenly waters. . . important for life on earth,” to be effectively used, must be “gathered in and assigned . . . to particular treasurehouses.” We are introduced to that physical part of the heavenly treasure in a grandiose scene in which we behold a great council in heaven being held at the creation of the world; there God, enthroned in the midst of his heavenly hosts, explains the plan of creation to them and then opens his treasure chest before them to show them the wondrous store of stuff that is to be used in making a world; but the new world is still in a preliminary state, “like unripe fruit that does not know what it is to become.” It is not until we get to the doctors of the Church, wholly committed to the prevailing teachings of the schools, that we hear of creation ex nihilo. Before then, creation is depicted as a process of imposing form and order on chaotic matter; the world is created for the specific purpose of carrying out a specific plan, and the plan, like the creation itself, requires strict organization—all creatures have their work assigned them in the coming world, to be carried out at predetermined times and places. When the plan was announced to the assembled hosts, and the full scope and magnanimity of it dawned upon them, they burst into spontaneous shouts of joy and joined in a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, the Morning-song of Creation, which remains to this day the archetype of hymns, the great acclamatio, the primordial nucleus of all liturgy.  
The Creation drama, which is reflected in the great year-rites all over the ancient world, does not take place in a vacuum but “in the presence of God,” seated in the midst of “His holy ones” with whom he takes counsel, they being his mind and mouth on the occasion as he is theirs. Though the plan from first to last is entirely God’s own, he discusses it with others, “consulting the souls of the righteous” before deciding to create the world,” not because he needs their advice, but because the plan concerns them and requires their maximum participation in it. The discussion was a lively one—apart from those rebellious angels who rejected it entirely, there was a general protest that the plan would be too painful for some parties and too risky for all; it was the generous voluntary offering of the Son of God that settled the question. Those who embrace the plan wholeheartedly on this earth are the Elect, “the people of the Plan,” chosen “from the foundation of the world”; they form an earth a community dedicated to “the faithful working out of God’s plan” in close cooperation with the heavenly hosts; they alone have access to the heavenly hidden treasure, because they alone covet and seek it.  
What most thrills the psalmist of Qumran as he sings of the bounteous fountain of God’s hidden treasures is the thought that he is not only a beneficiary of God’s plan, but was actually taken into his confidence in the making of it—he was there! When Clement of Alexandria recalls that “God worked in us before he knew us,” he is attesting a well-known teaching of the early Church. The recurring phrase “Blessed is he who is before he came into being” is not a paradox but refers to two states of being: if (following Baruch) “we have by no means been from the beginning what we are now,” it does not follow that we did not exist, for it is equally true that
“what we now are we shall not afterwards remain.” We are dealing here not with existence and non-
existence but with a passing from one state to another, sometimes explained as a passing from one type of visibility to another. It is common to speak of the
Creation as a renewing, even as a reorganizing of old matter, nay as the building of a world from materials taken from the dismantling of older worlds. Preexistent man had been
around a long time before it was decided to create this earth: the whole thing was produced, when the time
came, for his benefit; and though he was created last of all to take it over, in his real nature he is older than any of it. He is the child of an earlier, spiritual
birth or creation.

Nothing could be more gratifying to the ego and consoling to the afflicted spirit of mortals than to make their secret intimation of a glorious past and an exalted parentage. The exciting foster-parent illusion was exploited by the Gnostics for all it was
worth; but the idea was no invention of theirs: it was the thought of his
preexistent glory that was Job’s real comfort—“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth . . . when the morning stars sang together and all the
sons of God shouted for joy?” is not a rhetorical question. For it was the
recolleciton of that same Creation hymn of joy and their part in it that sustained the Sons of Light in the midst of terrible reverses. “If you could see your real
image which came into being before you,” says a logion of Jesus, “then you
would be willing to endure anything!” The author of the Thanksgiving Hymn
is simply drunk with the idea of his own
preexistent glory. Such glory, according to the Johannine writings, belonged not to the Lord but to all
who follow him.

But why leave one’s heavenly home for a dismal earthly one? To that question, constantly reiterated in the Mandaean writings, the Gnostic answer was that we were forced to make the move as a punishment; but the “Treasure” doctrine was the very opposite—we are here as a reward, enjoying an opportunity to
achieve yet greater things by being tried and tested, “that each one might be
promoted, according to his
intelligence and the perfections of his
way, or be retarded according to his
wrong-doings.” This is the well-known
dogma of the Two Ways: For this
reason the world has existed through the ages, says the Clementine Recognitions,
so that the spirits destined to come here might fulfill their number, and hence make their choice between the
upper and the lower worlds, both
of which are represented here. In what has been regarded as the oldest ritual
document in existence, the so-called
Shabako Stone from Memphis, we find the
concept full-blown: “To him who doeth
good will be given Life and [off Salvation
[htp]. To him who doeth evil will be given
the Death of the Condemned [criminal] . . .
according to that decree, conceived in the
heart and brought forth by the tongue, which
shall be the measure of all things.”

The element of opposition necessary for such a test is provided by the adversary, who in the beginning openly mocked God’s plan and set up his own plan in opposition to it. Being cast out of heaven with his followers
by main force, he continues upon this earth
during the set time allowed him by God’s
plan (for the irony of his situation is that he
is Mephistopheles, unwillingly if not
unwittingly contributing to the operation of
that plan), attempting to wreck the whole
enterprise by drawing off as many spirits
and as much material as possible into his
own camp. The devil and his hosts claim the
Treasure for themselves and attempt to pirate the treasure ships that cruise between the
worlds, using the loot in the outfitting of
their own dark worlds. A neglected
leitmotif of the New Testament is the
continuing conflict between the personal
feud between the Lord and the adversary
begun at the foundation of the world:
from the first each recognizes the other as
his old opponent and rival; they are
matched at every point—each claims
identical gifts, ordinances, signs, and
wonders; each has his doctrine and his
glory and his plan for the future of the
race. Above all, each claims to possess the
Treasure, the Lord promising treasures in
the heavens while the adversary offers a
clever, glittering earthly imitation: it is
the choice between these treasures (for no
man can have both) that is a man’s real
test here upon the earth, determining his
place hereafter. It is the “poor” who
recognize and seek the true treasures,
since they who are “rich as to the things
of this world” have deliberately chosen
the fraudulent imitation.

In coming to earth each man leaves his particular treasure, or his share of the
Treasure, behind him in heaven, safely kept in trust (“under God’s throne”) awaiting his
return. One has here below the opportunity of enhancing one’s treasure in heaven by
meritorious actions, and also the risk of
losing it entirely by neglecting it in his
search for earthly treasure. Hence the
passionate appeals to men to remember their
tremendous stake on the other side and “not
to defraud themselves of the glory that
awaits them” by seeking the things of the
world. To make the “treasure” test a fair
one, the two treasures are placed before
us on an equal footing (the doctrine of the
Two Ways), their two natures being
mingled in exactly equal portions in every
human being. To neutralize what would
otherwise be the overpowering appeal of
heavenly treasure, the memory of its
former glories has been erased from the
mind of man, which is thus in a state of
equilibrium, enjoying by “the
ancient law of liberty” complete
freedom to choose whatever it will.
In this state, whatever choice is
made represents the true heart and
mind of the one who makes it.

What conditions the Elect to make the
right choice is no unfair
advantage of instruction—for all
men are aware of the issues
involved—but a besetting nostalgia,
a constant vague yearning for one’s
distant treasure and happy
heavenly home. This theme, akin to
the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis [a
recalling to memory], runs through all
the Apocrypha and scriptures; it is
beautifully expressed in the Hymn of
the Pearl from the Acts of Thomas.

In this classic tale, a king’s son has
come down to earth to find a pearl
which he is to return to its heavenly
depositary; here below he becomes defiled with the things of the world
until a letter from heaven, signed by
cardinal and Great and Mighty Ones, recalls
to him his true heritage and his
purpose in coming to earth. Whereupon he casts off his earthly
garments and with the pearl returns to
the waiting arms of his loved ones in
the royal courts on high and to his
robe of glory that has been carefully
kept for him in the “Treasury.” Our
various “treasure” texts consistently
refer to going to heaven as a return,
a joyful homecoming, in which one
follows the steps of Adam “back to
the Treasury of Life from which he
came forth.” A great deal is said
about a garment that one changes in
passing from one stage to another, the
final garment of glory being often
equated to the Treasury itself. This
garment introduces us to the very
important ritual aspect of the treasure
story, for it is generally understood
that one can return to one’s heavenly
Treasure only by the careful
observance of certain rites and
ordinances, which provide the means
both of receiving instruction and
demonstrating obedience. In the
Mandaean economy the ordinances
are the Treasury, the knowledge of the
proper procedures being the very
knowledge by which the elements are
controlled and the spirit of man
exalted. The other sectaries are hardly
less concerned with ordinances,
however, the paradox of Qumran
being that a society that fled from the
raves of the temple at Jerusalem
should become completely engrossed in
yet more rites and ordinances once
it was in the desert. Moreover, the
most elaborate of all discourses on
the initiatory rites are those of the
Coptic Christians.

As teacher and administrator of the
ordinances, the priest holds the key to
the spiritual Treasure House in which "the merit accruing from ceremonial worship is accumulated." These ordinances, imported directly from that Treasury of Light to which they alone offer the means of return, are types of what is done above, through them "souls are led to the 'Treasury of Light.'" Between us and the Great King of the Treasury of Light are many steps and veils, and it is only by "giving the proper replies to the Guardians" that one is able to approach and finally enter the Treasury of Light. The ordinances are most secret (they are usually called "mysteries"), and it is through their scrupulous observance that every man "puts his own treasure in order."

The archetype whom all must follow in the ordinances is Adam, whose true home is the "Treasury of Light," and who belongs with all his children "to the Father who existed from the beginning." The preexistent Adam, "the Adam of Light," having descended to earth fell into a deep sleep, from which he awoke with his mind erased like that of a little child. He was thus in a state to undergo impartial testing, but in his new helplessness he needed instruction. This was provided by a special emissary from the Treasury of Light, the "Sent One." The Sent One is often a commission of three: the "Three Great Men" who wakened Adam from his sleep and immediately set about teaching him what he should know and do in order to return to the House of Light from which he had come. The Sent One may be Michael, Gabriel, or the Lord himself, but whoever holds that office always has the same calling, namely to assist the souls of men to return to the Treasury of Light: when the Lord, as the supreme example of the Sent One, descends below to deliver the spirits that sit in darkness, they hail him as "Son of Glory, Son of Lights and of the Treasures." Always a stranger on earth, recognized only by the "Poor," the Sent One comes to bring a treasure, and indeed he is sometimes called the Treasure, for he alone brings the knowledge men must have to return to the Father of Lights. Letters sent from above to help men in their need—the prototype of those "Letters from Heaven" that have haunted Christian and Moslem society through the centuries—being directives or passports for getting to the Treasure House, if not written deeds to the Treasure itself (the scriptures are rated as such), are themselves among the Treasures of Heaven.

While a treasure is anything precious and hidden, the early Christian idea of what was precious differed noticeably from the abstract and allegorical "spiritual" treasures of the philosophizing churchmen of a later time. The Patristic writers, trained in the schools, are offended and annoyed by the way in which many Christians cling to the old literalism of the Early Church. When primitive Christians thought of a treasure, it had to be something real and tangible; theirs was the tradition of the Jews before them; for them the delights of the other world "though including spiritual and intellectual joys are most tangible delights of a completely pleasing physical and social environment." Much has been written about early Christian and Jewish concepts of time, but where the other world is concerned, the ideas of space are at least equally important. With what care Luke tells us exactly where the angel stood in the temple and exactly where on the map he found Mary! What tireless comings and goings and what constant concern with being in one place or another fill the pages of the gospels! If we are not to think in terms of real time and place, why this persistent use of familiar words that suggest nothing else? Scholars have pointed out that it is impossible to take such formulaic expressions as "to visit the earth" and "he went and preached" (referring to the descensus) in any but the most literal sense. The insistence of our sources on depicting the hereafter in terms of "places" (topoi, the ma'man of the Dead Sea Scrolls) is a constant reminder that "heaven is not only a state but a place." True, it is so far away that our sun "and all the world of men" look like nothing but a tiny speck of dust, "because of the vast distance at which it is removed"; but for all that it is still the same universe, and all made of the same basic materials.

This preoccupation with locus assumes a plurality of worlds, and indeed in our "treasure" texts we often find worlds, earths, and kosmoses in the plural. It is only the fallen angels, in fact, led by the blind Samael, who insist: "We are alone, and there is none beside us!" To the Sons of Light, on the other hand, there is opened up the grandiose vision of the "worlds" united in the common knowledge of him who made them, exchanging joyful and affectionate messages as they "keep faith with one another" in the common plan and "talk to each other... and establish concord, each contributing something of its own" to the common interest. The members of the vast complex are kept in perfect accord by the sustaining Word of God, which reaches all alike, since it possesses "through the power of the Treasury" the capacity for traveling for unlimited distances with inexpressible speed. This Word is also the Son, who "has betaken himself to the numberless hidden worlds which have come to know him." The messages may also be borne by special messengers and inspectors, angels with special assignments and marvelous powers of getting around, who constantly go forth on their missions and return with their reports.

With all its perfect unity and harmony, the system presents a scene not of monotonous uniformity but rather of endless and delightful variety: "They are all different one from the other, but He hath not made any one of them superfluous, the one exchanging what is good, [in it] with the other." At a new creation there is a reshuffling of elements, like the rearranging of notes in the musical scale to make a new composition; it is even suggested, as we have noted, that old worlds may be dismantled to supply stuff for the making of newer and better ones.

Beginning with the very old Egyptian idea, recently examined by E. A. E. Reymond, that the creation of the world was really a re-creation by "transforming substances" that had already been used in the creation of other worlds, the Jewish and Christian apocryphal writers envisage a process by which the stuff of worlds is alternately organized into new stars and planets, and when these have served their time, scraped, decontaminated, and reused in yet more new worlds. This "Ustot" that is being constantly recycled is the Tohuwabohu of some Jewish teachers, according to Weiss, who saw the ultimate forms of matter in fire and ice. Likewise, according to the same authority, the world-holocaust of the Stoics was merely a necessary preparation for the making of new worlds from old materials. The whole thrust of Weiss’s book is that until the early Christian apologists, we find no trace anywhere of a doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, the Creation being everywhere conceived of as the act of organizing "matter unorganized" (amorphos hyle), bringing order from disorder, the basic prerequisites for the work being space (chora) and unorganized matter.

And so we have in the Pistas Sophia, continuing the Egyptian teachings, the picture of a constant remixing (kerasomos) going on in the universe in which old, worn-out, contaminated substances, the refuse (sorm) of worn-out worlds and kingdoms (247-250), is first thrown out on the scrapheap and returned to chaos as "dead" matter (134,41,68), then melted down in a dissolving fire for many years (365f.), by which all the impurities are removed from it (249), and by which it is "improved" (41,68), and is ready to be "poured from one kind of body into another" (251). This whole process by which souls as well as substances are "thrown back into the mixing" (14) is under the supervision of Melchizedek, the great reprocessor, purifier, and preparer of worlds (35f.). He takes over the refuse of defunct worlds or souls.
(36), and under his supervision five great Archons process (literally “knead”—ouoshm) it, separating out its different components, each one specializing in particular elements, which they thus recombine in unique and original combinations so that no new world or soul is exactly like any other (338).

In this full-blown pleniariam there is no waste and no shortage: “If any were superfluous or any lacking, the whole body would suffer, for the worlds counterpoise one another like the elements of a single organism.” The worlds go on forever: “They come and come and cease not, they ever increase and are multiplied, yet are not brought to an end nor do they decrease.”

It was essential to the plan that all physical things should pass away; this idea is depicted by the ancient Egyptian symbol of the Uroboros, the serpent with his tail in his mouth, representing the frustration of material things or matter consuming itself by entropy. Indeed, the Pistis Sophia describes the Uroboros (which means “feeding on its own tail”) in terms of the heat-death, when it reports that fire and ice are the end of all things, since ultimate hot and ultimate cold both mean an end to substance. Though matter is replaced through an endless cycle of creations and dissolution, only spirit retains conscious identity, so that strictly speaking “only progeny is immortal,” each “mounting up from world to world” acquiring ever more “treasure” while progressing toward His perfection, which awaits them all. When the apostles formed a prayer circle, “all clothed in garments of white linen,” Jesus, standing at the altar, began the prayer by facing the four directions and crying in an unknown tongue, “Iao, Iao, Iao!” The Pistis Sophia interprets the three letters of this word as signifying (1) Iota, because the universe took form at the Creation; (2) Alpha, because in the normal course of things it will revert to its original state, alpha representing a cycle; (3) Omega, because the story is not going to end there, since all things are tending towards a higher perfection, “the perfection of the perfection of everything is going to happen”—that is “syntropy.” (Pistis Sophia, 358.)

The eternal process is thus not a static one but requires endless expansion of the universe (p-sor ehol mptepf) (193ff., 219,225, etc.), since each dispensation is outgoing, tending to separation and emanation, that is, fissure (220), so that “an endless process in the Uncontainable fills the Boundless” (219). This is the Egyptian paradox of expanding circles of life that go on to fill the physical universe and then go on without end. Such a thing is possible because of a force that is primal and self-existent, having no dependence on other matter or its qualities. This is that “light-stream” that no power is able to hold down and no matter is able to control in any way. (Pistis Sophia, 227.) On the contrary, it is this light that imposes form and order on all else; it is the spark by which Melchizedek organizes new worlds (35); it is the light that purifies contaminated substances (388), and the light that enables dead matter to live (65; 134).

Reduced to its simplest form, creation is the action of light upon matter (hyle) (64); matter of itself has no power, being burnt-out energy (65), but light reactivates it (134); matter is incapable of changing itself—it has no desire to, and so light forces it into the recycling process where it can again work upon it—for light is the organizing principle (50). If Melchizedek is in charge of organizing worlds, it is Michael and Gabriel who direct the outpouring of light to those parts of chaos where it is needed (130). As light emanates out into itself in all directions it does not weaken but mysteriously increases more and more, not stopping as long as there is a space to fill. (129.) In each world is a gathering of light (“synergy”?), and as each is a product of a drive toward expansion, each becomes a source of new expansion, “having its part in the expansion of the universe.” (193ff.)

The mere mechanics of the creation process as described in our “treasure” texts display truly remarkable scientific insight. For the making of the world the first requirements, we are told, are a segment of empty space, pure and unencumbered, and a supply of primordial matter to work with. Mere empty space and inert matter are, however, forbidding and profitless things in themselves, disturbing and even dangerous things for humans to be involved with—contemplating them, the mind is seized with vertigo until some foothold is found in the void. The order and stability of a foundation are achieved through the operation of a “Spark.” The Spark is sometimes defined as “a small idea” that comes forth from God and makes all the difference between what lives and what does not: “Compared with it all the worlds are but a shadow, since it is the Spark whose light moves all [material] things.” It is the ultimate particle, the “ennas which came from the Father of those who are without beginning,” emanating from the Treasure House of Light from which all life and power is ultimately derived. Thanks to the vivifying and organizing power of the Spark, we find throughout the cosmos an infinity of dwelling-places (topos), either occupied or awaiting tenants. These are colonized by migrants from previously established toposes or worlds, all going back ultimately to a single original center. The colonizing process is called “planting,” and those spirits that bring their treasuries to a new world are called “Plants,” more rarely “seeds,” of their father or “Planter” in another world. Every planting goes out from a Treasure House, either as the essential material elements or as the colonizers themselves, who come from a sort of mustering-area called the “Treasure-house of Souls.”

With its “planting” completed, a new world is in business, a new Treasury has been established from which new Sparks may go forth in all directions to start the process anew in ever new spaces; God wants every man to “plant a planting,” say, “he has promised that those who keep his Law may also become creators of worlds.” But keeping the law requires following the divine pattern in every point; in taking the Treasure to a new world, the Sent One (who follows hard on the heels of the colonists) seeks nothing so much as complete identity with the One who sent him; hence, from first to last one mind alone dominates the whole boundless complex. Because each planting is completely dependent on its Treasure House or home base, the system never breaks up into independent systems. In this patriarchal order all remains forever identified with the Father from whom all ultimately come forth.

We on earth are not aware of all this because we comprehend only what we are like. Not only is God rendered invisible by the impenetrable veil of light that surrounds him, but he has purposely “placed veils between the worlds,” that all treasures may be hid from those who do not seek them in the proper way. On the other side of the veil of the temple lay “the secrets of heaven,” the celestial spaces that know no bounds, and all that they contain. The wilon (veil) quarantines this polluted world mercilessly from the rest. “Beyond the veil are the heavens,” and that goes for other worlds as well as this one, for each is shut off by its veil, for there are aeons and veils and firmaments: “He made a veil for their worlds, surrounding them like a wall.” Behind the ultimate veil sits Jes, “the Father of the Treasury of Light,” who is separated from all others by the veils (katapetasmata), a veil being that which separates that which is above from that which is below. When a cycle has been completed in the existence of things, “the Great Sabaoth the Good looks out” from behind the veil, and all that has gone before is dissolved and passes into oblivion. Only the qualified can pass by one of these veils, of course; when Pistis Sophia presumably behind the veil before she was ready, she promptly fell from her former glory. Only Jesus has passed through all the veils and all the degrees of

Documents > Handouts > Nibley > “Premortal disunity & Creation”     3-Mar-00     Page 4 of 6
glory and authority. As one grows in faith, more and more is revealed, until finally “the Watchers move the veils aside and you enter into the Presence of the Father, who gives you His name and His seal.”

These veils seem to serve as protecting as well as confining fences around the worlds: The light of the sun in its true nature (morphē) is not seen in this place, we are told, because it passes through “many veils and regions (topoi)" before reaching us; its protective function is represented by a wonderful super-bird, called “the guardian of the inhabited earth,” because “by spreading out his wings he absorbs (dechetai) the fire-like (pyrimorphos) rays” of the sun; “if he did not receive [absorb] them, the human race could not survive, nor any other form of life.” On a wing of the bird is an inscription declaring, “Neither earth nor heaven begot me, but the wings of fire.” Baruch was informed by an angel that this bird is the phoenix, the sun-bird, which feeds on the manna of heaven and the dews of earth. It blocks the sun with its wings outspread, suggesting solar prominences or zodiacal light. At any rate, it is an interesting example of how the ancients explained things that most men cannot see or comprehend in terms of things they can.

The plan calls for universal participation in the accumulation of treasure in a course of eternal progression. The “Treasures in the Heavens” is heady stuff; E. L. Cherbonnier has observed that the discovery that man really belongs to the same family as God, “to share in the same kind of existence which God himself enjoys,” is “like learning that one has won the sweepstakes. “The Evangelium is good news—the only good news, in fact, since all else ends in nothing. But it is also news, the sort of thing, as C. S. Lewis points out, that no human being could possibly have invented. Granted that the Treasures in the Heavens are something totally alien to human experience, something that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man,” they must be nonetheless real. “For the plan of Salvation,” as E. Soggin has recently put it, “only exists when we are dealing with reality, not with artificial contrivances; . . . as Hesse notes, ‘We are only interested in what really took place, all the rest being of little or no concern whatever.’” Likewise the religion of Egypt “n’est pas une mystique, mais une physique,” as we are now discovering. This attitude, diametrically opposite to that of Christian and Jewish scholars (for example, C. Schmidt) in the past, is gaining ground today. The old literalism has been dismissed as Gnostic, and indeed much of the appeal of Gnosticism lay in its exploitation of certain cosmist aspects of creation,” all seem to betray “a single organic foundation. “ And while the relationship between them all still remains to be established, it becomes clearer every day that there was a relationship. The “cosmist” idea is not the monopoly of any group, Gnostic or otherwise. Indeed, cosmism was essentially anti-Gnostic. The doctors of the Christians and the Jews who adopted the Neoplatonic and Gnostic ideas of the schools opposed the old literalism with all their might, so that to this day cosmism has remained the very essence of heresy. Still, the very fathers who opposed the old teaching admitted that it was the original faith of the Saints, and they could not rid themselves of it without a real struggle. In view of its age, its universality, its consistency, and its scientific and aesthetic appeal, the doctrine of the Treasures in the Heavens should be studied more closely than it has been. What we have presented in intensely concentrated form is enough to show that references to treasures in religious writings may well conceal far more than a mere figure of speech.

[Note: The 128 footnotes belonging to this article are not included herewith.]