HUMA 3457 Gnosticism

Sept. 18: Heresy Hunting
Read for Today: Denzey Lewis ch. 2; Irenaeus, Against Heresies (PDF 1, PDF 2); Epiphanius of Salamis, Against Heresies 33.3.1-33.7.10 (=Ptolemy’s Epistle to Flora) (PDF); Acts 8:9-25.

**Ptolemy’s Epistle to Flora analysis due today, if you chose that text**

1. Apologetic Literature
   - apologies written to explain Christian ideas and practices to the authorities and the literate
   - three main accusations: atheism, cannibalism and incest; also uneducated and libertine
   - Justin (ca. 100-165); from Gentile colony in Samaria; schooled in philosophy and turned to Christianity in 130; moved to Rome ca. 150 and set up a school; martyred ca. 165
   - *First Apology* addressed to emperor Antoninus Pius ca. 155, *Second Apology* to the Roman senate in 162 sees similarities in Greek thought and credits the philosophers with having discovered glimpses of the truth; they tapped into the logos, the universal reason that governs all reality; he says Jesus is the Logos; the pagans knew the logos but only dimly; those who are Christian know it fully
   - Clement of Alexandria (150-215) and Origen (185-254) also embraced philosophy, particularly Platonism, as a way of articulating Christian belief
   - Tertullian (150-225) wanted a fine balance between philosophy and tradition

2. Heresy Hunters
   - responsible both for preservation of heretical teachings and for their eradication
   - the problem of perspective: winners and losers; Roman Christian hegemony is anachronistic
   - statements of belief: Jesus Christ is the Messiah, Jesus Christ is the Lord, He died for our sins, etc.; creeds
   - the three pillars of faith: apostolic succession, rule of faith, canonical scriptures
   - achievements of heretics: first to bring up speculative questions of cosmology, anthropology, Christology and Trinitarian doctrine; first to begin process of Christian-only canon of scripture

3. Irenaeus’ Against Heresies
   - Justin Martyr’s *Syntagma*: charges: Gnostics calumniated the creator, disparaged the OT, and gave Christians a bad name
   - Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons ca. 130/150-200
   - wrote *The Refutation and Overthrow of the Knowledge Falsely So Called (Against Heresies)* for a friend to expose heretical thought, particularly among the Valentinian school
   - in the process of repudiating the heretics he also sets the standard for orthodoxy
- contents:
  - I: describes the heresies in question, sometimes sarcastically
  - II: shows their absurdity
  - III: basis of Christian doctrine in scripture and tradition is laid down and its essential points, the unity of God and redemption through Christ, are enlarged on in detail
  - IV: defends against Marcion the unity of the two covenants
  - V: resumes the discussion of redemption and passed on to the last things and the hope of the world to come
- “Gnostic” sects described by Irenaeus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor</th>
<th>Alexandrian Heresies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>Carpocrates (fl. ca. 130-150)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Menander</td>
<td>Basilides (fl. 120-140)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturninus (fl. ca. 90-100)</td>
<td>Valentinus (ca. 100-175)</td>
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<td>Cerdo (fl. ca. 150-154)</td>
<td>Ptolemy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcion (ca. 85-160)</td>
<td>Secundus</td>
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<td>Marcus</td>
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- Other schools:
  - Nicolatians: name from Nicolas of Antioch (see Acts); eat food sacrificed to pagan gods (see Rev.)
  - Ebionites: Jewish-Christian sect based in northern Judea/Palestine and southern Syria; name derives from Hebrew word for poor; Jewish in practice and do not believe in the virgin birth; only read Matthew and did not read Paul
  - Cerinthus: Jewish-Christian from Egypt who debated John the apostle in Asia Minor
  - Montanus: ca. 156/157 introduces the “New Prophecy”; resurgence of apocalyptic thought in wake of persecutions; emphasized life of renunciation, continence and fasting, and to be ready to confess the name of Christ at the (welcome) risk of martyrdom
  - Encratites: Christian renunciants associated with Tatian, a Syrian Christian and student of Justin Martyr

- Other heresiologists:
  - Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170-236 CE), *Refutation of All Heresies*
  - Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 CE), *Stromateis*
  - Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185-254 CE), *Against Celsus*
  - Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 376-400 CE), *Panarion*
4. Defining Gnosticism

- truth and fiction in the heresiologists: the heretics are often women or use women to spread their heresies; the Gnostics rejected the need for martyrdom; the Gnostics rejected the need for martyrdom; the Gnostics subverted proper Church authority; the Gnostics reject Scripture; The Gnostics considered themselves to be “saved” already; the Gnostics have crazy mythologies with endless stories of horrors in the heavens

- the Messina Definition (1966)
- Rethinking “Gnosticism” (Williams 1996 and King 2005): abandon the term, or use subcategories
- the Yale School: people did call themselves Gnostics
- the Bauer School: orthodoxy, heresy, proto-orthodoxy

5. The Origins of Gnosticism

![Diagram of Origins of Gnosticism]

6. Ptolemy’s *Epistle to Flora* (Discussion)