

HUMA 3457 Gnosticism

Oct. 2: Valentinians

Read for Today: Denzey Lewis ch. 5-8; *Prayer of the Apostle Paul*; *Tripartite Tractate*; *Gospel of Truth*; *Gospel of Philip* (all in Meyer).

Online Resources: the Gnosis Society hosts a home page dedicated to Valentinus. You can visit it at <http://www.gnosis.org/library/valentinus/>.

**** Rethinking the Origins of the Nag Hammadi Library assignment due today ****

1. Valentinus

- birth ca. 100 in Lower Egypt (Phrebonis) ca. 100
- received Greek education and taught in Alexandria
- possible contact with Philo, Basilides, and Hermetica
- traces ideas back to Paul though Theudas
- ca. 117-135 taught in Alexandria
- ca. 136-140 journeys to Rome; loses in “election” to be bishop
- ca. 160-175 dies, perhaps in Rome

2. Reconstructing “Valentinianism”

- sources: patristic authors (Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Epiphanius, and several later, mostly derivative writers); yields fragments totaling 400 words
- Nag Hammadi: no work claims to be Valentinian, nor by someone whom the fathers connected with that group; decision to call a work “Valentinian” rests exclusively on finding similarities between its content and the patristic descriptions of that group
- candidates: *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul*, *The Gospel of Truth*, *the Treatise on the Resurrection*, *The Tripartite Tractate*, *The Gospel of Philip*, *The Interpretation of Knowledge*, and *A Valentinian Exposition*
- questionable: first and second *Apocalypses of James*, *Letter of Peter to Philip*; perhaps chapters 94-102 and 109 of *Acts of John*
- Valentinian Sacraments: five seals corresponding to five ceremonies
 - baptism: initiation rite in which initiate partakes in immortality
 - chrism (anointing with oil): takes place before or after baptism; perhaps just for the elect
 - eucharist: sacred meal; appears vegetarian
 - redemption: second baptism for the elect
 - bridal chamber: rejoining the sundered male (body) and female (spirit) elements into a bisexual being
- other evidence: Flavia Sophe inscription and NCE 156

3. Later Valentinianism

- two branches by mid third century:
 - western branch (a.k.a. Italic School) founded by Ptolemy and Heracleon; adoptionist

- eastern branch (a.k.a. Oriental School) founded by Theodotus and Marcus (incarnationist, docetic)
- 326 CE Constantine forbids heretics, including the Valentinians from meeting
- 388 CE a mob destroys a church building used specifically by Valentinians in the Syrian city of Callinicum
- both die out ca. 7th century

4. *The Gospel of Philip*

- date of origin: ca. 200-350 CE
- perhaps originated in Syria (see Syriac etymologies in pars. 19, 47, 53)
- variety of literary forms: aphorism, saying, comparison, metaphor, parable, polemic, discourse, etc.
- sayings of Jesus (see appendix): 17 sayings, nine are citations and interpretations of Jesus' words from the canonical gospels
- theories of origin:
- majority see it as an anthology
- Wesley W. Isenberg: hints of organization suggest that all of the excerpts derive from a single work which must then have been a comprehensive Christian-Gnostic (perhaps Valentinian) sacramental catechesis
- 77, 106, 107a, 1-7b, 63a, 63b, 63c, 64 belong together; also 99c, 45, 51, 80; another example:

(70, 5-9) The powers do not see those who are clothed in the perfect light, and consequently are not able to detain him. One will clothe himself in this light sacramentally in the union.

(76, 22-77) Not only will they be able to detain the perfect man, but they will not be able to see him, for if they see him, they will detain him. There is no other way for a person to acquire this quality except by putting on the perfect light [and] he too becoming perfect light. He who has [put it] on will enter [...]. This is the perfect [...] that we [...] become [...] before we leave [...]. Whoever receives everything [...] hither [...] be able [...] that place, but will [...the middle] as imperfect. Only Jesus knows the end of this person.

(66, 7-29) And so he dwells either in this world or in the resurrection or in the middle place. God forbid that I be found there! In this world there is good and evil. Its good things are not good, and its evil things not evil. But there is evil after this world which is truly evil—what is called “the middle.” It is death. While we are in this world it is fitting for us to acquire the resurrection, so that when we strip off the flesh we may be found in rest and not walk in the middle. For many go astray on the way. For it is good to come forth from the world before one has sinned.

5. Discussion: *Gospel of Truth*

