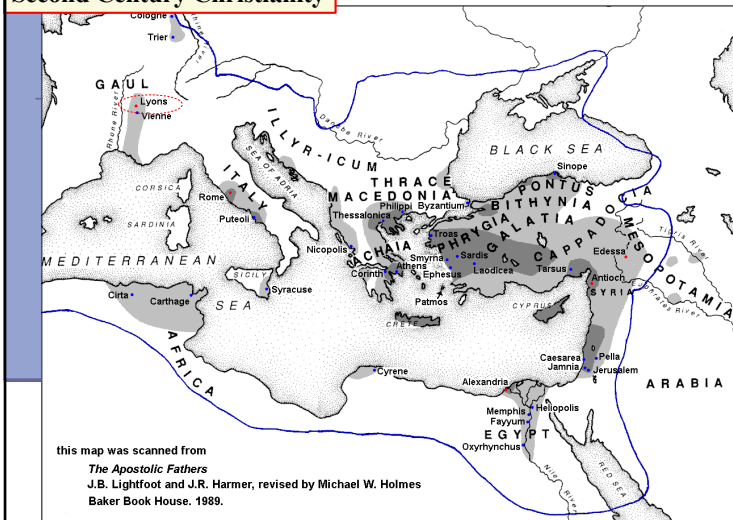


Gnosticism



1

Second Century Christianity



2

Irenaeus of Lugdunum [Lyon]

- Born c. 130–40
- Seems to have been a native of Asia Minor
- Claims to have personally known Polycarp

But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, *whom I also saw in my early youth*, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time,—

Irenaeus, *Against Haeresies* 3.3.4

3

Irenaeus of Lugdunum [Lyon]

- Seems to have relocated to Rome for a time
- In c. 177 was in Gaul, the community of Gaul sent him with a letter to bp. Eleutheris of Rome
 - Letter of the Martyrs of Lugdunum

Irenaeus also, who was at that time already a presbyter of the diocese at Lyons, the same martyrs commended to the afore-mentioned bishop of Rome, and gave him much good testimony, as is shown by words to the following effect: “Once more and always, Father Eleutherus, we wish you greeting in God. *We have asked our brother and companion, Irenaeus, to bring this letter to you and we beg you to hold him in esteem*, for he is zealous for the covenant of Christ. For had we known that rank can confer righteousness on anyone, we should first of all have recommended him as being a presbyter of the church, for that is his position.”

Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.4.1–2

4

Irenaeus of Lugdunum [Lyon]

- Upon his return to Lugdunum he was made bishop, successor to bp. Photinus who was martyred
- May have been bp. c. A.D. 180–200
- Wrote two extant works:
 - *Detection and Overthrow of the False Knowledge*
 - Written in Greek but only extant in a third or fourth century Latin translation *adversus haereses*
 - *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*
 - Extant only in an Armenian translation
 - Is a brief compendium of the Christian faith
- Fragments of two letters are preserved by Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.20 and 5.24

5

adversus haereses

- As the Latin title suggests, the work is directed against various heresies
- In particular it is directed against Valentinian Gnosticism
 - According to Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.4.3) Valentinus was from Egypt but came to Rome c. 140

For, prior to Valentinus, those who follow Valentinus had no existence; nor did those from Marcion exist before Marcion; nor, in short, had any of those malignant-minded people, whom I have above enumerated, any being previous to the initiators and inventors of their perversity. For Valentinus came to Rome in the time of Hyginus, flourished under Pius, and remained until Anicetus.

6

What is Gnosticism?

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is **falsely called knowledge**;

1 Timothy 6:20

Ὡς Τιμόθεε, τὴν παραθήκην φύλαξον ἐκτρεπόμενος τὰς βεβήλους κενοφωνίας καὶ ἀντιθέσεις τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως

- Derived from the Greek word gnosis or “knowledge”
- It refers to “revealed knowledge” available only to those who have received the secret teachings of a heavenly revealer
- All other humans are trapped in ignorance, the true home of the Gnostic is to return to the divine world
- For Gnostics it was not the salvific act of the atonement that was most important but secret knowledge that Jesus imparted to his disciples that lead to salvation

7

Gnosticism

- Gnosticism tried to answer certain existential questions: Who are we? Why am I here? Whither do I go?
- Cosmogony – birth of the cosmos
- Cosmology – metaphysical understanding of how the cosmos functions
- Dualistic – good/bad; light/dark; heaven/hell; knowledge/ignorance
 - As there are two worlds (heaven/hell) so to are there two different Gods
 - **Demiurge** (Jaldabaoth) – is the creator of this world and is generally identified with the God of the O.T., stands in contrast to the “**Father of All**” – he is the agnostos God, meaning he is indescribable

8

Gnostic Terminology

- **Pleroma** – signifies fullness, totality, perfection. To Gnostics it meant the entire divine celestial dimension in its multiplicity and unity, which contains in itself the invisible, transcendent beings and is their point of origin and goal of return as a place of rest in the state of salvation.
- **Kenoma** – the opposite of the pleroma, meaning for the Gnostics the present world where souls exist outside of the pleroma
 - For the gnostic Hell is not below the world, it has invaded the world, in fact it is the present world
- **Aeon** – the fullness of all, the world of Aeons, is destined to manifest itself
- **Sophia** – “wisdom,” worldly understanding; personified as Lady Wisdom, the syzygy of Christ

9

Such are the doctrines of these people, from which, like the Lernaean hydra, a beast with multiple heads, is generated the school of Valentinus.

Irenaeus, *Haer.* 30.14

In the invisible and unnameable heights there was a perfect Aeon, prior to all. This Aeon is called Pre-Beginning and Pre-Father and Abyss. Since he was incomprehensible and invisible, eternal and unbegotten, he was in silence and in rest for unlimited ages. With him was Thought, also called Grace and Silence. When this Abyss wanted to emit a Beginning of all, he set it like a seed in the womb of his companion Silence. When she received this seed she became pregnant and generated Mind, similar and equal to the one who emitted him, alone comprehending the greatness of the Father. This Mind they call Only-Begotten and Father and Beginning of all; with him was emitted Truth, to compose the first and primary, indeed Pythagorean Tetrad: Abyss and Silence, then Mind and Truth. This Only-Begotten, sensing the purpose for which he was emitted, himself emitted Logos and Life, Father of all later than himself, and the Beginning and Formation of the Pleroma. From Logos and Life were emitted, by pairing, Man and Church, and this is the firstborn Ogdoad, the root and substance of all, called by four names by them: Abyss, Mind, Logos, and Man. Each of these is male-female: first the Pre-Father united by pairing with his Thought, which they also call Grace and Silence; then the Only-Begotten, that is, Mind, with Truth; then Logos with Life; and Man with Church.

Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.1.1

10

Irenaeus and the Valentinian Gnostics

But those who are from Valentinus, being, on the other hand, altogether reckless, while they put forth their own compositions, boast that they possess more Gospels than there really are [i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John]. Indeed, they have arrived at such a pitch of audacity, as to entitle their comparatively recent writing “the Gospel of Truth,” though it agrees in nothing with the Gospels of the Apostles, so that they have really no Gospel which is not full of blasphemy. For if what they have published is the Gospel of truth, and yet is totally unlike those which have been handed down to us from the apostles, any who please may learn, as is shown from the Scriptures themselves, that that which has been handed down from the apostles can no longer be reckoned the Gospel of truth. But that these Gospels alone are true and reliable, and admit neither an increase nor diminution of the aforesaid number, I have proved by so many and such [arguments]. For, since God made all things in due proportion and adaptation, it was fit also that the outward aspect of the Gospel should be well arranged and harmonized. The opinion of those men, therefore, who handed the Gospel down to us, having been investigated, from their very fountainheads, let us proceed also to the remaining apostles, and inquire into their doctrine with regard to God; then, in due course we shall listen to the very words of the Lord.

Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.11.9

11

Nag Hammadi Codices

- Discovered in 1945 by Mohammed Ali Samman
- 13 codices dating from the 4th Cent.
- Texts have been identified as Gnostic in origin



12

<u>Codex I (=June Codex)</u> 1. The Prayer of the Apostle Paul 2. The Apocryphon of James 3. The Gospel of Truth. ➤ 4. The Treatise on the Resurrection 5. The Tripartite Tractate <u>Codex II</u> 6. The Apocryphon of John 7. The Gospel According to Thomas 8. The Gospel According to Philip 9. The Hypostasis of the Archons 10. On the Origin of the World 11. The Exegesis on the Soul 12. The Book of Thomas the Contender <u>Codex III</u> 13. The Apocryphon of John 14. The Gospel of the Egyptians 15. Eugnostos the Blessed 16. The Sophia of Jesus Christ 17. The Dialogue of the Saviour <u>Codex IV</u> 18. The Apocryphon of John 19. The Gospel of the Egyptians <u>Codex V</u> 20. Eugnostos the Blessed 21. The Apocalypse of Paul 22. The Apocalypse of James 23. The Apocalypse of James 24. The Apocalypse of Adam 32. Fragment of the Perfect Discourse <u>Codex VI</u> 33. The Paraphrase of Shem 34. The Second Treatise of the Great Seth	<u>Codex VII</u> 35. The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles 36. The Thunder, Perfect Mind 37. Authoritative Teaching 38. The Concept of Our Great Power 39. Plato's Republic 588A-589B 40. The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth 41. The Prayer of Thanksgiving 42. The Apocalypse of Peter 43. The Teachings of Silvanus 44. The Three Steles of Seth <u>Codex VIII</u> 45. Zostrianos 46. The Letter of Peter to Philip <u>Codex IX</u> 47. Melchizedek 48. The Thought of Norea 49. The Testimony of Truth <u>Codex X</u> 50. Marsanes <u>Codex XI</u> 51. The Interpretation of Knowledge 52. A Valentinian Exposition 53. Allogenes 54. Hypsiphrone <u>Codex XII</u> 55. The Sentences of Sextus 56. The Gospel of Truth. ➤ 57. Unidentified fragments <u>Codex XIII</u> 58. Trimorphic Protennoia 59. On the Origin of the World
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13

Gospel of Truth

The gospel of truth is joy to those who have received from the Father of truth the gift of knowing him by the power of the Logos, who has come from the Pleroma and who is in the thought and the mind of the Father; he it is who is called "the Savior," since that is the name of the work which he must do for the redemption of those who have not known the Father. For the name of the gospel is the manifestation of hope, since that is the discovery of those who seek him, because the All sought him from whom it had come forth. You see, the All had been inside of him, that illimitable, inconceivable one, who is better than every thought. This ignorance of the Father brought about terror and fear. And terror became dense like a fog, that no one was able to see. Because of this, error became strong. But it worked on its hylic substance vainly, because it did not know the truth. It was in a fashioned form while it was preparing, in power and in beauty, the equivalent of truth. This then, was not a humiliation for him, that illimitable, inconceivable one. For they were as nothing, this terror and this forgetfulness and this figure of falsehood, whereas this established truth is unchanging, unperturbed and completely beautiful.

14

Gospel of Truth

He became a guide, quiet and in leisure. In the middle of a school he came and spoke the Word, as a teacher. Those who were wise in their own estimation came to put him to the test. But he discredited them as empty-headed people. They hated him because they really were not wise men. After all these came also the little children, those who possess the knowledge of the Father. When they became strong they were taught the aspects of the Father's face. They came to know and they were known. They were glorified and they gave glory. In their heart, the living book of the Living was manifest, the book which was written in the thought and in the mind of the Father and, from before the foundation of the All, is in that incomprehensible part of him.

15

Such is their doctrine, which the prophets did not proclaim, the Lord did not teach, and the apostles did not transmit. They boast that they have known it more abundantly than anyone else. While citing texts from unwritten sources and venturing to weave the proverbial ropes out of sand, they try to adjust, in agreement with their statements, sometimes parables of the Lord, sometimes prophetic sayings, and sometimes apostolic words, so that their fiction may not seem without witness. They contradict the order and the continuity of the scriptures and, as best they can, dissolve the members of the truth. They transfer and transform, making one thing out of another, and thus lead many astray by the badly constructed phantom that they make out of the Lord's words they adjust.

Irenaeus, *Haer.* 8.1

16

Gospel of Truth

Gospel of Truth

He is the shepherd who left behind the ninety-nine sheep which had not strayed and went in search of that one which was lost. He rejoiced when he had found it. For ninety-nine is a number of the left hand, which holds it. The moment he finds the one, however, the whole number is transferred to the right hand. Thus it is with him who lacks the one, that is, the entire right hand which attracts that in which it is deficient, seizes it from the left side and transfers it to the right. In this way, then, the number becomes one hundred. This number signifies the Father.

Luke 15:1-7

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

² And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

³ And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

⁴ What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? ⁵ And when he hath found it, *he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.*

⁶ *And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*

⁷ *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

17

Gospel of Truth

Gospel of Truth

He labored even on the Sabbath for the sheep which he found fallen into the pit. He saved the life of that sheep, bringing it up from the pit in order that you may understand fully what that Sabbath is, you who possess full understanding. It is a day in which it is not fitting that salvation be idle, so that you may speak of that heavenly day which has no night and of the sun which does not set because it is perfect. Say then in your heart that you are this perfect day and that in you the light which does not fail dwells.

Matthew 12:11-12

¹¹ And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

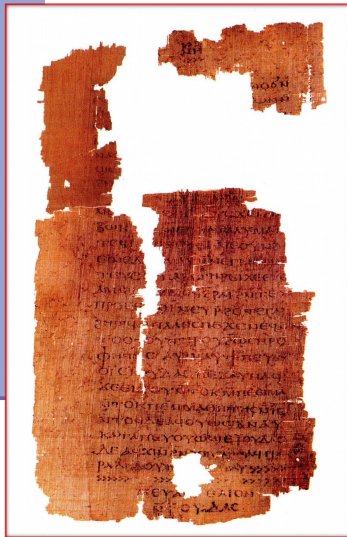
¹² *How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.*

18

Gospel of Truth

Each one will speak concerning the place from which he has come forth, and to the region from which he received his essential being, he will hasten to return once again. And he want from that place - the place where he was - because he tasted of that place, as he was nourished and grew. And his own place of rest is his Pleroma. All the emanations from the Father, therefore, are Pleromas, and all his emanations have their roots in the one who caused them all to grow from himself. He appointed a limit. They, then, became manifest individually in order that they might be in their own thought, for that place to which they extend their thoughts is their root, which lifts them upward through all heights to the Father. They reach his head, which is rest for them, and they remain there near to it so that they say that they have participated in his face by means of embraces. But these of this kind were not manifest, because they have not risen above themselves. Neither have they been deprived of the glory of the Father nor have they thought of him as small, nor bitter, nor angry, but as absolutely good, unperturbed, sweet, knowing all the spaces before they came into existence and having no need of instruction. Such are they who possess from above something of this immeasurable greatness, as they strain towards that unique and perfect one who exists there for them. And they do not go down to Hades. They have neither envy nor moaning, nor is death in them. But they rest in him who rests, without wearying themselves or becoming involved in the search for truth. But, they, indeed, are the truth, and the Father is in them, and they are in the Father, since they are perfect, inseparable from him who is truly good. They lack nothing in any way, but they are given rest and are refreshed by the Spirit. And they listen to their root; they have leisure for themselves, they in whom he will find his root, and he will suffer no loss to his soul.

19



Still others say that Cain came from the Absolute Sovereignty above, and Esau, Korah, and the men of Sodom, along with every person of this sort, have the same origin. They were hated by the Creator because though attacked they suffered no harm, for Sophia took to herself what was her own in them. The traitor Judas was the only one of the apostles who possessed this knowledge. For this reason he brought about the mystery of the betrayal; through him all things on earth and in heaven were destroyed. They provide a work to this effect called the "Gospel of Judas."

Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.31.1

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