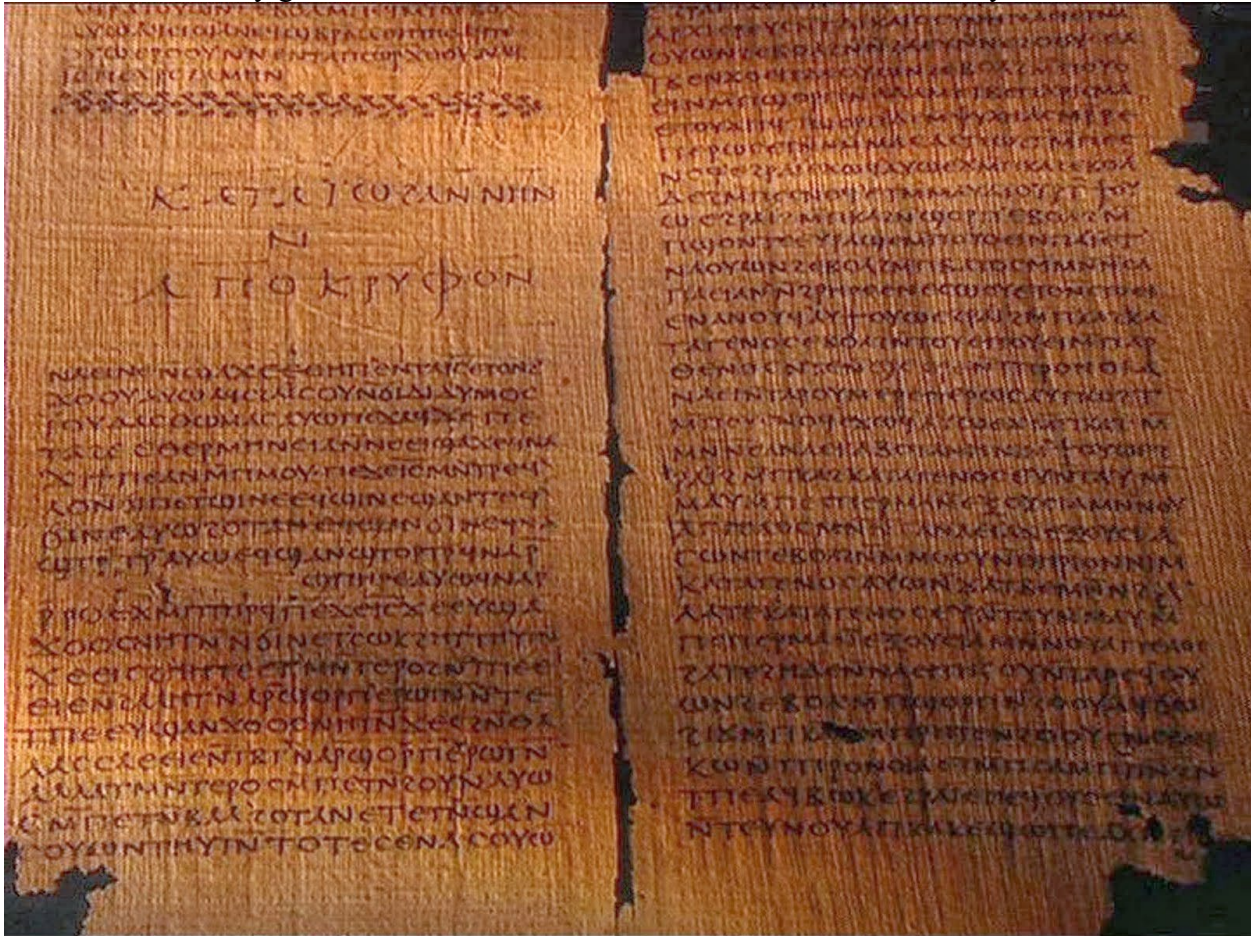


Gnostic Teachings

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- I. Syncretism – A combination of Christianity with the mystery religions, philosophy and perhaps Judaism and Zoroastrianism.
- II. Early Gnostics: Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24), Nicholas (Acts 6:5; Rev 2:6, 15), Cerinthus (end of 1st AD), Marcion (~AD 85-160), Basilides (taught in Alexandria AD 117-138), Valentinus (Rome ~AD 100-160).
***The early gnostics demonstrate that the movement contained many diverse beliefs.



- III. Knowledge (gnosis) as a Means for Obtaining Salvation
 - A. The Acquisition of knowledge (gnosis) brings about redemption and salvation
 - B. This knowledge is usually kept secret and is reserved for the privileged few (esoteric)
 - C. Content of the γνῶσις – knowledge:
 1. Primarily religious knowledge
 2. Knowledge of the highest divine being (the unknowable one)
 3. Knowledge of the cosmos – universe
 4. Knowledge of oneself and the spark of the divine one within
 5. Knowledge of the redeemer
 - Sometimes- 6. Knowledge of words or incantations (magic) to ascend & receive salvation

- D. This knowledge is not ascertained through logic, investigation or human teaching
- E. This knowledge is attained through revelation, (divine disclosure) and is given to the elect ones (predestination).
- F. Knowledge opposes “faith” (belief without understanding)



IV. Dualisms within a Monistic System

- *Monism – the belief that everything comes from the same divine substance.
- *God ultimately creates everything
 - All angelic powers and celestial realms, though they emanated from a higher aeon, go back to God.
 - People themselves have the spark of light within themselves (the soul).

Good	- Evil
Spiritual	- Material
Light	- Darkness
God	- Creation
Perfect	- Imperfect
Gnosis	- Agnosis
(knowledge)	(Ignorance)
Soul	- Body (Flesh)
Spirit	- Flesh

**Gnosticism devalues the material realm & all that is within it including creation & the body.

V. Cosmogony – The Creation of the World

- A. How can a perfect, all powerful and good God create a wicked world?
- B. The Gnostic creation stories involve syncretism with the Jewish creation story, astronomy, astrology and fatalism.
- C. A downward development of emanations (aeons and spheres) from the highest being.
- D. The creation of the world by the Demiurge – an evil being opposed to God who has attempted to entrap God in the material realm (sometimes the Jealous God of the OT)
- E. The fall of particles of light from the Pleroma (fulness) which became the souls of people
- F. The tyrannical rule of the aeons (archons) - sometimes through the Law of Moses

Cosmological Components:

- *The Pleroma (the fulness, completeness) = the dwelling of the highest being – the unknown God. Sometimes the Pleroma has different regions (spheres). The Pleroma is the realm of true light, the realm from which the souls of people originated.
- *The Heavens = Commonly there were seven or eight heavenly spheres inhabited by evil

archons (aeons), sometimes depicted by the 1 Sun 2 Moon 3 Mercury 4 Venus 5 Mars 6 Jupiter 7 Saturn 8 Fixed Stars. The first seven heavens with their “wandering” planets are cruel, anti-divine and anti-human rulers who determine activity on earth (Fate). These hostile powers are wicked and keep people in the darkness of this world. The eighth realm is ruled by the demiurge, who tore apart the Pleroma and created the realms.

- *The World (earth) – entirely physical and thus is evil and enshrouded in darkness and ignorance. A world of pain and suffering. A world of wickedness and injustice.
- * People – created by the curious, inquisitive, wandering Sophia (wisdom). A spark of light from the Pleroma became the soul (the intellect) within people, this light was entrapped in a physical body.

VI. Anthropology

A. Anthropology in Gnosticism is governed by the dualistic view in which all material is evil and reflects the wickedness, imperfection and hostility toward God which existed in its creator, the demiurge.

B. The passions and desires of the flesh are evidence of its wickedness. Sexual sins, coveting, stealing, hatred, violence, materialism, gluttony and ignorance are outcomes of the flesh. Cf. Gal 5:19-21 – The deeds of the flesh

C. People are composed of three parts: (Tripartite): Body, Soul (intellect, will and emotions), and Spirit (that which can understand God). The body and soul were created by the demiurge and are thus corrupted: Flawed bodies with evil desires and flawed minds with evil emotions, minds and intents.

D. The Spirit consists of a spark of the light from the heavenly realm – the Pleroma.

*The Spirit was created by the fall of Sophia (wisdom) – Sophia’s wandering inquisitiveness

*The Spirit is all that is good within a person.

*The Spirit alone is able to be redeemed from the physical realm & can ascend to the Pleroma.

E. Valentinus believed that the soul was the abode of evil spirits and demons which forced people to commit acts of unrighteousness.

F. The Spirit (spark of light) was imprisoned in the body and was released upon physical death.

G. Gnostics had no belief in a physical resurrection of the body from the dead.

H. People were commonly divided into three classes:

1. Spiritual people (pneumatic) = Gnostics, who may attain to the Pleroma
2. Soul people (psychic) = Christians who may attain salvation in paradise, or not at all.
3. Fleshly people (sarkic or hylic) = heathens with no hope of any salvation.

*Whatever element (body, soul, spirit) dominates the person determines their nature and class.

I. People are ignorant of their origin and divine nature. Redemption involves a knowledge of this information.

VII. Soteriology – Redemption and Salvation

A. This realm (world) is dualistically characterized as “darkness” and “ignorance.”

B. People are controlled by the demiurge to the degree that they echo and repeat error.

C. Salvation begins when people realize the divine spark within themselves and acquire knowledge of the cosmos and its function.

D. The process of reintegrating the spark of light into the Pleroma begins at death, when the spirit or soul is separated from the body.

E. The body and soul are perishable, since they come from the demiurge. However, the

spirit which resides within the soul is redeemable.

- F. Gnostics are redeemed by nature since the spark of the divine lies within (a sort of predestination). However, Gnostics have no automatic guarantee of salvation. Salvation must be accompanied by an appropriate way of life. “For each one will reveal his nature (physis) through his practice (praxis) and his knowledge (gnosis).” NHC II 5, 127.

G. The Gnostic Redeemer

1. There is no uniform “gnostic redeemer myth.”
2. Christianity did not supply the gnostic redeemer concept. The concept existed outside of Christian Gnosticism. However, the Christian redeemer (Christ) became a dominant Gnostic Redeemer concept (especially in Christian Gnosticism).
3. The Redeemer is the one who brings the gnosis (knowledge).

The redeemer appears repeatedly throughout history:

- a. The first appearance of the redeemer (the primal revelation) occurs through abstract entities: either wisdom (σοφία), or the spirit (of truth, of life, or of holiness), or understanding (νοῦς), or insight (ἐπινοία), or power of thought (first thought – ἐννοία), or the word (λογος), or light bearer (φωστήρ).
- b. Subsequent appearances of the redeemer tend to “historicize” the redeemer. At various places, historical redeemers include Seth, “the thrice great Hermes,” Simon Magus, and Zoroaster. Jesus Christ is most often identified as the redeemer in Christian Gnosticism. Simon Magus and Menander both claimed the position of the divine redeemer.

H. Gnostic Christology

Docetism – the belief that Christ appeared in the flesh, but was not physical

1. As a Spirit from the Pleroma, Christ did not acquire a fleshly body, but only appeared fleshly (a phantom).
2. This enabled Christ to avoid the stain of sin and evil which is inherent in the material, physical realm.
3. Christ did not really suffer and die upon the cross.
4. Christ took on the disguise of the flesh in order to outwit the demiurge, the archons and aeons and thus descend into the world without being trapped.
5. Two docetic views:
 - a. The spirit (“Christ”) descended upon the physical and human Jesus (either at baptism or conception) and used Jesus’ physical body. “Christ” departed from Jesus before the crucifixion. Jesus was born of Joseph and Mary, no virgin birth.
 - b. Christ never had a physical body. The body was an apparition or phantom, which appeared to be physical but which was really only a spiritual body.
6. A few gnostic movements actually taught that Jesus Christ died on the cross and attached saving value to the act. Most, however, denied the death and atonement.
--Basilides taught that Christ switched places with Simon of Cyrene and stood by laughing as Simon was crucified.

I. The Ascent of the Soul

1. Magical Words and incantations were sometimes necessary as the soul

ascended through the spheres, past the archons and aeons.

2. Knowledge (sometimes coupled with magic) is needed to elude (or trick) the archons who would attempt to impede the upward progress of the gnostic. Archons would attempt to retain the person in their realm of slavery.

J. Hell and Punishment

1. Those who have not attained the gnosis are punished in hell or Tartaros.
2. Examples on photocopy.

Gospel of Truth (AD 140-170): 16:31-38 “The Gospel of Truth is joy for those who have received from the Father of truth the grace of knowing him, through the power of the Word that came forth from the pleroma, the one who is in the thought and the mind of the Father, that is, the one who is addressed as the Savior.”

18:1-11 “Oblivion did not come into existence from the Father, although it did indeed come into existence because of him. But what comes into existence in him is knowledge, which appeared in order that oblivion might vanish and the Father might be known. Since oblivion came into existence because the Father was not known, then if the Father come to be known, oblivion will not exit from that moment on.”

18:15-26 “the hidden mystery, Jesus the Christ, enlightened those who were in darkness through oblivion. He enlightened them; he showed them a way; and the way is the truth which he taught them. For this reason error grew angry at him, persecuted him, was distressed at him and was brought to naught. He was nailed to a tree and he became a fruit of the knowledge of the Father.”

20:23-39 “For this reason Jesus appeared; he put on that book; he was nailed to a tree; he published the edict of the Father on the cross. O such great teaching! . . . Having stripped himself of the perishable rags, he put on imperishability, which no one can possibly take away from him. Having entered the empty spaces of terrors, he passed through those who were stripped naked by oblivion, being knowledge and perfection, proclaiming the things that are in the heart.”

21:8-21 “Since the perfection of the totality is in the Father, it is necessary for the totality to ascend to him. Then, if one has knowledge, he receives what are his own and draws them to himself. For he who is ignorant is in need, and what he lacks is great, since he lacks that which will make him perfect. . . . it is necessary for the totality to ascend to him.”

21:34-22:15 “For he who is ignorant until the end is a creature of oblivion, and he will vanish along with it. . . . If anyone has gnosis, he is a being who comes from above . . . He fulfils the will of him who has called him. . . . He who in this manner shall have gnosis knows from where he has come and where he is going.”

34:35 – 35:2 “This is the word of the gospel of the discovery of the Pleroma, for those who await the salvation which is coming from on high.”

37:37 - 38:4 “Now, the end is receiving knowledge about the one who is hidden, and this is the Father, from whom the beginning came forth, to whom all will return who have come forth from him.”