

Mary, Mother of Jesus Church Adult Faith Formation September 2022

Dr. Mary DeVille, Presenter

### Early Christian Heresies & Non-Canonical Scripture

Handout – 1 (09/06/22)

#### Documents of the Early Christian Church

- Didache (Syria 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries)
- Synoptic Gospels (65-85 CE)
- Gospel of John (c. 90-110 CE)
- Eusebius (Bishop of Caesarea, earliest Church historian, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (c. pre-326 CE))

#### Definition of Heresy

- Church defines heresy as “corruption of the Truth by the intellectual vanity of men”
- Heresy precedes orthodoxy and exerted great pressure on the 1st-3<sup>rd</sup> century church
- 3 types of Early Christian heresy: 1) Trinitarian/Christological; 2) Gnostic; 3) Other

#### Trinitarian/Christological Heresies

##### 1) Docetism (Gk. Dote = to seem or to appear)

- Bishop Serapion of Antioch (197-203 CE)
- The human form of Jesus Christ was an illusion, no true reality
- References to concept found in Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Philip

##### 2) Montanism (“The New Prophecy”)

- Montanus (2<sup>nd</sup>-century self-proclaimed prophet, with Prisca & Maximilla)
- Immanent coming of the Holy Spirit
- Ecstatic trances, proclaimed direct words of Holy Spirit
- Labeled heresy because of the new prophetic revelations
- Effect of Montanism on contemporary Catholic Church

##### 3) Marcionism

- Marcion (2<sup>nd</sup>-century wealthy Christian who settled in Rome)
- Based teaching on Pauline epistles
- Strict duality of OT God and NT God
- Total separation of Christianity from Judaism
- Sub-sect of Gnosticism and had greatest impact on orthodoxy

4) Monarchianism: sought to explain and guard the unity of God’s sovereignty over the world in alignment with Christ’s lordship over the world

2 distinct types

- Dynamic Monarchianism: God and Christ were related through a dynamic relationship instigated by God’s power (dunamis). Raised issue of “homoousion” – controversy in the Nicene Creed

- Modalistic Monarchiansm: (Sabellius: 3<sup>rd</sup>-century Roman theologian). God has several modes with different names: lawgiver, Jesus, Spirit, et al. God reveals his modes through events. Strong appeal to the common man who did not understand theology.

#### 5) Arianism (Arius (250-336 CE) Presbyter in Alexandria)

- Versus Athanasius (296-373 CE) Early Church Father who taught Trinitarianism
- Christ not fully God, fully man, but a created being, named Logos, who was the mediator between God and man
- Athanasius countered with his argument based on soteriology (doctrine of salvation) resulting in the wording of the Nicene Creed

### Gnosticism

#### What is Gnosticism?

- Gnosis = knowledge. Gained through experience and intuitive insight rather than factual information
- Know oneself > know human nature and destiny > know God
- A chasm separates humanity from its creator God
- The self and the divine are identical
- All material things = evil. All spiritual things = good
- Gnosticism was not so much a set of teachings as a world view. (Hellenistic Christianity)

#### Gnostic Theology

- Duality of worlds: light and dark headed by 2 different deities (duality of Gods) Original divine world = pleroma. Inferior material world = kenoma (created by the Demiurge = the Jewish OT God)
- The goal of the gnostic is to escape from the kenoma to the pleroma that is accorded to the souls who "know" the secret that unlocks the door to heaven
- 3 levels of humanity. 1) pagans = material beings who are set up for destruction. 2) Christians = belong to the Jewish God (the Demiurge) who will attain a 2<sup>nd</sup>-class salvation. 3) Spirituals (Gnostics) = those whose destiny is the fullness of the pleroma

#### Valentinian Gnosticism (Valentinus: Egyptian theologian)

- World of matter and world of spirit totally separated. The world of spirit is the pleroma
- Pleroma consists of 30 aeons in pairs of opposition
- The lowest aeon is Sophia (wisdom) who fell from the pleroma by thinking thoughts too lofty for her station
- The result was the creation of the Demiurge (OT God) who created the world
- Humanity was born out of Sophia's mistaken passion. They are the children of Sophia and share her fate of being excluded from the pleroma
- Humanity's goal (and problem!) is to get out of the realm of the Demiurge and back into the pleroma (just as Christ did)

- With gnosis (knowledge) imparted by Christ, humanity can, after death, escape the chain of the material life and ascend into the world of the spirit
- Valentinus divided humanity into 3 categories: 1) material people with no chance for salvation; 2) psychical people (Christians) who are not lost but not really saved; and 3) spiritual people who are already saved through their gnosis

#### Marcionism (Marcionistic Gnosticism) Marcion of Synope. Rome c. 144 CE

- Dualistic theology of a benevolent God (NT) who sent Jesus into the world as the savior and the malevolent Demiurge (OT) who created the material world
- Followed the teachings of Paul, believed to be the only true apostle of Christ
- Marcion created the first “canon” of scripture, consisting of 11 books: 10 Pauline epistles and a shortened version of the Gospel of Luke
- Disputed most strongly by Tertullian in *Adversus Marcionem* (c. 208 CE)
- Marcion differs from Valentinus because he (Marcion) based his teachings on those of Paul rather than Valentinus’ concept of a secret knowledge (gnosis)
- Jesus Christ was not a Jewish messiah but rather a spiritual entity sent by the Monad to reveal truth and allow humanity to escape the earthly trap of the Demiurge. //Monad = highest source in the pleroma, the region of light, the fullness of the Godhead. From the Monad various emanations emerge. They become progressively degraded due to their remoteness from the Father (Monad). There are 30 emanations (aeons): Jesus Christ is the closest to the Monad (Father) and Sophia is the farthest away. The Demiurge is just above Sophia (YHWH)

#### The Refutation of Irenaeus

##### Irenaeus

- (130-202 CE) Bishop of Lyons
- Christian theology and heresy: defining Catholic orthodoxy

##### Against Heresies: On The Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis (c. 180 CE)

- Identified the various sub-sects of Gnosticism
- Contrasts their theology with his orthodoxy
- Provides the best description of Gnosticism until the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library
- Orthodoxy and true doctrine is passed down through the apostolic tradition while the Gnostics distorted the words of the apostles
- Saw creation and the material world as good and destined for glorification
- One God of both OT and NT
- Quotes I Cor. 15: 50 as reference to the resurrection of the dead