

## Mary, Mother of Jesus Church Adult Faith Formation (September 2022)

### Week 2: September 13 Handout – 2

#### Overview of Gnosticism

- Attaining salvation through gnosis
- Material things = evil. Spiritual things = good
- Gnosticism is not so much a specific set of teachings as a world view
- Duality of worlds and duality of gods. Original divine world = Pleroma. Inferior material world = Kenoma (fashioned by the Demiurge = OT Jewish YHWH)
- 3 levels of humanity:
  - 1) pagans: material beings set up for destruction
  - 2) Christians: belong to the Jewish YHWH; attain a 2<sup>nd</sup>-class salvation
  - 3) Spirituals: Gnostics whose destiny is the fullness of the Pleroma

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

- World of ideas and fullness of God = Pleroma (where dwells the Monad)
- Pleroma consists of 30 aeons in pairs of opposition
- Aeon closest to the Monad is Jesus Christ
- Lowest aeon is Sophia who fell from the Pleroma and in turn created the Demiurge (OT YHWH) who created the physical world
- Humanity was born of Sophia and share her fate
- Goal of humanity is to escape the realm of the Demiurge and find their way back into the Pleroma
- With gnosis, imparted by Jesus Christ, humanity can, after death, escape the chains of material life and ascend to the Pleroma

#### The Nag Hammadi Library

- Discovered by Muhammad 'Ali al-Samman, December 1945, in cave at foot of cliff, Jabal al-Tarif, near the town of Nag Hammadi (Egypt)
- 13 papyrus codices comprising 52 tractates (6 are duplicates, 46 original)
- Coptic translations of original Greek texts
- Translated at (and probably hidden by) Pachomian Monastery at Chenoboskion, Egypt
- Easter 367 CE: Athanasius sent letter to all monasteries ordering the destruction of all apocryphal writings
- Translations into English completed in 1970s

#### Refutation by Irenaeus

*Against All Heresies: The Refutation and Overthrow of Falsely, So-Called Gnosis (Knowledge)*

- 5 volumes c. 180 CE
- Primarily to disprove Gnosticism
- Premise is that all authority in the church must come from the Apostolic Tradition

#### Irenaeus Doctrine of Redemption and the Church through Apostolic Tradition

- "Holy Catholic Church"

- Catholic = universal as opposed to a particular church
- Church = one house (one institution)
- The whole church as opposed to a particular church in a particular city with its Bishop
- Irenaeus expanded “catholic” to also mean “orthodox” as opposed to heretical
- Holy = communion or community = shares something in common
- Church = communion because the church participates in holy things and activities
- Apostolic Tradition makes its members holy

### The Gospel of Thomas

- Collection of sayings attributed to Jesus Christ
- Coptic text is a translation of the original Greek: 3 earlier fragments in Greek were found in 1898 at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt (MS. papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654. 1) at Oxford Bodleian Library; 2) at British Museum, London; 3) at Harvard University Library
- Gospel of Thomas is #2 of 7 tractates in Codex 2
- 114 Sayings, most have parallels in Synoptic Gospels
- Most Sayings begin with “Jesus said...”
- //The Secret Sayings which the living Jesus spoke whose interpretation will enable one to not experience death//

- 
- Saying 1: gnosis: whoever discovers (knows)
- 2: begins close to synoptic but then veers into Gnosticism (GK Oxy 654 “and having ruled, you will rest”
- 3: first step to gnosis is to know one’s self
- 6: negative version of The Golden Rule. Questions posed here will be answered in 14
- 7: Lion = symbolic for the passions. The passions may either be consumed (overcome) by a person or consume a person
- 9: parallel to Matt. 13: 1-9;18-23
- 11: the 4 riddles of life: here and the beyond
- 12: James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem
- 13: “because you have drunk...” Jesus is like a “waiter” serving up wisdom. Stoning was the Jewish punishment for blasphemy
- 14: answers the questions of Saying 6
- 17: I Cor. 2: 9 as a “wisdom saying”
- 19: The five trees in paradise. In the Jewish Kabbala: dimensions or levels relating to the soul’s progress toward unity with the Creator. Fullness = the Pleroma. With the benefits of self-knowledge even the stones will become servants = listening to the inner self
- 22: human transformation
- 24: duality of light and dark
- 30: parallel to Matt. 18: 20
- 37: cast off the material world and then you will know the self
- 42: “become passersby” = An Eastern teaching: “This world is a bridge. Pass over it, but do not build your house upon it.”
- 51: Kingdom of God is here and now
- 53: Paul: spiritual circumcision Romans 2: 25-29

- 55: “take up cross” was a common figure of speech meaning to bear up under burdens and difficulties
- 61: “as if you are from someone” = stranger
- 66: Psalm 118:22
- 68: meaning you will find a place where you are not persecuted. Reference to Christians fleeing Jerusalem to Pella (Transjordan) after Roman persecution
- 70: one of the most important sayings for Gnosticism: salvation comes from within
- 77: kingdom of God is not in future but now in present time and here. Reference to Celtic spirituality and the influence of Gnosticism on “domestic spirituality”
- 86: Matt. 8: 20; Luke 9: 58
- 90: major premise of the Christian life
- 93: GK Oxy 654 has “grind it to bits”
- 96: 3 parables Matt. 13: 33; Luke 13: 20-21
- 100: expansion of a synoptic text
- 108: compare to Saying 13
- 113: Matt. 13: 44-50. Synoptic Gospels say in the future; Thomas says now
- 114: duality of male and female. Thomas explains that Jesus Christ will give Mary the Biblical qualities of maleness: power, authority, top place in society, freedom, et al