


Gnosticism

Not to be confused with Agnosticism.

Part of a series on
Gnosticism

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Gnosticism (from Ancient Greek: γνωστικός *gnostikos*, "learned", from γνώσις *gnōsis*, knowledge) describes a collection of ancient religions that taught that people should shun the material world created by the demiurge and embrace the spiritual world.^[2] Gnostic ideas influenced many ancient religions that teach that *gnosis* (variously interpreted as knowledge, enlightenment, salvation, emancipation or 'oneness with God') may be reached by practicing philanthropy to the point of personal poverty, sexual abstinence (as far as possible for *hearers*, completely for *initiates*) and diligently searching for wisdom by helping others. However, practices varied among those who were Gnostic.

In Gnosticism, the world of the demiurge is represented by the lower world, which is associated with matter, flesh, time and more particularly an imperfect, ephemeral world. The world of God is represented by the upper world, and is associated with the soul and perfection. The world of God is eternal and not part of the physical. It is impalpable, and time doesn't exist there. To rise to God, the Gnostic must reach the *knowledge*, which mixes philosophy, metaphysics, curiosity, culture, knowledge, and the secrets of history and the universe.^{[3][4]}

Gnosticism is primarily defined in a Christian context.^{[5][6]} In the past, some scholars thought that gnosticism predated Christianity and included pre-Christian religious beliefs and spiritual practices argued to be common to early Christianity, Neoplatonism, Hellenistic Judaism, Greco-Roman mystery religions, and Zoroastrianism (especially Zurvanism). The discussion of gnosticism changed radically with the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library and led to a revision of older assumptions. To date, no pre-Christian gnostic texts have been found,^[7] and gnosticism as a unique and recognizable belief system is typically considered to be a second century (or later) development.^[8]

Nature and structure

Common characteristics

A common characteristic of some of these groups was the teaching that the realisation of Gnosis (esoteric or intuitive knowledge) is the way to salvation of the soul from the material world. They saw the material world as created through an intermediary being (the demiurge) rather than directly by God. In most of the systems, this demiurge was seen as imperfect, in others even as evil. Different gnostic schools sometimes identified the demiurge as Ahriman, El, Saklas, Samael, Satan, Yaldabaoth, or Yahweh.

Jesus is identified by some Gnostics as an embodiment of the supreme being who became incarnate to bring *gnōsis* to the earth, while others adamantly denied that the supreme being came in the flesh, claiming Jesus to be merely a human who attained divinity through gnosis and taught his disciples to do the same. Wikipedia:Citation needed Among the Mandaeans, Jesus was considered a *mšīha kdaba* or "false messiah" who perverted the teachings entrusted to him by John the Baptist. Still other traditions identify Mani and Seth, third son of Adam and Eve, as salvific figures.

The Christian groups first called gnostic were a branch of Christianity, however Joseph Jacobs and Ludwig Blau note that much of the terminology employed is Jewish and note that this "proves at least that the principal elements of gnosticism were derived from Jewish speculation, while it does not preclude the possibility of new wine having been poured into old bottles."^[9] The movement spread in areas controlled by the Roman Empire and Arian Goths,^[10] and the Persian Empire; it continued to develop in the Mediterranean and Middle East before and during the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Conversion to Islam and the Albigensian Crusade (1209–1229) greatly reduced the remaining number of Gnostics throughout the Middle Ages, though a few Mandaean communities still exist. Gnostic and pseudo-gnostic ideas became influential in some of the philosophies of various esoteric mystical movements of the late 19th and 20th centuries in Europe and North America, including some that explicitly identify themselves as revivals or even continuations of earlier gnostic groups.

The main features

Gnostic systems, particularly the Syrian-Egyptian schools, are typically marked by:

- The notion of a remote, supreme monadic divinity, source – this figure is known under a variety of names, including "Pleroma" (fullness, totality) and "Bythos" (depth, profundity);
- The introduction by emanation of further divine beings known as Aeons, which are nevertheless identifiable as aspects of the God from which they proceeded; the progressive emanations are often conceived metaphorically as a gradual and progressive distancing from the ultimate source, which brings about an instability in the fabric of the divine nature;
- The introduction of a distinct creator god or demiurge, which is an illusion and a later emanation from the single monad or source. This second god is a lesser and inferior or false god. This creator god is commonly referred to as the *demiourgós* used in the Platonist tradition. The gnostic demiurge bears resemblance to figures in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Republic*. In the former, the *demiourgós* is a central figure, a benevolent creator of the universe who works to make the universe as benevolent as the limitations of matter will allow; in the latter, the description of the leontomorphic "desire" in Socrates' model of the psyche bears a resemblance to descriptions of the demiurge as being in the shape of the lion; the relevant passage of *The Republic* was found within a major gnostic library discovered at Nag Hammadi, wherein a text existed describing the demiurge as a "lion-faced serpent". Elsewhere, this figure is called "Ialdabaoth", "Samael" (Aramaic: *səm'a-'el*, "blind god") or "Saklas" (Syriac: *səkla*, "the foolish one"), who is sometimes ignorant of the superior god, and sometimes opposed to it; thus in the latter case he is correspondingly malevolent. The demiurge typically creates a group of co-actors named "Archons", who preside over the material realm and, in some cases, present obstacles to the soul seeking ascent from it;
- The estimation of the world, owing to the above, as flawed or a production of "error" but possibly good as its constituent material might allow. This world is typically an inferior simulacrum of a higher-level reality or consciousness.

The inferiority may be compared to the technical inferiority of a work of art, painting, sculpture, etc.—to the thing the art represents. In other cases it takes on a more ascetic tendency to view material existence negatively, which then becomes more extreme when materiality, and the human body, is perceived as evil and constrictive, a deliberate prison for its inhabitants.

- The explanation of this state through the use of a complex mythological-cosmological drama in which a divine element "falls" into the material realm and lodges itself within certain human beings; from here, it may be returned to the divine realm through a process of awakening (leading towards salvation). The salvation of the individual thus mirrors a concurrent restoration of the divine nature; a central Gnostic innovation was to elevate individual redemption to the level of a cosmically significant event.

The model limits itself to describing characteristics of the Syrian-Egyptian school of Gnosticism. This is because the greatest expressions of the Persian gnostic school – Manicheanism and Mandaeanism – are typically conceived of as religious traditions in their own right; indeed, the typical usage of "Gnosticism" is to refer to the Syrian-Egyptian schools alone, while "Manichean" describes the movements of the Persia school.

This conception of Gnosticism has in recent times come to be challenged (see below). Despite this, the understanding presented above remains the most common and is useful in aiding meaningful discussion of the phenomena that compose Gnosticism. Above all, the central idea of *gnōsis*, a knowledge superior to and independent of faith made it welcome to many who were half-converted from paganism to Christianity. The Valentinians, for example, considered *pistis* (Greek: "faith") as consisting of accepting a body of teaching as true, being principally intellectual or emotional in character. The age of the Gnostics was highly diverse; they seem to have originated in Alexandria and coexisted with the early Christians until the 4th century AD, and because there was as yet no fixed church authority, syncretism with pre-existing belief systems as well as new religions were often embraced. According to Clement of Alexandria, "... In the times of the Emperor Hadrian appeared those who devised heresies, and they continued until the age of the elder Antoninus."

Prior to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library, much of what we know today about gnosticism was preserved only in the summaries and assessments of early church fathers. Irenaeus declares in his treatise "Against Heresies" that Gnostic movements subjected all morality to the caprice of the individual, and made any fixed rule of faith impossible, the whim of the individual being a subject that is of concern when discussing heresy and orthodoxy in relation to spiritual mysticism, such as the mysticism of Henry Corbin, Thelema, and even in fiction such as "The Theologians" by Jorge Luis Borges in *Labyrinths*. According to Irenaeus, a certain sect known as the "Cainites" professed to impart a knowledge "greater and more sublime" than the ordinary doctrine of Christians, and believed that Cain derived his power from the superior Godhead. Although a Christian who valued gnosis, Clement of Alexandria, a 2nd-century church father and the first notable member of the Church of Alexandria, raised a criticism against the followers of Basilides and Valentinus in his *Stromata*: in his view it annulled the efficacy of baptism, in that it held of no value faith, the gift conferred in that sacrament.

Dualism and monism

Typically, Gnostic systems are loosely described as being "dualistic" in nature, meaning that they have the view that the world consists of or is explicable as two fundamental entities. Hans Jonas writes: "The cardinal feature of gnostic thought is the radical dualism that governs the relation of God and world, and correspondingly that of man and world."^[11] Within this definition, they run the gamut from the "radical dualist" systems of Manicheanism to the "mitigated dualism" of classic gnostic movements; Valentinian developments arguably approach a form of monism, expressed in terms previously used in a dualistic manner.

- **Radical dualism**—or *absolute dualism*, posits two co-equal divine forces. Manichaeism conceives of two previously coexistent realms of light and darkness that become embroiled in conflict, owing to the chaotic actions of the latter. Subsequently, certain elements of the light became entrapped within darkness; the purpose of material creation is to enact the slow process of extraction of these individual elements, at the end of which the kingdom of light will prevail over darkness. Manicheanism inherits^{[12][13]} this dualistic mythology from Zurvanist Zoroastrianism,^[14] in which the eternal spirit Ahura Mazda is opposed by his antithesis, Angra Mainyu; the two are engaged in a cosmic struggle, the conclusion of which will likewise see Ahura Mazda triumphant. The Mandaean creation myth witnesses the progressive emanations of Supreme Being of Light, with each emanation bringing about a progressive corruption resulting in the eventual emergence of Ptahil, a demiurge who had a hand in creating and henceforward rules the material realm. Additionally, general Gnostic thought (specifically found in Iranian groups; for instance, see "The Hymn of the Pearl") commonly included the belief that the material world corresponds to some sort of malevolent intoxication brought about by the powers of darkness to keep elements of the light trapped inside it, or literally to keep them "in the dark", or ignorant; in a state of drunken distraction. Wikipedia:Citation needed
- **Mitigated Dualism** — where one of the two principles is in some way inferior to the other. Such classical Gnostic movements as the Sethians conceived of the material world as being created by a lesser divinity than the true God that was the object of their devotion. The spiritual world is conceived of as being radically different from the material world, co-extensive with the true God, and the true home of certain enlightened members of humanity; thus, these systems were expressive of a feeling of acute alienation within the world, and their resultant aim was to allow the soul to escape the constraints presented by the physical realm. Wikipedia:Citation needed
- **Qualified Monism** — where it is arguable whether or not the second entity is divine or semi-divine. Elements of Valentinian versions of Gnostic myth suggest to some that its understanding of the universe may have been monistic rather than a dualistic one. Elaine Pagels states that "Valentinian gnosticism [...] differs essentially from dualism"; while, according to Schoedel "a standard element in the interpretation of Valentinianism and similar forms of Gnosticism is the recognition that they are fundamentally monistic". In these myths, the malevolence of the demiurge is mitigated; his creation of a flawed materiality is not due to any moral failing on his part, but due to his imperfection by contrast to the superior entities of which he is unaware. As such, Valentinians already have less cause to treat physical reality with contempt than might a Sethian Gnostic

The Valentinian tradition conceives of materiality, rather than as being a separate substance from the divine, as attributable to an *error of perception*, which become symbolized mythopoetically as the act of material creation.

Moral and ritual practice

Numerous early Christian Fathers accused some Gnostic teachers of claiming to eschew the physical realm, while simultaneously freely indulging their physical appetites; however, there is reason to question the accuracy of these claims. Evidence in the source texts indicates Gnostic moral behaviour as being generally ascetic in basis, expressed most fluently in their sexual and dietary practice.^[15] Many monks would deprive themselves of food, water, or necessary needs for living. This presented a problem for the heresiologists writing on gnostic movements: this mode of behaviour was one they themselves favoured and supported, so the Church Fathers, some modern-day Gnostic apologist presume—would be required perforce to offer support to the practices of their theological opponents. To avoid this, a common heresiological approach was to avoid the issue completely by resorting to slanderous (and, in some cases, excessive) allegations of libertinism (see the Cainites), or to explain Gnostic asceticism as being based on incorrect interpretations of scripture, or simply duplicitous in nature. Epiphanius provides an example when he writes of the "Archontics": "Some of them ruin their bodies by dissipation, but others feign ostensible fasts and deceive simple people while they pride themselves with a sort of abstinence, under the disguise of monks" (*Panarion*, 40.1.4).

In other areas of morality, Gnostics were less rigorously ascetic, and took a more moderate approach to correct behaviour. Ptolemy's *Epistle to Flora* lays out a project of general asceticism in which the basis of action is the moral inclination of the individual:

"External physical fasting is observed even among our followers, for it can be of some benefit to the soul if it is engaged on with reason (*logos*), whenever it is done neither by way of limiting others, nor out of habit, nor because of the day, as if it had been specially appointed for that purpose."

—Ptolemy, Letter to Flora

This extract marks a definite shift away from the position of orthodoxy, that the correct behaviour for Christians is best administered and prescribed by the central authority of the Church, as transmitted through the Apostles to the Church's bishops. Instead, the internalised inclination of the individual assumes paramount importance; there is the recognition that ritualistic behaviour, though well-intentioned, possesses no significance or effectiveness unless its external prescription is matched by a personal, internal motivation.

Charges of Gnostic libertinism find their source in the works of Irenaeus. According to this writer, Simon Magus (whom he has identified as the prototypical source of Gnosticism, and who had previously tried to buy sacramental authority of ordination from St. Peter the Apostle) founded the school of moral freedom ('amoralism'). Irenaeus reports that Simon's argument was that those who put their trust in him and his consort Helen need trouble themselves no further with the biblical prophets or their moral exhortations and are free "to do what they wish", as men are saved by his (Simon's) grace and not by their "righteous works" (*Adversus Haereses*).

Simon is not known for any libertinistic practice, save for his curious attachment to Helen, typically reputed to be a prostitute. There is, however, clear evidence in the Testimony of Truth that followers of Simon did, in fact, get married and beget children, so a general tendency to asceticism can likewise be ruled out.

Irenaeus reports of the Valentinians, whom he characterizes as eventual inheritors of Simon, that they eat food "offered to idols" (idol-worship), are sexually promiscuous ("immoderately given over to the desires of the flesh") and are guilty of taking wives under the pretence of living with them as adopted "sisters". In the latter case, Michael Allen Williams has argued plausibly that Irenaeus was here broadly correct in the behaviour described, but not in his apprehension of its causes. Williams argues that members of a cult might live together as "brother" and "sister": intimate, yet not sexually active. Over time, however, the self-denial required of such an endeavour becomes harder and harder to maintain, leading to the state of affairs Irenaeus criticizes.

Irenaeus also makes reference to the Valentinian practise of the Bridal Chamber, a ritualistic sacrament in which sexual union is seen as analogous to the activities of the paired syzygies that constitute the Valentinian Pleroma. Though it is known that Valentinus had a more relaxed approach to sexuality than much of the Catholic Church (he allowed women to hold positions of ordination in his community), it is not known whether the Bridal Chamber was a ritual involving actual intercourse, or whether human sexuality is here simply being used in a metaphorical sense.

Of the Carpocratians Irenaeus makes much the same report: they "are so abandoned in their recklessness that they claim to have in their power and be able to practise anything whatsoever that is ungodly (irreligious) and impious ... they say that conduct is only good or evil in the eyes of man". Once again a differentiation might be detected between a man's actions and the grace he has received through his adherence to a system of *gnosis*; whether this is due to a common sharing of such an attitude amongst Gnostic circles, or whether this is simply a blanket-charge used by Irenaeus is open to conjecture.

On the whole, it would seem that Gnostic behaviour tended towards the ascetic. This said, the heresiological accusation of duplicity in such practises should not be taken at face value; nor should similar accusations of amoral libertinism. The Nag Hammadi library itself is full of passages that appear to encourage abstinence over indulgence. Fundamentally, however, gnostic movements appear to take the "ancient schema of the two ways, which leaves the decision to do what is right to human endeavour and promises a reward for those who make the effort, and punishment for those who are negligent" (Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 262).

Origins

Buddhism and Gnosticism

Main article: Buddhism and Gnosticism

The idea that Gnosticism was derived from Buddhism was first proposed by the Victorian gem collector and numismatist Charles William King (1864), but is generally rejected in scholarship.^[16] Mansel (1875)^[17] considered the principal sources of Gnosticism to be Platonism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism.^[18] However, the influence of Buddhism in any sense on either the *gnostikos* Valentinus (c. 170) or the Nag Hammadi texts (3rd century) is not supported by modern scholarship, but in the latter case is considered quite possible by Elaine Pagels (1979),^[19] who called for Buddhist scholars to try to find parallels.^[20]

Early 3rd- and 4th-century Christian writers such as Hippolytus and Epiphanius write about a Scythianus who visited India around 50 AD and brought back "the doctrine of the Two Principles". Karl Ritter (1838)^[21] suggested that when Cyril of Jerusalem remarks that one of Scythianus' pupils Terebinthus had changed his name to Buddas to escape detection while passing through Judea, and then died in Judea from a fall from a rooftop, that this is connected with the Buddha.^[22]

"But Terebinthus, his disciple in this wicked error, inherited his money and books and heresy, and came to Palestine, and becoming known and condemned in Judæa he resolved to pass into Persia: but lest he should be recognised there also by his name he changed it and called himself Buddas. However, he found adversaries there also in the priests of Mithras: and being confuted in the discussion of many arguments and controversies, and at last hard pressed, he took refuge with a certain widow. Then having gone up on the housetop, and summoned the dæmons of the air, whom the Manichees to this day invoke over their abominable ceremony of the fig, he was smitten of God, and cast down from the housetop, and expired: and so the second beast was cut off."

—Cyril of Jerusalem, "Catechetical lecture 6" ^[23]

Also in the 3rd century the Syrian writer and Christian Gnostic theologian Bar Daisan (154–222) described his exchanges with the religious missions of holy men from India passing through Syria on their way to Elagabalus or another Severan dynasty Roman Emperor. His accounts were quoted by Porphyry (*On Abstinence* 4:17) and

Stobaeus (*Eccles.*, iii, 56, 141).Wikipedia:Citation needed Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromateis* distinguishes Sramanas (Greek: Σαρμαναίοι) and Brahmans, without making any gnostic connection.^[24]

From the 3rd century to the 12th century, some Gnostic religions such as Manichaeism, which combined Christian, Hebrew and Buddhist influences (Mani, the founder of the religion, resided for some time in Kushan lands),^[25] spread throughout the Old World, to Gaul and Great Britain in the West, and to China in the East. Augustine of Hippo, like some other leading Christian theologians, was Manichaean before converting to orthodox Christianity.^[26]

Neoplatonism and Gnosticism

See also: Neoplatonism and Gnosticism and Neoplatonism and Christianity

Ancient Greek philosophy and Gnosticism

See also: Platonic Academy

The earliest origins of Gnosticism are obscure and still disputed. For this reason, some scholars prefer to speak of "gnosis" when referring to 1st-century ideas that later developed into gnosticism and to reserve the term "gnosticism" for the synthesis of these ideas into a coherent movement in the 2nd century.^[27] Probable influences include Plato, Middle Platonism and Neo-Pythagoreanism academies or schools of thought, and this seems to be true both of the more Sethian Gnostics, and of the Valentinian Gnostics. Further, if we compare different Sethian texts to each other in an attempted chronology of the development of Sethianism during the first few centuries, it seems that later texts are continuing to interact with Platonism. Earlier texts such as Apocalypse of Adam show signs of being pre-Christian and focus on the Seth, third son of Adam and Eve. These early Sethians may be identical to or related to the Nazarenes (sect), Ophites or to the sectarian group called hereticsWikipedia:Avoid weasel words by Philo.Wikipedia:Citation needed^{[28][29]}

Later Sethian texts such as Zostrianos and Allogenes draw on the imagery of older Sethian texts, but utilize "a large fund of philosophical conceptuality derived from contemporary Platonism, (that is late middle Platonism) with no traces of Christian content."^[30] Indeed the doctrine of the "triple-powered one" found in the text Allogenes, as discovered in the Nag Hammadi Library, is "the same doctrine as found in the anonymous Parmenides commentary (Fragment XIV) ascribed by Hadot to Porphyry [...] and is also found in Plotinus' Ennead 6.7, 17, 13–26."

However, by the 3rd century Neoplatonists, such as Plotinus, Porphyry and Amelius are all attacking the Sethians. It looks as if Sethianism began as a pre-Christian tradition, possibly a syncretic^[31] that incorporated elements of Christianity and Platonism as it grew, only to have both Christianity and Platonism reject and turn against it. Professor John D Turner believes that this double attack led to Sethianism fragmentation into numerous smaller groups (Audians, Borborites, Archontics and perhaps Phibionites, Stratiotici, and Secundians [32]).

Scholarship on Gnosticism has been greatly advanced by the discovery and translation of the Nag Hammadi texts, which shed light on some of the more puzzling comments by Plotinus and Porphyry regarding the Gnostics. More importantly, the texts help to distinguish different kinds of early Gnostics. It now seems clear that "Sethian" and "Valentinian"^[33] gnostics attempted "an effort towards conciliation, even affiliation" with late antique philosophy,^[34] and were rebuffed by some Neoplatonists, including Plotinus.

Philosophical relations between Neoplatonism and Gnosticism

Gnostics borrow a lot of ideas and terms from Platonism. They exhibit a keen understanding of Greek philosophical terms and the Greek Koine language in general, and use Greek philosophical concepts throughout their text, including such concepts as hypostasis (reality, existence), *ousia* (essence, substance, being), and demiurge (creator God). Good examples include texts such as the Hypostasis of the Archons^[35] (Reality of the Rulers) or Trimorphic Protennoia (The first thought in three forms).

Criticism of gnosticism by antique Greek philosophy

As a pagan mystic, Plotinus considered his opponents heretics^[36] and elitist blasphemers,^[37] arriving at misotheism as the solution to the problem of evil, being not traditional or genuine Hellenism (in philosophy or mysticism), but rather one invented taking all their truths over from Plato,^[38] coupled with the idea expressed by Plotinus that the approach to the infinite force, which is the One or Monad cannot be through knowing or not knowing (i.e., dualist, which is of the dyad or demiurge).^{[39][40]} Although there has been dispute as to which gnostics Plotinus referred to, it appears they were indeed Sethian.^[41] Plotinus' main objection to the gnostics he was familiar with, however, was their rejection of the goodness of the demiurge and the material world. He attacks the gnostics as vilifying Plato's ontology of the universe as contained in the *Timaeus*. He accused Gnosticism of vilifying the Demiurge, or craftsman that crafted the material world, and even of thinking that the material world is evil, or a prison. As Plotinus explains, the demiurge is the *nous* (as the first emanation of the One), the ordering principle or mind, and also reason. Plotinus was also critical of the gnostic origin of the demiurge as the offspring of wisdom, represented as a deity called Sophia. She was anthropomorphically expressed as a feminine spirit deity not unlike the goddess Athena or the Christian Holy Spirit. Plotinus even went so far as to state at one point that if the gnostics did believe this world was a prison then they could at any moment free themselves by committing suicide. To some degree the texts discovered in Nag Hammadi support his allegations, but others such as the Valentinians and the Tripartite Tractate insist on the goodness of the world and the Demiurge.

Christianity and Gnosticism

See also: Christian Gnosticism and Gnosticism and the New Testament

Although some scholars hypothesize that gnosticism developed before or contemporaneous with Christianity, no gnostic texts have been discovered that pre-date Christianity.^[42] James M. Robinson, a noted proponent of pre-Christian Gnosticism, has admitted "pre-Christian Gnosticism as such is hardly attested in a way to settle the debate once and for all."^[43] Since pre-Christian Gnosticism, as such, is strictly hypothetical, any influence of Gnosticism upon Christianity is speculative.

The necessity of immediate revelation through divine knowledge in order to attain transcendence in a Supreme Deity is important to understand in the identification of what evidence there is pertaining to Gnosticism^[44] in the New Testament (NT), which would influence orthodox teaching.^[45] Central Gnostic beliefs that differ from orthodox Christian teachings include: the creator as a lower being ['Demiurge'] and not a Supreme Deity; the belief that all matter is evil and the body is a prison to escape from (versus the Nicene Creed teaching that there will be a physical resurrection of all people); scripture having a deep, hidden meaning whose true message could only be understood through "secret wisdom";^[46] and Jesus as a spirit that "seemed"^[47] to be human, leading to a rejection of the incarnation (Docetism).^[48] The traditional "formula which enshrines the Incarnation...is that in some sense God, without ceasing to be God, was made man...which is a prima facie ['at first sight'] contradiction in theological terms...the NT nowhere reflects on the virgin birth of Jesus as witnessing to the conjunction of deity and manhood in His person...the deity of Jesus was not...clearly stated in words and [the book of] Acts gives no hint that it was".^[49] This philosophy^[50] was known by the Church Fathers such as Origen, Irenaeus, and Tertullian (questionable).^[51]

At its core, Gnosticism formed a speculative interest in the relationship of the oneness of God to the 'triplicity' of his manifestations. It seems to have taken Neoplatonic metaphysics of substance and hypostases ["being"]^[52] as a departure point for interpreting the relationship of the "Father" to the "Son"^[53] in its attempt to define a new theology.^[54] This would point to the infamous theological controversies by Arius^[55] against followers of the Greek Alexandrian school,^[56] headed by Athanasius.^[57]

The ancient Nag Hammadi Library, discovered in Egypt in the 1940s, revealed how varied this movement was. The writers of these manuscripts considered themselves 'Christians', but owing to their syncretistic beliefs, borrowed heavily from the Greek philosopher Plato. The find included the hotly debated Gospel of Thomas, which parallels some of Jesus' sayings in the Synoptic Gospels. This may point to the existence of a postulated lost textual source for

the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, known as the Q document.^[58] Thus, modern debate is split between those who see Gnosticism as a pre-Christian form of 'theosophy'^[59] and those who see it as a post-Christian counter-movement. New Testament scripture was largely unwritten, at least in the form of canon, existing in the practices, customs and teachings of the early Christian community. What largely was communicated generation to generation was an oral tradition passed from the apostles to the Bishops and from Bishops and priests to the faithful through their preaching and way of life.^[60] Constantine's call for unity in the building of the new Roman Church (which would become the state church of the Roman Empire) led to his request for Eusebius to produce some 50 copies of manuscripts. These were approved and accepted by the emperor, which later influenced the final stages of canonization.^[61]

It is hard to sift through what actual evidence there is regarding Gnosticism in the New Testament due to their historical synchronicity. The Hammadi library find contains Pagan, Jewish, Greek and early Gnostic influences,^[62] further reinforcing the need to tread lightly. The antiquity of the find being of utmost importance since it shows primary evidence of texts that may also have influenced the process of New Testament canonization.^{[63][64]}

Judaism and Gnosticism

Many heads of gnostic schools were identified as Jewish Christians by Church Fathers and Hebrew words and names of God were applied in some gnostic systems.^[65] The cosmogonic speculations among Christian Gnostics had partial origins in Ma'aseh Bereshit and Ma'aseh Merkabah.^[66]

Gnostic rejection of Judaism

Modern research (Cohen 1988) identifies Judaism, rather than Persia, as a major origin of Gnosticism. Many of the Nag Hammadi texts make reference to Judaism, in some cases with a violent rejection of the Jewish God.^[67] Gershom Scholem once described Gnosticism as "the Greatest case of metaphysical anti-Semitism". Professor Steven Bayme said gnosticism would be better characterized as anti-Judaism.^[68] Recent research into the origins of Gnosticism shows a strong Jewish influence, particularly from Hekhalot literature.^[69]

Kabbalah

Gnostic ideas found a Jewish variation in the mystical study of Kabbalah. Many core Gnostic ideas reappear in Kabbalah, where they are used to dramatically reinterpret earlier Jewish sources according to this new system.^[70] The Kabbalists originated in 13th-century Provence,^[71] which was at that time also the center of the Gnostic Cathars. While some scholars in the middle of the 20th century tried to assume an influence between the Cathar "gnostics" and the origins of the Kabbalah, this assumption has proved to be an incorrect generalization not substantiated by any original texts.^[72] On the other hand, other scholars, such as Scholem, have postulated that there was originally a *Jewish gnosticism*, which influenced the early origins of gnosticism.^[73]

Kabbalah does not employ the terminology or labels of non-Jewish Gnosticism, but grounds the same or similar concepts in the language of the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible).^[74] The 13th-century Book of Zohar ("Splendor"), a foundational text in Kabbalah, is written in the style of a Jewish Aramaic Midrash, clarifying the five books of the Torah with a new Kabbalistic system that uses completely Jewish terms.^[75]

History

Main article: History of Gnosticism

The development of the Syrian-Egyptian school

Bentley Layton has sketched out a relationship between the various gnostic movements in his introduction to *The Gnostic Scriptures* (SCM Press, London, 1987). In this model, "Classical Gnosticism" and "The School of Thomas" antedated and influenced the development of Valentinus, who was to found his own school of Gnosticism in both Alexandria and Rome, whom Layton called "the great [Gnostic] reformer" and "the focal point" of Gnostic

development. While in Alexandria, where he was born, Valentinus probably would have had contact with the Gnostic teacher Basilides, and may have been influenced by him.

Valentinianism flourished after the middle of the 2nd century AD. This movement was named after its founder Valentinus (c. 100 – 180 AD). The school is also known to have been extremely popular: several varieties of their central myth are known, and we know of "reports from outsiders from which the intellectual liveliness of the group is evident."^[76] It is known that Valentinus' students elaborated on his teachings and materials (though the exact extent of their changes remains unknown), for example, in the version of the Valentinian myth brought to us through Ptolemy.

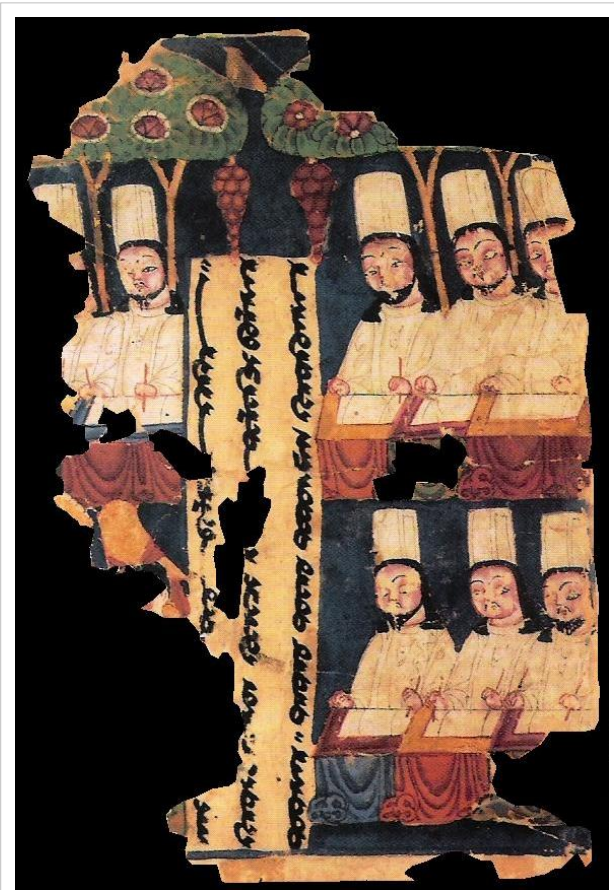
Valentinianism might be described as the most elaborate and philosophically "dense" form of the Syrian-Egyptian schools of Gnosticism, though it should be acknowledged that this in no way debarred other schools from attracting followers. Basilides' own school was popular also, and survived in Egypt until the 4th century.

Simone Petrement, in *A Separate God*, in arguing for a Christian origin of Gnosticism, places Valentinus after Basilides, but before the Sethians. It is her assertion that Valentinus represented a moderation of the anti-Judaism of the earlier Hellenized teachers; the demiurge, widely regarded as a mythological depiction of the Old Testament God of the Hebrews, is depicted as more ignorant than evil. (See below.)

The development of the Persian school

An alternate heritage is offered by Kurt Rudolph in his book *Gnosis: The Nature & Structure of Gnosticism* (Koehler and Amelang, Leipzig, 1977), to explain the lineage of Persian Gnostic schools. The decline of Manicheism that occurred in Persia in the 5th century was too late to prevent the spread of the movement into the east and the west. In the west, the teachings of the school moved into Syria, Northern Arabia, Egypt and North Africa (where Augustine was a member of the school from 373–382); from Syria it progressed still farther, into Palestine, Asia Minor and Armenia. There is evidence for Manicheans in Rome and Dalmatia in the 4th century, and also in Gaul and Spain. The influence of Manicheism was attacked by imperial elects and polemical writings, but the religion remained prevalent until the 6th century, and still exerted influence in the emergence of the Paulicians, Bogomils and Cathari in the Middle Ages, until it was ultimately stamped out by the Catholic Church.

In the east, Rudolph relates, Manicheism was able to bloom, given that the religious monopoly position previously held by Christianity and Zoroastrianism had been broken by nascent Islam. In the early years of the Arab conquest, Manicheism again found followers in Persia (mostly amongst educated circles), but flourished most in Central Asia, to which it had spread through Iran. Here, in 762, Manicheism became the state religion of the Uyghur Empire.



Manichean priests writing at their desks, with panel inscription in Sogdian. Manuscript from Khocho, Tarim Basin.

Major Gnostic movements

Schools of Gnosticism can be defined according to one classification system as being a member of two broad categories. These are the "Eastern"/"Persian" school, and a "Syrian-Egyptic" school. The former possesses more demonstrably dualist tendencies, reflecting a strong influence from the beliefs of the Persian Zurvanist Zoroastrians. Among the Syrian-Egyptian schools and the movements they spawned are a typically more Monist view. Notable exceptions include relatively modern movements that seem to include elements of both categories, namely: the Cathars, Bogomils, and Carpocratians, which are included in their own section.

Persian Gnosticism

The Persian Schools, which appeared in the western Persian province of Babylonia (in particular, within the Sassanid province of Asuristan), and whose writings were originally produced in the Aramaic dialects spoken in Babylonia at the time, are representative of what is believed to be among the oldest of the Gnostic thought forms. These movements are considered by most to be religions in their own right, and are not emanations from Christianity or Judaism.

- *Mandaeism* is still practiced in small numbers, in parts of southern Iraq and the Iranian province of Khuzestan. The name of the group derives from the term *Mandā d-Ĥeyyi*, which roughly means "Knowledge of Life." Although the exact chronological origins of this movement are not known, John the Baptist eventually came to be a key figure in the religion, as an emphasis on baptism is part of their core beliefs. As with Manichaeism, despite certain ties with Christianity,^[77] Mandaeans do not believe in Moses, Jesus, or Mohammed. Their beliefs and practices likewise have little overlap with the religions that manifested from those religious figures and the two should not be confused. Significant amounts of original Mandaean Scripture, written in Mandaean Aramaic, survive in the modern era. The primary source text is known as the *Genzā Rabbā* and has portions identified by some scholars as being copied as early as the 2nd century AD. There is also the *Qolastā*, or Canonical Book of Prayer and The Book of John the Baptist (*sidra d-iahia*).
- *Manichaeism*, which represented an entire independent religious heritage, but is now extinct, was founded by the Prophet Mani (216 – 276 AD). The original writings were written in Syriac Aramaic, in a unique Manichaean script. Although most of the literature/scripture of the Manichaeans was believed lost, the discovery of an original series of documents have helped to shed new light on the subject. Now housed in Cologne Germany, a Manichaean religious work written in Greek, the *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis*, contains mainly biographical information on the prophet and details on his claims and teachings. Before the discovery of these authentic Manichaean texts, scholars had to rely on anti-Manichaean polemical works, such as the Christian anti-Manichaean *Acta Archelai* (also written in Greek), which has Mani saying, for example, "The true God has nothing to do with the material world or cosmos," and, "It is the Prince of Darkness who spoke with Moses, the Jews and their priests. Thus the Christians, the Jews, and the Pagans are involved in the same error when they worship this God. For he leads them astray in the lusts he taught them."^{[78][79]}

Syrian-Egyptian Gnosticism

The Syrian-Egyptian school derives much of its outlook from Platonist influences. Typically, it depicts creation in a series of emanations from a primal monadic source, finally resulting in the creation of the material universe. As a result, these schools tend to view evil in terms of matter that is markedly inferior to goodness—evil as lacking spiritual insight and goodness, rather than to emphasize portrayals of evil as an equal force. These schools of gnosticism may be said to use the terms "evil" and "good" as being *relative* descriptive terms, as they refer to the relative plight of human existence caught between such realities and confused in its orientation, with "evil" indicating the extremes of distance from the principle and source of goodness, without necessarily emphasizing an *inherent* negativity. As can be seen below, many of these movements included source material related to Christianity, with some identifying themselves as specifically Christian (albeit quite different from the Orthodox or

Roman Catholic forms). Most of the literature from this category is known to us through the Library discovered at Nag Hammadi.

Sethian works typically include:

- *The Apocryphon of John*
- *The Apocalypse of Adam*
- *The Reality of the Rulers, Also known as The Hypostasis of the Archons*
- *The Thunder, Perfect Mind*
- *The Three-fold First Thought (Trimorphic Protennoia)*
- *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (also known as the *(Coptic) Gospel of the Egyptians*)
- *Zostrianos*
- *Allogenes*
- *The Three Steles of Seth*
- *The Gospel of Judas*
- *Marsanes*
- *The Coptic Apocalypse of Paul*
- *The Thought of Norea*
- *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*

The texts commonly attributed to the Thomasine school are:

- *The Hymn of the Pearl, or, the Hymn of Jude Thomas the Apostle in the Country of Indians*
- *The Gospel of Thomas*
- *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*
- *The Acts of Thomas*
- *The Book of Thomas: The Contender Writing to the Perfect*
- *The Psalms of Thomas*
- *The Apocalypse of Thomas*

Valentinian works are named in reference to the Bishop and teacher Valentinus. Circa 153 AD, Valentinus developed a complex cosmology outside of the Sethian tradition. At one point he was close to being appointed the Bishop of Rome of what is now the Roman Catholic Church. Works attributed to his school are listed below, and fragmentary pieces directly linked to him are noted with an asterisk:

- *The Divine Word Present in the Infant* (Fragment A) *
- *On the Three Natures* (Fragment B) *
- *Adam's Faculty of Speech* (Fragment C) *
- *To Agathopous: Jesus' Digestive System* (Fragment D) *
- *Annihilation of the Realm of Death* (Fragment F) *
- *On Friends: The Source of Common Wisdom* (Fragment G) *
- *Epistle on Attachments* (Fragment H) *
- *Summer Harvest**
- *The Gospel of Truth**
- *Ptolemy's Version of the Gnostic Myth*
- *Prayer of the Apostle Paul*
- *Ptolemy's Epistle to Flora*
- *Treatise on the Resurrection (Epistle to Rheginus)*
- *Gospel of Philip*

Basilidian works are named for the founder of their school, Basilides (132–? AD). These works are mainly known to us through the criticisms of one of his opponents, Irenaeus in his work *Adversus Haereses*. The other pieces are known through the work of Clement of Alexandria:

- The Octet of Subsistent Entities (Fragment A)
- The Uniqueness of the World (Fragment B)
- Election Naturally Entails Faith and Virtue (Fragment C)
- The State of Virtue (Fragment D)
- The Elect Transcend the World (Fragment E)
- Reincarnation (Fragment F)
- Human Suffering and the Goodness of Providence (Fragment G)
- Forgivable Sins (Fragment H)

The Gospel of Judas is the most recently discovered Gnostic text. National Geographic has published an English translation of it, bringing it into mainstream awareness. It portrays Judas Iscariot as the "thirteenth spirit (daemon)",^[80] who "exceeded" the evil sacrifices the disciples offered to Saklas by sacrificing the "man who clothed me (Jesus)".^[81] Its reference to Barbelo and inclusion of material similar to the Apocryphon of John and other such texts, connects the text to Barbeloite and/or Sethian Gnosticism.

Gnostic-influenced individuals and groups

- Simon Magus, the magician baptised by Philip and rebuked by Peter in Acts 8, became in early Christianity the archetypal false teacher. The ascription by Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and others of a connection between schools in their time and the individual in Acts 8 may be as legendary as the stories attached to him in various apocryphal books.
- Justin Martyr identifies Menander of Antioch as Simon Magus' pupil.
- Justin identifies Marcion of Sinope as a false teacher. Both developed a sizable following. Marcion is generally labeled a gnostic, however some scholars do not consider him to be a gnostic at all, for example Mead does consider him to be a Gnostic "...it is evident that the Marcionite tradition was of a distinctly Gnostic tendency^[82] but Harnack does not.^[83] Also the Encyclopædia Britannica article on Marcion^[84] clearly states: "In Marcion's own view, therefore, the founding of his church—to which he was first driven by opposition—amounts to a reformation of Christendom through a return to the gospel of Christ and to Paul; nothing was to be accepted beyond that. This of itself shows that it is a mistake to reckon Marcion among the Gnostics. A dualist he certainly was, but he was not a Gnostic".
- Cerinthus (c. 100 AD), the founder of a heretical school with gnostic elements. Like a Gnostic, Cerinthus depicted Christ as a heavenly spirit separate from the man Jesus, and he cited the demiurge as creating the material world. Unlike the Gnostics, Cerinthus taught Christians to observe the Jewish law; his demiurge was holy, not lowly; and he taught the Second Coming. His gnosis was a secret teaching attributed to an apostle. Some scholars believe that the First Epistle of John was written as a response to Cerinthus.^[85]
- The Ophites, so-named by Hippolytus of Rome because, Hippolytus claims, they worshiped the serpent of Genesis as the bestower of knowledge.
- The Cainites are so-named since Hippolytus of Rome claims that they worshiped Cain, as well as Esau, Korah, and the Sodomites. There is little evidence concerning the nature of this group. Hippolytus claims that they believed that indulgence in sin was the key to salvation because since the body is evil, one must defile it through immoral activity (see libertinism). The name Cainite is used as the name of a religious movement, and not in the usual Biblical sense of people descended from Cain.
- The Carpocratians, a libertine sect following only the Gospel according to the Hebrews
- The Borborites, a libertine Gnostic sect, said to be descended from the Nicolaitans

Later groups accused by their contemporaries of being in line with the "gnostics" of Irenaeus. Various later groups were also associated with earlier heretics by their contemporaries:

- The Paulicans, an Adoptionist group of which little is known first-hand, were accused by orthodox medieval sources of being Gnostic and quasi Manichaean Christian. They flourished between 650 and 872 in Armenia and

the Eastern Themes of the Byzantine Empire

- The Bogomils, the synthesis of Armenian Paulicianism and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church reform movement, which emerged in Bulgaria between 927 and 970 and spread throughout Europe
- The Cathars (Cathari, Albigenses or Albigensians) were also accused by their enemies of the traits of Gnosticism; though whether or not the Cathari possessed direct historical influence from ancient Gnosticism is disputed. If their critics are reliable the basic conceptions of Gnostic cosmology are to be found in Cathar beliefs (most distinctly in their notion of a lesser, Satanic, creator god), though they did not apparently place any special relevance upon knowledge (*gnosis*) as an effective salvific force. Wikipedia:Verifiability

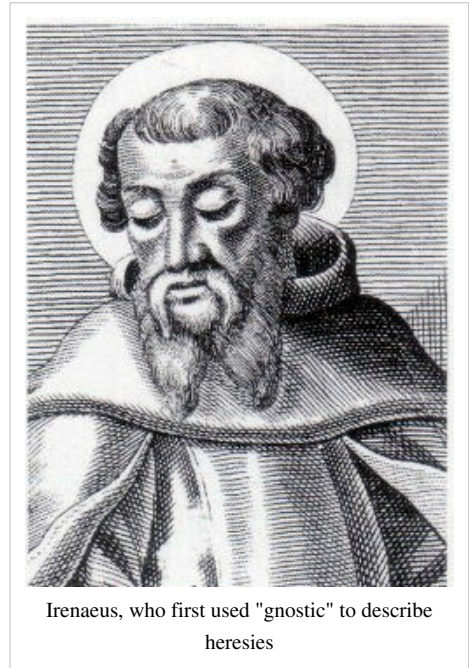
The term "Gnosticism"

The term "Gnosticism" does not appear in ancient sources,^[86] and was first coined in the 17th Century by Henry More in a commentary on the seven letters of the Book of Revelation, where More used the term "Gnosticisme" to describe the heresy in Thyatira.^[87] The term derives from the use of the Greek adjective *gnostikos* ("learned", "intellectual", Greek γνωστικός) by St. Irenaeus (c. 185 AD) to describe the school of Valentinus as *he legomene gnostike haeresis* "the heresy called Learned (gnostic)".^[88]

This occurs in the context of Irenaeus' work *On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis*, (Greek: *elenchos kai anatropē tes pseudonymou gnoseos*, ἔλεγχος καὶ ἀνατροπή τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως) where the term "knowledge falsely so-called" (*pseudonymos gnosis*) covers various groups, not just Valentinus, and is a quotation of the apostle Paul's warning against "knowledge falsely so-called" in 1 Timothy 6:20^[89]^[90].

The usual meaning of *gnostikos* in Classical Greek texts is "learned" or "intellectual", such as used in the comparison of "practical" (*praktikos*) and "intellectual" (*gnostikos*) in Plato's dialogue between Young Socrates and the Foreigner in his *The Statesman* (258e).^[91] Plato's use of "learned" is fairly typical of Classical texts.^[92]

By the Hellenistic period, it began to also be associated with Greco-Roman mysteries, becoming synonymous with the Greek term *musterion*. The adjective is not used in the New Testament, but Clement of Alexandria in Book 7 of his *Stromateis* speaks of the "learned" (*gnostikos*) Christian in complimentary terms.^[93] The use of *gnostikos* in relation to heresy originates with interpreters of Irenaeus. Some scholars, for example A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, translators of the French edition (1974),^[94] consider that Irenaeus sometimes uses *gnostikos* to simply mean "intellectual", as in 1.25.6, 1.11.3, 1.11.5, whereas his mention of "the intellectual sect" (Adv. haer. 1.11.1) is a specific designation. Irenaeus' comparative adjective *gnostikeron* "more learned", evidently cannot mean "more Gnostic" as a name.^[95] Of those groups that Irenaeus identifies as "intellectual" (*gnostikos*), only one, the followers of Marcellina use the term *gnostikos* of themselves.^[96] Later Hippolytus uses "learned" (*gnostikos*) of Cerinthus and the Ebionites, and Epiphanius applied "learned" (*gnostikos*) to specific groups.



Irenaeus, who first used "gnostic" to describe heresies

Study of Gnosticism

19th century to 1930s

Prior to the discovery of Nag Hammadi, evidence for gnostic movements was of necessity largely seen through the testimony of the early church heresiologists. The "church historical model," represented by Adolf von Harnack among others, saw gnosticism as an internal development within the church under the influence of Greek philosophy.^[97]

After the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library, 1945

See also: Nag Hammadi library

Study of Gnosticism and of early Alexandrian Christianity received a strong impetus from the discovery of the Coptic Nag Hammadi Library in 1945.^[98]

In 1979, Elaine Pagels, Professor of Religion at Princeton University, published a popular book, *The Gnostic Gospels*, which detailed the suppression of some of the writings found at Nag Hammadi by early bishops of the Christian church.

"Gnosticism" as a potentially flawed category

In 1966 in Messina, Italy, a conference was held concerning systems of *gnosis*. Among its several aims were the need to establish a program to translate the recently acquired Nag Hammadi library and the need to arrive at an agreement concerning an accurate definition of "Gnosticism". This was in answer to the tendency, prevalent since the 18th century, to use the term "gnostic" less as its origins implied, but rather as an interpretive category for *contemporary* philosophical and religious movements. For example, in 1835, New Testament scholar Ferdinand Christian Baur constructed a developmental model of Gnosticism that culminated in the religious philosophy of Hegel; one might compare literary critic Harold Bloom's recent attempts to identify Gnostic elements in contemporary American religion, or Eric Voegelin's analysis of totalitarian impulses through the interpretive lens of Gnosticism.

The "cautious proposal" reached by the conference concerning Gnosticism is described by Marksches:

"In the concluding document of Messina the proposal was "by the simultaneous application of historical and typological methods" to designate "a particular group of systems of the second century after Christ" as *gnosticism*, and to use *gnosis* to define a conception of knowledge that transcends the times, which was described as "knowledge of divine mysteries for an élite"."

—Marksches, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, p. 13

In essence, this decided that "Gnosticism" would become a historically specific term, restricted to mean the Gnostic movements prevalent in the 3rd century, while "gnosis" would be a universal term, denoting a system of knowledge retained "for a privileged élite." However, this effort towards providing clarity in fact created more conceptual confusion, as the historical term "Gnosticism" was an entirely modern construction, while the new universal term "gnosis" *was* a historical term: "something was being called "gnosticism" that the ancient theologians had called 'gnosis' ... [A] concept of gnosis had been created by Messina that was almost unusable in a historical sense". In antiquity, all agreed that knowledge was centrally important to life, but few were agreed as to what exactly *constituted* knowledge; the unitary conception that the Messina proposal presupposed did not exist.

These flaws have meant that the problems concerning an exact definition of Gnosticism persist.^[99] It remains current convention to use "Gnosticism" in a historical sense, and "gnosis" universally. Leaving aside the issues with the latter noted above, the usage of "Gnosticism" to designate a category of 3rd-century religions has recently been questioned as well. Of note is Michael Allen Williams' *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for the Dismantling of a Dubious Category*, in which the author examines the terms by which Gnosticism as a category is defined, and then

closely compares these suppositions with the contents of actual Gnostic texts (the newly recovered Nag Hammadi library was of central importance to his argument).

Williams argues that the conceptual foundations on which the category of Gnosticism rests are the remains of the agenda of the heresiologists. Too much emphasis has been laid on perceptions of dualism, body- and matter-hatred, and anticosmism without these suppositions being properly *tested*. In essence, the interpretive definition of Gnosticism that was created by the antagonistic efforts of the early church heresiologists has been taken up by modern scholarship and reflected in a *categorical* definition, even though the means now existed to verify its accuracy. Attempting to do so, Williams contests, reveals the dubious nature of categorical "Gnosticism", and he concludes that the term needs replacing to more accurately reflect those movements it comprises. Williams' observations have provoked debate; however, to date his suggested replacement term "the Biblical demiurgical tradition" has not become widely used.

Gnosticism in modern times

Main article: Gnosticism in modern times

A number of 19th-century thinkers such as Arthur Schopenhauer,^[100] Albert Pike and Madame Blavatsky studied Gnostic thought extensively and were influenced by it, and even figures like Herman Melville and W. B. Yeats were more tangentially influenced.^[101] Jules Doineau "re-established" a Gnostic church in France in 1890, which altered its form as it passed through various direct successors (Fabre des Essarts as *Tau Synésius* and Joanny Bricaud as *Tau Jean II* most notably), and, though small, is still active today.^[102]

Early 20th-century thinkers who heavily studied and were influenced by Gnosticism include Carl Jung (who supported Gnosticism), Eric Voegelin (who opposed it), Jorge Luis Borges (who included it in many of his short stories), and Aleister Crowley, with figures such as Hermann Hesse being more moderately influenced. Rene Guenon founded the gnostic review, *Le Gnose* in 1909 (before moving to a more "Perennialist" position). Gnostic Thelemite organizations, such as *Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica* and *Ordo Templi Orientis*, trace themselves to Crowley's thought.

The discovery and translation of the Nag Hammadi library after 1945 had a huge effect on Gnosticism since World War II. Intellectuals who were heavily influenced by Gnosticism in this period include Lawrence Durrell, Hans Jonas, Philip K. Dick and Harold Bloom, with Albert Camus and Allen Ginsberg being more moderately influenced. A number of ecclesiastical bodies that think of themselves as Gnostic have set up or re-founded since World War II as well, including the Society of Novus Spiritus, *Ecclesia Gnostica*, *Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica*, the Thomasine Church, the Apostolic Johannite Church, the Alexandrian Gnostic Church, the North American College of Gnostic Bishops. Celia Green has written on Gnostic Christianity in relation to her own philosophy.^[103]

Terms and concepts

See also: List of gnostic terms

Abraxas/Abrasax

Main article: Abraxas

The Egyptian Gnostic Basilideans referred to a figure called *Abraxas* who was at the head of 365 spiritual beings (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I.24); it is unclear what to make of Irenaeus' use of the term *archon*, which may simply mean "ruler" in this context. The role and function of Abraxas for Basilideans is not clear.

The word Abraxas was engraved on certain antique gemstones, called on that account Abraxas stones, which may have been used as amulets or charms by Gnostic groups. In popular culture, Abraxas is sometimes considered the name of a god who incorporated both Good and evil (god and demiurge) in one entity, and therefore representing the monotheistic god, singular, but (unlike, for example, the Christian God) not omnibenevolent. (See Hermann Hesse's *Demian*, and Carl Jung's *Seven Sermons to the Dead*.) Opinions abound on Abraxas, who in recent centuries has been claimed to be both an Egyptian god and a demon, sometimes even being associated with the dual nature of Satan/Lucifer.

The above information relates to interpretations of ancient amulets and to reports of Christian heresy hunters, which are not always clear.

Actual ancient Gnostic texts from the Nag Hammadi Library, such as the Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians, refer to Abraxas as an Aeon dwelling with Sophia and other Aeons of the Spiritual Fullness in the light of the luminary Eleleth. In several texts, the luminary Eleleth is the last of the luminaries (Spiritual Lights) that come forward, and it is the Aeon Sophia, associated with Eleleth, who encounters darkness and becomes involved in the chain of events that leads to the Demiurge and Archon's rule of this world, and the salvage effort that ensues. As such, the role of Aeons of Eleleth, including Abraxas, Sophia, and others, pertains to this outer border of the Divine Fullness that encounters the ignorance of the world of Lack and interacts to rectify the error of ignorance in the world of materiality.

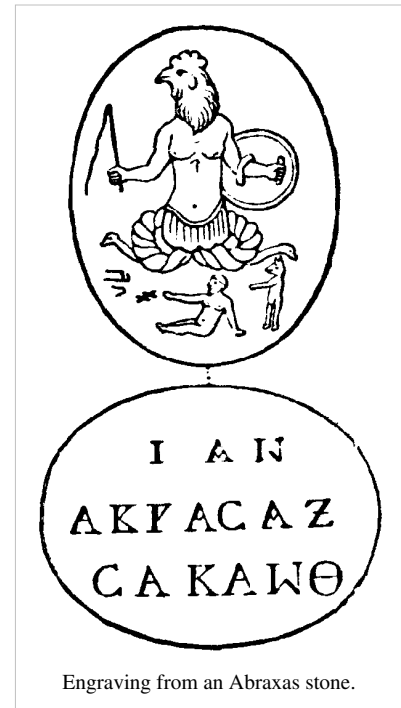
Words like or similar to Abraxas or Abrasax also appear in the Greek Magical Papyri. There are similarities and differences between such figures in reports about Basileides' teaching, in the larger magical traditions of the Graeco-Roman world, in the classic ancient Gnostic texts such as the Gospel of the Egyptians, and in later magical and esoteric writings.

The Swiss psychologist Carl Jung wrote a short Gnostic treatise in 1916 called *Seven Sermons to the Dead*, which called Abraxas a God higher than the Christian God and Devil, that combines all opposites into one Being.

Aeon

Main article: Aeon (Gnosticism)

In many Gnostic systems, the æons are the various emanations of the superior God, who is also known by such names as the One, the Monad, *Aion teleos* (Greek: "The Complete Æon"), Wikipedia:Citation needed Bythos (Greek: *Βυθος*, 'Depth' or 'profundity'), Proarkhe (Greek: *προαρχη*, "Before the Beginning"), HE Arkhe (Greek: *ἡ ἀρχή*, "The Beginning"), Ennoia (Greek: "Thought") of the Light or Sige (Greek: *Σιγη*, "Silence"). From this first being, also an æon, a series of different emanations occur, beginning in certain Gnostic texts with the hermaphroditic Barbelo, from which successive pairs of aeons emanate, often in male-female pairings called *syzygies*; the numbers of these pairings varied from text to text, though some identify their number as being thirty. The aeons as a totality constitute



Engraving from an Abraxas stone.

the *pleroma*, the "region of light". The lowest regions of the pleroma are closest to the darkness; that is, the physical world. Wikipedia:Citation needed

Two of the most commonly paired æons were Jesus and *Sophia* (Greek: "Wisdom"); the latter refers to Jesus as her "consort" in *A Valentinian Exposition*. *Sophia*, emanating without her partner, resulting in the production of the *Demiurge* (Greek: lit. "public builder"), who is also referred to as *Yaldabaoth* and variations thereof in some Gnostic texts. This creature is concealed outside the Pleroma; in isolation, and thinking itself alone, it creates materiality and a host of co-actors, referred to as archons. The demiurge is responsible for the creation of mankind; trapping elements of the Pleroma stolen from Sophia inside human bodies. In response, the Godhead emanates two savior æons, *Christ* and *the Holy Spirit*; Christ then embodies itself in the form of Jesus, in order to be able to teach man how to achieve gnosis, by which they may return to the Pleroma.

Archon

Main article: Archon § Gnostic archons

In late antiquity some variants of Gnosticism used the term *Archon* to refer to several servants of the demiurge. In this context they may be seen as having the roles of the angels and demons of the Old Testament.

According to Origen's *Contra Celsum*, a sect called the Ophites posited the existence of seven archons, beginning with Iadabaoth or Ialdabaoth, who created the six that follow: Iao, Sabaoth, Adonaios, Elaios, Astaphanos and Horaios. Similarly to the Mithraic Kronos and Vedic Narasimha, a form of Vishnu, Ialdabaoth had a head of a lion.

Demiurge

Main article: Demiurge

The term *Demiurge* derives from the Latinized form of the Greek term *dēmiourgos*, δημιουργός (literally "public or skilled worker"), and refers to an entity responsible for the creation of the physical universe and the physical aspect of humanity. The term *dēmiourgos* occurs in a number of other religious and philosophical systems, most notably Platonism. Moral judgements of the demiurge vary from group to group within the broad category of Gnosticism — such judgements usually correspond to each group's judgement of the status of materiality as being inherently evil, or else merely flawed and as good as its passive constituent matter allows. In Gnosticism the Demiurge, creator of the material world, was not God but the Archon.^[105]

As Plato does, Gnosticism presents a distinction between a supranatural, unknowable reality and the sensible materiality of which the demiurge is creator. However, in contrast to Plato, several systems of Gnostic thought present the Demiurge as antagonistic to the Supreme God: his act of creation either in unconscious and fundamentally flawed imitation of the divine model, or else formed with the malevolent intention of entrapping aspects of the divine *in* materiality. Thus, in such systems, the Demiurge acts as a solution to the problem of evil. In the Apocryphon of John (several versions of which are found in the Nag Hammadi library), the Demiurge has the name "Yaltabaoth", and proclaims himself as God:

"Now the archon who is weak has three names. The first name is Yaltabaoth, the second is Saklas, and the third is Samael. And he is impious in his arrogance which is in him. For he said, 'I am God and there is no other God beside me,' for he is ignorant of his strength, the place from which he had come."^[106]

"Samael", in the Judeo-Christian tradition, refers to the evil angel of death, and corresponds to the Christian demon of that name, one second only to Satan. Wikipedia:Citation needed Literally, it can mean "blind god" or "god of the



A lion-faced deity found on a Gnostic gem in Bernard de Montfaucon's *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures* may be a depiction of the Demiurge; however, cf. Mithraic Zervan Akarana ^[104]

blind" in Aramaic (Syriac *səm'ā-'el*); another alternative title is "Saklas", Aramaic for "fool" (Syriac *sækla* "the foolish one").

Gnostic myth recounts that Sophia (Greek, literally meaning "wisdom"), the Demiurge's mother and a partial aspect of the divine Pleroma or "Fullness", desired to create something apart from the divine totality, and without the receipt of divine assent. In this abortive act of separate creation, she gave birth to the monstrous Demiurge and, being ashamed of her deed, she wrapped him in a cloud and created a throne for him within it. The Demiurge, isolated, did not behold his mother, nor anyone else, and thus concluded that only he himself existed, being ignorant of the superior levels of reality that were his birthplace.

The Gnostic myths describing these events are full of intricate nuances portraying the declination of aspects of the divine into human form; this process occurs through the agency of the Demiurge who, having stolen a portion of power from his mother, sets about a work of creation in unconscious imitation of the superior Pleromatic realm. Thus Sophia's power becomes enclosed within the material forms of humanity, themselves entrapped within the material universe: the goal of Gnostic movements was typically the awakening of this spark, which permitted a return by the subject to the superior, non-material realities that were its primal source. (See Sethian Gnosticism.)^{Wikipedia:Citation needed}

Gnosis

Main article: Gnosis

The word "Gnosticism" is a modern construction, though based on an antiquated linguistic expression: it comes from the Greek word meaning "knowledge", *gnosis* (γνῶσις). However, *gnosis* itself refers to a very specialised form of knowledge, deriving both from the exact meaning of the original Greek term and its usage in Platonist philosophy.

Ancient Greek was capable of discerning between several different forms of knowing. These different forms may be described in English as being propositional knowledge, indicative of knowledge acquired *indirectly* through the reports of others or otherwise by inference (such as "I know *of* George Bush" or "I know Berlin *is in* Germany"), and empirical knowledge acquired by *direct participation* or *acquaintance* (such as "I know George Bush personally" or "I know Berlin, having visited").

Gnosis (γνῶσις) refers to knowledge of the second kind. Therefore, in a religious context, to be "Gnostic" should be understood as being reliant not on knowledge in a general sense, but as being specially receptive to mystical or esoteric experiences of direct participation with the divine. Indeed, in most Gnostic systems the sufficient cause of salvation is this "knowledge of" ("acquaintance with") the divine. This is commonly identified with a process of inward "knowing" or self-exploration, comparable to that encouraged by Plotinus (c. 205 – 270 AD). This is what helps separate Gnosticism from proto-orthodox views, where the orthodox views are considered to be superficial.^[107] The inadequate take then requires a correct form of interpretation. With "gnosis" comes a fuller insight that is considered to be more spiritual. Greater recognition of the deeper spiritual meanings of doctrines, scriptures, and rituals are obtained with this insight. However, as may be seen, the term "gnostic" also had precedent usage in several ancient philosophical traditions, which must also be weighed in considering the very subtle implications of its appellation to a set of ancient religious groups.

Monad

Main article: Monad (Gnosticism)

In many Gnostic systems (and heresiologies), God is known as the *Monad*, the One, The Absolute, *Aion teleos* (The Perfect Æon), *Bythos* (Depth or Profundity, Βυθος), *Proarkhe* (Before the Beginning, προαρχη), and *HE Arkhe* (The Beginning, ἡ ἀρχή). God is the high source of the pleroma, the region of light. The various emanations of God are called æons.

Within certain variations of Gnosticism, especially those inspired by Monoimus, the Monad was the highest God which created lesser gods, or elements (similar to æons).

According to Hippolytus, this view was inspired by the Pythagoreans, who called the first thing that came into existence the *Monad*, which begat the dyad, which begat the numbers, which begat the point, begetting lines, etc. This was also clarified in the writings of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. This teaching being largely Neopythagorean via Numenius as well.

This Monad is the spiritual source of everything that emanates the pleroma, and could be contrasted to the dark Demiurge (Yaldabaoth) that controls matter.

The Sethian cosmogony as most famously contained in the Apocryphon ("Secret book") of John describes an unknown God, very similar to the orthodox apophatic theology, although very different from the orthodox credal teachings that there is one such god who is identified also as creator of heaven and earth. In describing the nature of a creator god associated with Biblical texts, orthodox theologians often attempt to define God through a series of explicit positive statements, themselves universal but in the divine taken to their superlative degrees: he is omniscient, omnipotent and truly benevolent. The Sethian conception of the most hidden transcendent God is, by contrast, defined through negative theology: he is immovable, invisible, intangible, ineffable; commonly, "he" is seen as being hermaphroditic, a potent symbol for being, as it were, "all-containing". In the Apocryphon of John, this god is good in that it bestows goodness. After the apophatic statements, the process of the Divine in action are used to describe the effect of such a god.

An apophatic approach to discussing the Divine is found throughout gnosticism, Vedanta, and Platonic and Aristotelian theology as well. It is also found in some Judaic sources.

Pleroma

Main article: Pleroma

Pleroma (Greek πληρωμα) generally refers to the totality of God's powers. The term means *fullness*, and is used in Christian theological contexts: both in Gnosticism generally, and in Colossians 2:9.

Gnosticism holds that the world is controlled by evil archons, one of whom is the demiurge, according to some the deity of the Old Testament (YHWH) who holds the human spirit captive.

The heavenly pleroma is the center of divine life, a region of light "above" (the term is not to be understood spatially) our world, occupied by spiritual beings such as aeons (eternal beings) and sometimes archons. Jesus is interpreted as an intermediary aeon who was sent from the pleroma, with whose aid humanity can recover the lost knowledge of the divine origins of humanity. The term is thus a central element of Gnostic cosmology.

Pleroma is also used in the general Greek language and is used by the Greek Orthodox church in this general form since the word appears under the book of Colossians. Proponents of the view that Paul was actually a gnostic, such as Elaine Pagels of Princeton University, view the reference in Colossians as something that was to be interpreted in the gnostic sense.

Sophia

Main article: Sophia (wisdom)

In Gnostic tradition, the term *Sophia* (Σοφία, Greek for "wisdom") refers to the final and lowest emanation of God. In most if not all versions of the gnostic myth, Sophia births the demiurge, who in turn brings about the creation of materiality. The positive or negative depiction of materiality thus resides a great deal on mythic depictions of Sophia's actions. She is occasionally referred to by the Hebrew equivalent of *Achamoth* (this is a feature of Ptolemy's version of the Valentinian gnostic myth). Jewish Gnosticism with a focus on Sophia was active by 90. Wikipedia:Citation needed

Almost all gnostic systems of the Syrian or Egyptian type taught that the universe began with an original, unknowable God, referred to as the Parent or Bythos, as the Monad by Monoimus, or the first Aeon by still other traditions. From this initial unitary beginning, the One spontaneously emanated further Aeons, pairs of progressively "lesser" beings in sequence. The lowest of these pairs were Sophia and Christ. The Aeons together made up the Pleroma, or fullness of divinity and thus should not be seen as identical with God nor as distinct from the divine, but

as embodied divine emanations.

Notes

- [1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Gnosticism&action=edit>
- [2] On the complexity of gnosticism, see
- [3] <http://www.theopedia.com/Gnosticism>
- [4] <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Gnosticism.aspx>
- [5] Adolf von Harnack (1885) defined it as "the acute Hellenization of Christianity". Moritz Friedländer (1898) advocated Hellenistic Jewish origins, and Wilhelm Bousset (1907) advocated Persian origins.
- [6] Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (2005) "Bousset held that Gnosticism was a pre-Christian religion, existing alongside of Christianity. It was an Oriental product, anti-Jewish and un-Hellenic..."
- [7] James M. Robinson, one of the chief scholars on Gnosticism said at the 1978 International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale "At this stage we have not found any Gnostic texts that clearly antedate the origin of Christianity." cited in Edwin Yamauchi, "Pre-Christian Gnosticism, the New Testament and Nag Hammadi in recent debate," in *Themelios* 10.1 (Sept 1984): 22–27.
- [8] To this end Paul Trebilco cites the following in his article "Christian Communities In Western Asia Minor Into The Early Second Century: Ignatius And Others As Witnesses Against Bauer" in *JETS* 49.1: E.M. Yamauchi, "Gnosticism and Early Christianity," in ; ; cf. ; For discussions of "Gnosticism" see Yamauchi, "Gnosticism" 29–61; ; .
- [9] J. Jacobs, L. Blau Gnosticism Article (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=280&letter=G&search=gnosticism>) from the Jewish Encyclopedia 1911
- [10] Barbarian migrations and the Roman West, 376–568 By Guy Halsall pg 293 Publisher: Cambridge University Press (January 28, 2008) ISBN 0-521-43491-2 ISBN 978-0-521-43491-1 (http://books.google.com/books?id=S7ULzYGlj8oC&pg=PT359&lpg=PT359&dq=Huneric+Manichaeans.&source=bl&ots=qL0pl-gbSw&sig=54Z95nKOW8iXsL39eSiuKXCFIzE&hl=en&ei=LZsrS-3nIM-Utgetzb2SCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CBAQ6AEwAjqK#v=onepage&q=Huneric+Manichaeans.&f=false)
- [11] Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, p. 42, Beacon Press, 1963, ISBN 0-8070-5799-1; 1st ed. 1958
- [12] Middle Persian Sources: D. N. MacKenzie, Mani's Šābuhragān, pt. 1 (text and translation), BSOAS 42/3, 1979, pp. 500–34, pt. 2 (glossary and plates), BSOAS 43/2, 1980, pp. 288–310.
- [13] Bevan, A. A. (1930). *Manichaeism*. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Volume VIII Ed. James Hastings. London
- [14] A section of the book is available online (<http://www.farvardyn.com/zurvan.php>). Several other websites have duplicated this text, but include an "Introduction" that is very obviously not by Zaehner.
- [15] Layton, Bentley (1987). *The Gnostic Scriptures*. SCM Press — Introduction to "Against Heresies" by St. Irenaeus
- [16] Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Clare Goodrick-Clarke *G. R. S. Mead and the Gnostic Quest* 2005 p8 "The idea that Gnosticism was derived from Buddhism was first postulated by Charles William King in his classic work, *The Gnostics and their Remains* (1864). He was one of the earliest and most emphatic scholars to propose the Gnostic debt to Buddhist thought."
- [17] H. L. Mansel, *Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries* (1875); p.32
- [18] International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: E-J p490 ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley — 1982 "Mansel ... summed up the principal sources of Gnosticism in these three: Platonism, the Persian religion, and the Buddhism of India."
- [19] Pagels, Elaine (1979, repr. 1989). *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. xxi. New York: Random House. (<http://books.google.com/books?id=9I8ySs4eusoC&lpg=PR2&dq=elaine+pagels&pg=PR21#v=onepage&q=buddhism&f=false>)
- [20] The Eastern Buddhist Society (1981) "This paper is an initial attempt to follow up Pagels' call for a comparative study of the Nag Hammadi tractates and Indian sources,6 by considering some of the similarities in theory and practice present in certain Nag Hammadi texts, in certain Buddhist wisdom scriptures, and in the works of two second to third century cE Mahayana Buddhist philosophers, Nagarjuna and Aryadeva."
- [21] Ritter *Die Stupa's: oder die architectonischen Denkmale* 1838
- [22] Cyril of Jerusalem Catechetical Lecture 6, paragraph 23 (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310106.htm>)
- [23] <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310106.htm>
- [24] "There are two classes of these, called Sarmans and Brahmins. Among the Sarmans, the so-called forest dwellers do not occupy cities or have roofs over their heads."
- [25] Willis Barnstone, Marvin Meyer. *The Gnostic Bible*, p.7 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=MlmaI4bS6-0C&lpg=PA772&dq=buddhism+gnosticism&pg=PA7#v=snippet&q=buddhism+OR+buddhist&f=false>), p.569 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=MlmaI4bS6-0C&lpg=PA772&dq=buddhism+gnosticism&pg=PA569#v=snippet&q=buddhism+OR+buddhist&f=false>), p.572 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=MlmaI4bS6-0C&lpg=PA772&dq=buddhism+gnosticism&pg=PA572#v=snippet&q=buddhism+OR+buddhist&f=false>), Shambhala Publications, 2006.
- [26] March 2002 edition: ISBN 1-57910-918-7.
- [27] R. McL. Wilson, "Nag Hammadi and the New Testament", *New Testament Studies*, vol. 28, (1982), 292.
- [28] *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Rise and Decline of the Roman World) VI 21/1 Volume 2; Volume 21 By Hildegard Temporini, Joseph Vogt, Wolfgang Haase Publisher: Walter de Gruyter (December 31, 1983) Language: German ISBN 3-11-008845-2 ISBN 978-3-11-008845-8 (http://books.google.com/books?id=hBlbw9iMqIIC&pg=PA302&lpg=PA302&dq=philo+minuth&source=bl&ots=Y3JdTWVYJa&sig=jGvqo077rcs2oIMYzzQFjftPIV0&hl=en&ei=NrcrS9iKH8SUtget2vT7CA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&)

- resnum=3&ved=0CAwQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=philo_minuth&f=false)
- [29] Outdated source? The term "minim" in the Talmud often refers to gnostics, as Friedländer, and before him Krochmal and Grätz, have pointed out. (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=280&letter=G&search=gnosticism#ixzz0a3pXc2Qb>)
- [30] Turner, John. "Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History" in Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity, 1986 p. 59
- [31] Hebrew (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1565639448>)
- [32] http://toolserver.org/%7Edispenser/cgi-bin/dab_solver.py?page=Gnosticism&editintro=Template:Disambiguation_needed/editintro&client=Template:Dn
- [33] This is what the scholar A. H. Armstrong wrote as a footnote in his translation of Plotinus' Enneads in the tract named against the Gnostics. Footnote from Page 264 1. From this point to the end of ch.12 Plotinus is attacking a Gnostic myth known to us best at present in the form it took in the system of Valentinus. The Mother, Sophia-Achamoth, produced as a result of the complicated sequence of events after the fall of the higher Sophia, and her offspring the Demiurge, the inferior and ignorant maker of the material universe, are Valentinian figures: cp. Irenaeus adv. Haer 1.4 and 5. Valentinus had been in Rome, and there is nothing improbable in the presence of Valentinians there in the time of Plotinus. But the evidence in the Life ch.16 suggests that the Gnostics in Plotinus's circle belonged rather to the other group called Sethians on Archonties, related to the Ophites or Barbelognostics: they probably called themselves simply "Gnostics." Gnostic groups borrowed freely from each other, and it is likely that Valentinus took some of his ideas about Sophia from older Gnostic sources, and that his ideas in turn influenced other Gnostics. The probably Sethian Gnostic library discovered at Nag Hammadi included Valentinian treatise: ep. Puech, Le pp. 162–163 and 179–180.
- [34] Schenke, Hans Martin. "The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism" in The Rediscovery of Gnosticism. E. J. Brill 1978
- [35] <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/intpr.html>
- [36] Introductory Note This treatise (No.33 in Porphyry's chronological order) is in fact the concluding section of a single long treatise that Porphyry—to carry out the design of grouping his master's works more or less according to subject into six sets of nine treatise—roughly hacked into four parts, which he put into different Enneads, the other three being III. 8 (30) V. 8 (31) and V. 5 (32). Porphyry says (Life ch. 16.11) that he gave the treatise the Title "Against the Gnostics" (he is presumably also responsible for the titles of the other sections of the cut-up treatise). There is an alternative title in Life. ch. 24 56–57, which runs "Against those who say that the maker of the universe is evil and the universe is evil. The treatise as it stands in the Enneads is a most powerful protest on behalf of Hellenic philosophy against the *un-Hellenic heresy* (as it was from the Platonist as well as the orthodox Christian point of view) of Gnosticism. A.H. Armstrong introduction to II 9. Against the Gnostics Pages 220–222
- [37] They claimed to be a privileged caste of beings, in whom God alone was interested, and who were saved not by their own efforts but by some dramatic and arbitrary divine proceeding; and this, Plotinus claimed, led to immorality. Worst of all, they despised and hated the material universe and denied its goodness and the goodness of its maker. For a Platonist, this is utter blasphemy — and all the worse because it obviously derives to some extent from the sharply other-worldly side of Plato's own teaching (e.g. in the Phaedo). At this point in his attack Plotinus comes very close in some ways to the orthodox Christian opponents of Gnosticism, who also insist that this world is the work of God in his goodness. But, here as on the question of salvation, the doctrine Plotinus is defending is as sharply opposed in other ways to orthodox Christianity as to Gnosticism: for he maintains not only the goodness of the material universe but also its eternity and its divinity. A.H. Armstrong introduction to II 9. Against the Gnostics Pages 220–222
- [38] The teaching of the Gnostics seems to him untraditional, irrational and immoral. They despise and revile the ancient Platonic teachings and claim to have a new and superior wisdom of their own: but in fact anything that is true in their teaching comes from Plato, and all they have done themselves is to add senseless complications and pervert the true traditional doctrine into a melodramatic, superstitious fantasy designed to feed their own delusions of grandeur. They reject the only true way of salvation through wisdom and virtue, the slow patient study of truth and pursuit of perfection by men who respect the wisdom of the ancients and know their place in the universe. A.H. Armstrong introduction to II 9. Against the Gnostics Pages 220–222
- [39] Faith and Philosophy By David G. Leahy (http://books.google.com/books?id=VrB5314wNK0C&pg=PA5&lpg=PA5&dq=plotinus+energy&source=web&ots=rblnlnwui5&sig=84RfXY8ErXUowZm2xT21Nuk8_II#PPA6,M1)
- [40] Enneads VI 9.6
- [41] This is what the scholar A. H. Armstrong wrote as a footnote in his translation of Plotinus' Enneads in the tract named against the Gnostics. Footnote from Page 264 1. From this point to the end of ch.12 Plotinus is attacking a Gnostic myth known to us best at present in the form it took in the system of Valentinus. The Mother, Sophia-Achamoth, produced as a result of the complicated sequence of events that followed the fall of the higher Sophia, and her offspring the Demiurge, the inferior and ignorant maker of the material universe, are Valentinian figures: cp. Irenaeus adv. Haer 1.4 and 5. Valentinus had been in Rome, and there is nothing improbable in the presence of Valentinians there in the time of Plotinus. But the evidence in the Life ch.16 suggests that the Gnostics in Plotinus's circle belonged rather to the other group called Sethians on Archonties, related to the Ophites or Barbelognostics: they probably called themselves simply "Gnostics." Gnostic groups borrowed freely from each other, and it is likely that Valentinus took some of his ideas about Sophia from older Gnostic sources, and that his ideas in turn influenced other gnostics. The probably Sethian Gnostic library discovered at Nag Hammadi included Valentinian treatise: ep. Puech, Le pp. 162–163 and 179–180.
- [42] "At this stage we have not found any Gnostic texts that clearly antedate the origin of Christianity." J. M. Robinson, "Sethians and Johannine Thought: The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Prologue of the Gospel of John" in The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol. 2, Sethian Gnosticism, ed. B. Layton (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 662.
- [43] J. M. Robinson, "Jesus: From Easter to Valentinus (Or to the Apostles' Creed)," Journal of Biblical Literature, 101 (1982), p.5.

- [44] First coined in Plato's *Politikos* ['Statement'] as *gnostikoi* ['those capable of knowing'], and linking it with knowledge [*episteme*] (Introduction to *Politikos*. Cooper, John M. & Hutchinson, D. S. [Eds.] (1997)
- [45] What is understood as "orthodox" and "Gnostic" teachings in this early period (1st and 2nd centuries) must be redefined due to the complexities now unfolding regarding their historical and doctrinal similarities and dissimilarities (e.g., the gnostic belief that all matter is evil and the body is a prison to escape from, versus the NT insistence on a physical resurrection).
- [46] The terminology has ties to the passage in Prov 8:23, taking a well known Judaic-concept of 'personification' and defining it with Christ as the "wisdom of God" [1 Co 1:24]. This metaphor was common and understood by most church fathers like Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, Epiphanius and Cyril. (Racovian Catechism, pp. 73–75)
- [47] From the Greek *dokein*, hence Docetism (Dictionary of the Later NT & its Developments, Intersarsity Press, 1997)
- [48] Jesus was *Sui Generis*, the doctrine of the "pre-existent" Christ accepted by some Gnostics and 'orthodox' Christians. Hanson R. P. C (The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–381 A.D. Edinburgh T. & T. Clark, 1988)
- [49] New Bible Dictionary, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., Grand Rapids, MI, 1975), pp. 558–560. Furthermore, some New Testament texts indicate that this is not in line with Judaic [or rabbinic] teaching, something Jesus himself adhered to [Luke 2; John 4:24; Phil 3:3–4]. Also see, Nuesner, Jacob, *The Modern Study of the Mishna*, 1997; & *Mishne Torah*.
- [50] In Platonism the soul [*psuchē*] was self-moving, indivisible; degenerated and eternal, existing before the body which housed it, and longing to be free from its earthly imprisonment, leading to the Docetist-dualist concept of 'good' & 'evil' matter. Ed. Note.
- [51] Their own heresiology would later be attacked as heretical. See, Holt, Reinhard, *The Western Heritage of Faith and Reason*, Winston N.Y., 1971), p. 382; Alastair H. B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy* (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1996)
- [52] "Was the Lord's prayer addressed only to the hypostasis of the Father as 'our Father' and the Father of the Son, or to the entire *ousia* of the Godhead?" Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. 1, the Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600). Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- [53] A new theological vocabulary capable of explaining this doctrine was created [e.g. *homoousios*=same essence]. Adopting an idea of Origen's that easterners would appreciate in their own Sabellianism. Hanson, Search, pp. 687–688
- [54] The crisis of the later Roman Empire and move towards the east brought a *new realism*, which may have inclined Christians to accept the new theological doctrine. Ed. note
- [55] Arius preached that, "before Christ, God was not yet a Father...there was when he [Jesus] was not." Since most of his works are lost, the accounts are based on reports of others. Hanson, Search, pp. 5–8.
- [56] Alexandria had long been a hotbed of theological innovation and debate where high ranking Christian thinkers used methods from Greek philosophy as well as Jewish and Christian sources for their teachings. Ed. note
- [57] Although, he took his monotheism seriously, he later taught that the only way to save mankind from moral and physical extinction was for God to do the unthinkable, descend into human flesh. Athanasius, "On the Incarnation of the World", in Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series, vol. 4, Athanasius: Select Works and Letters (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994)
- [58] See Goodacre, Mark. *The Case against Q: Studies in Marcan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002); Robinson, James, M. *The Nag Hammadi Library*, HarperOne, 1990.
- [59] The word became familiar to Greeks in the 3rd century with Ammonius Saccas and the Alexandrian Neo-Platonists [or Theurgists]: it was adopted in 1875 by H. P. Blavatsky and others associated with the Theosophical Society (Blavatsky, H. P. *The Secret Doctrine*, the synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy, Theosophical Uni. Press, first published 1888)
- [60] Its formulation coinciding with the period most strongly associated with Gnosticism (4th to 6th centuries). See, Eusebius *Hist. Eccl*; McDonald, L. M., *The Formation of the Biblical Canon* (rev. and exp. ed; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995).
- [61] *Dictionary of the Later New Testament*, pp. 135–143.
- [62] "Both pagan mythologies and Platonic philosophical traditions...extensive use of the early chapters of Genesis...the obvious centrality of Jesus Christ [and apostolic figures] in many texts." *Dictionary of the Later New Testament*, p 410
- [63] See Everett Ferguson, "Factors leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon," in *The Canon Debate*. eds. L. M. McDonald & J. A. Sanders (Hendrickson, 2002); Lindberg, Carter (2006) *A Brief History of Christianity*. Blackwell Publishing
- [64] Works Cited I. Alastair, H. B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy* (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1996) II. Bewkes, E. G. *The Western Heritage of Faith and Reason* (Holt, Rinehart, Winston, N.Y., 1960). III. Blavatsky, H. P. *The Secret Doctrine*, the synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy, Theosophical Uni. Press, first published 1888. IV. Cooper, John M. & Hutchinson, D. S. (Eds.) *Introduction to Politikos*, 1997. V. Danielou, Jean. *The Origin of Latin Christianity* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1977). VI. *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, Intersarsity Press, 1993. VII. *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, Intersarsity Press, 1997. VIII. Hanson, R. P. C. *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–381 AD*. Edinburgh T. & T. Clark, 1988. IX. Holt, Reinhard. *The Western Heritage of Faith and Reason*, Winston N.Y., 1971. X. Horner, G. W. *The Coptic version of the New Testament in the southern dialect, otherwise called Sahidic and Thebaic*, 1911. XI. *New Bible Dictionary*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., Grand Rapids, MI, 1975. XII. Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. 1, the Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600). Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971. XIII. Phillip, Schaff & Wace, Henry eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series, vol. 4, Athanasius: Select Works and Letters (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994). XIV. Selwyn, E. G. 'Image, Fact and Faith', *NTS* 1 no. 4 (May 1955). XV. Wolfson, H. A. 'Notes on Patristic Philosophy', *Harvard Theological Review* 57, no. 2 (Apr. 1964) & *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Harvard Uni. Press, Publishing, PA. 1976).
- [65] *Jewish Encyclopedia Article* (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=280&letter=G&search=gnosticism#ixzz1L59waxy8>) Jewish Gnosticism. "Jewish gnosticism unquestionably antedates Christianity, for Biblical exegesis had already reached an age of five

- hundred years by the first century C.E. Judaism had been in close contact with Babylonian-Persian ideas for at least that length of time, and for nearly as long a period with Hellenistic ideas. Magic, also, which, as shown further on, was a not unimportant part of the doctrines and manifestations of gnosticism, largely occupied Jewish thinkers. There is, in general, no circle of ideas to which elements of gnosticism have been traced, and with which the Jews were not acquainted. It is a noteworthy fact that heads of gnostic schools and founders of gnostic systems are designated as Jews by the Church Fathers. Some derive all heresies, including those of gnosticism, from Judaism (Hegesippus in Eusebius, "Hist. Eccl." iv. 22; comp. Harnack, "Dogmengesch." 3d ed. i. 232, note 1). It must furthermore be noted that Hebrew words and names of God provide the skeleton for several gnostic systems. Christians or Jews converted from paganism would have used as the foundation of their systems terms borrowed from the Greek or Syrian translations of the Bible. This fact proves at least that the principal elements of gnosticism were derived from Jewish speculation, while it does not preclude the possibility of new wine having been poured into old bottles."
- [66] Article (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=280&letter=G&search=gnosticism#ixzz1L59waxy8>) Pre-Christian. — Cosmogonic-theological speculations, philosophemes on God and the world, constitute the substance of gnosis. They are based on the first sections of Genesis and Ezekiel, for which there are in Jewish speculation two well-established and therefore old terms: "Ma'aseh Bereshit" and "Ma'aseh Merkabah." Doubtless Ben Sira was thinking of these speculations when he uttered the warning: "Seek not things that are too hard for thee, and search not out things that are above thy strength. The things that have been commanded thee, think thereupon; for thou hast no need of the things that are secret" (Ecclus. [Sirach] iii. 21–22, R. V.). The terms here emphasized recur in the Talmud in the accounts of gnosis. "There is no doubt that a Jewish gnosticism existed before a Christian or a Judæo-Christian gnosticism. As may be seen even in the apocalypses, since the second century B.C. gnostic thought was bound up with Judaism, which had accepted Babylonian and Syrian doctrines; but the relation of this Jewish gnosticism to Christian gnosticism may, perhaps, no longer be explained" (Harnack, "Geschichte der Altchristlichen Litteratur," p. 144). The great age of Jewish gnosticism is further indicated by the authentic statement that Johanan b. Zakkai, who was born probably in the century before the common era, and was, according to Sukkah 28a, versed in that science, refers to an interdiction against "discussing the Creation before two pupils and the throne-chariot before one."
- [67] *20th Century Jewish Religious Thought* Arthur A. Cohen, Paul Mendes-Flohr, Arthur Allen Cohen 1988 republished 2010 – Page 286 "Recent research, however, has tended to emphasize that Judaism, rather than Persia, was a major origin of Gnosticism. Indeed, it appears increasingly evident that many of the newly published Gnostic texts were written in a context from which Jews were not absent. In some cases, indeed, a violent rejection of the Jewish God, or of Judaism, seems to stand at the basis of these texts. ... facie, various trends in Jewish thought and literature of the Second Commonwealth appear to have been potential factors in Gnostic origins.
- [68] *Understanding Jewish History: Texts and Commentaries* by Steven Bayme Publisher: Ktav Publishing House ISBN 0-88125-554-8 ISBN 978-0-88125-554-6 (http://books.google.com/books?id=56QJ9O7MFJ4C&pg=PA122&lpg=PA122&dq=gershom+scholem+gnosticism+anti-semitic&source=bl&ots=qKECnoMshu&sig=wdV7x2W3FJjtdmWVCSgyrMigPyE&hl=en&ei=EAELStOJDYUmtgemr5HFAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5)
- [69] Idel, Moshe. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Yale University Press, 1990, p. 31 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=utWy5kz5K7IC&lpg=PA31>). ISBN 978-0-300-04699-1
- [70] Scholem, Gershom *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 1962.
- [71] *The first kabbalistic text with a known author that reached us is a brief treatise, a commentary on the Sefer Yezira written by Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham the Blind, in Provence near the turn of the thirteenth century.* Dan, Joseph *Kabbalah: a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p 25.
- [72] Dan, Joseph *Kabbalah: a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p 24.
- [73] Scholem, Gershom. *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and the Talmudic Tradition*, 1965.
- [74] *Lessons from the Kabbalah and Jewish history* By Josef Blaha (<http://books.google.com/books?id=1eTf-tDqDeMC&lpg=PA183&dq=kabbalah+gnostic+torah&pg=PA183#v=onepage&q=kabbalah+gnostic+torah&f=false>), Page 183
- [75] *Jewish mysticism: an introduction* By J. H. Laenen (<http://books.google.com/books?id=rQWY52H2HI4C&lpg=PA129&dq=kabbalah+gnostic+zohar&pg=PA130#v=onepage&q=kabbalah+gnostic+zohar&f=false>), Page 130
- [76] Marksches, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, 94.
- [77] King, Karen L. *What Is Gnosticism?*, p.91.
- [78] *Classical Texts: Acta Archelai* Now, he who spoke with Moses, the Jews, and the priests he says is the archont of Darkness, and the Christians, Jews, and pagans (ethnic) are one and the same, as they revere the same god. For in his aspirations he seduces them, as he is not the god of truth. And so therefore all those who put their hope in the god who spoke with Moses and the prophets have (this in store for themselves, namely) to be bound with him, because they did not put their hope in the god of truth. For that one spoke with them (only) according to their own aspirations. [www.fas.harvard.edu/~iranian/Manicheism/Manicheism_II_Texts.pdf] Page 76
- [79] Likewise, Manichaeism, being another Gnostic sect, preached a similar doctrine of positioning God against matter. This dualistic teaching embodied an elaborate cosmological myth that included the defeat of a primal man by the powers of darkness that devoured and imprisoned the particles of light. The *Acta Archelai* further has Mani saying, "It is the Prince of Darkness who spoke with Moses, the Jews and their priests. Thus the Christians, the Jews, and the Pagans are involved in the same error when they worship this God. For he leads them astray in the lusts he taught them." (<http://www.themystica.org/mystica/articles/d/dualism.html>)
- [80] Gospel of Judas, pg 44. translated by Kasser, Meyer, Wurst.
- [81] Gospel of Judas, pg 56. translated by Kasser, Meyer, Wurst.
- [82] <http://gnosis.org/library/meadmarcion.htm>
- [83] <http://gnosis.org/library/marcion/Harnack.html>

- [84] http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/MAL_MAR/MARCION.html
- [85] González, Justo L.(1970). *A History of Christian Thought, Vol. I*. Abingdon. pp. 132–3
- [86] Ismo Dunderberg *Beyond gnosticism: myth, lifestyle, and society in the school of Valentinus*. Columbia University Press, 2008. p16 "The problems with the term "Gnosticism" itself are now well known. It does not appear in ancient sources at all, ... "
- [87] Birger Albert Pearson *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* 2004 p210 "As Bentley Layton points out, the term Gnosticism was first coined by Henry More (1614–1687) in an expository work on the seven letters of the Book of Revelation.²⁹ More used the term Gnosticisme to describe the heresy in Thyatira."
- [88] Stephen Charles Haar *Simon Magus: the first gnostic?* p231
- [89] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+6&version=ESV>
- [90] Dominic J. Unger, John J. Dillon — 1992 *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the heresies*, Vol.1 p3 "the final phrase of the title "knowledge falsely so-called" is found in 1 Timothy 6:20.
- [91] LSJ entry (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=gnwstikos&la=greek#lexicon>) **γνῶσι-κός** , **ή**, **όν**, A. of or for knowing, cognitive: ή -κή (sc. ἐπιστήμη), theoretical science (opp. πρακτική), Pl.Pl.258e, etc.; τὸ γ. ib.261b; "ἔξεις γ." Arist.AP0.100a11 (Comp.); "γ. εἰκόνας" Hierocl.in CA25p.475M.: c. gen., able to discern, Ocell. 2.7. Adv. "-κῶς" Procl.Inst.39, Dam.Pr.79, Phlp.in Ph.241.22.
- [92] In Perseus databank (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/wordfreq?lang=greek&lookup=gnwstiko/s>) 10x Plato, Cratylus, Theaetetus, Sophist, Statesman 2x Plutarch, Compendium libri de animae procreatione + De animae procreatione in Timaeo, 2x Pseudo-Plutarch, De musica
- [93] Morton Smith *History of the term gnostikos* 1973
- [94] A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau Saint Irénée de Lyon : *Traité contre les hérésies* 1974
- [95] Williams *Rethinking "Gnosticism": an argument for dismantling a dubious category* 1999 p36: "But several of Irenaeus's uses of the designation gnostikos are more ambiguous, and it is not so clear whether he is indicating the specific sect again or using "gnostics" now merely as a shorthand reference for virtually all of the"; p37: "They argue that Irenaeus uses *gnostikos* in two senses: (1) with the term's 'basic and customary meaning' of 'learned' (savant), and (2) with reference to adherents of the specific sect called 'the gnostic heresy' in Adv. haer. 1.11.1."; p271: "1.25.6 where they think that *gnostikos* means 'learned' are in 1.11.3 ('A certain other famous teacher of theirs, reaching for a doctrine more lofty and learned [*gnostikoteron*] ...) and 1.11.5 ('... in order that they [i.e.,])"
- [96] Williams p42-43 "On the other hand, the one group whom Irenaeus does explicitly mention as users of this self-designation, the followers of the second-century CE teacher Marcellina, are not included in Layton's anthology at all, on the grounds that their doctrines are not similar to those of the "classic" gnostics.⁴⁴ As we have seen, Epiphanius is one of the witnesses for the existence of a special sect called "the gnostics," and yet Epiphanius himself seems to distinguish between these people and "the Sethians" (Pan 40.7.5), whereas Layton treats them as both under the "classic gnostic" category."
- [97] Trames – 2006 Vol. 10, n° 3 "One of the most difficult questions in the history of the study of Gnosticism has been the issue of the origins of gnostic movement, ... The main representative of that model was Adolf von Harnack in the 19th century; however, the model has had
- [98] R. van den Broek *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity* Page vii 1996 "The study of Gnosticism and, to a lesser extent, of early Alexandrian Christianity received a strong impetus by the discovery of the Coptic Nag Hammadi Library, in 1945,"
- [99] The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies – Susan Ashbrook Harvey, David G. Hunter – 2008 Page 216 "As the first section of this chapter paradoxically demonstrates, during the last 20 years the definition of 'Gnosticism' has become the most difficult issue in the study of 'Gnosticism'. Future research will have to show whether a new, working ..."
- [100] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. II, Ch. XLVIII
- [101] Smith, Richard. "The Modern Relevance of Gnosticism" in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 1990 ISBN 0-06-066935-7
- [102] Cf. l'Eglise du Plérôme (<http://www.plerome.org>)
- [103] Green, Celia (1981,2006). *Advice to Clever Children*. Oxford: Oxford Forum. Ch.s XXXV-XXXVII.
- [104] Campbell, Joseph: *Occidental Mythology*, page 262. Penguin Arkana, 1991.
- [105] <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/demiurge.aspx>
- [106] "Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism" by Karen L. King, Page 243
- [107] Ehrman, Bart D."Lost Christianities". Oxford University Press, 2003, p.185.

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External links

- Gnostic texts at sacred-texts.com (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/gno/index.htm>)
 - Religious Tolerance (<http://www.religioustolerance.org/gnostic.htm>) — A survey of Gnosticism
 - Early Christian Writings (<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/gnostics.html>) — primary texts
 - The Gnostic Society Library (<http://www.gnosis.org/library.html>) — primary sources and commentaries.
 - Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Gnosticism (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/g/gnostic.htm>)
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