Gnosticism

Robert C. Newman
from Robert M. Grant, Gnosticism
and Irenaeus, Against Heresies
Gnosticism Characterized

• This world is unredeemably bad.
• Salvation is escape from the world, by means of self-knowledge.
• God is completely transcendent.
• Between God & the world are numerous intermediate spirit beings, called aeons, one (or more) of whom made this world.
• Somehow, some of the divine spark was trapped in the world in (some) humans.
• The Redeemer came down to give knowledge by which humans may be saved.
Gnosticism Characterized

• Humans are divided into 3 classes:
  – *Hulic* – earthly, material
    • Incapable of salvation
  – *Psychic* – animal, soulish, spiritual
    • Capable of salvation
    • Need to accept Gnostic gospel
    • Usually orthodox Christians are put in this class
  – *Pneumatic* – spiritual
    • Already saved by nature
    • Typically, the Gnostic leaders
Origin of Gnosticism

Very controversial

• From ancient Oriental religion?
  – Zoroastrian, Mesopotamian, Indian?

• From heterodox Judaism?
  – Apocalyptic, mystical?

• From heterodox Christianity?

• From late Hellenistic philosophy?
  – Neoplatonism?
Early "Christian" Gnostics

Lots of Gnostic “gurus” and groups:
- Simon Magus
- Menander
- Saturninus
- Basilides
- Carpocrates
- Cerinthus
- The Ebionites
- Valentinus

- The Nicolaitans
- Cerdo
- Marcion
- The Enchatrites
- The Barbelo-Gnostics
- The Sethian-Ophites
- The Cainites
Gnostic "Aeons"
in system of Valentinus

THE OGDOAD:
• Proarche
• Ennoea
• Nous
• Aletheia
• Logos
• Zoe
• Anthropos
• Ecclesia

THE DECAD:
• Bythius
• Mixis
• Ageratos
• Henosis
• Autophyes
• Hedone
• Acinetos
• Syncrasis
• Monogenes
• Macaria
Gnostic "Aeons"
in system of Valentinus

THE DUODECAD:

- Paracletus
- Pistis
- Patricos
- Elpis
- Metricos
- Agape

- Ainos
- Synesis
- Ecclesiasticus
- Macariotes
- Theletos
- **Sophia**
Gnostic "Aeons"
in system of Valentinus

- The Ogdoad, Decad, & Duodecad make up the PLEROMA.
- Sophia, also called Acamoth (Wisdom), consists of spirit, animal, and matter.
- Her child is the Demiurge, the God of everything outside the Pleroma, the Creator in Genesis.
Gnosticism

Believe it or not ...

... is currently experiencing a revival of sorts