

[1968. In *Encyclopedia of Christianity*. Edwin A. Palmer, ed. Wilmington, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education.]

GNOSTICISM. Gnosticism was a syncretistic religion that nearly overwhelmed the Christian church in the second century. Justin Martyr states that Simon Magus was the first gnostic, and the writings of John provide some evidence that gnostic ideas were present in the first century. In the 3rd century the movement began to die.

The possible combinations of pagan theologies with Christian terminology are numerous, and therefore gnosticism came in many varieties. The two best organized systems were those of Basilides (A.D. 130), who claimed to have received his doctrine from Peter, and Valentine (A.D. 150), whose teacher Theudas supposedly reported the views of Paul.

Valentinus taught that every development of the world was an emanation from above. Basilides, on the other hand, taught that there was an evolutionary development of the world upward. In addition to these teacher there were Certinthus, Marcion, and Saturnius of Antioch.

The term *gnosticism* (and *gnostic*) came from the Greek word for “knowledge,” and indicated salvation through a secret knowledge which gnostics claimed to have. All varieties of gnosticism agreed that matter is inherently evil, that the creator of the world was not the Supreme Being, who is unknown and unknowable, and that the material world yet contains certain germs of the spiritual that are in certain ones who inherently possess them. The system of Valentinus described below illustrates gnostic theology and shows that gnosticism was basically a pagan philosophy that interpreted God and the world contrary to Scripture.

Valentinus' system is divided into three stages: the emanation from the Pleroma, the disruption, and the restitution. In the eternal beginning were Abyss and Silence, from which emanated Mind and Truth. These give rise to Logos and Life, and these produce Man and Church. These four pairs are the Ogdoad. This is essentially a description of the Ultimate Being—the ineffable, ungenerated, incomprehensible Forefather and Self-Sire, above all the Silence of eternity, undifferentiated mind, a vague consciousness.

Logos and Life now beget the Decad—five pairs: Deep Mingling, Ever-young Union, Self-existent Pleasure, Unmoved Blending, and Only-begotten Blessedness.

Man and Church now beget the Dodecad, comprising six pair, a list of elements of “Christian” consciousness: Abiding Faith, Paternal Hope, Maternal Love, Ever-intelligent Sagacity, Churchly Bliss, and God-willed Wisdom.

These together are the thirty eons: angels, spirits, thoughts that constitute the mind of the ultimate God. Wisdom, science, or philosophy, is the last element in the divine mind. It is also the villain, for through the beautiful virgin Sophia sin entered the world and necessitated the cosmic drama. Sophia is often singled out as the original rebel, though Valentinus seems to make all the eons guilty. Each eon is a limited aspect of the divine mind; but each wants to know more, and claims to know more than any other; hence they fight and disrupt the peace of God's mind.

Now an influx of new divine light cleanses the Pleroma. Sophia, or the eons, and their sinful products are swept out into the lower world, and the new light forms a Boundary, the Oros, the sky, to prevent any return. The sky has a cross on it, which bars anyone who does not himself have the sign of the cross.

The remnant of Sophia, or of the eons, left behind in the Pleroma is a new eon called Christ (the Logos). Christ takes pity on miserable, dark Sophia and reveals himself to her on the cross in the sky. This momentary vision gave her the desire to return to the Pleroma. But the way is barred by the darkness and error of her mind. Christ, or the Savior, to redeem her, changes her incorporeal emotion into corporeal matter, or two kinds, psychic and hylic. The psychic is soul stuff which in mankind gives a desire for god. The hylic is the substratum of Aristotle, which hates light.

Sophia now begins to work out her own salvation. Since she is science, God's plan for the

universe, she proceeds to form the world. One of her sub-agents is Topos, Makom, names for the God of the Jews. The world is not entirely material: Sophia produces souls. By creation the material and the human world Sophia relieves herself of the darkness and error of her mind.

From psychic stuff Sophia creates the demiurge, the boastful bragging JHVH (Jehovah) of the OT. This demiurge separates the region above the moon from the region below. The lower world is yet in chaos. Therefore the demiurge changes grief into air, fear into water, and consternation becomes earth. Then he makes man in the fourth heaven. Man is given a psychic or animal soul, and around it a hylic body. Then Sophia the mother of the demiurge, plays a trick on him and inserts into man a spiritual element without his knowledge. Finally man is given a material body and sent to earth.

Subordinate to the demiurge is the evil Cosmo-krater, the devil, who rebelled against the demiurge. They struggle over man. Sophia sympathies with the efforts of the demiurge to save man and inspires the prophets, whose prophecies astound the demiurge, for he thought that he was the only God beside whom there was no other. The demiurge also created a psychic Christ by whom he intended to preserve man from Cosmo-krater.

In the cosmic drama of salvation the Logos Christ, or Savior, took some spiritual germs from Sophia and wrapped himself in them. These germs are light, but not so brilliant as his light. Descending into the Hebdomad, he takes the psychic Christ from the demiurge and uses it as his next wrapping. He then appeared in the sky in the form of comet, the star of Bethlehem. The head of comet was Christ, and the tail was composed of innumerable specs of light, each an angel in heaven. By this time Sophia had already formed images corresponding to each angel, which became the human spirit of those to be redeemed. These spirits became the souls of men. The Jesus of our Gospels is the materialized spirit. At Jesus' death, the spirit from above was not crucified. The body, nailed to the cross, cried out, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me." The spirit had departed, and the wrappings only remained on the cross. These wrappings contained the souls of redeemed, the twin spirits of angels above, the ones who had committed the sins. These spirits bore the penalty.

Man himself is a complex being with "wrappings." Salvation is redemption, *apolutrosis*, the "laying aside" of each wrapping in its proper place. The clay body or matter is destroyed, for its use was temporary. The psychic element has a possibility of destruction or bliss. And the spiritual element will inevitably be saved. At death a man must pass through the air to the moon. On this journey he is met by demons and temptations. He must also pass through the river of fire, hell, that flows from the throne of Tobos or Makom. The hylic body now evaporates and the psychic may ascend. After a long time and much cleansing, the spirits reaches the Ogdoad, where it finds its mother, Sophia. There they continue until all spirits have returned.

Then the consummation takes place. The demiurge is now completely developed, and so are all his angels. The second advent occurs, when the Savior comes from the Pleroma and marries Sophia. Each angel marries its twin, and all ascend to the Pleroma. The demiurge is made second to the Savior, and hidden fire annihilates the lower world and the Cosmo-krater. Nothing remains of the sin of Sophia, except the now redeemed demiurge, who had cooperated in the redemption, and the now happy spirits. All remain forever in the Ogdoad. And the Pleroma, God's mind, is finally in perfect peace.

GORDON H. CLARK