

Valentinus

Valentinus's Myth according to Irenaeus

The following text is excerpted from Bentley Layton in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Doubleday 1987), pp. 225-227. The text comes from Irenaeus' *Adv. Haer.* 1.11.1 and is quoted by Epiphanius in his *Against Heresies* 31.32.2-9. Please refer to Layton for background, bibliography, and notes.

Relation to gnostic myth (a)

Valentinus adapted the fundamental principles of the so-called gnostic school of thought to his own kind of system. Here is what he laid down.

The ineffable and silence (b)

There was a duality, of which one member is called the ineffable and the other is called silence.

Production of the other aeons (c)

Then from this duality a second duality was emitted, of which one member he calls the parent and the other he calls truth.

The quartet yielded:

- the Word;
- life;
- the human being;
- the church.

This is the first octet.

And—he says—from the Word and life ten powers were emitted, as I already said. And from the human being and the church twelve powers were emitted.

Revolt of the mother (d)

One of these revolted and became lacking; this one was responsible for the rest of the affair.

Two boundaries (e)

He assumes the existence of two boundaries: one is between the deep and the rest of the fullness, bounding the engendered aeons away from the unengendered parent; the other bounds their mother apart from the fullness.

Production of the anointed (Christ) and "shadow" (f)

And furthermore, the anointed (Christ) was not emitted from the aeons within the fullness. Rather, he and a shadow were engendered by the mother, according to her memory of the superior realm, while she was outside (of the fullness). Since he was male he cut off the shadow, (removing it) from himself; and he hastened up into the fullness.

Loss of spirit by the mother. The craftsman. (g)

The mother was left behind with the shadow; and having been emptied of the spiritual substance, she emitted another child. This was the craftsman, whom he also calls the almighty of those that are subject to it.

The left-hand ruler (h)

Just like the gnostics—falsely so called!—of whom we shall speak further on, he holds that along with this (craftsman) was emitted also a ruler on the left.

The emanation of Jesus (i)

And furthermore, sometimes he says that Jesus emanated from that being who had drawn away from this mother of theirs and had merged with the entirety, i.e. the wished-for. At other times he says that he emanated from that being which had hastened up into the fullness, i.e. the anointed (Christ); at still other times, he says that he emanated from the human being and the church.

The holy spirit (j)

And the holy spirit, he says, was emitted by truth, for the scrutiny and yielding of the aeons, invisibly entering into them. Through it the aeons yielded the plants of truth.

Valentinus: The Divine Word Present in the Infant

The following text is excerpted from Bentley Layton in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Doubleday 1987), p. 231. The text comes from Hippolytus's *Against Heresies* 6.42.2. Please refer to Layton for background, bibliography, and notes.

Fragment A

For Valentinus says he saw a newborn babe, and questioned it to find out who it was. And the babe answered him saying that it was the Word. Thereupon, he adds to this a certain pompous tale, intending to derive from this his attempt at a sect.

Valentinus: The Three Natures

The following text is excerpted from Bentley Layton in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Doubleday 1987), p. 233. The text comes from Marcellus of Ancyra, *On the Holy Church*, 9. Please refer to Layton for background, bibliography, and notes.

Fragment B

Valentinus, the leader of a sect, was the first to devise the notion of three subsistent entities (hypostases), in a work that he entitled *On the Three Natures*. For, he devised the notion of three subsistent entities and three persons—father, son, and holy spirit.

Valentinus: Adam's Faculty of Speech

The following text is excerpted from Bentley Layton in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Doubleday 1987), p. 235. The text comes from Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 2.36.2-4. Please refer to Layton for background, bibliography, and notes.

Fragment C

And even as awe overcame the angels in the presence of that modeled form because it uttered sounds superior to what its modeling justified, owing to the agent who had invisibly deposited in it a seed of higher essence and who spoke freely: so too in the races of worldly people, human artifacts become objects of awe for their creators—for example, statues and paintings and everything that (human) hands make as representing a god. For Adam, modeled as representing a human being, made them stand in awe of the preexistent human being; for precisely the latter stood in him. And they were stricken with terror and quickly concealed the work.

Valentinus: Adam's Name

The following text is excerpted from Bentley Layton in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Doubleday 1987), p. 237. The text comes from Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 4.89.6-4.90.1. Please refer to Layton for background, bibliography, and notes.

Fragment D

However much a portrait is inferior to an actual face, just so is the world worse than the living realm. Now, what is the cause of the (effectiveness of the) portrait? It is the majesty of the face that has furnished to the painter a prototype so that the portrait might be honored by his name. For the form was not reproduced with perfect fidelity, yet the name completed the lack within the act of modeling. And also god's invisible cooperates with what has been modeled to lend it credence.

Valentinus: Jesus' Digestive System: Epistle to Agathapous

The following text is excerpted from Bentley Layton in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Doubleday 1987), p. 239. The text comes from Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 3.59.3. Please refer to Layton for background, bibliography, and notes.

Fragment E

He was continent, enduring all things. Jesus digested divinity; he ate and drank in a special way, without excreting his solids. He had such a great capacity for continence that the nourishment within him was not corrupted, for he did not experience corruption.

Valentinus: Annihilation of the Realm of Death

The following text is excerpted from Bentley Layton in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Doubleday 1987), p. 241. The text comes from Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 4.89.1-3. Please refer to Layton for background, bibliography, and notes.

Fragment F

From the beginning you (plur.) have been immortal, and you are children of eternal life. And you wanted death to be allocated to yourselves so that you might spend it and use it up, and that death might die in you and through you. For when you nullify the world and are not yourselves annihilated, you are lord over creation and all corruption.

Now, like Basilides, he supposes that there is a people that by its very nature is saved; that this race, indeed, has come down to us for the destruction of death; and that the origination of death is the work of the creator of the world. Accordingly, he understands the scriptural passage (Ex 33:20) "No one shall see the face of god and live" as though god were the cause of death.

Valentinus: The Source of Common Wisdom: On Friends

The following text is excerpted from Bentley Layton in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Doubleday 1987), p. 243. The text comes from Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.52.3-4. Please refer to Layton for background, bibliography, and notes.

Fragment G

Many of the things written in publicly available books are found in the writings of god's church. For this shared matter is the utterances that come from the heart, the law that is written in the heart. This is the people of the beloved, which is beloved and which loves him.

Valentinus: The Vision of God: Epistle on Attachments

The following text is excerpted from Bentley Layton in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Doubleday 1987), p. 245. The text comes from Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 2.114.3-6. Please refer to Layton for background, bibliography, and notes.

Fragment H

And one there is who is good! His free act of speaking is the manifestation of the son. And through him alone can a heart become pure, when every evil spirit has been put out of the heart. For the many spirits dwelling in the heart do not permit it to become pure: rather, each of them performs its own acts, violating it in various ways with improper desires. And in my opinion the heart experiences something

like what happens in a caravansary. For the latter is full of holes and dug up and often filled with dung, because while they are there, people live in an utterly vulgar way and take no forethought for the property since it belongs to someone else. Just so, a heart too is impure by being the habitation of many demons, until it experiences forethought. But when the father, who alone is good, visits the heart, he makes it holy and fills it with light. And so a person who has such a heart is called blessed, for that person will see god.

Valentinus: Summer Harvest

The following text is excerpted from Bentley Layton in *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Doubleday 1987), pp. 248-249. The text comes from Hippolytus of Rome, *Against Heresies* 6.37.7-8. This little ditty is not a fragment but rather a complete work of Valentinus. Please refer to Layton for background, bibliography, and notes.

Summer Harvest

I see in spirit that all are hung
I know in spirit that all are borne
Flesh hanging from soul
Soul clinging to air
Air hanging from upper atmosphere

Crops rushing forth from the deep
A babe rushing forth from the womb.

He means this: "flesh" according to them is matter which "hangs from" the "soul" of the craftsman. "Soul clings to air": i.e. the craftsman (clings) to spirit of the outer fullness. And "air hangs from upper atmosphere," i.e. the outer wisdom (hangs) from the inner boundary and the entire fullness. "Crops rush forth from the deep," having become the complete emanation of the aeons from the parent.

Information on Valentinus

Bentley Layton writes (*The Gnostic Scriptures*, p. 217):

Valentinus (A.D. ca. 100-ca. 175) was born in the Egyptian Delta, at Phrenobis (see Map 4). He enjoyed the good fortune of a Greek education in the nearby metropolis of Alexandria, the world capital of Hellenistic culture. In Alexandria he probably met the Christian philosopher Basilides (see Part Five), who was teaching there, and may have been influenced by him. There, too, he must have made the acquaintance of Greek philosophy. Valentinus's familiarity with Platonism may have come to him through study of Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of the bible, for in a passage of one of his sermons he seems to show knowledge of a work by the great Alexandrian Jewish allegorist and philosopher Philo Judaeus (ca. 30 B.C.-A.D. ca. 45). [GTr 36:35f may use the allegory of Gn 2:8 found in Philo Judaeus, "Questions and Answers on Genesis" 1.6.] Valentinus's distinguished career as a teacher began in Alexandria, sometime between A.D. 117 and 138. Since most of the Fragments of his works (VFr) were preserved by a second-century Christian intellectual in Alexandria, Valentinus may have written and published in Alexandria while he was teaching there. If so, his considerable expertise in rhetorical composition, which is

evident in these Fragments, must have been acquired while he was studying in Alexandria. Valentinus's followers in Alexandria later reported that he had claimed a kind of apostolic sanction for his teaching by maintaining that he had received lessons in Christian religion from a certain Theudas, who—he said—had been a student of St. Paul. If there is any truth in this claim, his contact with Theudas and his reading of St. Paul may have occurred in Alexandria.

J. Quasten writes (*Patrology*, v. 1, p. 260):

By far more important than Basilides and his son Isidore was their contemporary Valentinus. Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 3,4,3) states of him: 'Valentinus came to Rome in the time of Hyginus (ca. 136 to 140 A.D.), flourished under Pius (ca. 150 to 155) and remained until Anicetus' (ca. 155 to 160). Epiphanius (*Haer.* 31,7 to 12) is the first who reports that he was born in Egypt, educated in Alexandria, and that he spread his doctrine in Egypt before he went to Rome. Epiphanius adds that he later left Rome for Cyprus. Clement of Alexandria has six fragments of his writings incorporated into his *Stromata*: two of them are from his letters, two from his homilies, and two of them do not give any indication from which of his writings they are taken.

Quasten also states: "Valentinus found many followers both in the East and in the West. Hippolytus speaks of two schools, an Oriental and an Italian." (*Patrology*, v. 1, p. 261)

Bentley Layton expounds (*The Gnostic Scriptures*, pp. 221-222):

Three sides of Valentinus' literary personality emerge in these remains. First, there is the mythmaker—continuing in the steps of the gnostics, but strikingly innovative so as to take account of the different brand of philosophy, a more profound acceptance of biblical and cross-centered Christianity, and a different structuring of the myth. A doctrinal résumé of Valentinus's myth, by St. Irenaeus, survives (IrV): it is abbreviated and stops short, so no more than a hint of this side of Valentinus emerges. The myth is known in more detail in versions taught by Valentinus's disciples. The version by Ptolemy is included in the present volume (IrPt); from it, a modern reader can get a better idea of what Valentinus's own teaching must have been like, though some details are doubtless due to Ptolemy's own creativity.

Second, there is the Platonizing—or perhaps, better, gnosticizing—biblical theologian of the Fragments (VFrA-H). These eight Fragments, excerpted by ancient witnesses from Valentinus's philosophical epistles, sermons, and treatises, show an intensity, an attention to detail, and a penchant for unexpected turns of thought that set them apart from most other literature of gnostic Christianity and Valentinianism. Despite their brevity and incompleteness, they are among the most striking remains of ancient Christian literature. Without more of the originals, it is hard to assess how far they resembled other material attributed to Valentinus. VFrA, VFrC, and VFrD relate to a mythic story of cosmic structure and creation like IrV, while VFrF and VFrH resemble more the content of GTr. However, there is very little in the Fragments that unambiguously resembles gnostic or postgnostic myth (except perhaps "the preexistent human being" in VFrC; cf. VFrD, "the form was not reproduced with perfect fidelity").

Third, there is the mystic poet of *Summer Harvest* (VHr) and *The Gospel of Truth* (GTr). Both these works are personal and visionary. *Summer Harvest* is nothing less than a

stylized evocation of the whole metaphysical and physical world, in seven line of verse that hover between philosophical cosmology and pure poetry. *The Gospel of Truth* also evokes the entire universe, but in a rhetoric that no longer bears any immediate relation to the linear, chainlike cosmology of gnostic myth or *Summer Harvest*. The world view of GTr is Stoic and pantheistic: that is, a universe in which all is enclosed by god, and ultimately all *is* god. Although it begins with formal rhetoric and continues with exhortation of the listeners, GTr ends in a purely visionary mode in which Valentinus confesses that he is already present in the "place" of repose and salvation.

Like Marcion, Valentinus held to a faith that did not fit into the orthodoxy of early Catholicism but that also does not strictly correspond to classical Gnosticism, as known from the Apocryphon of John and the bulk of the refutations of Irenaeus. Also like Marcion, Valentinus was active in Rome in the late 130s. Both Marcion and Valentinus provide us with a perspective on "Christianity as it could have been." As it turned out, the Roman church developed doctrines that were more along the lines of apologist Justin Martyr, who arrived in Rome in 140 CE and may have had some responsibility for the fact that Valentinus never became a bishop in Rome.