

In my previous post I reproduced my Introduction to the Sethian Gnostics from the second edition of my reader in early Christianity, After The New Testament. One other highly important group of Christian Gnostics are known as the Valentinians. Here is what I say about them in the book

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### Valentinians

Unlike the Sethian Gnostics, the Valentinians were named after an actual person, Valentinus, the founder and original leader of the group. We know about the Valentinians from the writings of proto-orthodox heresiologists beginning with Irenaeus and by some of the writings discovered among the Nag Hammadi Library that almost certainly derive from Valentinian authors, including one book that may actually have been written by Valentinus himself (The Gospel of Truth).

Valentinus was born around 100 CE and was raised in Alexandria Egypt. He allegedly was a student of the Christian teacher Theudas, who was in turn a disciple of the apostle Paul. Valentinus moved to Rome in the late 130s and there became an influential speaker and teacher. According to some of our early reports he very nearly was elected to be the bishop of Rome. Despite his distinctive views - which for the proto-orthodox seemed completely aberrant - he and his followers continued on in the Roman church. There is nothing to suggest that he or his followers started their own churches; they worshiped with proto-orthodox Christians and were in outer appearance very difficult to tell apart from them.

Valentinus nonetheless had been heavily influenced by the Sethian Gnostic myth and adopted it into a kind of proto-orthodox framework. His understanding of the divine and material realms were somewhat less complex than the Sethian; his views of the creator God were not as harsh; he was not as condemning of the material world; and he had a more developed understanding of the human race: according to Irenaeus, he and his followers taught that just as a person has a body, soul, and spirit, so too the race itself is divided up into people who are purely animal (bodies that ceased to exist when they died), or psychic (i.e., "soulish" - these are regular Christians who can be saved and given a decent afterlife if they have faith and do good works), or pneumatic (i.e. "spiritual: - these are the Valentinians who understand the deeper truths that are necessary for a full salvation in a return to the Pleroma above).

None of the surviving Valentinian writings lays out ...

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