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Gnosticism is not a specific heretical movement in church history but rather a loose collection of different religious beliefs. Gnosis is the Greek word for “knowledge,” and Gnostics claimed to have a special knowledge that was hidden from most people. Although they often used similar terms and rituals as Christians, the Gnostics interpreted them according to deeper, secret meanings; for instance, one early text, the Gospel of Thomas, explained Jesus’ claim to be the fount of living water as a metaphor for his teachings rather than for Jesus himself: “Jesus said, ‘Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me; I myself shall become that person, and the hidden things will be revealed to him.’” Other characteristics that bound different Gnostic groups included the belief that matter is evil and that spirit is pure, as well as an elaborate primordial mythology. Let's take a closer look. By submitting your email address, you understand that you will receive email communications from HarperCollins Christian Publishing (501 Nelson Place, Nashville, TN 37214 USA) providing information about products and services of HCCP and its affiliates. You may unsubscribe from these email communications at any time. If you have any questions, please review our Privacy Policy or email us at yourprivacy@harpercollins.com. Where did Gnosticism come from? The origins of Gnosticism are still a bit unclear. Some think Gnosticism originated as a heresy that diverged from orthodox Christian teaching, while others see the movement as an independent, non-Christian movement stemming from either paganism or Judaism. For example, church historian Everett Ferguson argues that “Gnosticism seems to have grown up concurrently with Christianity in a similar environment (but from different roots), with the two having some interactions in the first century before Gnosticism developed into a separate religion in the second century.” That Gnosticism had contact with early Christianity is almost certain — there seem to be anti-Gnostic warnings in the letters of Paul (although many Gnostics also liked to claim Paul for themselves), as well as 1 John. However, the first certain identification comes from the mid-second century, in the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons. His book Against Heresies provides detailed descriptions and refutations of a number of different Gnostic sects, including Valentinians, Ophites, Sethians, Cainites, and the followers of Basilides. Based on the number of sects and the wide range of beliefs, we can certainly conclude that the Gnostics had been established for some time before Irenaeus wrote. Irenaeus’s work was a staple for later scholars of heresy, and it represented much of the information on Gnosticism that was available for some time. Since Irenaeus and his disciples were obviously hostile toward the Gnostics, researchers didn’t believe that they were representing Gnostic beliefs fairly. However, the relatively recent discovery of a library of Gnostic texts near Nag Hammadi in Egypt (containing forty new documents from the late fourth century) has greatly increased scholars’ ability to analyze and describe early forms of Gnosticism. The library contains the sacred scriptures of many of the groups that Irenaeus wrote about, and although it confirms most of Irenaeus’s information, it also provides a more detailed glimpse into their world. What Gnostics Teach The Gnostics differed widely in their beliefs, and some scholars have wondered if it is appropriate to use a single term to denote all of them. Nevertheless, Birger Pearson has provided a list of several categories that broadly describe Gnosticism: Gnosis: The adherents of Gnosticism regarded gnosis (secret knowledge), rather than faith in Christ or observance of the law, as the way of salvation. The saving “knowledge” involved a revelation of the true nature both of the self and of God. For Gnostics, self-knowledge is knowledge of God. Theology: The Gnostics often believed in one, transcendent, supreme god who was utterly silent. This god was revealed by the coming of Jesus (as opposed to God’s interactions with the Hebrews). However, there are numerous intermediate gods (known as Aeons) and dark, evil gods (known as Archons) that hover just above the earth. Cosmology: The universe, having been created by an inferior and ignorant power, is a dark prison in which human souls are held captive. Anthropology: A human being is a divine spark that originated in the transcendent divine world and, by means of gnosis, can be released from the cosmic prison and return to its heavenly origin. The human body, on the other hand, is part of the cosmic prison from which the spirit (the “real” person) must be redeemed. Experimental: Mystical experience was an important part of Gnosticism. Religious experience, for the Gnostics, involved joy in the salvation won by gnosis, as well as an extreme alienation from, and revolt against, the physical world. Myth: What held everything together for Gnostics is myth. One of the most characteristic features of Gnosticism was its impulse to create an elaborate mythical system. Each Gnostic teacher created new elements to be added to their received myth, and, with such elaborations, Gnostic myths could become more and more complicated as they developed. Parasitical: What makes Gnosticism so hard to define is, finally, its parasitical character. It borrowed freely from other religions, and its members sometimes attached themselves to other congregations. The Christian Response to Gnosticism Although small in number, the Gnostics and their teachings wreaked havoc in the mainstream Christian community. Their use of Scripture and Christian language meant that they could attend Christian services seemingly as one of the faithful. Their idea of an elite, informed clique was naturally appealing, as was their dismissal of the Hebrew Bible with its stories of anger and war and vengeance. Being Gnostic was associated with being urbane, sophisticated, and intelligent, which was a powerful draw at a time when ordinary Christians had few intellectual centers. To the churches at Corinth and Colossae, Paul battled the Gnostic heresy with a robust Christology — teaching about the person and work of Christ. His solution to their abhorrent views of the body, the resurrection, and salvation was to point them to the supremacy of Christ in his incarnation, life, death, and victorious resurrection. Gnosticism Today Gnosticism has made a surprising spiritual renaissance. Although the strong asceticism that characterized some early forms of Gnosticism is almost entirely lacking today, Gnosticism has contributed to New Age spirituality. Consider the promise of a book featured on Oprah in recent years called The Secret: “Without The Power you would not have been born. Without The Power, there wouldn’t be a single human being on the planet. Every discovery, invention, and human creation comes from The Power. Perfect health, incredible relationships, a career you love, a life filled with happiness, and the money you need to be, do, and have everything you want, all come from The Power.” “The Power” is classic Gnosticism — a silent, supreme god that also lives inside of you and who will allow you to become as powerful as you wish. Often, as in Gnosticism, a Jesus separate from the God of Israel is featured in New Age beliefs as a spirit guide or key to enlightenment, but never as a Lord who calls for repentance and dependence on the Savior’s life, death, and resurrection What sets Christianity apart from Gnosticism is that in Christ, the supreme character of the once-hidden God has now been definitively and exhaustively revealed, so much so that Jesus could tell his followers that those who had seen him had seen his Father. There is no God that remains hidden from plain sight or reserved for an elite, enlightened group of people. Instead, Christ has made supreme knowledge of God available in his life, death, and resurrection, and that knowledge was written and recounted in the Christian Scriptures that testify to Christ. Learn more by watching Justin S. Holcomb’s in-depth video on Gnosticism. Click here to get FREE access to the video on Gnosticism for the next 14 days › Access an always-growing video library.Learn from leading Christian scholars.Stream unlimited videos on the web or on your iOS or Android device.Try It Free Today's post is adapted from Know the Heretics, by Justin S. Holcomb. Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Early Christian and Jewish religious systems Not to be confused with Agnosticism. Part of a series onGnosticism Gnostic concepts Adam kasia Adam pagria Aeon Anima mundi Archon Barbelo Demiurge Five Seals Gnosis Kenoma Luminary Manda Monad Ogdoad Pleroma Sophia Uthra World of Light World of Darkness Yaldabaoth Gnostic sects and founders List of Gnostic sects Proto-Gnosticism Maghāriya Thomasines Judean / Israelite Adam Mandaeism Elksai Elkasaites Samaritan Baptist Dositheos Simon Magus (Simonians) Menander Quqites Christian Gnosticism Apelles Cerinthus Justin Marcion Marcionism Nicolaism Perates Saturninus Ophites Sethianism Basilides Basilideans Valentinus Valentinianism Marcus Marcosians Florinus Naassenes Thomasine Barbelo Borborites Carpocratians (Gnostic sect) Cerdo (Gnostic) Persian Gnosticism Mani Manichaeism Chinese Gnosticism Chinese Manichaeism Islamic Gnosticism Druze Nusayrism Modern Modern schools Scriptures List of Gnostic texts Texts Nag Hammadi library Pseudo-Abdias Clementine literature Gnosticism and the New Testament Mandaean scriptures Codices Codex Tchacos Cologne Mani-Codex Askew Codex Bruce Codex Berlin Codex Codex Nasaraeus Influenced by Apocalyptic literature Early Christianity Christology Docetism Paul and Gnosticism Merkabah mysticism Middle Platonism Philo Wisdom (personification) Influence on Carl Jung Esoteric Christianity Christian theosophy Gnosticism in modern times Neoplatonism and Gnosticism Perennial philosophy Thelema Theosophy (Blavatskian) Western esotericism René Guénon Rudolf Steiner vte Page from the Gospel of Judas Mandaean Beth Manda (Mashkhanna) in Nasiriyah, southern Iraq, in 2016, a contemporary-style mandi Gnosticism (from Ancient Greek: γνωστικός, romanized: gnōstikós, Koine Greek: [ɣnosti'kos], 'having knowledge') is a collection of religious ideas and systems that coalesced in the late 1st century AD among early Christian sects. These diverse groups emphasized personal spiritual knowledge (gnosis) above the proto-orthodox teachings, traditions, and authority of religious institutions. Gnostic cosmogony generally presents a distinction between a supreme, hidden God and a malevolent lesser divinity (sometimes associated with the Hebrew Bible deity Yahweh)[1] who is responsible for creating the material universe. Consequently, Gnostics considered material existence flawed or evil, and held the principal element of salvation to be direct knowledge of the hidden divinity, attained via mystical or esoteric insight. Many Gnostic texts deal not in concepts of sin and repentance, but with illusion and enlightenment.[2] Gnostic writings flourished among certain Christian groups in the Mediterranean world around the second century, when the Early Church Fathers denounced them as heresy.[3] Efforts to destroy these texts were largely successful, resulting in the survival of very little writing by Gnostic theologians.[4] Nonetheless, early Gnostic teachers such as Valentinus saw themselves as Christians. In the Gnostic Christian tradition, Christ was seen as a divine being which had taken human form in order to lead humanity back to recognition of its own divine nature. Gnosticism is not a single standardized system and the emphasis on direct experience allows for a wide variety of teachings, including distinct currents such as Valentinianism and Sethianism. In the Persian Empire, Gnostic ideas spread as far as China via the related movement Manichaeism, while Mandaeism, the only surviving Gnostic religion from antiquity, is found in Iraq, Iran and diaspora communities.[5] Jorunn Buckley posited that the early Mandaeans may have been among the first to formulate what would become Gnosticism within the community of early followers of Jesus.[6] For centuries, most scholarly knowledge about Gnosticism was limited to the anti-heretical writings of early Christian figures such as Irenaeus of Lyons and Hippolytus of Rome. There was a renewed interest in Gnosticism after the 1945 discovery of Egypt's Nag Hammadi library, a collection of rare early Christian and Gnostic texts, including the Gospel of Thomas and the Apocryphon of John. Some scholars say Gnosticism may contain historical information about Jesus from the Gnostic viewpoint,[7] although the majority conclude that apocryphal sources, Gnostic or not, are later than the canonical sources and many, such as the Gospel of Thomas, depended on or used the Synoptic Gospels.[8][9][10] Elaine Pagels has noted the influence of sources from Hellenistic Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Middle Platonism on the Nag Hammadi texts.[4] Since the 1990s, the category of "Gnosticism" has come under increasing scrutiny from scholars. One question is whether Gnosticism ought to be considered to be a form of early Christianity, an interreligious phenomenon, or an independent religion. Other contemporary scholars such as Michael Allen Williams,[11] Karen Leigh King,[12] and David G. Robertson[13] contest whether "Gnosticism" is a valid or useful historical term, or if it was an artificial category framed by proto-orthodox theologians to target miscellaneous Christian heretics. Main article: Gnosis Gnosis is a feminine Greek noun which means "knowledge" or "awareness".[14] It and the associated verb are often used for personal knowledge, as compared with intellectual knowledge (Greek verb εἴδειν eídein). A related term is the adjective gnostikos, "of or for knowledge",[15] a reasonably common adjective in Classical Greek.[16] By the Hellenistic period, it began also to be associated with Greco-Roman mysteries, becoming synonymous with the Greek term mysterion. Consequentially, Gnosis often refers to knowledge based on personal experience or perception.[citation needed] In a religious context, gnosis is mystical or esoteric knowledge based on direct participation with the divine. In most Gnostic systems, the sufficient cause of salvation is this "knowledge of" ("acquaintance with") the divine. It is an inward "knowing", comparable to that encouraged by Plotinus (neoplatonism), and differs from proto-orthodox Christian views.[17] Gnostics are "those who are oriented toward knowledge and understanding – or perception and learning – as a particular modality for living".[18] The usual meaning of gnostikos in Classical Greek texts is "learned" or "intellectual", such as used by Plato in the comparison of "practical" (praktikos) and "intellectual" (gnostikos).[note 1][subnote 1] Plato's use of "learned" is fairly typical of Classical texts.[note 2] Sometimes employed in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible, the adjective is not used in the New Testament, but Clement of Alexandria[note 3] who speaks of the "learned" (gnostikos) Christian quite often, uses it in complimentary terms.[19] The use of gnostikos in relation to heresy originates with interpreters of Irenaeus. Some scholars[note 4] consider that Irenaeus sometimes uses gnostikos to simply mean "intellectual",[note 5] whereas his mention of "the intellectual sect"[note 6] is a specific designation.[21][note 7][note 8][note 9] The term "Gnosticism" does not appear in ancient sources,[23][note 10] 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.[24][note 11] The term Gnosticism was derived from the use of the Greek adjective gnostikos (Greek γνωστικός, "learned", "intellectual") by St. Irenaeus (c. 185 AD) to describe the school of Valentinus as he legomene gnostike haeresis "the heresy called Learned (gnostic)".[25][note 12] The origins of Gnosticism are obscure and still disputed. Alexandria was of central importance for the birth of Gnosticism. Gnosticism is strongly influenced by Middle Platonism and its theory of forms.[27][28][29] Elaine Pagels has noted the influence of sources from Hellenistic Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Middle Platonism on the Nag Hammadi texts.[4] The Christian ecclesia (i. e. congregation, church) was of Jewish–Christian origin, but also attracted Greek members, and various strands of thought were available, such as "Judaic apocalypticism, speculation on divine wisdom, Greek philosophy, and Hellenistic mystery religions."[30] The proto-orthodox Christian groups called Gnostics a heresy of Christianity.[note 13][32] While rejecting the underlying framing that proto-orthodox Christianity is the 'original' and 'true' Christianity from which Gnosticism and other 'heresies' then deviated, scholars such as Simone Pétrement[33] and David Brakke[34] have argued that Gnosticism originated as an intra-Christian movement, being one of several responses to the life, death, and presumed resurrection of Jesus, with Pétrement tracing it specifically to tendencies in the letters of Paul and the Gospel of John.[35] Within early Christianity, the teachings of Paul the Apostle and John the Evangelist may have been a starting point for Gnostic ideas, with a growing emphasis on the opposition between flesh and spirit, the value of charisma, and the disqualification of the Jewish law. The mortal body belonged to the world of inferior, worldly powers (the archons), and only the spirit or soul could be saved. The term gnostikos may have acquired a deeper significance here.[30] Other modern scholars hold that Gnosticism arose within Judaism and later incorporated stories about Jesus into pre-existing speculation about a cosmic Savior and Philo's Jewish interpretation of Middle Platonic thought about the demiurge and the logos.[36][37][38][39][40][note 14][41] A small minority of scholars debate Gnosticism's origins as having roots in Buddhism, due to similarities in beliefs.[42] Some scholars prefer to speak of "gnosis" when referring to first-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 second century.[43][44] According to James M. Robinson, no Gnostic texts clearly pre-date Christianity,[note 15] and "pre-Christian Gnosticism as such is hardly attested in a way to settle the debate once and for all."[45] See also: Origins of Christianity and Split of Christianity and Judaism A common position is that Gnosticism has Jewish Christian origins, originating in the late first century AD in nonrabbinical Jewish sects and early Christian sects.[46][39][40][note 14] Ethel S. Drower adds, "heterodox Judaism in Galilee and Samaria appears to have taken shape in the form we now call Gnostic, and it may well have existed some time before the Christian era."[47]: xv 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.[48] The cosmogonic speculations among Christian Gnostics had partial origins in Maaseh Breshit and Maaseh Merkabah. This thesis is most notably put forward by Gershom Scholem (1897–1982) and Gilles Quispel (1916–2006). Scholem detected Jewish gnosis in the imagery of merkabah mysticism, which can also be found in certain Gnostic documents.[46] Quispel sees Gnosticism as an independent Jewish development, tracing its origins to Alexandrian Jews, to which group Valentinus was also connected.[49] Many of the Nag Hammadi texts make reference to stories and characters from the Hebrew Bible, in some cases with a violent rejection of the Jewish God.[40][note 14] Gershom Scholem once described Gnosticism as "the Greatest case of metaphysical anti-Semitism",[50] though Professor Steven Bayme said Gnosticism would be better characterized as anti-Judaism.[51] However, recent research into the origins of Gnosticism shows a strong Jewish influence, particularly from Hekhalot literature.[52] Regarding the angel Christology of some early Christians, Darrell Hannah notes: [Some] early Christians understood the pre-incarnate Christ, ontologically, as an angel. This "true" angel Christology took many forms and may have appeared as early as the late First Century, if indeed this is the view opposed in the early chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Elchasaites, or at least Christians influenced by them, paired the male Christ with the female Holy Spirit, envisioning both as two gigantic angels. Some Valentinian Gnostics supposed that Christ took on an angelic nature and that he might be the Saviour of angels. The author of the Testament of Solomon held Christ to be a particularly effective "thwarting" angel in the exorcism of demons. The author of De Centesima and Epiphanius' "Ebionites" held Christ to have been the highest and most important of the first created archangels, a view similar in many respects to Hermas' equation of Christ with Michael. Finally, a possible exegetical tradition behind the Ascension of Isaiah and attested by Origen's Hebrew master, may witness to yet another angel Christology, as well as an angel Pneumatology.[53] The pseudepigraphical Christian text Ascension of Isaiah identifies Jesus with angel Christology: [The Lord Christ is commissioned by the Father] And I heard the voice of the Most High, the father of my LORD as he said to my LORD Christ who will be called Jesus, 'Go out and descend through all the heavens...[54] The Shepherd of Hermas is a Christian literary work considered as canonical scripture by some of the early Church fathers such as Irenaeus. Jesus is identified with angel Christology in parable 5, when the author mentions a Son of God, as a virtuous man filled with a Holy "pre-existent spirit".[55] See also: Platonic Academy, Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, and Neoplatonism and Christianity In the 1880s Gnostic connections with Platonism were proposed.[56] Ugo Bianchi, who organised the Congress of Messina of 1966 on the origins of Gnosticism, also argued for Orphic and Platonic origins.[49] Gnostics borrowed significant ideas and terms from Platonism,[57] using Greek philosophical concepts throughout their text, including such concepts as hypostasis (reality, existence), ousia (essence, substance, being), and demiurge (creator God). Both Sethian Gnostics and Valentinian Gnostics seem to have been influenced by Plato, Middle Platonism, and Neopythagorean academies or schools of thought.[58] Both schools attempted "an effort towards conciliation, even affiliation" with late antique philosophy.[59] The Gnostics were strongly opposed by Plotinus and later Neoplatonists, who rejected their radical dualism and pessimistic view of creation. In his work Against the Gnostics (Enneads II.9), Plotinus criticized Gnostic cosmology, arguing that the material world was not inherently evil but rather a reflection of the One through a series of divine emanations. Neoplatonists such as Porphyry and Proclus continued this critique, defending the Demiurge as a benevolent force and emphasizing the soul's ascent to the divine through intellectual and contemplative purification, rather than through esoteric knowledge (gnosis) alone. While Neoplatonism retained some mystical and hierarchical elements that paralleled Gnostic thought, it ultimately positioned itself as an alternative, philosophical path to transcendence that was rooted in classical Greek rationalism rather than Gnostic revelation.[60] Early research into the origins of Gnosticism proposed Persian origins or influences, spreading to Europe and incorporating Jewish elements.[61] According to Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1920), Gnosticism was a form of Iranian and Mesopotamian syncretism,[56] and Richard August Reitzenstein (1861–1931) situated the origins of Gnosticism in Persia.[56] Carsten Colpe (b. 1929) has analyzed and criticised the Iranian hypothesis of Reitzenstein, showing that many of his hypotheses are untenable.[62] Nevertheless, Geo Widengren (1907–1996) argued for the origin of Mandaean Gnosticism in Mazdean (Zoroastrianism) Zurvanism, in conjunction with ideas from the Aramaic Mesopotamian world.[49] However, scholars specializing in Mandaeism such as Kurt Rudolph, Mark Lidzbarski, Rudolf Macúch, Ethel S. Drower, James F. McGrath, Charles G. Häberl, Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, and Şinasi Gündüz argue for a Judean–Israelite origin. The majority of these scholars believe that the Mandaeans likely have a historical connection with John the Baptist's inner circle of disciples.[47][63][64][65][66][67][68][69] Charles Häberl, who is also a linguist specializing in Mandaic, finds Palestinian and Samaritan Aramaic influence on Mandaic and accepts Mandaeans having a "shared Palestinian history with Jews".[70][71] Main article: Buddhism and Gnosticism In 1966, at the Congress of Median, Buddhologist Edward Conze noted phenomenological commonalities between Mahayana Buddhism and Gnosticism,[72] in his paper Buddhism and Gnosis, following an early suggestion put forward by Isaac Jacob Schmidt.[73][note 16] 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, although Elaine Pagels called it a "possibility".[77] The Syrian–Egyptian traditions postulate a remote, supreme Godhead, the Monad.[78] From this highest divinity emanate lower divine beings, known as Aeons. The Demiurge arises among the Aeons and creates the physical world. Divine elements "fall" into the material realm, and are latent in human beings. Redemption from the fall occurs when the humans obtain Gnosis, esoteric or intuitive knowledge of the divine.[79] See also: Nontrinitarianism Gnostic systems postulate a dualism between God and the world,[80] varying from the "radical dualist" systems of Manichaeism to the "mitigated dualism" of classic Gnostic movements. Radical dualism, or absolute dualism, posits two co-equal divine forces, while in mitigated dualism one of the two principles is in some way inferior to the other. In qualified monism the second entity may be divine or semi-divine. Valentinian Gnosticism is a form of monism, expressed in terms previously used in a dualistic manner.[81] Gnostics tended toward asceticism, especially in their sexual and dietary practice.[82] In other areas of morality, Gnostics were less rigorously ascetic, and took a more moderate approach to correct behavior. In normative early Christianity, the Church administered and prescribed the correct behavior for Christians, while in Gnosticism it was the internalized motivation which was important. Ptolemy's Epistle to Flora described limited fasting, but maintained that true "spiritual" fasting would be to refrain from everything bad.[note 17] For example, ritualistic behavior was not seen to possess as much importance as other practice, unless it was based on a personal, internal motivation.[84] The role women played in Gnosticism is still being explored. The very few women in most Gnostic literature are portrayed as chaotic, disobedient, and enigmatic.[85] However, the Nag Hammadi texts place women in roles of leadership and heroism.[85][86][87] Main article: Monad (Gnosticism) In many Gnostic systems, God is known as the Monad, the One.[note 18] God is the high source of the pleroma, the region of light. The various emanations of God are called 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. Main article: Pleroma Pleroma (Greek πλήρωμα, "fullness") refers to the totality of God's powers. 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 its divine origins. The term is thus a central element of Gnostic cosmology. The term ‘pleroma’ is also used in the general Greek language, and it is used by the Greek Orthodox church in this general form, since the word appears in the Epistle to the Colossians. Proponents of the view that Paul was actually a Gnostic, such as Elaine Pagels, view the reference in Colossians as a term which must be interpreted in a Gnostic sense. Main article: Emanationism The Supreme Light or Consciousness descends through a series of stages, gradations, worlds, or hypostases, becoming progressively more material and embodied. In time, it will turn around to return to the One (epistrophe), retracing its steps through spiritual knowledge and contemplation.[clarification needed][citation needed] Main article: Aeon (Gnosticism) In many Gnostic systems, the aeons are the various emanations of the superior God or Monad. Beginning in certain Gnostic texts with the hermaphroditic aeon Barbelo,[88][89][90] the first emanated being, various interactions with the Monad occur which result in the emanation of successive pairs of aeons, often in male–female pairings called syzygies.[91] The numbers of these pairings varied from text to text, though some identify their number as being thirty.[92] The aeons as a totality constitute the pleroma, the "region of light". The lowest regions of the pleroma are closest to the darkness, that is, the physical world.[citation needed] Two of the most commonly paired æons were Christ and Sophia (Greek: "Wisdom"); the latter refers to Christ as her "consort" in A Valentinian Exposition.[93] Main article: Sophia (Gnosticism) In Gnostic tradition, the name Sophia (Σοφία, Greek for "wisdom") refers to the final emanation of God, and is identified with the anima mundi or world-soul. She is occasionally referred to by the Hebrew equivalent of Achamoth [dubious – discuss] (this is a feature of Ptolemy's version of the Valentinian Gnostic myth). Jewish Gnosticism with a focus on Sophia was active by 90 AD.[94] 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 and negative depictions of materiality depend on the myth's depictions of Sophia's actions. Sophia, in this highly patriarchal narrative, is described as unruly and disobedient, which is due to her bringing a creation of chaos into the world.[87] The creation of the Demiurge was an act done without her counterpart's consent. Because of the predefined hierarchy between them, this action contributed to the narrative that she was unruly and disobedient.[95] Sophia, emanating without her partner, resulted in the production of the Demiurge (Greek: lit. "public builder"),[96] who is also referred to as Yaldabaoth and variations thereof in some Gnostic texts.[88] This creature is concealed outside the pleroma;[88] 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 humankind, trapping elements of the pleroma stolen from Sophia inside human bodies.[88][97] In response, the Godhead emanates two savior aeons, Christ and the Holy Spirit; Christ then takes on material form in the figure of Jesus, in an act of divine embodiment, in order to teach humans how to achieve gnosis, by which they may return to the pleroma.[98] Main article: Demiurge 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 Yaldabaoth, the Demiurge; however, see Mithraic Zervan Akarana.[99] The term demiurge derives from the Latinized form of the Greek term dēmiourgos, δημιουργός, literally "public or skilled worker".[note 20] This figure is also called "Yaldabaoth",[88] Samael (Aramaic: sæm´a-´el, "blind god"), or "Saklas" (Syriac: sækla, "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. Other names or identifications are Ahriman, El, Satan, and Yahweh. The demiurge creates the physical universe and the physical aspect of human nature.[101] 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.[88] The inferiority of the demiurge's creation 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, including the human body, is perceived as evil and constrictive, a deliberate prison for its inhabitants. Moral judgments of the demiurge vary from group to group within the broad category of Gnosticism, viewing materiality as inherently evil or as merely flawed and as good as its passive constituent matter allows.[102] Main article: Archon (Gnosticism) In late antiquity, some variants of Gnosticism used the term archon to refer to several servants of the demiurge.[97] 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.[103] Ialdabaoth had a head of a lion.[88][104] Other Gnostic concepts are:[105] sarkic – earthly, hidebound, ignorant, uninitiated. The lowest level of human thought is the fleshly, instinctive level of thinking. hylic – lowest order of the three types of humans. They cannot be saved since their thinking is entirely material, incapable of understanding the gnosis. psychic – "soulful", partially initiated. Matter-dwelling spirits pneumatic – "spiritual", fully initiated, immaterial souls escaping the doom of the material world via gnosis. kenoma – the visible or manifest cosmos, "lower" than the pleroma charisma – gift, or energy, bestowed by pneumatics through oral teaching and personal encounters logos – the divine ordering principle of the cosmos; personified as Christ. hypostasis – literally "that which stands beneath" the inner reality, emanation (appearance) of God, known to psychics ousia – the essence of God, known to pneumatics. Specific individual things or being. Jesus is identified by some Gnostics as an embodiment of the supreme being who became incarnate to bring gnōsis to the earth,[106][98] while others adamantly denied that the supreme being came in the flesh, claiming Jesus to be merely a human who attained enlightenment through gnosis and taught his disciples to do the same.[107] Others believed Jesus was divine, although did not have a physical body, reflected in the later Docetist movement. Among the Mandaeans, Jesus was considered a mšiha kdaba or "false messiah" who perverted the teachings entrusted to him by John the Baptist.[108] Still other traditions identify Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, and Seth, third son of Adam and Eve, as salvific figures. Three periods can be discerned in the development of Gnosticism:[109] Late-first century and early second century: development of Gnostic ideas, contemporaneous with the writing of the New Testament; mid-second century to early third century: high point of the classical Gnostic teachers and their systems, "who claimed that their systems represented the inner truth revealed by Jesus";[109] end of the second century to the fourth century: reaction by the proto-orthodox church and condemnation as heresy, and subsequent decline. During the first period, three types of tradition developed:[109] Genesis was reinterpreted in Jewish milieux, viewing Yahweh as a jealous God who enslaved people; freedom was to be obtained from this jealous God; A wisdom tradition developed, in which Jesus' sayings were interpreted as pointers to an esoteric wisdom, in which the soul could be divinized through identification with wisdom.[109][note 21] Some of Jesus' sayings may have been incorporated into the gospels to put a limit on this development. The conflicts described in 1 Corinthians may have been inspired by a clash between this wisdom tradition and Paul's gospel of crucifixion and resurrection;[109] A mythical story developed about the descent of a heavenly creature to reveal the Divine world as the true home of human beings.[109] Jewish Christianity saw the Messiah, or Christ, as "an eternal aspect of God's hidden nature, his "spirit" and "truth", who revealed himself throughout sacred history".[30] The movement spread in areas controlled by the Roman Empire and Arian Goths,[111] and the Persian Empire. It continued to develop in the Mediterranean and Middle East before and during the 2nd and 3rd centuries, but decline also set in during the third century, due to a growing aversion from the Nicene Church, and the economic and cultural deterioration of the Roman Empire.[112] Conversion to Islam, and the Albigensian Crusade (1209–1229), greatly reduced the remaining number of Gnostics throughout the Middle Ages, though Mandaean communities still exist in Iraq, Iran and diaspora communities. Gnostic and pseudo-Gnostic ideas became influential in some of the philosophies of various esoteric mystical movements of the 19th and 20th centuries in Europe and North America, including some that explicitly identify themselves as revivals or even continuations of earlier Gnostic groups. Part of a series on theHistory ofChristian theology Background Christian theology Diversity in early Christian theology Adoptionism Arianism Docetism Gnosticism Marcionism Montanism Early Christianity Proto-orthodox Christianity Timeline History of Christianity Template:History of Christianity Ecclesiastical polity Trinitarianism Nontrinitarianism Christology Paterology Pneumatology Mariology Biblical canon Deuterocanon Hermeneutics Theological hermeneutics African American Asian American Philosophical theology Christian philosophy Christian apologetics Persecution and tolerance Historical theology Ecumenical Creeds Apostles' Nicene Chalcedonian Athanasian Patristics and Councils Great church ante-Nicene period Church Fathers Apostolic Fathers Cappadocian Fathers Desert Fathers Desert Mothers Augustine Nicaea Ephesus Chalcedon Post-Nicene development Heresy Monophysitism Monothelitism Byzantine Iconoclasm Gregory I Alcuin Photios East–West Schism Scholasticism Aquinas Anselm Palamas Reformation Martin Luther Theology 95 Theses John Calvin Radical Evangelicalism theology Five solae Book of Concord Arminianism English Counter- Trent Jansenism From the Reformation to the World Wars Natural Onto- Practical Pietism John Wesley Great Awakenings Holiness movement Restoration Movement Dispensationalism Covenant theology Existentialism Dogmatics Fundamental/foundational Liberal Catholic Anglo-Catholic Critical realism Political Since the World Wars Vatican II of religions Situational ethics Nouvelle théologie (Ressourcement) Death of God Postliberal • Narrative Continental philosophy Radical orthodoxy Neo-orthodoxy Reconciliation Analytic in Thomism Theopoetics Ecumenism Digital Systematic Biblical Constructive Eco- Environmental Public Contextualisation and Inculturation Indigenous church mission theory Sino-Christian Feminism in Feminist theology Asian Womanist New Queer Liberation Black Dalit Latin American Minjung Palestinian Postcolonial Fourth Great Awakening Christian Zionism Paleo-orthodoxy Dominion theology extraterrestrials Moderate Christianity Conservative Christianity Emerging church Progressive Christianity Confessing Movement Biotheology Theophysics Christianity portalvte Dillon notes that Gnosticism raises questions about the development of early Christianity.[113] See also: Diversity in early Christian theology The Christian heresiologists, most notably Irenaeus, regarded Gnosticism as a Christian heresy. Modern scholarship notes that early Christianity was diverse, and Christian orthodoxy only settled in the 4th century, when the Roman Empire declined and Gnosticism lost its influence.[114][112][115][113] Gnostics and proto-orthodox Christians shared some terminology. Initially, they were hard to distinguish from each other.[116] According to Walter Bauer, "heresies" may well have been the original form of Christianity in many regions.[117] This theme was further developed by Elaine Pagels,[118] who argues that "the proto-orthodox church found itself in debates with Gnostic Christians that helped them to stabilize their own beliefs."[113] According to Gilles Quispel, Catholicism arose in response to Gnosticism, establishing safeguards in the form of the monarchic episcopate, the creed, and the canon of holy books.[119] On the other hand, Larry Hurtado argues that proto-orthodox Christianity was rooted into first-century Christianity: ...to a remarkable extent early-second-century protoorthodox devotion to Jesus represents a concern to preserve, respect, promote, and develop what were by then becoming traditional expressions of belief and reverence, and that had originated in earlier years of the Christian movement. That is, proto-orthodox faith tended to affirm and develop devotional and confessional tradition [...] Arland Hultgren[120] has shown that the roots of this appreciation of traditions of faith actually go back deeply and widely into first-century Christianity.[121] See also: Jesus in comparative mythology and Christ myth theory The Gnostic movements may contain information about the historical Jesus, since some texts preserve sayings which show similarities with canonical sayings.[122] The Gospel of Thomas in particular has a significant amount of parallel sayings.[122] Yet, a striking difference is that the canonical sayings center on the coming endtime, while the Thomas-sayings center on a kingdom of heaven that is already here, and not a future event.[123] According to Helmut Koester, this is because the Thomas-sayings are older, implying that in the earliest forms of Christianity, Jesus was regarded as a wisdom-teacher.[123] An alternative hypothesis states that the Thomas authors wrote in the second century, changing existing sayings and eliminating the apocalyptic concerns.[123] According to April DeConick, such a change occurred when the end time did not come, and the Thomasine tradition turned toward a "new theology of mysticism" and a "theological commitment to a fully-present kingdom of heaven here and now, where their church had attained Adam and Eve's divine status before the Fall."[123] According to scholar-priest John P. Meier, scholars predominantly conclude that the gospel of Thomas depends on or parallels the Synoptics.[9] Meier has repeatedly argued against the historicity of the Gospel of Thomas, stating that it cannot be a reliable source for the quest of the historical Jesus and also considers it a Gnostic text.[124] He has also argued against the authenticity of the parables found exclusively in the Gospel of Thomas.[125] According to James Dunn, the Gnostic emphasis on an inherent difference between flesh and spirit represented a significant departure from the teachings of the Historical Jesus and his earliest followers.[126] The prologue of the Gospel of John describes the incarnated Logos, the light that came to earth, in the person of Jesus.[127] The Apocryphon of John contains a scheme of three descendants from the heavenly realm, the third one being Jesus, just as in the Gospel of John. The similarities probably point to a relationship between Gnostic ideas and the Johannine community.[127] According to Raymond Brown, the Gospel of John shows "the development of certain gnostic ideas, especially Christ as heavenly revealer, the emphasis on light versus darkness, and anti-Jewish animus."[127] The Johannine material reveals debates about the redeemer myth.[

most to be religions in their own right and are not emanations from Christianity or Judaism.[citation needed] Main article: Manichaeism Manichean priests writing at their desks, with panel inscription in Sogdian. Manuscript from Qocho, Tarim Basin. Manichaeism was founded by Mani (216–276). Mani's father was a member of the Jewish Christian sect of the Elcesaites, a subgroup of the Gnostic Ebionites. At ages 12 and 24, Mani had visionary experiences of a "heavenly twin" of his, calling him to leave his father's sect and preach the true message of Christ. In 240–241, Mani travelled to the Indo-Greek Kingdom of the Sakas in what is now Afghanistan, where he studied Hinduism and its various extant philosophies. Returning in 242, he joined the court of Shapur I, to whom he dedicated his only work written in Persian, known as the Shabuhragan. The original writings were written in Syriac, an Eastern Aramaic language, in a unique Manichaean script. Manichaeism conceives of two coexistent realms of light and darkness that become embroiled in conflict. Certain elements of the light became entrapped within darkness, and the purpose of material creation is to engage in the slow process of extraction of these individual elements. In the end, the kingdom of light will prevail over darkness. Manicheanism inherits this dualistic mythology from Zurvanist Zoroastrianism,[197] in which the eternal spirit Ahura Mazda is opposed by his antithesis, Angra Mainyu. 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.[198] According to Kurt Rudolph, the decline of Manichaeism that occurred in Persia in the 5th century was too late to prevent the spread of the movement into the east and the west.[148] In the west, the teachings of the school moved into Syria, Northern Arabia, Egypt and North Africa.[note 28] There is evidence for Manicheans in Rome and Dalmatia in the 4th century, and also in Gaul and Spain. From Syria, it progressed further into Syria Palestina, Anatolia, and Byzantine and Persian Armenia. The influence of Manicheanism was attacked by imperial edicts and polemical writings, but the religion remained prevalent until the 6th century, and still exerted influence in the emergence of Paulicianism, Bogomilism, and Catharism in the Middle Ages, until it was ultimately stamped out by the Catholic Church.[148] In the east, Rudolph relates, Manicheanism was able to bloom, because the religious monopoly position previously held by Christianity and Zoroastrianism had been broken by nascent Islam. In the early years of the Arab conquest, Manicheanism again found followers in Persia (mostly amongst educated circles), but flourished most in Central Asia, to which it had spread through Iran. There, in 762, Manicheanism became the state religion of the Uyghur Khaganate.[148] After its decline in the Mediterranean world, Gnosticism lived on in the periphery of the Byzantine Empire, and resurfaced in the western world. The Paulicians, an Adoptionist group which flourished between 650 and 872 in Armenia and the Eastern Themes of the Byzantine Empire, were accused by orthodox medieval sources of being Gnostic and quasi Manichaean Christian. The Bogomils, emerged in Bulgaria between 927 and 970 and spread throughout Europe. It was as synthesis of Armenian Paulicianism and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church reform movement. 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.[201] Some Sufistic interpretations depict Iblis as ruling the material desires in a manner that resembles the Gnostic Demiurge. The Quran, like Gnostic cosmology, makes a sharp distinction between this world and the afterlife. God is commonly thought of as being beyond human comprehension. In some Islamic schools of thought, God is identifiable with the Monad.[202][203] However, according to Islam and unlike most Gnostic sects, it is not rejection of this world but the performing of good deeds that leads to Paradise. According to the Islamic belief in tawhid ("unification of God"), there was no room for a lower deity such as the demiurge.[204] Islam also integrated traces of an entity given authority over the lower world in some early writings: Iblis is regarded by some Sufis as the owner of this world and humans must avoid the treasures of this world since they would belong to him.[205] In the Isma'ili Shi'i work Umm al-Kitab, Azazil's role resembles whose of the demiurge.[206] Like the demiurge, he is endowed with the ability to create a world and seeks to imprison humans in the material world, but here, his power is limited and depends on the higher God.[207] Such anthropogenic[clarification needed] can be found frequently among Isma'ili traditions.[208] In fact, Isma'ilism has been often criticised as non-Islamic.[citation needed] Al-Ghazali characterized them as a group who are outwardly Shia but were adherents of a dualistic and philosophical religion. Further traces of Gnostic ideas can be found in Sufi anthropogeny.[clarification needed][209] Like the Gnostic conception of human beings imprisoned in matter, Sufi traditions acknowledge that the human soul is an accomplice of the material world and subject to bodily desires similar to the way archontic spheres envelop the pneuma.[210] The ruh (pneuma, spirit) must therefore gain victory over the lower and material-bound nafs (psyche, soul, or anima) to overcome its animal nature. A human being captured by its animal desires, mistakenly claims autonomy and independence from the "higher God", thus resembling the lower deity in classical Gnostic traditions. However, since the goal is not to abandon the created world, but just to free oneself from lower desires, it can be disputed whether this can still be Gnostic, but rather a completion of the message of Muhammad.[211] It seems that Gnostic ideas were an influential part of early Islamic development but later lost its influence. However light metaphors and the idea of unity of existence (Arabic: وحدة الوجود, romanized: waḥdat al-wujūd) still prevailed in later Islamic thought, such as that of ibn Sina.[20 Gershom Scholem, a historian of Jewish philosophy, wrote that several core Gnostic ideas reappear in medieval Kabbalah, where they are used to reinterpret earlier Jewish sources. In these cases, according to Scholem, texts such as the Zohar adapted Gnostic precepts for the interpretation of the Torah, while not using the language of Gnosticism.[212] Scholem further proposed that there was a Jewish Gnosticism which influenced the early origins of Christian Gnosticism.[213] Given that some of the earliest dated Kabbalistic texts emerged in medieval Provence, at which time Cathar movements were also supposed to have been active, Scholem and other mid-20th century scholars argued that there was mutual influence between the two groups. According to Dan Joseph, this hypothesis has not been substantiated by any extant texts.[214] Moshe Idel however has argued that the Gnostic or esoteric ideas found in Kabbalah have Jewish roots from ancient times, though we do not have written records of them.[215] Main article: Gnosticism in modern times Found today in Iraq, Iran and diaspora communities, the Mandaeans are an ancient Gnostic ethnoreligious group that follow John the Baptist and have survived from antiquity.[216] Their name comes from the Aramaic manda meaning knowledge or gnosis.[144] There are thought to be 60,000 to 70,000 Mandaeans worldwide.[143][148] A number of modern Gnostic ecclesiastical bodies have been set up or re-founded since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library, including the Ecclesia Gnostica, Apostolic Johannite Church, Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica, the Gnostic Church of France, the Thomasine Church, the Alexandrian Gnostic Church, and the North American College of Gnostic Bishops.[217] A number of 19th-century thinkers such as Arthur Schopenhauer,[218] 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.[219] Jules Doinel "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),[220] and, though small, is still active today. 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. René Guénon founded the Gnostic review, La Gnose in 1909, before moving to a more Perennialist position, and founding his Traditionalist School. 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 has 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.[219] Celia Green has written on Gnostic Christianity in relation to her own philosophy.[221] Alfred North Whitehead was aware of the existence of the newly discovered Gnostic scrolls. Accordingly, Michel Weber has proposed a Gnostic interpretation of his late metaphysics.[222] Prior to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library in 1945 Gnosticism was known primarily through the works of heresiologists, Church Fathers who opposed those movements. These writings had an antagonistic bias against Gnostic teachings, and were incomplete. Several heresiological writers, such as Hippolytus, made little effort to exactly record the nature of the sects they reported on, or transcribe their sacred texts. Reconstructions of incomplete Gnostic texts were attempted in modern times, but research on Gnosticism was coloured by the orthodox views of those heresiologists. Justin Martyr (c. 100/114 – c. 162/168) wrote the First Apology, addressed to Roman emperor Antoninus Pius, which criticised Simon Magus, Menander and Marcion. Since then, both Simon and Menander have been considered as 'proto-Gnostic'.[223] Irenaeus (died c. 202) wrote Against Heresies (c. 180–185), which identifies Simon Magus from Flavia Neapolis in Samaria as the inceptor of Gnosticism. Irenaeus charted an apparent spread of the teachings of Simon through the ancient "knowers" into the teachings of Valentinus and other contemporaneous Gnostic sects.[note 29] Hippolytus (170–235) wrote the ten-volume Refutation Against all Heresies, of which eight have been found. It also focuses on the connection between pre-Socratic ideas and the false beliefs of early Gnostic leaders. Thirty-three of the groups he reported on are considered Gnostic by modern scholars, including 'the foreigners' and 'the Seth people'. Hippolytus further presents individual teachers such as Simon, Valentinus, Secundus, Ptolemy, Heracleon, Marcus and Colorbasus. Tertullian (c. 155 – c. 230) from Carthage wrote Adversus Valentinianos ('Against the Valentinians'), c. 206, and five books around 207–208 chronicling and refuting the teachings of Marcion. See also: Gnostic texts and Nag Hammadi library Prior to the discovery at Nag Hammadi, a limited number of texts were available to students of Gnosticism. Reconstructions were attempted from the records of the heresiologists, but these were necessarily coloured by the motivation behind the source accounts. The Nag Hammadi library is a collection of mostly Gnostic texts discovered in 1945 near Nag Hammadi, Upper Egypt. Twelve leather-bound papyrus codices buried in a sealed jar were found by a local farmer named Muhammed al-Samman.[224] The writings in these codices comprised fifty-two mostly Gnostic treatises, but they also include three works belonging to the Corpus Hermeticum and a partial translation/alteration of Plato's Republic. These codices may have belonged to a nearby Pachomian monastery, and buried after Bishop Athanasius condemned the use of non-canonical books in his Festal Letter of 367.[225] Though the original language of composition was probably Greek, the various codices contained in the collection were written in Coptic. A 1st- or 2nd-century date of composition for the lost Greek originals has been proposed, though this is disputed; the manuscripts themselves date from the 3rd and 4th centuries. The Nag Hammadi texts demonstrated the fluidity of early Christian scripture and early Christianity itself.[note 30] Prior to the discovery of Nag Hammadi, the Gnostic movements were largely perceived through the lens of the early church heresiologists. Johann Lorenz von Mosheim (1694–1755) proposed that Gnosticism developed on its own in Greece and Mesopotamia, spreading to the west and incorporating Jewish elements. According to Mosheim, Jewish thought took Gnostic elements and used them against Greek philosophy.[61] J. Horn and Ernest Anton Lewald proposed Persian and Zoroastrian origins, while Jacques Matter described Gnosticism as an intrusion of eastern cosmological and theosophical speculation into Christianity.[61] In the 1880s, Gnosticism was placed within Greek philosophy, especially neo-Platonism.[56] Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), who belonged to the History of Dogma school and proposed a Kirchengeschichtliches Ursprungsmodell, saw Gnosticism as an internal development within the church under the influence of Greek philosophy.[56][227] According to Harnack, Gnosticism was the "acute Hellenization of Christianity".[56] The Religionsgeschichtliche Schule ("history of religions school", 19th century) had a profound influence on the study of Gnosticism.[56] The Religionsgeschichtliche Schule saw Gnosticism as a pre-Christian phenomenon, and Christian gnosis as only one, and even marginal instance of this phenomenon.[56] According to Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1920), Gnosticism was a form of Iranian and Mesopotamian syncretism,[56] and Eduard Norden (1868–1941) also proposed pre-Christian origins,[56] while Richard August Reitzenstein (1861–1931), and Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) also situated the origins of Gnosticism in Persia.[56] Hans Heinrich Schaeder (1896–1957) and Hans Leisegang (1890–1951) saw Gnosticism as an amalgam of eastern thought in a Greek form.[56] Hans Jonas (1903–1993) took an intermediate approach, using both the comparative approach of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule and the existentialist hermeneutics of Rudolph Bultmann.[228]:94-95 Jonas emphasized the duality between the Gnostic God and the world. Jonas concluded that Gnosticism cannot be derived from Platonism, nor from Judaism. Instead, he proposed that Gnosticism manifested an existential situation triggered by the conquests of Alexander The Great. Following Weber and Spengler, he noted the impact of the conquests on Greek city-states (in the "West") and castes of priest-intellectuals (in the Persian "East").[228]:107-108[229] Following Jonas's existential lead and some of his methods, scholarship contemporary to Jonas advocated a different proposal, claiming that Gnosticism has Jewish or Judeo-Christian origins;[228][46] These theses were notably put forward by Gershom Scholem (1897–1982) and Gilles Quispel (1916–2006).[230] The study of Gnosticism and of early Alexandrian Christianity received a strong impetus from the discovery of the Coptic Nag Hammadi library in 1945.[231][232] A great number of translations have been published, and the works of Elaine Pagels, especially The Gnostic Gospels, which detailed the suppression of some of the writings found at Nag Hammadi by early bishops of the Christian church, have popularized Gnosticism in mainstream culture,[web 3][web 4] but also provoked strong responses and condemnations from clerical writers.[233] As of the 1970s, these and other publications applied the revised version of Jonas's proposal and criticized it, mostly relating to the evidence regarding "Pre-Cristian" Gnosticism.[228]:115 A prominent shift of emphasis surfaced during the mid-1990s and the early years of the 21st century. In 1996, Michael Williams published his landmark Rethinking "Gnosticism" where he doubted the applicability of "Gnosticism" as a socio-historical category. Instead, and somewhat to the converse, he proposed the use of "Biblical-Demiurgic tradition", where "tradition" is read as a collective religious choice that competes on the religious "marketplace".[228]:116 In 2004, Karen Leigh King published her equally important What is Gnosticism?. Broadly, King's book traces elements of the history of research, arguing that the term and its typical connotations do injustice to the diversity and breadth of early Christianity. Thus, in King's reading, it is not precisely the category of Gnosticism that is flawed, but the way in which it was conceived and applied, a form of self/other rhetoric that rendered the remaining portion of Christianity less diverse for centuries to come.[228]:116-117 The effects of Williams and King cannot be understated, to the point that "Gnostic studies" often became "Nag Hammadi studies". Nevertheless, some scholars seem to retain either a nuanced version of the term, considered "the Gnostic school of thought",[234] or as a unique phenomenon regardless of defamation campaigns.[235] According to Matthew J. Dillon, six trends can be discerned in the definitions of Gnosticism:[236] Typologies, "a catalogue of shared characteristics that are used to classify a group of objects together."[236] Traditional approaches, viewing Gnosticism as a Christian heresy[237] Phenomenological approaches, most notably Hans Jonas[238][239] Restricting Gnosticism, "identifying which groups were explicitly called gnostics",[240] or which groups were clearly sectarian[240] Deconstructing Gnosticism, abandoning the category of "Gnosticism"[241] Psychology and cognitive science of religion, approaching Gnosticism as a psychological phenomenon[242] The 1966 Messina conference on the origins of gnosis and Gnosticism proposed 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.[243] This definition has now been abandoned.[236] It created a religion, "Gnosticism", from the "gnosis" which was a widespread element of ancient religions,[note 31] suggesting a homogeneous conception of gnosis by these Gnostic religions, which did not exist at the time.[244] According to Dillon, the texts from Nag Hammadi made clear that this definition was limited, and that they are "better classified by movements (such as Valentinian), mythological similarity (Sethian), or similar tropes (presence of a Demiurge)."[236] Dillon further notes that the Messina-definition "also excluded pre-Christian Gnosticism and later developments, such as the Mandaeans and the Manichaeans."[236] Hans Jonas discerned two main currents of Gnosticism, namely Syrian-Egyptian, and Persian, which includes Manicheanism and Mandaeism.[46] Among the Syrian-Egyptian schools and the movements they spawned are a typically more Monist view. Persian Gnosticism possesses more dualist tendencies, reflecting a strong influence from the beliefs of the Persian Zurvanist Zoroastrians. Those of the medieval Cathars, Bogomils, and Carpocratians seem to include elements of both categories. However, scholars such as Kurt Rudolph, Mark Lidzbarski, Rudolf Macúch, Ethel S. Drower and Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley argue for a Palestinian origin for Mandaeism. Gilles Quispel divided Syrian-Egyptian Gnosticism further into Jewish Gnosticism (the Apocryphon of John)[168] and Christian Gnosis (Marcion, Basilides, Valentinus). This "Christian Gnosticism" was Christocentric, and influenced by Christian writings such as the Gospel of John and the Pauline epistles.[245] Other authors speak rather of "Gnostic Christians", noting that Gnostics were a prominent substream in the early church.[246] The best known example of this approach is Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), who stated that "Gnosticism is the acute Hellenization of Christianity."[237] According to Dillon, "many scholars today continue in the vein of Harnack in reading gnosticism as a late and contaminated version of Christianity", notably Darrell Block, who criticises Elaine Pagels for her view that early Christianity was wildly diverse.[239] Hans Jonas (1903–1993) took an existential phenomenological approach to Gnosticism. According to Jonas, alienation is a distinguishing characteristic of Gnosticism, making it different from contemporary religions. Jonas compares this alienation with the existentialist notion of geworfenheit, Martin Heidegger's "thrownness", as in being thrown into a hostile world.[239] In the late 1980s scholars voiced concerns about the broadness of "Gnosticism" as a meaningful category. Bentley Layton proposed to categorize Gnosticism by delineating which groups were marked as Gnostic in ancient texts. According to Layton, this term was mainly applied by heresiologists to the myth described in the Apocryphon of John, and was used mainly by the Sethians and the Ophites. According to Layton, texts which refer to this myth can be called "classical Gnostic".[240] In addition, Alastair Logan uses social theory to identify Gnosticism. He uses Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge's sociological theory on traditional religion, sects and cults. According to Logan, the Gnostics were a cult, at odds with the society at large.[240] According to the Westar Institute's Fall 2014 Christianity Seminar Report on Gnosticism, there is no group that possesses all of the usually-attributed features. Nearly every group possesses one or more of them, or some modified version of them. There was no particular relationship among any set of groups which one could distinguish as "Gnostic", as if they were in opposition to some other set of groups. For instance, every sect of Christianity on which we have any information on this point believed in a separate Logos who created the universe at God's behest. Likewise, they believed some kind of secret knowledge ("gnosis") was essential to ensuring one's salvation. Likewise, they had a dualist view of the cosmos, in which the lower world was corrupted by meddling divine beings and the upper world's God was awaiting a chance to destroy it and start over, thereby helping humanity to escape its corrupt bodies and locations by fleeing into celestial ones.[247] According to Michael Allen Williams, the concept of Gnosticism as a distinct religious tradition is questionable, since "gnosis" was a pervasive characteristic of many religious traditions in antiquity, and not restricted to the so-called Gnostic systems.[11] According to Williams, the conceptual foundations on which the category of Gnosticism rests are the remains of the agenda of the heresiologists.[11] The early church heresiologists created an interpretive definition of Gnosticism, and modern scholarship followed this example and created a categorical definition. According to Williams the term needs replacing to more accurately reflect those movements it comprises,[11] and suggests to replace it with the term "the Biblical demiurgical tradition".[241] According to Karen King, scholars have "unwittingly continued the project of ancient heresiologists", searching for non-Christian influences, thereby continuing to portray a pure, original Christianity.[241] In light of such increasing scholarly rejection and restriction of the concept of Gnosticism, David G. Robertson has written on the distortions which misapplications of the term continue to perpetuate in religious studies.[248] Carl Jung approached Gnosticism from a psychological perspective, which was followed by Gilles Quispel. According to this approach, Gnosticism is a map for the human development in which an undivided person, centered on the Self, develops out of the fragmentary personhood of young age. According to Quispel, gnosis is a third force in western culture, alongside faith and reason, which offers an experiential awareness of this Self.[241] According to Ioan Culianu, gnosis is made possible through universal operations of the mind, which can be arrived at "anytime, anywhere".[249] A similar suggestion has been made by Edward Conze, who suggested that the similarities between prajñā and sophia may be due to "the actual modalities of the human mind", which in certain conditions result in similar experiences.[250] ^ In Plato's dialogue between Young Socrates and the Foreigner in his The Statesman (258e). ^ 10x Plato, Cratylus, Theaetetus, Sophist, Statesman 2x Plutarch, Compendium libri de animae procreatione + De animae procreatione in Timaeo, 2x Pseudo-Plutarch, De musica[web 2] ^ In Book 7 of his Stromateis ^ For example A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, translators of the French edition (1974)[20] ^ As in 1.25.6, 1.11.3, 1.11.5. ^ Adv. haer. 1.11.1 ^ Irenaeus' comparative adjective gnostikeron "more learned", evidently cannot mean "more Gnostic" as a name.[21] ^ Williams, p. 36: "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 groups he is criticizing"; p. 37: "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."; p. 271: "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.,]).”[21] ^ Of those groups that Irenaeus identifies as "intellectual" (gnostikos), only one, the followers of Marcellina use the term gnostikos of themselves.[22][subnote 2] Later Hippolytus uses "learned" (gnostikos) of Cerinthus and the Ebionites, and Epiphanius applied "learned" (gnostikos) to specific groups. ^ Dunderberg: "The problems with the term 'Gnosticism' itself are now well known. It does not appear in ancient sources at all"[23] ^ Pearson: "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."[24] ^ This occurs in the context of Irenaeus' work On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis, (Greek: elenchos kai anatrope tes pseudonymou gnoseos, ἔλεγχος καὶ ἀνατροπὴ τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως) where the term "knowledge falsely so-called" (pseudonymos gnosis) is a quotation of the apostle Paul's warning against "knowledge falsely so-called" in 1 Timothy 6:20, and covers various groups, not just Valentinus.[26] ^ 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", giving Basilides and Valentinus as examples[31] ^ a b c Cohen & Mendes-Flohr: "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.[40] ^ Robinson: "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), p. 662. ^ The idea that Gnosticism was derived from Buddhism was first proposed by the Victorian gem collector and numismatist Charles William King (1864).[74] Mansel (1875)[75] considered the principal sources of Gnosticism to be Platonism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism.[76] ^ Ptolemy, in Letter to Flora: "External physical fasting is observed even among our followers, for it can be of some benefit to the soul if it is engaged in with reason (logos), whenever it is done neither by way of imitating others, nor out of habit, nor because of the day, as if it had been specially appointed for that purpose."[83] ^ Other names include The Absolute, Aion teleos (The Perfect Æon), Bythos (Depth or Profundity, Βυθός), Proarkhe (Before the Beginning, προαρχή), and He Arkhe (The Beginning, ἡ ἀρχή). ^ The relevant passage of The Republic was found within the Nag Hammadi library,[100] wherein a text existed describing the demiurge as a "lion-faced serpent".[88] ^ The term dēmiourgos occurs in a number of other religious and philosophical systems, most notably Platonism. The Gnostic demiurge bears a resemblance to figures in Plato's Timaeus and Republic. In Timaeus, 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 Republic 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.[note 19] ^ According to Earl Doherty, a prominent proponent of the Christ myth theory, the Q-authors may have regarded themselves as "spokespersons for the Wisdom of God, with Jesus being the embodiment of this Wisdom. In time, the gospel-narrative of this embodiment of Wisdom became interpreted as the literal history of the life of Jesus.[110] ^ The existence of Jesus is explored in other Wikipedia articles, such as: Christ myth theory, Historicity of Jesus, Sources for the historicity of Jesus, Historical Jesus, Quest for the historical Jesus ^ 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."[58] ^ Quotes:* Elaine Pagels: "Valentinian gnosticism [...] differs essentially from dualism";[182]* Schoedel: "a standard element in the interpretation of Valentinianism and similar forms of Gnosticism is the recognition that they are fundamentally monistic".[183] ^ Irenaeus describes how the Valentinians claim to find evidence in Ephesians for their characteristic belief in the existence of the Æons as supernatural beings: "Paul also, they affirm, very clearly and frequently names these Æons, and even goes so far as to preserve their order, when he says, "To all the generations of the Æons of the Æon." (Ephesians 3:21) Nay, we ourselves, when at the giving of thanks we pronounce the words, 'To Æons of Æons' (for ever and ever), do set forth these Æons. And, in fine, wherever the words Æon or Æons occur, they at once refer them to these beings." On the Detection and Overthrow of Knowledge Falsely So Called Book 1. Ch.3 ^ The texts commonly attributed to the Thomasine Traditions 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 ^ Encyclopædia Britannica: "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". ^ Where Augustine was a member of the school from 373–382.[199][200] ^ This understanding of the transmission of Gnostic ideas, despite Irenaeus' certain antagonistic bias, is often utilized today, though it has been criticized. ^ According to Layton, "the lack of uniformity in ancient Christian scripture in the early period is very striking, and it points to the substantial diversity within the Christian religion."[226] ^ Markschies: "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."[244] ^ perseus.tufts.edu, LSJ entry: γνωστ-ικός, ή, όν, A. of or for knowing, cognitive: ἡ -κή (sc. ἐπιστήμη), theoretical science (opp. πρακτική), Pl.Plt.258e, etc.; τὸ γ. ib.261b; "ἕξεις γ." Arist.AP0.100a11 (Comp.); "γ. εἰκόνες" 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.[web 1] ^ Williams: "On the other hand, the one group whom Irenaeus does explicitly mention as users of this self-designation, the followers of the Second Century 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. 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."[22] This article has an unclear citation style. The references used may be made clearer with a different or consistent style of citation and footnoting. (January 2024) (Learn how and when to remove this message) ^ Pagels 1989, pp. 28–47, "One God, One Bishop: The Politics of Monotheism". ^ Pagels 1989, p. xx. ^ Layton 1995, p. 106. ^ a b c Pagels 1989, p. xx. ^ a b Deutsch 2007. ^ a b c d e Buckley 2010, p. 109. ^ Dillon, M. (2016). "Gnosticism Theorized: Major Trends and Approaches to the Study of Gnosticism". Secret Religion: 23–38. doi:10.17613/0qxh-ed23. ISBN 978-0-02-866350-0. ^ Culpepper 1999, p. 66. ^ a b Meier (1991), pp. 135–138. ^ Petersen 2010, p. 51. ^ a b c d Williams 1996. ^ King, Karen L (2005). What is Gnosticism?. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. ISBN 9780674017627. ^ Robertson 2021, p. [page needed]. ^ Liddell Scott entry γνῶσις, εως, ἡ, A. seeking to know, inquiry, investigation, esp. judicial, "τὰς τῶν δικαστηρίων γ." D.18.224; "τὴν κατὰ τοῦ διαιτητοῦ γdeetr." Id.21.92, cf. 7.9, Lycurg.141; "γ. περὶ τῆς δίκης" PHib.1.92.13 (iii B. C.). 2. result of investigation, decision, PPetr.3p.118 (iii B. C.). II. knowing, knowledge, Heraclit.56; opp. ἀγνωσίη, Hp. Vict.1.23 (dub.); opp. ἄγνοια, Pl.R.478c; "ἡ αἴσθησις γ. τις" Arist.GA731a33: pl., "Θεὸς γνώσεων κύριος" LXX 1 Ki.2.3. b. higher, esoteric knowledge, 1 Ep.Cor.8.7,10, Ep.Eph.3.19, etc.; "χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν νοῦν, λόγον, γνῶσιν" PMag.Par.2.290. 2. acquaintance with a person, "πρός τινα" Test. ap.Aeschin.1.50; "τῶν Σεβαστῶν" IPE1.47.6 (Olbia). 3. recognizing, Th.7.44. 4. means of knowing, "αἱ αἰσθήσεις κυριώταται τῶν καθ᾽ ἕκαστα γ." Arist.Metaph.981b11. III. being known, "γνῶσιν ἔχει τι", = "γνωστόν ἐστι", Pl.Tht.206b. 2. fame, credit, Hdn.7.5.5, Luc.Herod.3. IV. means of knowing: hence, statement in writing, PLond.5.1708, etc. (vi A. D.). V. = γνῶμα, Hsch. s. h. v. ^ Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek lexicon entry γνωστ-ικός, ή, όν, A. of or for knowing, cognitive: ἡ -κή (sc. ἐπιστήμη), theoretical science (opp. πρακτική), Pl.Plt.258b.c., etc.; τὸ γ. ib.261b; "ἕξεις γ." Arist.AP0.100a11 (Comp.); "γ. εἰκόνες" 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. ^ In Perseus databank 10x Plato, Cratylus, Theaetetus, Sophist, Statesman 2x Plutarch, Compendium libri de animae procreatione + De animae procreatione in Timaeo, 2x Pseudo-Plutarch, De musica ^ Ehrman 2003, p. 185. ^ a b Valantasis 2006, p. [page needed]. ^ Smith 1981. ^ Rousseau & Doutreleau 1974. ^ a b c Williams 1996, p. 36. ^ a b Williams 1996, pp. 42–43. ^ a b Dunderberg 2008, p. 16. ^ a b Pearson 2004, p. 210. ^ Haar 2012, p. 231. ^ Unger & Dillon 1992, p. 3: "the final phrase of the title 'knowledge falsely so-called' is found in 1 Timothy 6:20". ^ Pearson, Birger A. (1984). "Gnosticism as Platonism: With Special Reference to Marsanes (NHC 10,1)". The Harvard Theological Review. 77 (1): 55–72. doi:10.1017/S0017816000014206. ISSN 0017-8160. JSTOR 1509519. ^ Turner, John D.; Corrigan, Kevin; Rasimus, Tuomas, eds. (2013). 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