THE SCHOOL OF VALENTINUS

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The school of Valentinus was one of the most significant early Christian groups rejected by representatives of nascent Christian orthodoxy. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, wrote already in the 180s a five-volume refutation against Valentinians, now usually called *Adversus haereses* (*Against Heresies*). Irenaeus’ major concern was that Valentinians did not form a dissident group of their own but remained within the Church. They confessed, Irenaeus admits, “God the Father” and “our Lord Jesus Christ,”2 claimed to have “the same doctrine” as other Christians, and resented to being called heretics.3 They also employed New Testament writings as proof texts for their views.4 The difference between Valentinians and other Christians was, thus, far from obvious.

Irenaeus’ most important goal was to make this difference clear.5 He wanted to lay bare secret teachings of Valentinians which, in his opinion, ran contrary to Christian faith. Irenaeus constructed his opponents’ views in order to show their deviation from what he considered to be the orthodox Christian faith. In so doing, Irenaeus produced the first systematic presentation of the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) that was later used to determine Christian orthodoxy. In addition, his work became a model and major source of information for other anti-Valentinian polemicists, such as Hippolytus of Rome and Tertullian in the early third century, and Epiphanius of Salamis in the fourth.

1 In addition to the editors of this book, I would like to express my heart-felt thanks to Birger Pearson for reading the penultimate draft of this chapter and suggesting some important additions to it.
2 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.33.3.
3 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.15.2.
Before the Nag Hammadi Library was found in Upper Egypt in 1945, texts stemming from Valentinian teachers were few, since writings of dissident Christians were actively censored after the nascent orthodox Christianity began to be favored by Roman emperors from the beginning of the fourth century. Only a few fragments from the extensive literary production of Valentinian teachers survived in the works of the early Christian authors who found acceptance by the Church during this period. Already this scanty evidence, however, has demonstrated remarkable deviations from the picture of Valentinianism painted by Irenaeus.

The Nag Hammadi Library brought to light a number of texts written or compiled by Valentinians. These texts bear witness to the continuing popularity of the school of Valentinus in the fourth century, when these texts were copied. They contain little information on the historical development of the school of Valentinus, but the opportunities to assess Valentinian teachings on their own terms have considerably improved due to the new data.

1. Making a Heretic: Irenaeus’ Account of the Valentinians

Irenaeus’ work begins with the so-called “Great Account,” which comprises a lengthy presentation of Valentinian theology.⁶ This account is no objective description; it is often seasoned with irony and sarcastic remarks. Irenaeus intended to brand his opponents as propagating mere absurdities. This strategy proved effective in years to come. In the introduction to a popular translation of Irenaeus’ work in Aucto-Nonae Fathers from the end of 19th century, it was still affirmed:

It may be made matter of regret, that so large a portion of the work of Irenaeus is given to an exposition of manifold Gnostic speculations. Nothing more absurd than these has probably ever been imagined by rational beings ... by giving loose reins to their imagination they built up the most incongruous and ridiculous systems; while, by deserting the guidance of Scripture they were betrayed into the most pernicious and extravagant errors.⁷

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⁶ Irenaeus, Haer. 1.1-7.
⁷ "Introductory Note to Irenaeus’ Against Heresies," ANF 1:311.
While this statement bears witness to an uncritical adoption of Irenaeus' viewpoint, recent scholarship has been more critical in tracing Irenaeus' tendentiousness embedded in his account of Valentinian theology. The Valentinian "system" described by Irenaeus is basically his construction and did not exist as such before him. He pulled together one body of thought from diverse written and oral sources, but he did not reproduce these sources word for word. His account is, rather, a summary, or an epitome, the purpose of which was to give to his readers a general outline of the Valentinian body of thought. While Irenaeus occasionally mentions examples of diversity in Valentinian views, his general approach tends to give a more unitarian and systematic picture of Valentinian theology than it really had.

Moreover, composing a summary is a selective process. It reflects not only what is found in various sources but also what the composer finds noteworthy in these sources. Since Irenaeus wanted to distinguish between right and wrong forms of Christianity, he concentrated on the issues that, in his view, made this difference clear. Consequently, his account revolves around two issues. First, there is a difference in teachings about God. Valentinians did not attribute the creation of the world to the supreme God but to an inferior and ignorant creator-God whom they, following Platonic philosophical tradition, called the demiurges ("craftsmen"). Second, Irenaeus emphasizes the Valentinian distinction between "psychic" (from Gr. ψυχή, "soul") and "pneumatic" (from Gr. πνεῦμα, "spirit") human beings. He employs this distinction to portray Valentinians as an elitist, arrogant, and morally indifferent group who considered themselves spiritual Christians, while ordinary members of the Church belonged to an inferior class of "psychic" Christians. Irenaeus claims that this distinction made Valentinian Christians to take liberties that they did not allow to other members of the Church. This accusation proves problematic, however, if it is compared to what is said about psychic and spiritual Christians in primary sources. Nevertheless, this

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9 Irenaeus, Hist. 1, preface.
10 For the uses of epitome, see H. Gregory Snyder, Teachers and Text in the Ancient World: Philosophers, Jews and Christians (London: Routledge, 2000), 13.
picture of Valentinians suits well Irenaeus’ purpose of drawing a clear boundary between them and other Christians.

Irenaeus’ “Great Account” begins with Valentinian theories about the origin of the world. The process leading to the creation of the world was set in motion in the divine realm called “fullness” (Gr. plēōnía). In the beginning, there was only the eternal, incomprehensible and invisible Father in “deep quiet and stillness,”¹¹ who was accompanied by his thought. The Father’s thought is also called “Grace” and “Silence.” As the Father decided to “emit from himself the beginning of all things,” his decision impregnated his thought, Silence, who gave birth to two other divine qualities, Mind and Truth. Thus begins a chain reaction that finally leads to the creation of the sensible world and the human being. First, new pairs of eternal beings called “aeons” (Gr. aión, “eternity,” also “lifetime,” “space of time”) were being born from conjugal unions of those beings already in existence. The aeons are personified qualities such as Faith, Hope and Love (cf. 1 Cor 13:13), or Union, Pleasure, and Wisdom. They are divided into male and female ones, and each of them has their own partner of the opposite sex.¹²

Personification of abstract qualities in the Valentinian myth was not unique. In the Hebrew Bible, God’s wisdom is portrayed as a separate figure who assisted God in creating the world (e.g., Prov 8). Moreover, it is not clear whether the Valentinians really conceived of the aeons as separate divine beings or whether the aeons were only portrayed as such for the purposes of a cosmogonic tale. At least some Valentinians considered the aeons as qualities and dispositions of the supreme God rather than independent divine beings.

Wisdom ( sophía) plays a crucial role in the Valentinian cosmogonic tale, but her role is strikingly different from that in Jewish Wisdom Literature.¹³ In the Valentinian myth, the aeons have in common their “desire to seek their First-Father.” Nevertheless, only Wisdom, the youngest of all aeons, is bold enough to act according to this desire. The consequences are both unexpected and far-reaching. There are two Valentinian versions as to what Wisdom did in the

¹¹ Irenaeus,  Hœr. 1.1.1.
¹³ Irenaeus,  Hœr. 1.2.1–6.
divine pleroma. According to one version, she wanted to understand the Father's greatness. Since this was impossible due to his "unsearchable nature," Wisdom's attempt was doomed to failure. Her failure, in turn, aroused in her emotions that made her weak. In another version, Wisdom wanted to create something on her own, without the consent of her divine spouse. Since her male partner was not involved, Wisdom gave birth to a being devoid of form. In this version, Wisdom's emotions, grief and fear were triggered by seeing the formless creature she had made.

In both versions, Wisdom's wrong intention and emotions are removed outside the divine realm. They become substances laying the basis for the creation of the world. Wisdom's intention gave rise to the spiritual substance, and her emotions to the material one. Another, inferior Wisdom is created from these substances. She is also called Achaomoth. The name is a pun based upon a Hebrew word hokhmoth used of the personified figure of Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible. Achaomoth was formless to begin with, but she was provided with a form by the heavenly Christ who visited her from the divine realm. As Christ returned to the pleroma, Achaomoth became seized with emotions (grief, fear, and perplexity). Most importantly, however, she has the ability to convert to what is better, to Christ who gave her form. This ability is characteristic of the third substance that now emerges. This substance is called "psychic nature" (to pschikon), and it makes conversion possible. Hence the origin of three substances (spiritual, psychic, and material), upon which is built the Valentinian division of humankind into three classes, the spiritual, the psychic, and the material.

While Wisdom in Proverbs assists God in creating the world, the Valentinian Achaomoth creates the demiurge, who then creates "the heavenly and earthly things." The demiurge belongs to the middle class of psychic beings; the spiritual substance is not bestowed upon him. The demiurge is also ignorant of the supreme God and the divine realm, and imagines that he is the only God. The ignorant demiurge acts, however, at the instigation of Achaomoth and makes use of the three substances that are already in existence. The Valentinian demiurge is not identified with the devil, as the creator-God.

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14 Irenaeus, *Haer.*, 1.4.1-5.
Yaldabaoth is in some Sethian texts. Instead, the devil is part of the demiurge’s creation.

The spiritual, psychic and material substances are of different origin and have different determination. The spiritual and material ones are opposites to each other: the former will be saved and the latter will perish no matter what; the former cannot be corrupted, and the latter cannot be saved. The psychic nature lies in the middle, between the two opposites; hence its ability to “go over to that element to which it has an inclination.”

All three substances were present in the first human being, Adam. It would seem natural to assume, therefore, that they are bestowed on all other human beings as well. According to Irenaeus, however, this was not the case. He claims that Valentinians divided humankind into three classes, and that neither promotion nor degradation from one class to another was possible. Valentinians held themselves to be the spiritual ones who will be saved in any case due to their nature, while other members of the Church were the psychic ones characterized by ambivalence. Consequently, the latter could be saved only if they were “made steadfast by works and bare faith.”

Valentinian teaching as portrayed by Irenaeus excludes, thus, every chance of getting in, or falling away from, the spiritual class. Irenaeus constructs Valentinian theology at this point in a way that fits well his purpose of drawing boundaries, for his portrayal made Valentinianism a far less attractive option to non-Valentinian Christians to whom his work was addressed. The same purpose was served by Irenaeus’ claim that the certainty of salvation made Valentinians prone to evil deeds: they had no qualms about eating meat offered to idols, attending pagan festivals and gladiator shows, nor defiling women who have joined them. Moreover, Irenaeus implies that sexual defilement takes place in the Valentinian bridal chamber ritual which “they must always and in every way put into practice.”

Irenaeus obviously attempted to make the Valentinian lifestyle as despicable and non-attractive as possible to his audience. It remains

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15 On the Sethian demiurge, see Williams’ article in this book.
16 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.5.1–6.
17 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.6.1–2.
18 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.6.2.
19 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.6.3.
20 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.6.4.
unclear, however, how reliable his description of Valentinian moral teaching and practice is. Allegations of indifference find no support in the Valentinian texts of the Nag Hammadi Library. Not only do they not encourage licentious behavior, but there are also examples of moral exhortation that are completely absent in Irenaeus. Interestingly, he does mention that there were some Valentinians who tried to live irreproachably. According to Irenaeus, these Valentinians did not fare much better than the licentious ones, for their more ambitious lifestyle only made them irritatingly arrogant. In any case, this part of Irenaeus' portrayal shows that his claims about the licentiousness of Valentinians were greatly exaggerated and polemic in nature. In addition, other texts show that the boundary between spiritual and psychic Christians was less fixed in Valentinian theology than Irenaeus would have us to believe.

In spite of its polemical perspective, Irenaeus' account has assumed a dominant position in scholarly presentations of Valentinian theology. Scattered quotations from Valentinian teachers in other patristic sources have usually been interpreted in light of Irenaeus. In recent years, however, primary sources have been increasingly studied on their own terms. Results have been surprising. It has been affirmed that the surviving fragments from Valentinus' own teaching betray no close contact to the Valentinian body of thought described by Irenaeus. Heracleon is another well-known Valentinian teacher whose relationship to Irenaeus' account of Valentinianism has proved remote. Similar problems even pertain to Ptolemy, though it was his disciples from whom Irenaeus solicited information. The way Ptolemy portrays the figure of the demiurge in his Letter to Flora is not entirely compatible with Irenaeus' account of the teachings of his followers.

21 Irenæus, Haer. 3.15.2.
25 Irenaeus, Haer. 1, preface.
Nevertheless, the Valentinian cosmogonic myth described by Irenaeus was not his own invention. There is multiple attestation for the existence of the basic Valentinian myth, though there is considerable variation in details. Other patristic authors offer slightly different versions of the Valentinian myth which are in part independent of Irenaeus.\textsuperscript{26} In addition, the Valentinian \textit{Tripartite Tractate} provides us with a lengthy first-hand account of this myth.

The Valentinian cosmogonic myth was similar both in structure and narrative details to that in the \textit{Apocryphon of John}. Thus, there must have been some affinity between the Valentinian and Sethian cosmogonic myths. The Sethian version seems more archaic; features that were most likely to offend many contemporary groups (both Christians and non-Christian philosophers alike), like the portrayal of the demonic creator-God Yaldabaoth, seem to have been toned down in the Valentinian myth. This suggests that the Sethian version of the myth is earlier. There is, however, no consensus about this issue; some scholars think that the Sethian myth is later than the Valentinian one and based upon it.\textsuperscript{27}

In addition, discrepancies in the sources raise the question of continuity in the school of Valentinus. There must have been some reasons for the lumping together of these teachers in ancient sources, but it is more difficult to tell what these reasons were exactly. Irenaeus draws a distinction between the Valentinian public (exoteric) and secret (esoteric) teaching. This distinction has been invoked to account for differences between Irenaeus and primary sources.\textsuperscript{28} In so doing, scholars have often too readily taken over Irenaeus’ point of view and accepted his account as a disclosure of what Valentinians really taught. Nevertheless, the possibility that Valentinians offered instruction at different levels cannot be discarded altogether. Ptolemy’s \textit{Letter to Flora} offers direct evidence for this view of education (see below).

Moreover, Valentinians were regarded by their contemporaries as a school of thought, and they themselves employed terminology

\textsuperscript{26} Most important variants are reported by Clement (\textit{Exe.}) and Hippolytus (\textit{Hecr}).


related to a school setting. The idea of instruction at different levels may have come naturally in this context, since in ancient schools of thought advanced discussion was often confined to insiders. The setting of a school also provided a forum for learned discussion about different opinions. This may in part account for the characteristic diversity of Valentinian theology.

2. Valentinus

Irenaeus used the term “the school of Valentinus” and spoke about his “school (didaskaleion) of distinct character.” Thus, Valentinus was from early on considered the founder of an early Christian school of thought. However, only scattered references to him and his career have survived in ancient sources. Valentinus most likely originally came from Egypt, arrived in Rome at the end of the 130s, and remained there for fifteen to twenty years. Unlike Marcion, he was never expelled from the Roman Christian community. It is even related that Valentinus ran for the office of the bishop of Rome, but was defeated by a candidate who had publicly confessed his faith under persecution. Doubts can be raised as to historical reliability of this story, but its existence suggests that Valentinus enjoyed some popularity in Rome.


31 Irenaeus, Haer. 1.30.15.

32 Irenaeus, Haer. 1.11.1. The reference to a school is blurred in Unger and Dillon’s English translation of this passage: “his peculiar system of doctrine.”

33 The dates are based on Irenaeus (Haer. 3.4.3), who mentions that Valentinus was in Rome during the time of three different bishops, Hyginus (136–140), Pius (140–155) and Anicius (155–166).


35 Tertullian, Val. 4.1.2. According to Tertullian, it was Valentinus’ resentment caused by this event that made him invent his heresy.

36 Cf. Markschies, Valentinian Gnostics, 308.
It is unclear whether Valentine ever left Rome. Epiphanius claimed that Valentine was shipwrecked on Cyprus, went mad and became heretic there, but this story is hardly more than a malevolent rumor. 37 It is, nevertheless, possible that Valentine returned to Egypt at some later point. This would explain the fact that so many quotations from his works are preserved in the Stromatais of Clement of Alexandria.

Less than a dozen short passages from Valentine’s writings have survived in the texts of authors accepted in the nascent orthodox church. Even some of these passages are probably not authentic. 38 Although the genuine fragments offer only a very limited glimpse at Valentine’s literary activity, they show that he composed letters, sermons, and poems. 39 Moreover, the fragments clearly demonstrate the Christian profile of Valentine’s teaching. He found important to affirm that it is Jesus who reveals the Father. 40 He also quoted from the Gospel of Matthew; 41 whether he knew other early Christian gospels cannot be known with certainty. 42 Valentine’s Christian vantage point becomes also visible in his peculiar theory about the divine essence of Jesus: 43

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37 Epiphanius, Pan. 31.7.2. For a critical assessment of this passage, see Marckesch, Valentine Gaustheus, 331–34.

38 In my references to Valentine’s fragments, I follow Völker’s traditional system. Fragments 1–6 are derived from Clement’s Stromatais [2,36.2–4 [1]; 2,114.3–6 [2]; 3,59.3 [3]; 4,89.1–3 [4]; 4,89.6–90.1 [5]; 6,52.3–53.1 [6], and fragments 7–8 from Hippolytus’ Refutatio Manichaeorum [6,42.2 [7]; 6,37.7 [8]]. While these fragments are likely to be authentic, two other passages attributed to Valentine in the texts of Pseudo-Athanasius (De Squito Ecclesiā, 9 [9]) and Photius (Cod. 230 [10]) are dubious; cf. Marckesh, Valentine Gaustheus. Marckesch also suggests that there is still another passage in Hippolytus (Hier. 10,13,4) which could possibly be added to the genuine fragments of Valentine (ibid. 278–90). (An alternate reference system has been proposed by Benley Layton, The Gaustic Scriptures [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987], 229–49, who has arranged the fragments “according to the order of events in the gnostic myths” [p. 229]. The Fragments A–H in Layton correspond to the traditional numbering in the following manner: A = Frag. 7; B = Frag. 9; C = Frag. 1; D = Frag. 5; E = Frag. 3; F = Frag. 4; G = Frag. 6; H = Frag. 2. “Hr” in Layton equals to Frag. 8 in Völker.

39 Letters: frags. 1–3; sermons: frags. 4 and 6; a poem: frag. 8.

40 Valentine, Frag. 2 (H in Layton).

41 Frag. 2 (H in Layton) contains quotations from Matt 5:18 and 19:17.

42 If Valentine was the author of the Gospel of Truth, it would follow that he knew the Gospel of John (cf. Layton, The Gaustic Scriptures, 251). The attribution of the Gospel of Truth to Valentine is, however, uncertain (see below). As for other early Christian gospels, I find it possible that Valentine may have known the Gospel of Thomas; cf. Duddenberg, “From Thomas to Valentine: Genesis Exegesis in the Fragment 4 of Valentine and Its Relationship to the Gospel of Thomas,” in Thessanian Traditions in Antiquity (ed. J. M. Asgerisson, A.D. De Coniack, and R. Uro; Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies; Leiden: E. J. Brill, forthcoming).

43 Valentine, Frag. 3 (E in Layton; trans. Layton with modification).
He was continent, enduring all things. Jesus practiced 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.

From the modern perspective, speculation about Christ's digestion may seem odd and Valentinus' solution that Christ ate and drank but did not defecate may even sound distasteful. Yet in the ancient Church Valentinus' theory was one attempt to solve a burning theological issue. It was considered a crucial witness for Christ's incarnation that he ate and drank;\(^44\) but it was difficult to reconcile this idea with the divinity of Jesus. A purely docetic position would have been that Christ had an ostensible body that needed neither food nor drink. While this view was rejected by the Church, there were other theories that came quite close to it. Clement of Alexandria insisted that Christ "ate not because of his body that was sustained by the Holy Spirit" but because he wanted to reject the docetic heresy in advance.\(^45\)

Clement and Valentinus shared the idea that Christ had an unusual body. Paradoxically, Clement's quip at the docetic position is in itself one step closer to full-blown docetism than Valentinus' teaching. For unlike Clement, Valentinus did not maintain that Christ's body did not need nourishment. In addition, Valentinus' claim that Christ did not defecate was less original in antiquity than it may sound now. The same claim was made in other sources of Pythagoras.\(^46\) It may be, thus, that Valentinus' idea of Christ's digestion was based upon earlier stories about this legendary Greek sage.\(^47\)

Other fragments of Valentinus also bear witness to the influence of Greek philosophical traditions. Valentinus took over the Platonic distinction between the eternal model world of ideas and the sensible world based upon that world.\(^48\) This can be seen in Valentinus' affirmation that the world was created after a model of "the living eternal realm (aiōn)."\(^49\) His eloquent poem Harvest lends, in turn,

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\(^{44}\) E.g., Ign., \textit{Troll}, 9; Irenaeus, \textit{Harr.} 3.22.2.


\(^{46}\) Diogenes Laërtius, \textit{Philosophia biot} 8.19. A similar story was also told of Epimenides (ibid. 1.114).

\(^{47}\) For the background of Valentinus' view of Christ's digestion in ancient physiology, see De Groot, "The Great Mystery of Marriage," 313–15.


\(^{49}\) Valentinus, Frag. 5 (D in Layton).
expression to a Stoic notion of the all-pervasive spirit which keeps all things together like a cosmic bond:\textsuperscript{50} 

I see that all is hung up by the spirit,
I understand that all is carried by the spirit,
Flesh, hanging from soul,
Soul, depending on air,
Air, hanging from aether,
Fruits that are borne from the depth,
A babe that is brought forth from the womb.

These teachings of Valentinus betray no attitude of world-rejection, which has often been considered essential to the distinctly gnostic worldview. Although he did not consider the sensible world a perfect place, he taught that the “invisible essence of God” is reflected in this world and makes it “reliable.”\textsuperscript{51} Valentinus has no qualms about the Stoic idea of a cosmic harmony supported by the all-pervasive spirit. Valentinus’ way of using philosophical traditions suggests, therefore, that his worldview was neither very negative nor strictly dualistic.

It is puzzling that the fragments of Valentinus contain no clear links to the Valentinian body of thought described by Irenaeus. There are no references to the figure of Wisdom, to the demiurge, or to the three classes of humankind. Nevertheless, in his teaching about Adam’s creation, Valentinus seems familiar with traditions that could be designated as “gnostic.” Valentinus described the confusion of the creator angels arising from their observation that there was in Adam “an essence from above” and “the pre-existent human being.” This essence made Adam superior to his creators, and they tried to destroy him. Whether they succeeded in their attempt or not remains unclear in the extant fragment.\textsuperscript{52} The closest analogy to this interpretation of Genesis is the account of Adam’s creation in the Apocryphon of John, the key text bearing witness to Sethian views.\textsuperscript{53} The close resemblance suggests that Valentinus either knew the Apocryphon of John or was familiar with traditions similar to those attested in this text. This affinity could speak in favor of the idea that Valentinus himself was

\textsuperscript{50} Valentinus, Frag. 8 (Hr in Layton).
\textsuperscript{51} Valentinus, Frag. 5 (D in Layton).
\textsuperscript{52} Valentinus, Frag. 1 (C in Layton).
\textsuperscript{53} Ap. John (NHC II,1) 19–21.
the connecting link between Sethians and later Valentinians. Nevertheless, it is impossible to tell how well Valentinus knew Sethian traditions or how crucial they were to his thinking and teaching.

3. Other Valentinians: Ptolemy, Heracleon, Theodotus and Marcus

Hippolytus of Rome says that the Valentinians were divided into two groups due to their differing views about the body of Christ. The “Italian” faction taught that Christ had a psychic body, which the spirit entered in his baptism, while the “Eastern” faction opined that the Savior’s body was also spiritual and that he was born from the Virgin Mary “as through a pipe,” without having any physical contact with her. Ptolemy and Heracleon are identified as the most famous representatives of the Italian group. The term “eastern teaching” occurs also in the full title of the Excerpts from Theodotus by Clement of Alexandria. This suggests that the Valentinian Theodotus was associated with eastern Valentinianism from early on.

There is even less biographical data related to Ptolemy, Heracleon and Theodotus than there was concerning Valentinus, but traces of their texts remain in patristic sources. Ptolemy’s Letter to Flora is quoted completely in the anti-heretical compendium written by Epiphanius. Origen provides us with quotations from Heracleon’s commentary on the Gospel of John; and quotations from Theodotus can be found in Clement’s aforementioned Excerpts.

There is an intriguing possibility that the Valentinian Ptolemy could be identical with the Ptolemy mentioned by Justin Martyr. In

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54 This suggestion has been made, but not carefully argued, by Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, xv–xvi. Irenaeus (Haer. 1.11.1) already held a similar view, saying that Valentinus had “adapted the principles from the so-called Gnostic heresy...” Irenaeus’ subsequent report about this heresy (Haer. 1.29–30) is often considered evidence for a basically Sethian body of thought.

55 Haer. 6.35.5–7.

56 The full title of this work is Excerpta from Theodotus and the So-Called Eastern Teaching at the Time of Valentinus.

57 Pan. 33.3.1–7.10.

58 It is not only difficult to determine which parts in Clement’s Excerpta stem from Theodotus and which from other Valentinian teachers, but it is also sometimes difficult to separate Valentinian teachings from Clement’s own comments. Casey’s careful assessment of this issue still seems largely valid to me (Robert P. Casey, ed., The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria [London: Christophers, 1994], 5–16); some important modifications to it have been made in Menard’s edition.
his Second Apology, Justin tells about a Christian teacher called Ptolemy who became a martyr, when Urbicus was the prefect of Rome (144–160). Justin’s Ptolemy is not associated with the followers of Valentinus nor does Justin make any critical reservations as to Ptolemy’s Christian faith. Speaking against the identification of this Ptolemy with the Valentinian Ptolemy is the fact that Valentinians are condemned in Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho. This work was, however, composed later than Second Apology. This leaves the possibility open that, when writing his Second Apology (ca. 152 C.E.), Justin either did not yet know exactly what Valentinians taught, or he did not know about Ptolemy’s affinity with the school of Valentinus.

Justin’s Ptolemy was a teacher of a Roman woman who, after her conversion, wanted to divorce her husband. It is noteworthy that, in his letter addressed to a woman called Flora, the Valentinian Ptolemy touched upon the issue of divorce as well. Ptolemy argued that the law in the Hebrew Bible permitting divorce does not stem from God, but from Moses. In spite of its lesser origin, Ptolemy sees this law justified insofar as its intention is to prevent a greater damage that would follow if divorce were not allowed. This teaching fits well the situation described in Justin, and therefore supports the possibility that the two Ptolemys were the same person.

Ptolemy’s Letter to Flora is the only surviving document of his writings. Its careful composition demonstrates Ptolemy’s skill in literary style. The letter presents itself as instruction addressed to a beginner. It ends with a promise of further teaching—given that the addressee proves worthy of it. The introductory nature of the letter can be

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59 2 Apol. 2.
60 Dial. 35.
62 Scholars often attribute the Valentinian body of thought in Irenaeus directly to Ptolemy, but this attribution is unwarranted. As was pointed out above, Irenaeus speaks only of his conversations with Ptolemy’s disciples. In the Latin version, Irenaeus’ account of Valentinian theology ends with the words “thus indeed Ptolemy” (et Ptolemaeus quidem ita). Since these words are missing in the extant Greek version of this text, they are likely to be a later gloss; cf. Lüdemann, “The History of Earliest Christianity,” 126.
63 Ptolemy, Letter to Flora in Epiphanius, Pan. 33.7.9.
seen in its subject matter as well. Ptolemy presents proofs to the
effect that there exists the demiurge who is neither the supreme God
nor the devil, but a figure between them. The demiurge is neither
good nor evil, but, in a rigid manner, righteous and just. Ptolemy’s
view about the demiurge is, thus, quite similar to that of Marcion.  

To bring his point home, Ptolemy engages in a careful discussion
about the law in the Hebrew Bible. He distinguishes first between
the divine law and human additions to it; the latter go back to Moses
(including the legislation concerning divorce), and to the elders of
Israel. Then Ptolemy goes on to argue that even the divine part of
the biblical law is not entirely perfect. The divine legislation in the
Hebrew Bible is divided into three parts:

1. the decalogue,
2. laws based upon retaliation (“an eye for an eye, a tooth for a
tooth”)
3. ritual laws

It is the second group that proves significant for Ptolemy’s argument.
He admits that the good goal of the laws based upon retaliation is
to prevent evil. In actual fact, however, they increase evil. If a mur-
derer receives a death sentence, there will be at the end two mur-
ders instead of one. This shows that the divine legislator who accepted
retaliatory laws was “fooled by necessity.” Hence Ptolemy’s con-
sclusion that the god giving these kinds of laws cannot be perfect.

Like Valentinus, Ptolemy argued from an emphatically Christian
point of view. He sought proofs for his views from Jesus and Paul;
the latter was “the apostle” for Ptolemy. First, Ptolemy pointed out
that Jesus not only accepted the decalogue, but also “fulfilled” it by
demanding more intense observance of it. The fact that the decal-
logue needs to be fulfilled by Jesus shows, according to Ptolemy, that
even it was not completely perfect. Second, Ptolemy reminds his
audience that Jesus abolished the laws based upon retaliation (e.g.,
Matt 5:38–39). Third, Ptolemy invokes Paul in arguing that ritual
laws in the Hebrew Bible should be interpreted allegorically.

Ptolemy was clearly aware of other contemporary theories about
biblical law.  

64 For Marcion’s demiurgism, see Heikki Räisänen, “Marcion,” in this volume.
65 For example, the separation of human additions to the law from the divine
legislation is not very crucial for Ptolemy’s own argument, but this theory needed
Bible initiated by Marcion in Rome. Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* is usually taken as a refutation of Marcion's or his followers' views about the Hebrew Bible.66 Yet Ptolemy, in fact, adopted Marcion's position to a certain degree.67 The quotations from Matthew show that Ptolemy did not accept Marcion's canon, nor did he demand abandonment of the Hebrew Bible. But Ptolemy's view about the demuirge, whose legislation shows that he is neither good nor evil but merely righteous, is so close to Marcion's position that it must be assumed that Ptolemy took Marcion seriously and showed partial agreement with his ideas.

Heracleon was the author of the earliest commentary on the Gospel of John known to us thus far. He is also called "the most famous in the school of Valentinus,"68 but no details of his life have survived. A recent study plausibly suggests that Heracleon, like Valentinus, came from Egypt, made a temporary visit in Rome, and then returned to Egypt.69 The visit in Rome accounts for Heracleon's association with "Italian" Valentinianism in Hippolytus, while his Egyptian provenance can be deduced from the fact that the fragments of his works stem entirely from two Alexandrian authors, Clement and Origen.

A few fragments from Heracleon's commentary on John have survived in Origen's *Commentary on John*. They show Heracleon's great competence in different areas of textual interpretation, such as text criticism, word explanation, analysis of style, and allegorical interpretation.70 Like Ptolemy, Heracleon assumed the existence of the inferior demuirge and apparently responded to Marcion in his writings.71 No clear references to the tale of Wisdom's fall are, however, included in the fragments of Heracleon. For him, the real creator who used the demuirge as a tool was Christ, not Wisdom, as in Irenaeus.72

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67 For a more thorough discussion of this issue, see Dunderberg, "Valentinian Teachers," 162–65.
68 Clement, Strom. 4.71.
71 Cf. Wucherpfennig, *Heracleon Philologus*, 156–58, 178 etc.
Heraclaeon’s view of the demiurge is surprisingly positive. He saw in the story of the healing of the royal officer’s son in John 4:46–54 an allegorical reference to the demiurge asking the Savior for help, as the human being created by the demiurge was about to die.\(^\text{73}\)

Heraclaeon’s view coincides with the Valentinian idea attested in Irenaeus that the demiurge became the Savior’s follower as soon as the latter entered the world.\(^\text{74}\)

Heraclaeon agrees with Irenaeus’ account in presupposing the distinction between the spiritual, the psychic and the material essences. Yet these essences do not denote different classes of Christians, but are interpreted in terms of ethnic identity. Heraclaeon shared with many other early Christian authors the idea that Christians were neither Greeks nor Jews, but formed the third race (tertium genus).\(^\text{75}\)

Relying on an early Christian text called Kerugmata Petrou, he taught that, while pagans worship the material world and Jews worship the psychic demiurge and his angels, the spiritual ones worship the true Father.\(^\text{76}\) The term “the spiritual ones” is used here for “Christians” in general.

The story of the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–42 was interpreted by Heraclaeon as describing the awakening of the spiritual essence. Heraclaeon also maintained that spiritual Christians should bring other people to Christ, just like the woman in the story brought other Samaritans to Jesus.\(^\text{77}\) It is a matter of debate whether Heraclaeon considered the three essences predetermined, as one could assume on the basis of Irenaeus’ account.\(^\text{78}\) In my view, it is not necessary to assume that Heraclaeon thought in terms of fixed origins of the three classes of humankind. Rather, he reckoned that progress from one group to another is possible. “Like the woman changes to the

\(^{71}\) Origen, *Comm. Jo.*, 13.60.

\(^{74}\) Irenaeus, *Hær.*, 1.7.4.


\(^{76}\) Origen, *Comm. Jo.*, 13.16.


\(^{78}\) For this debate, see Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Born from Above: The Anthropology of the Gospel of John* (HUT 29; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992), 22–30. Trumbower (p. 29) himself sides with those insisting that, in Valentinianism, “the three classes of human beings were fixed . . . due to their origin.”
man", Heracleon affirms, "a voice" can change to "a word." This interpretation (based upon John 1:23) suggests that, in Heracleon's view, the psychic essence is able transform into the spiritual essence.

Theodotus has provided us with a passage that can be found in almost every course book on gnosticism as a summation of what gnostic thinking is all about. It is not only baptism that liberates, but also the knowledge (gnōsis) of who we were; what we have become; where we were, or where we have fallen into; where we hasten to; from what we have been redeemed, what is birth; what is rebirth.

One central concept in Theodotus' teaching is to diapheron sperma, which he employs for Christians. The Greek term is a double entendre that means both the "superior seed" and the "separated seed." Theodotus probably played upon both meanings. On the one hand, the divine seed stems from the divine realm; hence its being "superior." On the other, the seed lives now in separation from the divine realm and must be reintergrated into it. The double view of to diapheron sperma becomes visible in Theodotus' interpretation of what it means that Jesus is the door (John 10:7, 9).

Therefore, when he says, "I am the door," he means that "you, who belong to the superior/separated seed (to diapheron sperma) will come to the boundary where I am." When he enters himself, also the seed, gathered and brought in by the door, enters with him to the pleroma.

According to Theodotus, the salvation of the divine seed is a crucial event also for Wisdom and the angels, for they can enter the divine realm only after the superior-but-detached-seed has been brought together. In the light of his excerpts, Theodotus was closer than any other Valentinian teacher mentioned above to the Valentinian body of thought described by Irenaeus. The Exegeta contain clear references to the divine pleroma inhabited by divine couples and presuppose

30 Clement, Exc. 78.2.
33 Clement, Exc. 35.
a tale of Wisdom that is very similar to that in Irenaeus.\textsuperscript{84} However, Theodotus parts company from Irenaeus’ Valentinians as regards the distinction between the spiritual and the psychic ones. Theodotus taught that there will be an eschatological marriage feast in which the spiritual and the psychic ones will be joined to each other and made equal to each other. After this reunion, the spiritual essence departs from the souls and enters the pleroma.\textsuperscript{85} The spiritual and the psychic are, thus, two separate groups before the marriage feast, but after it there will no longer be any difference between them. From the assembly of the two groups is, then, selected the spiritual essence (\textit{ta pneumatika})—not the spiritual ones (\textit{hoi pneumatikoi})—which attains the ultimate salvation. The distinction between “spiritual” and “psychic” was sustained by Theodotus, but it was not related to two different groups of persons, as in Irenaeus, but to two different essences.\textsuperscript{86}

Marcus is, in many respects, a special case in the history of Valentinianism.\textsuperscript{87} In light of Irenaeus’ account, Marcus’ teaching was very similar to the Valentinian body of thought, though he tinged it with speculation on letters and their numerical values.\textsuperscript{88} Irenaeus portrays Marcus as a magician who attracted men and women, particularly those belonging to upper classes.\textsuperscript{89} Irenaeus says that Marcus lured them with tricks performed with cups of wine and made his female adherents to prophesy. Irenaeus also claims that Marcus gathered a fortune from his rich female adherents, gave them love potions, and had sex with them.\textsuperscript{90} There was even an early lampoon of Marcus which Irenaeus quotes in his work.\textsuperscript{91}

Marcus, maker of idols, observer of portents,
Skilled in astrology and in all arts of magic,
Whereby you confirm your erroneous doctrines.

\textsuperscript{81} Clement, \textit{Ex.} 21; 32; 34; 35.1.

\textsuperscript{85} Clement, \textit{Ex.} 63.

\textsuperscript{86} Pagels, “Conflicting Versions,” 44–53.

\textsuperscript{87} For Marcus, see especially Nickas Forster, \textit{Marcus Magus: Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gauklergruppe: Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar} (WUNT 114; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

\textsuperscript{88} Irenaeus, \textit{Haer.} 1.14–16.

\textsuperscript{89} Irenaeus, \textit{Haer.} 1.13.3, mentioning women “who are well-dressed and clothed in purple and who are very rich.”

\textsuperscript{90} Irenaeus, \textit{Haer.} 1.13.3, 5. He also relates a special case of a deacon in Asia Minor whose beautiful wife “was delined in mind and body by this magician” (\textit{Haer.} 1.13.5).

\textsuperscript{91} Irenaeus, \textit{Haer.} 1.15.6 (trans. Unger and Dillon).
THE SCHOOL OF VALENTINUS

Showing wonders to whomever you lead into error,
Showing the works of the apostate Power,
Marvels which Satan, your father, teaches you always
To perform through the power angelic of Azazel,
Using you as the precursor of godless evil.

For the most part, Irenaeus’ information about Marcus seems to be nothing more than malevolent rumors. Nevertheless, Marcus and his followers occasioned some confusion in Christian communities of Asia Minor. One reason for the conflict with them was that women were able to assume a more active role in their meetings than in other Christian groups. Marcosians were also more clearly characterized by their distinct rituals than other Valentinians. Notably, Irenaeus did not call the Marcosians a school, like other Valentinians, but a cult society (θησαυρός). He also devoted much attention to describing the extraordinary practices of this group. Some Marcosians performed a deathbed ritual called “redemption” (απολύτρωσις). In it, the dying were anointed with oil, or a mixture of oil and water, and supplied with the answers they should give the powers and the demiurge and his assistants in the hereafter.

I am a child of Father, of preexistent Father. I am a child in the preexistent one. . . . I am returning to my own, whence I came. . . . I am a precious vase, more precious than the female who made you. . . . I know myself, and I know whence I am, and I call upon incorruptible Wisdom who is in Father and who is the Mother of your Mother who had no Father nor a male consort.

This invocation shows that the Valentinian tale of Wisdom was not only an artificial myth (Kaisenethus), but there were Valentinian groups in which the knowledge of this tale was considered necessary for salvation, and a special ritual practice was developed to achieve this salvation.

92 Cf. Förster, Marcus Magnus, 123–25.
93 This can be inferred from Irenaeus’ emphasis on Marcus teaching women to prophesy, and his account that Marcosians commanded “one another to prophesy”—most likely at their banquets where liturgical tasks were distributed by drawing lots in each meeting separately (Haer. 1.13.3–4). Cf. Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Vintage Books, 1989; orig. 1979), 40; Förster, Marcus Magnus, 130–3.1
94 Irenaeus, Haer. 1.13.4; cf. Förster, Marcus Magnus, 129.
95 Irenaeus, Haer. 1.21.5 (trans. Unger and Dillon, with modification). Irenaeus points out that not all Valentinians performed a ritual of redemption, and that, among those who did, it was practiced in different ways.
4. In Their Own Words: The Valentinian Texts of the Nag Hammadi Library

In the Nag Hammadi Library, there are eight texts that are usually classified as Valentinian:

- Prayer of the Apostle Paul (NHC I,1)
- Gospel of Truth (NHC I,3)
- Tripartite Tractate (NHC I,5)
- Treatise on the Resurrection (Letter to Rheginus, NHC I,4)
- Gospel of Philip (NHC II,3)
- (First) Apocalypse of James (NHC V,3)
- Interpretation of Knowledge (NHC XI,1)
- A Valentinian Exposition (NHC XI,2)

These texts have survived only in Coptic copies, but they were most likely originally composed in Greek; the author of the Gospel of Philip was also familiar with Syriac (see below). There are limitations as regards the historical value of these texts: their authors cannot be identified; no Valentinian teacher is mentioned in them by name; and they do not contain any accounts of historical events related to the school of Valentinus. An exact dating of these texts is not possible either. They could have been composed any time after 130 C.E. (the beginning of the school) and before 350 C.E. (the approximate date of the Nag Hammadi codices).

In spite of these restrictions, the Valentinian texts of the Nag Hammadi Library offer significant glimpses of Valentinian theology and moral exhortation.

The Gospel of Truth is an intriguing text in more than one respect. Irenaeus mentioned that a text with this name was circulated among Valentinians. The Gospel of Truth belonging to the Nag Hammadi Library does not bear a title as some other texts in this collection. The title has been given on the basis of the words found at the outset of this text: “The gospel of the truth is a joy for those who have received grace from the true Father.” It is possible, however, that

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96 Cf., e.g., Desjardins, Sin in Valentinianism, 6; Einar Thomassen, “Notes pour la délimitation d’un corpus valentinien à Nag Hammadi,” in Les Textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification (ed. Louis Fainchaud and Anne Pasquier; Bibliothèque copie de Nag Hammadi, Études 3; Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1995), 243-63. I will refer to the Nag Hammadi texts by giving their title and page numbers in the original codices.

97 Irenaeus, Hist. 3.11.9.

98 Cfr. Trad. 16.
the text was already known by this title in antiquity, when writings were often identified by their opening words. It has also been suggested that the Gospel of Truth was written by Valentinus himself, but this view has not unanimously been accepted by scholars.

The relationship of the Gospel of Truth to the Valentinian body of thought described by Irenaeus is not very close. Wisdom, the demiurge, and the three classes of humankind are not mentioned in it. The origin of the world is mentioned only in passing, but it is explained in a manner that runs parallel to Irenaeus' account: As the entirety searched for the Father in vain, ignorance emerged and caused "fear and anxiety," Anxiety then gave rise to error which worked at matter and created "a substitute for truth." The Gospel of Truth puts emphasis on the revelation Jesus brought to humankind. He enlightened those in forgetfulness and darkness, and brought "many back from error." Christ came to call "those whose names he knew in advance," and they possess the knowledge that makes them his followers. Christ's revelation is described with colorful metaphors and seasoned with allusions to the New Testament: "For when they saw and heard him, he let them taste and smell of himself and touch the beloved son, after he had appeared to tell them about the Father..." There are also references to the crucifixion: "He was nailed to a tree and became fruit of the knowledge of the Father." Jesus appeared, wrapped himself in that book of the living, was nailed to a piece of wood, and published the Father's edict upon the cross. O, such a great teaching! Nothing suggests that the author would have considered the sufficing of Christ to be ostensible or that someone else would have died on the cross instead of Christ.

Moreover, while Irenaeus complained that the Valentinians were morally indifferent, the author of the Gospel of Truth is occupied with moral exhortation:

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100 Gos. Truth 17.
101 Gos. Truth 18, 22.
103 Gos. Truth 30; cf. 1 John 1:1.
Speak...from the heart, for it is you that are the perfect day, and it is within you that there dwells the light that does not set. Speak of the truth with those who seek it, and of knowledge in the midst of their error. Make steady the feet of those who have stumbled, and stretch out your hands to those who are sick. Feed those who are hungry, and give repose unto those who are weary; and awaken those who wish to arise, and get up from your sleep.

The *Tripartite Tractate* is the largest exposition (about 80 pages) of Valentinian theology known to us. The title of this work stems from modern scholars and is based upon the fact that, in the Coptic manuscript, the text has already been divided into three different parts by means of dipses (>>>>>). The first part of the *Tripartite Tractate* (pp. 54–104) consists of a description of the Father, other eternal divine beings, and the cosmic household (*oikonomía*), to which also belongs the demiurge and his assistants. The second part offers only a brief account of the creation of humankind (pp. 104–8). The third part is again quite extensive. It introduces several focal points of Valentinian theology, such as views about the Savior, the tripartite division of humankind, and views about salvation (pp. 108–38).

One feature peculiar to the *Tripartite Tractate* is the idea that the confusion in the divine realm was occasioned not by Wisdom, but by Word (*Logos*). Like Wisdom in other Valentinian sources, Word is portrayed in this text as the real creator of the world who employed the demiurge as his "hand and mouth." Clearly different from other Valentinian texts is the characterization of the demiurge and his assistants by their "lust for power." The latter is, in fact, a central theme in the whole text. According to it, "lust for power" pervades the whole sensible world.

The Church is portrayed in the *Tripartite Tractate* as suffering from hatred and ill-will of those who have power. The Valentinian tripartite division of humankind is in this text related to the portrayal of the oppressed Church. Those who persecuted Christ and now persecute the Church are divided into the psychic and the material ones. Their difference is that the former can convert to Christianity, while the latter cannot. To which class a human being belongs becomes clear only when he or she encounters the Savior and either

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107 Tri. Trac. 101.

accepts or rejects him.\footnote{99} There is no different salvation for the spiritual and the psychic ones; they all will enter the pleroma.\footnote{100}

The \textit{Treatise on the Resurrection} offers instruction in the form of a letter; thus it reminds one of Ptolemy’s \textit{Letter to Flora}. The text is addressed to a certain Rheginus, who is otherwise unknown, and it deals with views about the resurrection. The resurrection of body is also discussed in the text, but it remains subject to debate whether it is accepted or denied in the text. There is a key passage that has been interpreted in opposing ways.\footnote{111}

Do not doubt resurrection, my child Rheginus. If you were not in flesh, you took on flesh, as you came into the world. Why will you not take on flesh, when you ascend to the eternal realm.

If the sentence “why will you not take on flesh” in this passage is a rhetorical question, the author simply wants to affirm that believers, as a matter of course, will receive a body of spiritual flesh at the resurrection.\footnote{112} The sentence can, however, be understood also as a question posed by an imaginary opponent created by the author. In that case, the author himself would argue \textit{against} the resurrection of the body.\footnote{113} What makes the latter interpretation difficult is that the Coptic text does not bear clear signs of introducing the opinion of an imaginary opponent at this point. We cannot be sure whether any clearer indications were available in the Greek original of this text.


\footnote{100} \textit{Trit. Trac.} 123; cf. Attridge and Pagels, \textit{“The Tripartite Tractate,”} 188-89.


\footnote{112} Peel, \textit{“The Treatise on the Resurrection,”} 142-43.

\footnote{113} Bentley Layton argued for this reading already in his \textit{The Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection from Nag Hammadi} (HDR 12; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979) and it underlies his interpretation of this text in \textit{The Gnostic Scriptures}, 316-24. Layton’s translation of the passage quoted above runs as follows: “Do not be doubtful about resurrection, my child Rheginus. Now (you might wrongly suppose), granted you did not preexist in flesh—indeed you took on flesh when you entered this world—why will you not take your flesh with you when you return to the realm of eternity.”
However that might be, the author of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* emphasizes the present aspect of salvation. The resurrection can be experienced already in this life: "If you have the resurrection but continue as if you are to die... why, then do I ignore your lack of exercise? It is fitting for each one to practice in a number of ways...". The passage shows, moreover, that Valentinian instruction was not only concerned with creating a body of thought but also with a certain lifestyle involving exercise and practice (*askēsis*). Unfortunately, there is no description of what kinds of exercises the author had in mind. There are a variety of possibilities. In ancient schools' thought, such exercises could have been either "physical, as in dietary regimes, or discursive, as in dialogue and meditation," or intuitive, as in contemplation...".

The *Gospel of Philip* is neither a narrative account of Jesus (like the gospels in the New Testament), nor a collection of his sayings (like the *Gospel of Thomas*). It is, rather, a collection of teachings stemming from Valentinian Christians and, possibly, from other early Christians. The title already appears in the manuscript, and it is most likely due to the fact that Philip is the only apostle mentioned by name in the text, otherwise he plays no role in it. The *Gospel of Philip* has no apparent thematic arrangement. Only in a few cases do extracts derived from various sources form larger units dealing with one and the same issue. In addition, the text contains teachings that seem contradictory. For example, the authority of the apostles is called upon in some passages, while in some other passages they are considered outsiders to real Christianity. Similarly, the text refutes those insisting upon the physical resurrection and affirms that the earthly body must be stripped off, but it also criticizes those claiming that the body of flesh will not be raised.

The *Gospel of Philip* bears witness to the Valentinian division between the superior and inferior Wisdom: "Echamon is one thing and Echmoth another. Echamon is Wisdom simply, but Echmoth is the

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116 *Gos. Phil.* 73.
117 E.g., *Gos. Phil.* 74.
118 *Gos. Phil.* 55.
119 *Gos. Phil.* 56-57, 66.
Wisdom of death which is the one which knows death, which is called ‘the little Wisdom.’ In this passage, however, Echamoth is identified with the superior Wisdom, while in Irenaeus the inferior Wisdom was called Achamoth. Both names are variants of the word הָלוֹהַמָּת (halēmah) employed for the figure of Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible. The name “Echamoth,” used for the inferior Wisdom in this passage means in targumic Aramaic and in Syriac “like death”; hence her identification with the “Wisdom of death.” There are also other passages in the Gospel of Philip offering explanations based upon Syriac terms. The text stems, thus, most likely from Syria.

The Gospel of Philip attributes the creation of the world to an inferior creator-God who made it “in error.” Nevertheless, like in some other Valentinian sources, it is affirmed in this text that the demiurge will be saved after all. However, neither Wisdom nor the demiurge play any prominent role in the Gospel of Philip. Far more central in it are interpretations of Genesis and selected New Testament passages as well as discussion on Christian sacraments.

Five sacraments are mentioned in the Gospel of Philip: baptism, anointing, the eucharist, redemption and the bridal chamber. They are collectively called “a mystery”, through which “the Lord did everything.” In addition, there is a reference to a holy kiss among the perfect. Baptism, anointing and the eucharist were common to most Christians, whereas the redemption and the bridal chamber seem more distinctly Valentinian rituals. Irenaeus describes different ways of how Valentinians performed the redemption. In addition to the Marcosian death-bed ritual that was already mentioned above, the redemption could be the bridal chamber ritual; baptism involving special Hebrew invocations and anointing; or anointing without baptism. Some Valentinians considered the bridal chamber a completely spiritual thing and did not perform any ritual connected to it.

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120 Gos. Phil. 60, trans. Isenberg.
121 Gos. Phil. 75.
122 Gos. Phil. 84; cf. Irenaeus, Ἡμερ. 1.7.1.
123 Gos. Phil. 67.
124 Gos. Phil. 58–59; 63–64.
125 The bridal chamber was not, however, confined to Valentinian groups; it is also mentioned in non-Valentinian texts (Dial. Scip. 138; Ἐκκ. Συμ. 132; Gos. Thom. 75; Ἱερ. Seth 57). Some of them may also refer to the practice of a bridal chamber ritual.
126 Irenaeus, Ἡμερ. 1.21.
The Gospel of Philip seems to presuppose the practice of the bridal chamber ritual, but there is no description of how it was performed. The text is more concerned with the spiritual interpretation of the bridal chamber. What happens in it is that the separation that took place at creation is removed: "...those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated. Thus Eve separated from Adam because it was not in the bridal chamber that she united with him." The division of humankind into two sexes is considered as a consequence of the fall, while Christ came to rectify its consequences. The unification of those who were separated from each other takes place in the bridal chamber; hence the identification of Christians as "the children of the bridal chamber".

Views about the bridal chamber in the Gospel of Philip are congruent with its emphasis on the present aspect of salvation. This emphasis becomes clearly visible in this text's teaching about the resurrection: "Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error. If they do not first receive the resurrection while they live, when they die they will receive nothing." Unlike the Gospel of Truth, the Gospel of Philip has a clearly docetic view of Christ: Jesus' cry on the cross (Mark 15:34 and parallels) is understood as bearing witness that the heavenly Christ left him before his death: "My God, my God, why O Lord, have you forsaken me?" It was on the cross that he (Jesus) said these words, for he (the Lord) had departed from that place.

The (First) Apocalypse of James is a revelation dialogue between Christ and James, whom Christ calls his brother, though affirming that they are not brothers "materially." The eastern provenance of this text is suggested by the fact that it mentions Adadai, who according to other sources brought Christianity to Edessa. The revelation described

127 Gos. Phil. 70, trans. Isenberg.
128 Gos. Phil. 70–71, 73.
129 Gos. Phil. 90, trans. Isenberg.
131 1 Apoc. Jas. 24.
in this text takes place on two separate occasions, first prior to the death of Jesus, and then after his resurrection. It is striking that the instruction connected to the Marcosian redemption ritual in Irenaeus appears in this text in a practically identical form, though the ritual itself is not mentioned in it. As in the Gospel of Philip, the Christology in the (First) Apocalypse of James is docetic: “Never have I suffered in any way, nor have I been distressed. And this people has done me no harm.”

Moral exhortation looms large in the Interpretation of Knowledge. Unfortunately, the manuscript of this text is poorly preserved: more than half of its contents is either completely missing or badly damaged. Nevertheless, the author of this text casts a situation in which a community is split into two parties, and urges the audience to reconciliation. The parties are engaged in a debate over charismatic gifts, and this has occasioned discord in the community. The author dissuades one part of the audience from being jealous of the gift God has provided to some members of the community: “...it is fitting for [each] of us to [enjoy] the gift that he has received from [God, and] that we not be jealous....” If someone has what the author calls “a prophetic gift”, others should share it without hesitation. On the other hand, the author addresses the other party of the debate, the spiritually advanced, as well, warning them against regarding lesser members as ignorant.

Like Paul in 1 Corinthians, the author of the Interpretation of Knowledge makes use of rhetorical traditions that were characteristic of Greco-Roman concord (homonoea) speeches. Their purpose was to put an end to factionalism in society. In them, thus, the city-state was

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133 1 Apoc. Jas. 33–35.
134 1 Apoc. Jas. 31.
135 Michel R. Desjardins, “The Interpretation of Knowledge: Introduction,” (unpublished manuscript), 13, offers the following calculation: the Coptic text of Int. Koinel. consisted originally of ca. 795 lines, of which 202 lines (25%) are now missing, and 153 lines (20%) are severely damaged. The critical edition of this text by John Turner contains a large number of restorations. Although they show the editor’s great erudition and command of the subject, they also may pull one into false confidence as to how much can really be known about the contents of the text.
137 Interp. Know. 15.
138 Interp. Know. 17.
139 For concord speeches, see Margaret M. Mitchell, Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians
"portrayed as a body, and strife, discord, or any civil disturbance as a disease that must be eradicated from it." The metaphor of a body is also used in the Interpretation of Knowledge:

Do not accuse your Head because it has not appointed you as an eye but rather as a finger. And do not [be] jealous of that which has been put in the class of an eye or a hand or a foot, but be thankful that you do not exist outside the body.

Like in some other early Christian texts, Christ is identified in this passage with the "head" of the body. The passage possibly recalls Paul's description of body parts squabbling with each other (1 Cor 12:14–26). The Interpretation of Knowledge is, however, closer than Paul to the benevolent patriarchalism inherent in concord speeches. The author of this text follows their usual habit of invoking "the body analogy...to solidify an unquestioned status hierarchy." Thus, it is pointed out that inferior members, like a finger, should not be jealous of more important members (eye, hand, foot). The former should be thankful that it may exist in the body. In light of the wider context of the Interpretation of Knowledge, the purpose of this description is to petrify a clear hierarchy in the community between those who have the prophetic gift and those who have not.

A Valentinian Exposition bears witness to a cosmogonical tale that is strikingly similar to the Valentinian system described in heresiological sources, especially in Hippolytus. It has been concluded that

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140 Martin, The Corinthian Body, 42.
141 Cf. Eph 1:22; 4:15–16; Col 1:18; 2:19; 1 Clem. 37.5; Ignatius, Troll. 11.2.
142 The relationship between the two passages is not especially close, however. The body members mentioned in them are only partially the same (Paul: foot/hand; ear/eye; eye/hand; head/foot; Interp. Know.: head, eye, finger, foot); Interp. Know. does not mention the "shameful parts" (1 Cor 12:23–24) at all; and there are no imaginary discussions between body parts in Interp. Know. 18, as there were in Paul.
144 Martin, The Corinthian Body, 94.
145 As Martin (The Corinthian Body, 94–95) has shown, Paul reverses the traditional usage of the body analogy in affirming the necessity of weaker members (1 Cor 12:22–25).
this text “may be placed in the milieu of one of the western, Italic traditions of Valentinian theology.” The badly damaged text begins with an account of how the divine realm originated, and then moves on to a tale of Wisdom being dispelled outside the pleroma, and of the demiuget who made a human being “according to his image on the one hand and on the other according to the likeness of those who exist from the first.” In addition, the text contains previously unattested Valentinian interpretations of Genesis, including references to Abel and Cain (Gen 4:1–16), the fallen angels (Gen 6:1–6), and the flood (Gen 6:5–8:22). A Valentinian Exposition is followed by five supplements which most likely are excerpts from Valentinian sacramental instruction (On Anointing; On Baptism A; On Baptism B; On the Eucharist A; On the Eucharist B).

5. A School of Thought

Since Irenaeus portrayed Valentinians as a school, it seems likely that this group had some resemblance to ancient schools of thought. The school terminology also appears in some Valentinian texts. The Gospel of Truth describes how Christ appeared “in schools (mna 

chô)” and “spoke the word as a teacher (eioi nousak).” In the Interpretation of Knowledge, Christ is called the “teacher of immortality.” As such, he is opposed to the figure of “the arrogant teacher.” While Christ represents a “living school,” the school of the arrogant teacher is confined to the interpretation of writings that only “taught about our death.” Moreover, Valentinians placed emphasis on education in their theology. They considered the world a place of instruction that needs to be visited by those coming from above. A human being is made “a dwelling place... for the seeds” and “a school... for doctrine and for form.”

151 Pagels, Val. Exp. 38.
152 Gos. Truth 19.
153 Interp. Know. 9.
154 For Valentinian emphasis on education, see also Irenaeus, Haer. 1.6.1; Heracleon, Elog. 36 (Origen, Comm. Jo. 13.50); Tri. Tract. 104; Holger Strutwolf, Gnosis als System: Zur Rezeption der valentinischen Gnosis bei Origenes (FKD, 56; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 256.
No information has survived on how the school of Valentinus was organized or whether they owned special buildings or rooms for giving instruction. It seems likely that teachers belonging to this school were active in house churches in Rome and other big cities. That Valentinian teachers had a relatively high level of education can be seen, for example, in Valentinus’ poetry, Ptolemy’s knowledge of rhetoric, and Heracleon’s familiarity with the rules of textual interpretation. These qualities were likely to make Valentinian teachers attractive to the educated members of early Christian communities.

In antiquity, education and wealth usually went together. Therefore, it can be also assumed that the educated early Christians were also the wealthy ones who could afford private houses and opened them for the meetings of Christians. The organizational structure of the early house churches was based upon “extended family structures of the Greco-Roman households.”\(^{155}\) The host who invited Christian meetings to his or her house also “assumed major leadership responsibilities,” including the recruitment and sustenance of visiting teachers.\(^{156}\) In consequence, the teachers’ success was largely dependent on the impression they were able to make on the hosts. Teachers who were able to demonstrate good education and creative insights were better off in this situation than their less educated competitors.

Ancient schools differed from each other as to how binding they considered traditions stemming from founders or other early teachers of their schools. Valentinian teachers seem to have belonged to those who tolerated different opinions. While Valentinus made use of traditions attested in Sethian texts in addition to Platonic and distinctly Christian ones, Ptolemy accepted to some degree the radical teaching of Marcion. Moreover, Valentinians were ready to discuss their opinions not only among themselves, but also with outsiders. Although Irenaeus claims that Valentinians revealed their real teachings only to the initiated, he also says that he was able to talk with them about their views and had access to their books as well.

On the other hand, as Ptolemy’s *Letter to Flora* indicated, Valentinians distinguished between beginners’ instruction and the more advanced


\(^{156}\) Lane, “Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity,” 211–12.
teaching. A similar distinction is also indicated in the Gospel of Philip: “the disciple of God... will look at the condition of the soul of each one and speak with him.... To the slaves he will give only the elementary lessons, to the children he will give the complete instruction.”

The idea of two or more levels of instruction was not unusual in ancient schools of thought. Examples can be derived from Origen, Plotinus, Jewish rabbis, and Hermetic writings to the effect that esoteric teaching was often part of advanced philosophical and religious education. The advanced teaching of Valentinians was not, however, necessarily due to their wish to present themselves as mysterious, as Irenaeus insinuates. It may be that they simply thought that some questions could be dealt with only by those having a sufficient education.

6. What Happened to the Valentinians?

In Rome, it seems that Valentinians were able to continue teaching for a long time without any disruption in Christian communities. House churches were independent units, and they did not usually pronounce judgments on the views of other early Christian groups. Justin’s attack against the Valentinians and other dissidents seems an exception that proves the rule. There is no evidence that Valentinus or any other Valentinian teacher was excommunicated in Rome in the second century. Even Irenaeus’ attack against the Valentinians did not change the situation immediately. Victor, Bishop of Rome (189–199), still had a Valentinian presbyter called Florinus as his assistant.

While some Valentinian Christians remained within the ordinary Christian church, others began to drift apart from it at the turn of the third century. The followers of Marcus differed from other Christians more clearly than Valentinians in general. One sign of their greater distance to other Christians was that Marcosians who

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137 Gos. Phil. 81, trans. Isenberg.
138 For evidence, see Dunderberg, “Valentinian Teachers in Rome,” 166–68.
140 Irenaeus had to urge Victor to read Florinus’ writings and to get rid of them (Frag. syr. 28). For Florinus, see also Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 5.20.4; Lampe, From Paul to Valentinus, 389–90.
decided to return to the ordinary Christian community were subjected to public confession in the latter. This practice indicates a clear barrier drawn between Marciosians and other Christians. In reality, however, even this boundary was less fixed. As Irenaeus mentions, “some of the most faithful women, who have the fear of God and could not be deceived,” had visited meetings led by Marcus. Irenaeus also complains that there are some who “waver between both courses,” being “neither outside nor inside.” It was only later, at the turn of the third century, that Marciosians clearly formed a church of their own. This development can be seen in Hippolytus who says that Marciosians had their own bishop who performed the redemption.

The situation of Valentinians and other dissident Christians worsened dramatically at the beginning of the fourth century, as Constantine the Great made Christianity the privileged religion in the Roman empire. From this point on, the orthodox Christians could lean on authority and the financial support of emperors in their battle against heretics, to whom Valentinians were included. Constantine’s laws from 326 prohibited heretics from owning properties used for common meetings.

While restrictions on their ownership were not always followed, heretics became outlaws in the Roman empire. Their meetings were forbidden in the laws of Theodosius. Books written by the heretics were censored, which explains the fact that Valentinian writings have survived only under special circumstances. In addition, emperors tolerated orthodox hooliganism. This can be seen well in the correspondence between Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and the emperor Theodosius I from 388 C.E. As Christians had burned down a Jewish synagogue, the emperor had ruled that its rebuilding should be paid for by the Church. Ambrose wrote a letter of complaint to the emperor in which he also mentions Valentinians, whose church furious monks had burned down earlier. If Christians should pay for the

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64 Cf. Förster, Marcus Magnus, 402.
65 Irenaeus, Haer. 1.13.4.
66 Irenaeus, Haer. 1.13.7.
67 Hippolytus, Ref. 6.41.4–5; cf. Förster, Marcus Magnus, 155.
69 The Valentinian church is often located in Callinicum on the basis of Ambrose’s
rebuilding of the synagogue, Ambrose argues, they should also pay for the rebuilding of the Valentinian church. The latter is, however, out of question, for it is impossible for the Church to support heretics. Hence Ambrose’s conclusion: the Church should not be burdened with the rebuilding of the destroyed synagogue either. Ambrose’s argument proved effective: Theodosius took back his decision and freed the church from reimbursement for the burned synagogue. 167

Although hooliganism by orthodox Christians was now allowed, Valentinians held out surprisingly long. New stipulations against them were still made in the canons of the second synod of Trulla, held in 692 C.E. 168 It seems likely that, even at this late stage, there were still some Valentinians against whom such regulations were considered necessary. After this date, all traces of them disappear.

Bibliography


letter. He mentions, however, only that the burned synagogue was there; where the Valentinian church was is not stated in the letter.


168 Koschorke, “Patriotische Materialien,” 125.


