

d. Salvation

Salvation is extremely limited and available only to those who are able to receive the true Gnosis...the full spiritual enlightenment, the secret teaching imparted by the Gnostic teachers to their immediate disciples who have passed it on to other men. Salvation is chiefly the release from the persistence of evil and the prevalency of matter...but not just a "death release" but an "absorbition release." If you get the true gnosis you can get there before you die!

e. Matter

Matter is relatively unreal, shadowy, and persistently evil. The visible world and our human flesh are both evil and this is where the metaphysical dualism is best seen. How matter is treated to make it of less effect and thereby diminished in hampering our comprehension of the true gnosis is interesting:

(1) deny it absolutely (extreme asceticism)

(2) give in completely (total indulgence)

Either of these will effectively in time curb the influence of matter. In the case of the second we must be sure of our motivation--obviously.

f. Christian Gnostics

Contradictory terms, to be sure, but some believers (or supposed believers) by-passed a-b on our scheme and thought of a superior knowledge which, in addition to that of Christ, allowed one to be led into a fuller comprehension of God. They tended to rely on Paul (although everything I know of is his writing would go against their ideas) and worked with such texts as 1 Cor. 2:6. The Lord generally had a non-real body and "salvation" was a matter of belief and self-denial. A very confused opinion...its intrusion may have occasioned some of the Johannine literature. Simon Magus was regarded as being the founder of this sort of body and the gnostic writers you are most likely to meet in your study are Valentinus of Rome (150 ca) and Basileides of Alexandria (130 ca). The church fathers Irenaeus and Martyr both wrote extensively against gnosticism and Book VII of Hippolytus: Refutation of All Heresies deals extensively with the matter.

To sharpen your general understanding you may wish to consult Kelly: Early Christian Doctrines, p. 27.(second edition).

4. Varied Syncretisms

A syncretism is a weaving of strands from varied background to make one product. It usually has a corrupted view of all its sources and the end product is not faithful to any one part of the tradition. Syncretisms are bound to occur as persons try to identify with one another and compromise ideals and issues.