

--Hierocles of Bithynia: The last of the neo-platonists as they concern us, he was the author of a work entitled: TRUTH LOVING WORDS FOR CHRISTIANS, and that was designed to show Jesus as a magician. It had a good following in its day and was a precursor to much of the Christ-ridiculing volumes that have followed.

III.2.c  
(continued)

Rival Religious Systems

Mani

Mani, d. 277 or thereabouts, took some of the mystery ideas from Persia and interwove them with some concepts of Judaism and Christianity. In his system one will see materials representative of just about everything from Buddha to Zoroaster. The ideal was ascetic on a more legally developed line than that which was seen in gnosticism. The main idea was that man was trapped in an evil prison. Salvation is based on the knowledge of man's bondage. It concentrates on a flight from darkness to light through ritual asceticism and abnegation of the dungeon. The more one understands one's bondage, the more one repudiates it, the more likely one is to flee the dark in successful escape. The bondage is caused by physical limitation and the escape from this is perceived mystically and ascetically.

Austerity and asceticism are the chief means of deliverance, therefore. Those who can comply fully with the methods set forth by Mani are the "perfect" and those who can only listen and not perform because they lack the will power to do all that is asked, are called "hearers". There is not much hope for them and they are always a considerable number. Mani suffered a martyr's death for his convictions (flayed alive) and his ideas will later be seen in some of the Albigensian (Cathari) movements of the middle ages.

If one should wonder why the authorities would object to asceticism, etc., it is somewhat due to the fact that those who propounded it often sought to enforce it. This will be seen in the later middle ages when monks who had supposedly given themselves to poverty would burn and ravage the monasteries of monks who did not seem to have the poverty image. The ascetic is not dangerous when he lives in a cave in the desert.. he may be dangerous when he lives in a cave next to you and denounces the sort of people who live in houses. Witness the "naturalist" movements of more recent years as an illustration of such things.