

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

## Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

---

Bachelor of Divinity

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

---

4-15-1939

### The Gnosticism Opposed and Condemed in the New Testament

Erwin Lueker

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir\_luekere@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Lueker, Erwin, "The Gnosticism Opposed and Condemed in the New Testament" (1939). *Bachelor of Divinity*. 34.

<https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv/34>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bachelor of Divinity by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

THE GNOSTICISM OPPOSED AND CONDEMNED  
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT  
A Thesis presented to the  
Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

by  
Erwin L. <sup>Louis</sup> Lueker 1914-

Concordia Seminary

April 15, 1939

Approved by

---

*P. E. Krupmann.*



## CONTENTS

Introduction	1
I. The Gnostics Opposed and Con- demned by Paul	7
1. The Heresy at Colosse	7
2. Origin of the Colossian Heresy	25
3. The Gnosticism Opposed in the Letter to the Ephesians	42
II. The Gnostics of the Pastoral Letters	44
III. The Libertine Gnostics Opposed in Peter, Jude, and Revelation	52
1. The Gnosticism in II Peter	52
2. The Gnosticism Opposed in Jude	55
3. The Nicolaitanes Opposed in Revelation	58
IV. The Gerinthian Gnosticism Opposed by John	62
Appendices	
I. Simon Magus	70
II. Notes on Essenes	74
III. The Relation of New Testament Gnostics to Later Gnosticism	81



## INTRODUCTION

The first century of the Christian era has often been described as an irreligious age.\* It is true that the national gods were being gradually discarded. The disruption of nationalities, the increased intercourse of peoples with one another, and other related conditions had rudely shaken the old fabrics of mythological religion.\*\* When nationalism disappeared, and the highest honor to which a person could aspire was to become a citizen of the Roman Empire, it is but natural that the national gods must be relinquished. Thus the very foundations of the religious life of the people of the age were removed.

Though their gods were removed, and their religions shattered, still the people at the time of Christ were not indifferent to religious matters. They were vitally concerned over matters of life and death. Fisher gives us a glimpse of the souls of the people with the words:

The broken bonds of morality, the prevalence of vice, not to dwell on the remorse and fears of conscience ... could not fail to awaken in many a sense of the need of a more effectual restraint than heathen worship, or Greek letters and philosophy, or Roman civil law could furnish. There was a craving, more or less obscurely felt, for new regenerating force that should enter with life-giving efficacy into the heart of ancient society. The age was ripe and ready for the incoming of such an epoch. "In the fullness of the time, God sent forth His Son". \*\*\*

This quotation well describes the restlessness of the age into which the Gospel came. The unnamed seekers of truth were legion. The world had literally "lost its nerve".\*\*\*\*

\* Jones: *The Church's Debt to Heretics*, 15.

\*\* Fisher: *History of Christian Doctrine*, 29

\*\*\* Op. cit., 22

\*\*\*\* Jones: Op. cit., 28



As a result, there existed an all pervading drift toward syncretism. The disposition to amalgamate mythology with philosophy was evident. The West showed a strange fascination for the mysterious aspects of oriental religions, and there were periodic "invasions" of the West by the religions of the East. Especially were the people of the West interested in the mystery religions and the cults that offered salvation for the individual souls. "This disposition to draw in the religious systems of the Orient created a ferment everywhere." \*

The condition of the common man under such circumstances presents a picture of bewilderment. We have little evidence of the common people prior to the writings of Paul. They, evidently, readily succumbed to those who offered them a gnosis which laid claim to a deeper insight, or knowledge, of divine truths than was open to the common believer. Hence, as soon as writers give us a view into the religious life of the age, we get a glimpse of such a complex of religious views as was seldom seen in other ages. \*\*

The Jews were also drawn into these syncretistic movements. For many years they had been in increasingly close contact with both the Orient and the Occident. Lietzmann gives us the following statistics on the Jews\*\*\*: Seven percent of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire were Jews. In Egypt and Syria there may well have been over a

---

\* Fisher: Op. cit., 52. \*\* Iren. I, XXIX: "Gnostics have sprung up, and have been manifested like mushrooms growing out of the ground." Compare also Jones, op. cit., 28.

\*\*\* The Beginnings of the Christian Church, 97



million Jews. In Palestine there were 500, 000, in the rest of the Roman Empire at least 1, 500, 000. The Jews were thickly settled in the East, which is often pointed to as the source of Gnostic speculations. \*

Furthermore, the Jews were in a favorable position for the dissemination of religious views. Year by year they gathered from the various parts of the Diaspora in order to celebrate their feasts at Jerusalem.\*\* Year by year, as the Jews streamed to the Temple, false views were also carried into the land of Palestine. This fact is revealed by the many condemnations of heresies in Jewish writings.\*\*\*

\* Hans Jonas: Gnosis und Spaentaniker Geist, 75: "Nur dasz die ganze Bewegung vom Osten her vordringt, dasz allgemein von einer Orientalisierung der damaligen Welt zu sprechen ist und dasz alle Anzeichen nach Vorder-Asien weisen, wird immer deutlicher."

\*\* Harnack: The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, 23: "Jews thickly massed in Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Media.... Their number were greatest in Syria, next to that in Egypt, Rome and the Provinces of Asia Minor. The extent to which they had made their way into all the local conditions is made particularly clear by the evidence bearing on the sphere last named, where, as on the coast of the Black Sea, Judaism also played some part in the blending of religions."

\*\* A graphic description of such a gathering of Jewish Pilgrims at the Passover is given by Edersheim: The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, ii, 488.

\*\*\* More, History of Religions, 24: "The picture which Jeremiah and Ezekiel draw of the political, social, and religious decadence is darker than ever. In desperation men turned for refuge to foreign gods; idolatrous mysteries were practised in secret in the chambers of the temple."

More, Judaism, i, 452: "There are various fantasies in the Midrash.... One, repeated in several places, attributes to him (Adam) enormous dimensions.... Of greater interest is the notion that man was created androgynous, because it is probably a bit of foreign lore adapted to the first pair in Genesis."



A strange incident of Jewish syncretism has been brought to our attention in the following words of Lietzmann:

The cult of Sabazius, which originated in Phrygia and Lydia, introduced many elements into the mysteries of Dionysos. The kistophoric coinage bears witness, among other matters, to this fact. But its greatest significance is in its connection with Judaism in Asia Minor which equated Sabazius Dionysus with Jahweh Sabaoth. This identification was in the imperial epoch, for Plutarch uses it as the basis for explaining to his readers the meaning of the Sabbath. In the period of the earliest empire, a college of the "Sabbathists" with a "President of the Synagogue" is noted on an inscription on a wall of rock in the neighborhood of Elaeussa in Cilicia. We are probably justified in claiming this as a witness of some such mixture of Jewish with Sabazic elements. \*

The date of many other mythological elements in Judaism cannot be determined because they were handed down through esoteric channels, only to come to light in the Middle Ages. But from such works as the Book of Enoch we have some clues of early mythology.\*\*

But how about the common people, of whom we have few records? No source informs us of the common man, who, equally removed from scribism and other fanatical leaders, strove well or ill to fulfill the moral requirements of God. That the common people leaned toward the teachings of the East, especially its dualism, is plainly shown by the writings of the Jewish leaders. Of this tendency More says: "That such dualism had found entrance into certain circles is evident from the frequent mention of the

---

\* Lietzmann: The Beginnings of the Christian Church, 212.

\*\* Lietzmann (Op. Cit.) says that the Book of Enoch was written from the time of the Seleucids to that of Herod. "The entire eastern fairy world supplies building stones to the earth and heaven, which are erected before our eyes, and the paths...lead from this product of Palestine to Persia and Babylon." Pg. 44.



heresy of 'Two Powers'; but the religious leaders never fail to condemn it as incompatible with the corner-stone of Judaism." \* So among the Jews we have discovered the tendency toward syncretism and dualism, the latter being the basis of Gnosticism. \*\*

For no doubt the great appeal in Gnosticism "lay in its dualism which offered a solution, theoretical and practical, to the problem of evil". \*\*\* "If we enquire what principles underlie all Gnostic systems we shall find a sufficient answer in a single sentence of Eusebius in which he speaks of the question much discussed among the heretics, 'Whence comes evil?' " \*\*\*\* From this fundamental principle of Gnosticism the other tenets are derived. We may list them as follows:

1. A higher knowledge than is possessed by ordinary men is necessarily required to apprehend that which is supersensuous.
2. If the material of the world is essentially evil, it cannot be the creation of the supreme God.
3. Since creation is not of God, then it is of a lower

---

\* More: Judaism, 502. Another interesting quotation from the same author is found on page 364: "If the leaders of Palestinian Jewry had little fear of actual lapse into polytheism and idolatry, they had a greater concern about a defection from strict monotheistic principles of a different kind, the currency of the belief that there were two authorities. The references to this error do not define it. A theory of two authorities might be entertained by thinkers who held that God was the author of good only, and that for the evil in the world another cause must be assumed (Philo: *Quod omnis probus liber* c. 12, 84 assigns this error to the Essenes); or by such as in their thinking so exalted God and assigned the world to an inferior intermediate power as demiurge."

\*\*Fisher: *Op. cit.* 52: "Gnosticism may be defined as an eclectic philosophy in which Jewish, heathen, and Christian elements commingled."

\*\*\* Streeter: *The Primitive Church*, 8

\*\*\*\* Foakes-Jackson: *History of the Christian Church*, 127.



being, and angel worship was introduced.

4. If matter is evil, then the doctrine of the Incarnation cannot be admitted.

5. If matter is evil, then the body is also evil. This led either to asceticism or libertinism.

6. If the body is materially evil, then there is no resurrection of the body.\*

Christianity met Gnosticism in the latter's incipient stages. This fact is becoming more apparent every day.

In den Jahrhunderten um die Zeitenwende erwuchs in den Gebieten des Mittelmeeres bis tief nach Asien hinein ein neues Weltgefuehl- soviel wir sehen in spontaner Gleichzeitigkeit auf weitem Raume- mit ungeheurer Macht und aller Verworrenheit des Anganges hervorbrechend und naturgemaesz nach eigenem Ausdruck ringend.\*\*

To trace this movement through its various channels to its original antecedents is impossible because of the syncretistic tendencies of the times. We only know that it entered the West out of the East.\*\*\*

It is our purpose in this thesis to trace the movement in the form in which it is opposed and condemned in the New Testament, and, if possible, find external information on these movements. Although many of the passages which condemn false teachers may have been written against gnostics, we shall deal only with those in which gnostic tendencies are revealed.

\* More: History of Religions, 55: "From the fifth century on the Jews were in increasingly close contact with three peoples who had much more definite ideas about the hereafter, the Egyptians, the Persians, and the Greeks"

Op. cit., 57: It is instructive to compare 2 Maccabees, in which the resurrection is the sustaining hope of the martyrs, with 4 Maccabees, which uses the martyr stories...but effaces every mention of a resurrection...substituting the immortality of the soul"

\*\*Jonas: Gnosis u. Spaentaniker Geist, 1,74. \*\*\*Op. cit.,77



# I. THE Gnostics OPPOSED AND CONDEMNED BY PAUL

## 1. THE HERESY AT COLOSSE

In the Lycus valley, one hundred miles east of Ephesus, three cities were located: Hierapolis, Laodicea, and Colosse. Xenophon had called Colosse a large and prosperous city. But when the Church was gaining a foothold in the heathen world, it was no longer large. \* Hayes describes the city as a small village, in fact the least of the cities to which Paul addressed letters.\*\* The congregation there, founded by Epaphras, consisted chiefly of Gentiles.

About the year 54, Paul found it necessary to write a letter to the congregation there. Epaphras had come to Paul in prison, and told him of a strange new sect that was troubling the church at Colosse. Paul then wrote the \* Epistle to the Colossians to refute this new movement that had caused Epaphras so much concern.\*

We notice immediately that these false teachers were Jews. In Col. 2, 16 Paul warns the Christians against the attempts to bring them under the Ceremonial Law: "Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of sabbath days."

The eating of certain kinds of meat was forbidden in the Ceremonial Law. \*\*\* In the New Testament times, this law was strictly observed by the Jews. So we find that

---

\* All Isagogical material found in this thesis is taken from Dr. Arndt's classroom lectures, 1936-1937, unless otherwise stated.

\*\* Paul and His Epistles, 354

\*\*\* Gen. 9, 4; Lev. 11, 4; 22, 8; Deut. 14, 3.10; Jud. 13, 4. 14.



that Peter still felt bound by the Ceremonial Law until his eyes were opened in a vision. \* The Babylonian Jews were content to make a meal without any meat. With the Palestinian Jews, however, the favorite dish was young meat: goats, lambs, or calves. \*\*

The Old Testament had laid down no definite laws forbidding drinks.\*\*\* So here we are evidently dealing with a movement that leaned toward the Ceremonial Law of Moses, but at the same time went beyond it. In regard to the Sabbath, the Rabbinic Law went far beyond the Old Testament. \*\*\*\* The "new moon" and the "holy days" are also included in the ceremonial laws of the Jews. <sup>(5)</sup>

Furthermore, we note that spiritual circumcision is stressed over against the physical circumcision. <sup>(6)</sup> The false teachers evidently attempted to persuade the Christians at Colosse to be circumcized. Paul refutes this error by pointing out that the Christians are complete (πεπληρωμένοι) in Christ. For in Christ they were circumcized with the circumcision not made with hands, when, through faith in the atonement of the Savior, they were cut off from their sins. While the Christians were dead in trespasses and sins, separated from Christ and God by their spiritual un-<sup>(7)</sup>circumcision, Jesus brought them life by forgiving their sins. <sup>(8)</sup> The Christians are no longer in bondage to the Law.

\* Acts 10, 14f.

\*\* Edersheim: L. and T. of J. the M. , ii, 206

\*\*\*Except in the case of the Nazarites. Drunkenness also of course forbidden.

\*\*\*\* Edersheim: Op. cit., ii, 56ff. 5. Num. 10,10 et.al.

6. 2, 10-14

7. Cf. the uncircumcision of Acts 7, 51

8. Parallels for spiritual circumcision: Deut. 10, 16; 30, 6; Jer. 4, 4; Rom. 2, 29; et. al.



In verse fourteen of the second chapter, Paul is also evidently opposing a Judaistic use of the Law.

These examples will show that the false teachers described in this letter were Jews. \* But to say that Paul is rejecting merely Judaistic teachings in this letter leaves a large part of the false teachings unexplained. For beside the Jewish tendencies of the false teachers, we also find a strange new teaching, which is not mentioned in the earlier Epistle to the Galatians, where pure Judaism is opposed. In this letter, as we shall note, we have definite Gnostic elements.

Did Paul, then, have two sects in mind when he wrote this letter? This is possible, since the world at that time was full of many divergent religions and teachings.\*\* But, with Lightfoot, \*\*\* we must take our stand against the two-heresy view for the following reasons:

1. Nothing in the Epistle to the Colossians itself would lead us to accept that Paul has more than one heresy in mind.

2. It is always unwise to multiply the number of opponents without due reasons. \*\*\*\*

3. The structure of Colossians ii, forces us to accept the view that only one type of heresy is condemned. For in verse eight the world philosophies and speculations of the false teachers are condemned. Following that sec-

---

\* The supposition that heathen would advance all of these teachings is untenable.

\*\* See page 1ff.

\*\*\* Lightfoot: Colossians and Philemon, 86ff.

\*\*\*\* A more complete discussion of these two points may be found in Lightfoot, op. cit. pg. 86ff.



tion we have a warning against the carnal circumcision of the Jews. In verse sixteen we have warnings against Jewish tendencies, together with a warning against those who forbid drinks. \* Following that we have more pointed warnings against asceticism, etc. So the Jewish elements are so closely combined with the Gnostic elements that it would lead to a hopeless splitting of the text, if we would try to separate the two.

4. The circumstances under which the Epistle was written points to the fact that one heresy is condemned. Epaphras is confronted with a heresy that is making inroads into the church. He goes to see Paul, and the latter writes a letter to the Colossians. \*\* In substantiation of this view Zahn says:

Vielleicht war es nur ein einziger Mann von einiger Bedeutung von welchem die ganze Bewegung ausging, die dem Epaphras so schwere Sorge machte und den Pl bewog an die Gemeinde von Kol diesen Brief zu richten, waehrend er gleichzeitig an den groeszeren Kreis zu welchem diese Gemeinde gehoerte ein Rundschreiben von allgemeinerer Haltung absandte.\*\*\*

But now, are we able to establish the Gnostic tendencies of these teachers? The evidence given in the letter is very fragmentary. Evidently the Apostle Paul does not give the false teachers more publicity than is necessary to impress sound teaching on the minds of his readers.\*\*\*\* However, by a careful study of this letter, we may draw the following conclusions with regard to the false teachers:

\* The prohibition of meat may also go beyond the Jewish Law.

\*\* Kretzmann: Popular Commentary, ii, 317

\*\*\* Zahn: Einleitung in das Neue Test., i, 335

\*\*\*\* Compare the writings of John against Cerinthus.



These false teachers came with a show of wisdom. \* They came with a show of wisdom which Paul refutes in one comprehensive statement: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ". \*\* This is the only passage in the New Testament where the word *φιλοσοφία* occurs. Paul may have taken it from the false teachers themselves. This philosophy is only a *κενὴς δόξης*, a vain deceit. While it promises much, still it only leads to dissatisfaction and strife. Paul also points out that it was handed over by men, from human sources. Far from being a divine revelation, the philosophy was handed down by generation after generation of false teachers.\*\*\* Furthermore, it is according to the *στοιχεῖα* of the world. The word *στοιχεῖα* comes from *στοῖχος* which means "row", "rank", or "series". From these primary meanings it came to be used for the alphabet, not the written characters, but the characters pronounced. Then the word designated the elements from which all things have come, the heavenly bodies, and also the fundamental principles of any art, science, or discipline. \*\*\*\* So St. Paul tells his readers that the new philosophy was after all only based on the "A B C's" of the world, of human speculation. Considering the show of wisdom which these men displayed, we can appreciate this condemnation. But the greatest condemnation of all consisted in the fact that this philosophy

\*Kretzmann, Op. cit., N.T., ii, 317

\*\* Col. 2, 8

\*\*\* Princeton Theological Review, 16, 567.

\*\*\*\* Thayer: Greek-English Lexicon



was not of Christ. \*

This warning of Paul was necessary, because the danger was ever present, that some would be deceived by the false reasoning (*πιθαρολογία*) of these false teachers.\*\* For they came to the people with persuading words (*πειθούς λόγος*), words so framed with probable arguments as to lead the people astray to their hurt. Indeed, when their arguments are studied, they have in them a show of wisdom. This evidently points to the fact that their logical schemes were perfectly built, and appealed to the human mind, as all work-righteous religions will. \*\*\*

It provided a fruitful field for speculation in the occult, which has always held a fascination for the mind of man. It seemed to provide answers to two of the most persistent and vexing questions man has ever sought to answer, the mystery of creation and the presence of evil in the world. And then finally, it provided a way of salvation by which man could achieve his own redemption. \*\*\*\*

In the end, however, it is only what Luther calls "selbsterwählte Geistlichkeit" (*ἑθελοθρησκία* <sup>(5)</sup>), a worship which they inflicted on themselves.

Paul deals with this false philosophy in order, first, the nature of this false philosophy (ii, 8), its worthlessness to the Christian (ii, 9-15), and finally its consequent rejection (ii, 16-23).

\* Cf. Gal. 3, 10 and parallels.

\*\* Col. 2, 4

\*\*\* 2 Cor. 2, 14

\*\*\*\* J.A.L.O. I, 7, 34

5. Lenski: Commentary on Colossians, 147. The other possible interpretation, namely, worshipping their will, makes no difference in the meaning.



So far we have considered the negative statements of Paul. But we may also make inferences from his positive statements.

a. From the frequent emphasis that Paul places upon the wisdom of the Gospel, we may conclude that these teachers came with a show of a superior knowledge.\*

b. Their wisdom was naturally restricted to the few. Those who followed their special teachings considered themselves of higher standing than the ordinary Christians.\*\*

Against this false view Paul proclaims the universality of the religion of Christ:

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.\*\*\*

c. These false teachers evidently stressed the fact that more must be added to the preaching of the Gospel. It was not complete in itself, but additional work must be added. The Christian must separate himself from the material world.

In opposition to this view, Paul stresses the fullness of the Gospel. In 1,9, he tells the Christian that he prayed in order that they might be filled with all wisdom. In 3,16, he stresses the fact that the Word of Christ should dwell in them "in all wisdom".

---

\* σοφία : 1,9.28; 2,3; 3,16; 4,5. συνέως : 1,9.  
 2,2. γνῶσις : 2,3. ἐπιγνώσις : 1,9.10; 2,2; 3,10.  
 See also: 2,4.8.

\*\*Zahn: Einleitung in das Neue Test., ii,331.

\*\*\* 1, 27-29



d. Did the false teachers come with a show of mystery? Paul opposes to it the *μυστήριον* of the Gospel, that mystery which was not known to natural man, which was hidden from ages to ages, but now is being proclaimed to all the world ( 1, 26). He tells his readers that he had been in great conflict in order that they might know "all the riches of the full assurance of understanding , to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God (2, 2). And again in 4, 3 he says: "to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I also am in bonds ".

So we here have the first mark of Gnosticism. In the introduction we observed that the tenets of Gnosticism flowed from dualism. Since matter is inherently evil, a higher knowledge that that possessed by ordinary men is necessarily required to apprehend that which is super-sensuous.

2. But let us now discuss the fifth principle which we enumerated in the introduction: If matter is essentially evil, then the body must also be evil. \*

The false view of the disturbing element is that matter is evil, and hence it must be avoided. In 2, 21 , this is plainly expressed. "Erst durch Askese, so werden sie gelehrt haben, gewinne der Christ die erforderliche Unabhengigkeit des geistigen Lebens von der Materie und den in dieser waltenden Kraeften." \*\* The disturbing teachers seem to have taught that all connections with the material world must be severed. \*\*\*

---

\* For a fuller discussion of the origin of dualism see: Bousset; Hauptprobleme der Gnosis, 106 ff.

\*\* Zahn, Einleitung in d. N.T., 1, 331

\*\*\* Fisher; Op. Cit. , 52ff.



In chapter two ,verse sixteen, the same false premise is set forth. The question arises whether the meat ( *βρωσις* ) there refers to the forbidden foods of the Old Testament, or does it refer to all abstinence from meat ? Comparing this verse with verse twenty-one, we are led to believe that total abstinence from meat is demanded. Since we have drink mentioned here together with meat, we are led to believe that these false teachers started with the Old Testament , but then went far beyond it.

Furthermore, the ascetic tendencies are shown in connection with the words *ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνη* (v.18). Comparing this verse with verse twenty-three we see that the humility refers to bodily humility. For in twenty-three the word humility is used between two other phrases: *ἐν ἐβελόθῳκία* and *ἀφειδία* . Both of these imply an asceticism, the first the will power necessary to abstain from certain foods, and the second, disregard of the body. The whole context shows that this humility does not refer to mental humility, since the phrase that immediately follows shows that they were proud in their minds. In 2, 23 , Paul adds that these things are not of any use against the indulgence of the flesh.\*

---

\* The translation of the RV in my estimation comes nearest to the correct meaning. The word *πλησμονή* means "satiety", or "repletion". The meaning may then be that all the ascetic practices which these false teachers have will, after all, not subdue the lusts of the flesh. The flesh will still be hungry for lust, even after the artificial remedies have been applied. This is a wonderful passage against ascetic practices. Monasticism will not remove the weakness of the flesh, nay, it will rather increase it. After all these practices have been carried on, the same lustful flesh remains.



But now we have not yet dealt with the word *θελων*. The AV translates this "voluntary humility". But the word *θελων* is in the nominative case, showing that the word is not to be taken with "humility" but with the person who is inflicting the humility. So we would translate with Lenski: "arbitrarily beguile".\* The meaning would then be: Let no man arbitrarily beguile you of your reward by imposing a humility.

Paul's condemnation of this dualistic conception is very powerful:

a. These things are for a destruction to him who uses them. \*\* Verse twenty-two translated literally would be: "All which things are for a destruction to the user". The dative here seems to be the dative of personal interest.\*\*\* Such practices are harmful to the user in a twofold sense: a) They weaken the body; b) they destroy the soul. \*\*\*\*

b. We are dead with Christ to the rudiments of the world. Christ has freed us from the evils of our sinful flesh. We are no longer servants of the world, then why should we be subject to the service of the world? The words *στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου* are often connected with the heavenly bodies, and so referred to the superstitious worship of the age. This meaning is possible in as far as the words themselves are concerned, but untenable in view of the context. We were never subjected to heavenly bodies, how then could Christ free us from them? Zahn is evidently

\* Lenski: Op. cit., ad loc.

\*\* 2, 22

\*\*\* Robertson: Word Pictures in the N.T., iv, 244

\*\*\*\* Gal. 3, 10

5. Wahlstrom, J. A. L. C. 1, 7, 29



right when he says that this denotes "die Enthaltung von gewissen Nahrungsmitteln." \*

c. Matter cannot be evil, because Christ has created it. \*\*

d. Furthermore, matter is not evil because the fullness ( *πλήρωμα* ) \*\*\* of God dwells in the human body\*\*\*\* of Christ. It was by the blood of Christ that we are cleansed ( 1, 14; 2, 9). Paul here disposes of the Docetic theory that Jesus had only a divine nature, as well as the error later championed by Cerinthus, namely that there is a separation between the man, Jesus, and the aeon, Christ.

3. Did these men introduce strange beings between God and the world? That leads us to a discussion of the angels mentioned in 1, 18. Here we have two opposing views, the one takes *τῶν ἀγγέλων* as the subjective genitive, and the other as the objective.

Zahn <sup>(5)</sup> takes the view that we here have a subjective genitive. He is followed by Lenski. <sup>(6)</sup> The reasons Zahn

\* Op. cit. 335

\*\* Col. 1, 15. Zahn: Op. cit., 333

\*\*\* The word "Pleroma" holds a very important position in many of the Gnostic systems, where it has a technical meaning. ( Jones: Op. cit., 32). This word is found frequently in the LXX ( Jer. 8, 16 et. al.) "As pleroun is "complete" so pleroma is "that which is completed" i.e., "the complement" the full tale, the entire number or quantity, the plenitude, the perfection" ( ICC: Col. 323). This word is also found in other places ( Xen. Hell. 1, 6, 16; Matt. 9, 16; I Cor. 10, 26 et. al.) "This is another way of expressing the fact that he is the Logos...the synthesis of all the various dunamis in and by which God manifests himself" ( ICC: 323f.)

\*\*\*\* Somatikos is a late and rare adverb found in the Plutarch inscription, and only here in the New Testament.

5. Op. cit. , 333. All the following quotations of Zahn are taken from this and the following pages.

6. Lenski: Op. cit. , 130



a

advances are the following:

Es waere schon schwer begreiflich dasz Pl eine Abgoetterei, welche dies fuer ihn, wie fuer jeden rechtglaebigen Juden und Christen der Apostolzeit gewesen waere, nur in der Beschreibung des Charakters der Ihrlehrer und nur als eine Liebhaberei derselben erwaeht haette. \*

This argument overlooks one of the essential features of the book, namely the brevity with which Paul describes the false teachers. He spends the greater part of the book in giving positive teachings. But there are several points which we must advance against this statement of Zahn:

1). Paul does warn against this teaching. They will lose heaven if they follow it( 2,18).

2). There are no indications that Paul considers the teaching a mere "Liebhaberei".

3). Is this angel cultus worse than the belief in demons which Zahn advances for the asceticism of these false teachers, and which Paul does not even mention in this epistle? \*\*

The second objection of Zahn reads: "Es waere unerfindlich, wie sich auch an den Vorwurf der Engelanbetung der Vorwurf grundloser Aufgeblasenheit und fleischlichen Hochmuts anschlieszen konnte, ohne dasz auch nur das Beieinander unvergengsaetze angedeutet waere". \*

1). But the word *ἄνωκεν* need not mean a worshipping of the angels, but merely a sinful speculation in regard to them. Such speculations were common at the time.\*\*\*

---

\* For all quotations see reference at bottom of page 17.

\*\* Zahn: Op. cit. , 331

\*\*\* More: History of Religions, 72. We shall deal more fully with this later.



2). To assume that they had a superior knowledge of the spirit world would certainly be a mark of pride on the part of these false teachers, and an intrusion into the things that they did not know.

Another objection of Zahn: "Ebenso unbegreiflich waere, dasz Pl, wo er zum zweiten Mal auf diese Threskeia zu reden kommt( 2, 23) die Engel gar nicht nennt, sondern diesem angeblichen Kultus nur wilkuerlich nachsagt."

1). This is an argument from silence.

2). Verse twenty-three does not contradict the view that a cultus dealing with angels is mentioned in verse eighteen, but rather establishes it. These men have arbitrarily selected their own worship. Furthermore, the dualism expressed in verse twenty-three, when carried to its logical conclusions, would demand a strange cultus of intermediary beings.

Endlich ist aufs engste verbunden und von der gleichen Praeposition abhaengig tapeinophrosune. Hierunter kann natuerlich nicht die von Pl so hoch gepriesene Gesinnung der Demut (Kl 3, 12; Eph 4, 2; Phl 2, 3...) verstanden werden, sondern nur ein aeuszeres Gebahren, welches neben dem denselben Leuten nachgesagten fleischlichen Hochmut bestehen kann. Da das Wort aber in der Sprache des Pl ein solches Gebahren nicht bezeichnet, so ist auch dann, wenn er es den Reden der Irrlehrer selbst entnommen haben sollte (A7) zu erwarten, dasz er es wenigstens da, wo er es das erste Mal gebraucht, naeher bestimmt haben wird, dasz also ton aggelon ebenso zu tapeinophrosune wie zu Threskeia gehoert, was ohnedies das sprachlich Naechstliegende ist, da im anderen Falle en vor Threskeia wiederholt sein wuerde. Es muss dann aber auch der Genetiv ton aggelon zu beiden Begriffen im gleichen Verhaeltnis stehen. Kann nun unter tapeinophrosune ton aggelon nur ein Gebahren verstanden werden wie es sich fuer Engel schicken oder auch vorkommen mag, fuer den leiblich lebenden Menschen aber eben darum nicht paszt, so gilt das Gleiche auch fuer Threskeia ton aggelon.\*

---

\* Zahn: Op. cit., 333



We find the following difficulties with this view;

1). To use "worship of angels" to clarify the new use of the word "humility" seems unwarranted. It would only confuse the readers.

2). Paul would have no reason for accusing them of "intruding into those things" which they "have not seen". Zahn maintains that these people tried to imitate the angels who do not eat and drink. But these men only abstained from certain kinds of food. The comparison which Zahn draws is in no way demanded by the text.\*

3). This argument rests upon the absence of en before threskeia, an argument which is not decisive. Even Robertson does not find any difficulty in the omission of the en.\*\*

The other view is the one adopted by Robertson,\*\* International Critical Commentary, \*\*\* Lightfoot, \*\*\*\*  
(5) Kretzmann, and others. This view makes aggelon the objective genitive. Angels are the objects of a special  
(6) cultus. In support of this view we may advance the following considerations:

1). This is the natural interpretation at this point.

---

\* Zahn: Op. cit., 333

\*\* Word Pictures, iv, 497

\*\*\* Col. 268

\*\*\*\* Op. cit. He maintains this view both in the introduction and in the exegesis of the verse under consideration.

5. Popular Commentary, N.T., ii, 329

6. This need not necessarily mean that the angels were given adoration. The word may indicate that these men had a religion in which these angels played a prominent part. ( For that use of threskeia see : James i, 26; Acts 26, 5; Josephus antt. 8, 11, 1; 12, 5, 4; 4 Macc. 6, 13 )



The mention of a worship of angels would at once cause the readers to think of a special angel cultus.

2). This is the translation that fits the context. A special angel cultus would show a tendency to intrude into those things of which these men knew little. If the men were only imitating the angels by refraining from certain food and drinks, they would not be on unknown ground. Angels were known as spirits who required no food.

3). This interpretation fits in with the epistle itself. Paul repeatedly points out that Christ is above all other principalities and powers. \*

4). This interpretation fits in with the times. There was much speculation about the angels. Their names were used for magical purposes?\*

5). This interpretation fits well with the dualistic principle. If matter is essentially evil, then there can be no direct connection between God and the material world. Furthermore, the system of aeons had its crude beginning already at this time. In this connection Edersheim says:

Neither the Eastern mystical Judaism, nor the philosophy of Philo, could admit of any direct contact between God and the creation. The Kab-

---

\* 2, 16; 1, 16; et al.

\*\* More: History of Religions, 72: "The old beliefs about demons and their harmful doings not only persisted but underwent a development parallel to that of angelology. It was the cosmopolitan age in superstition, as well as in religion. Egypt, Babylonia, and Persia all contributed to the composite demonology of Western Asia and to the arts of dealing with demons, exorcism and demoniac magic flourished everywhere. The evil angels like the good formed a hierarchy of many ranks."



balah solved the difficulty by their Sephiroth, or emanations from God, through which this contact was ultimately brought about, and of which Ensoth, or crown, was the spring "the source from which the infinite light issued". This Kabbalah is presupposed in the Mishnah Tract.... The ten are: Crown, Wisdom, Intelligence, Mercy, Judgment, Beauty, Triumph, Praise, Foundation, Kingdom. \*

Philo also had a system of potentates under God, who created the material world. But in due justice to Philo, we must say that he did not personify his potentates, but tried to keep them attributes of God. His description of these potentates is so vague, that the ordinary reader could not but come to the conclusion that these potentates were real persons. Philo indicates that the nearer the powers are to the deity, the more powerful they are. \*\*

So from the East to Egypt we find Jews expressing the view that there were intermediate powers between God and the world.

Paul gives many warnings against the introduction of these intermediary beings. In 2, 18 he tells the people that they will lose their reward if they follow the false teachers.

Furthermore, Paul makes the existence of such intermediary beings impossible by his doctrine of Christ. In the first chapter Christ is set forth as the center of the world view. Christ is the force, the power, that is active

\* Op. cit., i, 45

\*\* Drummond: Philo Judaeus, or the Jewish Alexandrian Philosophy, ii, 83: "These are six in number, and corresponding with the six divine powers. The oldest and the best acting as the divine metropolis, is the divine Logos." The other five are: Creative, Regal, Propitious, Preceptive, Prohibitive. It is difficult to determine whether Philo considered these powers as separate entities or not. Drummond comes to the conclusion that Philo regarded them as predicates of God. (147).



in nature. In 1, 15-18 Paul shows that Christ is the image of the invisible God, and the creator and sustainer of all things. Were there those who taught that we must come to God through mediary beings? Christ is the image of the invisible God, there is no need for any other mediator. Were there those who taught that matter was evil, and hence, that God could not have created it? Christ, in whose body the fullness of God dwells ( 2, 9 ; 1, 19 \* ) is actually active in all things, he is the cohesion in which all things consist.

Here we have the fundamental blow given to the whole system of the false teachers. Paul refutes them with one word: Christ. He is the point of contact between God and the world. By this Paul does not deny the divine immanence of God, but only refutes the views of the false teachers.

SUMMARY: The false teachers in Colosse were Jews. They were also Gnostics. First of all, since matter is evil ,

\* 1, 19 . In what sense shall we interpret this verse? The first point that we must consider is the subject of the verb *εὐδόκησεν*. Whom has it pleased? This is not expressly stated in the verse if we follow the rendering of Luther, the AV, RV, or Vulgate. Some have supplied as the subject of the verb, "the Son". But that is not reconcilable with 2 Cor. 5, 18. A more fitting subject would be "the Father". That would be a good rendering if *eudokesen* were used in a technical sense to mean the council of God. But Paul uses it oftener of men than he does of God. Furthermore, there is nothing in the context which would warrant the insertion of Theos . So we take *πᾶν τὸ πλῆρωμα* as the subject ( C.T.M., May, 1933, pg. 339ff. )

Pleroma seems to be used in this letter in a technical sense. As Paul uses it this is another way of expressing the fact that Christ is the Logos, for Logos is the synthesis of all the various *onameis* in and by which God is manifested. We shall more fully discuss this under John's writings.



these false teachers introduced a knowledge that was supposed to be higher than that of ordinary men in order that they might apprehend that which is super-sensuous. Since the world of matter is essentially evil, it cannot be the work of the supreme God and hence inferior beings are introduced. Furthermore since matter is evil, the doctrine of the incarnation cannot be true. Finally, in order to rise above the evil of matter, the body must be abused; This led to two extremes: asceticism or unbridled license. In this letter we have teachers described who taught an asceticism.

---



## 2. ORIGIN OF THE COLOSSIAN HERESY

To trace a movement to its source in an age that is highly syncretistic is very difficult. But since we have among the Colossians one of the earliest forms of Gnosticism with which Christianity came into contact, many attempts have been made to trace the movement to its source. Lenski lists the various schools of interpretation. \* One group of interpreters makes these heretics wholly Jewish, another wholly Gentile, and a third group claims that Paul wrote this letter to refute several of these classes. Those who try to make the movement wholly Jewish try to trace the false teachers back to the Pharisees, Alexandrine Jews, or agents of the Jewish sect of the Essenes. Those who try to establish that they were Gentiles point to the Epicurean Gentiles, Pythagoreans, Platonic Stoics, Gnostics, incipient Gnostics, syncretistic universalists, syncretistic theosophists (combining nature mysticism with Christianity). "Of late the debate has narrowed down to a choice between Essenes and Gnostics." \*

The view that Paul wrote this letter to refute several of these groups has been rejected in the first chapter. There is nothing in the letter to indicate that Paul had more than one sect in mind, and the polemics of the second chapter is so closely knit together that it makes it impossible to assume that more than one sect is condemned.

---

\* Lenski: Op. cit., VIII, 10



The interpretation which points to Gentiles only cannot be accepted at all, unless we make certain limitations. The Jewish elements are too strongly indicated to be ignored. But is it possible, that Gentiles had adopted much of the Jewish cultus? We must concede that much of the Jewish religion was evidently adopted by the heathen, wherever they came into contact with the Jews. \* Still it seems improbable that a Gentile sect would adopt all of the Jewish views that are listed in chapter two: circumcision, the Ceremonial Law ( v.14), the holy days, Sabbath, etc. \*\* The evidence certainly points to a Jewish, rather than to a heathen , sect. Furthermore, the description of the false teachings which we have in Colossians would not describe the Greek philosophies listed. The rest of the proposed views of those who consider the disturbing element wholly Gentile( Gnostic, theosophists) are descriptions of the heresy, rather than an explanation of their origin.

If the above positions are tenable, then we must look for the origin of this sect in Judaism. These false teachers could not have their origin with the Pharisees as we know the latter, for the following reasons:

1). We have no indications that the Pharisees went to the limits of dualism as the teachers described in Colossians did. The Pharisees certainly did not consider the body evil , since they believed in the resurrection of the body ( Acts 23, 8).

---

\*Lenski: Interpretation of Colossians, 10ff. Note also the proselytes in the N. T. ( Acts 6, 5; 10).

\*\* Few heathen took Jewish circumcision.



2). The sect here mentioned is essentially mystical, the Pharisees were practical.\*

But let us look more closely at the sect at Colosse. Seeing that they were Jews, we may adopt one of three theories:

1). These Jews obtained their false views by mixing the tenets of their religion with elements from the heathen religions around them.

2). These Jews brought their false views with them from the East when they were transplanted many years before.

3). These false teachers were wither from a foreign Jewish land, or had adopted their views from a teacher who came to them from a foreign Jewish settlement.

Let us examine the first view. The Jews, as we have seen in the introduction, have often adopted false views from the Gentiles around them. But the heresy which troubled Epaphras does not seem to be derived from the teachings of the heathen around Colosse. It seems to have been confined to Colosse. That is why Paul found it necessary to write a special letter to this small congregation. The circumstances under which the letter was written point to the fact that this teaching is just appearing.\*\* Furthermore, it is the view of the writer that the heathen ideas around Colosse are more of the type described in 2 Peter.\*\*\*

2). Nor does it seem probable that the Jews brought these views with them at the time when they were transplanted.

---

\* Lightfoot: Op. cit., 86ff.

\*\* Discussed more fully under the third point.

\*\*\* Only so can we explain its wide scope, as pictured in the Epistle of Jude and Peter. We shall see later that this is also the view of Harnack.



Although the features of the movement point to the East as the place of their origin, still, if these people had retained the views opposed in Colossians from the time of their transplanting ( 200 B. C. ), then we could well claim that these false Jews would also have been found in the neighborhood-- Hierapolis and Laodicea. Then it seems reasonable to suppose that Paul would also have included the churches at the latter two cities in the greetings of this letter. \*

3. The best view that offers itself, is that this letter, written to the Colossians, opposes teachers who were from other lands. That is also the view of Zahn, who mentions the fact that Ignatius speaks of wandering teachers in Asia Minor.\*\* For those who hold that Ephesians was written at the same time as the epistle under consideration, this view is practically the only one that is tenable. \*\*\* Only in this way could we explain the need of a separate letter to the small church at Colosse.

But whence came these teachers, or teacher? We still have the Alexandrine theory before us. Can we find traces of this heresy in Egypt? We think at once of Philo Judaeus.\*\*\*\* But the following considerations hinder attempts to trace this movement back to his influence:

1). He does not use the term "pleroma" in the technical sense in which it is found in Colossians. (5)

\* Kretzmann: Op. cit., 317

\*\* Op. cit., i, 354

\*\*\* View held by Zahn, Arndt, et. al.

\*\*\*\* Born c. 20 B. C. Drummond, Op. cit., i, lf.

5. A study of Philo failed to reveal any traces of this usage. Also see ICC on Col. 1, 19

28-35  
32-41



2). Philo did not teach an ascetic dualism. \*

But there is a sect in Egypt to which we may point as a forerunner of the heresy at Colosse. This sect is described to us by Philo, who calls the people of this sect "Therapeutae".\*\* The members of this sect seemed to have branched from the Essenes. So the Jewish Encyclopedia explains their name.\*\*\* They differed from the Essenes in that each one lived in his own cell, and that they received women into their organization. While living in retirement they did not eat meat, nor drink wine. Early in the morning they arose for prayer, and at night they thanked God for the sunlight and the light of the Torah. They took meals only after sunset so as not to waste any of the sunlight. Their fasts were frequent. They drank water from a spring instead of wine. Young men waited on the tables. They had no slaves. Later Gnostic leaders came to Asia Minor from Egypt. So we may also venture the theory that some of these early gnostics came from Egypt. But this is less satisfactory than the

---

\* The dualism of Philo distinguished between the rational and the irrational. Drummond, op. cit., i, 292.

\*\* Philo: De Vita Contemp. ii. The fact that the Therapeutae are mentioned only by Philo at this age, and that they were declared by Eusebius to have been monks (Historia Ecclesiastica" (ii, x, 17)), has induced Lucius in his "Die Therapeuten und Ihre Stellung in der Geschichte der Askese" to attempt to show that these people had a Christian origin. Lucius found many followers. Among them we may name Lenski. (Interpretation of Colossians, 10f.) But Lucius was ably refuted by some of the best students of Philo. Among these we may mention Wendland ("Die Therapeuten") and Conybeare ("Philo about Contemplative Life"). The existence of branches of the Essenes outside of the region around the Dead Sea makes it difficult for those who try to sever all connections between the Essenes and Jewish ascetics in other parts of the Roman world. The secrecy which was practiced by the members of these sects made it very difficult for the outside world to get information about them. This seems to have been especially true at the time of Philo. For a fuller discussion see the Jewish Encyclopedia.

\*\*\* Consult under "Therapeutes".



Palestinian or Eastern theory.

But that leads us to the discussion of the Essenes. As we consider some of their customs and tenets we will notice a close resemblance to the false teachers opposed in Colossians. \*

1). They were rigorous in keeping parts of the Mosaic Law. So

They are stricter than any of the Jews in resting from their labors on the seventh day; for they not only get their food ready the day before, that they may not be obliged to kindle a fire that day, but they will not remove any vessel out of its place. \*\*

2). To this legalism of the Pharasaic type, the Essenes also added an asceticism.

a. They frowned on marriage.

They neglect wedlock but choose out other persons' children, while they are still pliable and fit for learning and esteem them to be their own kindred, and form them according to their own manner. They do not absolutely deny the fitness of marriage, and the succession of mankind thereby continued, but they guard against all lascivious behavior of women and are persuaded that none of them preserve their fidelity to one man. \*\*\*

Note here that they do not absolutely reject the right of marriage but consider it a rather poor way of subduing the flesh. This is explained by a remark of Josephus " These Essens reject pleasure, but esteem continence and the conquest over our passions to be a virtue." \*\*\*\* Note the strange contrast of their refusal to marry with the Jewish emphasis on wedlock. Had they given up the Messianic hope? Or did they feel that He could not be of earthly substance?

\* Lightfoot, op. cit., 86 ff.

\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 9

\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 2.

\*\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 2



- We note especially on this point that the chief rule of the order was not abstention from marriage, but rather a dualism. For there were some who considered that it was lawful to marry and even had wives. \* Is the latter sect one which Josephus distinguishes from those on the Dead Sea? Evidently these are not included among the 4000 of which men usually speak. For Josephus excludes those who marry from that number by saying: "There are about 4000 that live in this way, and neither marry wives, nor are desirous to keep servants." \*\*

b. They had special regulations in regard to food. Josephus tells us that "the same amount of food and drink is allotted to them." \*\*\* (Compare Colossians 2, 18: "Let no man judge you in meat or in drink "). Furthermore, before a novice could be taken into the order he must spend a year in demonstrating that he could keep their way of life and then he is permitted "to touch their common food." \*\*\*\* Their food consists of loaves "and a single plate of one sort of food." (5) Their rules as to food were so ingrained upon the followers that Josephus tells us that if one of them was expelled from the tribe, he would often die after a miserable manner. "As he is bound by the oath he hath taken and by the customs he hath been engaged in, he is not at liberty to partake of that food that he meets with elsewhere, but is forced to eat grass and to famish his body." (6)

\* B. J. 2, 8, 9

\*\* Ant. 18, 1, 5

\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 5

\*\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 7

5. B. J. 2, 8, 5

6. B. J. 2, 8, 8. Compare Eusebius H.E. 2, 23



So we notice that this sect had special regulations in regard to food, and some of them practiced total abstinence from wine. \*

3). They had a strange speculative teaching. The nature of this teaching cannot be determined altogether. They bound the men that entered the order not to reveal any of their teachings, or the contents of any of the books except as he had received them. \*\* (This seems to have given the right to the members to form other orders). This oath was required after the novice had passed through a trial period, so it is easy to surmise that these doctrines were not revealed until the candidate had taken the oath. Was this the mystery with which the false teachers at Colosse lured the Christians?

a. They dwelt on the existence of God and the creation of the world. What could the teaching of a sect be, that did not hesitate to set aside the law of God in the Old Testament whenever it pleased them to do so? Did they, like Philo, introduce intermediary beings in the creation account of Genesis? Dualism led only to one conclusion: God cannot in the final analysis be the Creator of matter. Probably only indirectly they traced all back to God. \*\*\*

b. They had esoteric teachings in regard to the angels. When a novice was accepted into the order he swore that he would not reveal the names of the angels.\*\*\*\*

\* Ant., 18, 1, 5.

\*\* B.J., 2, 8, 7

\*\*\* They studied the ancients, 2, 8, 6; Ant., 18, 1, 5

\*\*\*\* B.J. 2,8, 7

\*\*\*\* Lietzmann, The Beginnings of the Christian Church, 42: The esoteric names of the angels of which Josephus tells us cannot but reveal living relations with popular apocalyptic writings and its Persian sources and these latter are doubtless responsible for the traces of sun-worship which are to be found....The Essenes afford us an impressive proof that the religious currents in Palestinian Judaism are not exhausted ... by Rabbinic writings.



c. According to Josephus, they also had a strange teaching concerning the rays of the sun. For they removed all polluting matter, so that they may "not affront the divine rays of light."\* Furthermore, in the morning they would have prayers before sunrising "as if they made supplication for its rising."\*\* ( Compare the Therapeutes, 3, 4).

d. The fact that they did not bring sacrifices in the temple in spite of the direct command of God to do so, cannot be explained apart from their rule not to partake of certain kinds of food. Did they consider it a defilement to touch animal meat? They refused to bring these sacrifices, claiming that they had "more pure lustrations of their own"\*\*\*

They considered the contact with certain things as a defilement. They would not touch food prepared by anyone except to whom this authority was entrusted by the order.\*\*\*\*

"They think that oil is a defilement"<sup>(5)</sup>. Note how also this characteristic given us by Josephus is in opposition to the Old Testament.<sup>(6)</sup> In this connection we may also mention their rules of bathing.<sup>(7)</sup>

4) Their rulers were absolute and revered next to God. "They do nothing but according to the injunction of their curators; only these two things are done among them at every one's own free-will, which are to assist those that want it, and to show mercy."<sup>(8)</sup>

---

\* B. J. 2, 8, 10

\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 5

\*\*\* Ant. 18, 1, 5

\*\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 5. 7

5. B. J. 2, 8, 3

6. I Sam. 16, 11ff.

7. B. J. 2, 8, 5

8. B. J. 2, 8, 6



Compare this absolute authority that was vested in the curators with the statement in Col. 2, 18: "Let no man arbitrarily beguile you of your reward with a humility." ( Our translation).

4). Another characteristic and perhaps their chief tenet was dualism.

For their doctrine is this: That bodies are corruptible, and that the matter they are made of is not permanent; but that the souls are immortal and continue forever; and that they come out of the most subtile air, and are drawn by a certain natural reticement; but that when they are set free from the bonds of the flesh, they then, as released from long bondage rejoice and mount upward."\*

If we accept the view that Paul's emphasis on the resurrection in the first part of Col. 1 was written to fortify the Christians against false teachers who denied a bodily resurrection, then all the false views from the quotation above are rejected by Paul in his letter.

5). Where did the Essenes gather these strange doctrines? They had books handed down to them by their ancestors. \*\* They study all the writings of the ancients that they could obtain. \*\*\* And they had certain holy books out of which they learned the rituals for their performance of magic and foretelling of the future. \*\*\*\*

So we have noted that the teachings of the Essenes were in many ways similar to those which Paul condemns in his letter to the Colossians. But we must also consider some of the objections that are brought against this view.

\* B. J. 2, 8, 11

\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 5

\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 6

\*\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 12; 1, 3, 5; 2, 7, 3; 3, 2, 5.



Before considering the individual objections to the view which looks to the Essenes for the origin of the Colossian heresy we must establish one fact. The individual prohibitions of the Essenes flowed from one central tenet; namely, that the flesh must be abused. This was necessary because the body is evil and contains the soul as in a prison. \* They rejected pleasure as evil and sought continence and the conquest over passions. This was done in different ways by the various Essenes whom Josephus mentioned. So we have noted above that one sect permitted marriage while another rejected it. But now to take some of the arguments of Zahn:

1). Zahn compares these false teachers with those of Rom. 14, and by comparison shows that also in the latter case wine is rejected by some ( v. 21). So the teachers in Colossians were similar to those at Rome and not Essenes.\*\*

a. The comparison of the heresy mentioned in Colossians with the views expressed by people with whom Paul deals in Rom. 14 is unwarranted. In Colossians Paul tells the people that they should not heed the teachings of the heretics. In Romans, Paul is dealing with brethren that are weak, and who still consider the Ceremonial Law. But there he tells the Christians that they should abstain from meat in order to avoid giving offense. The comparison rather shows that the disturbers at Colosse were outside the pale of the Christians there.

b. The Essenes had rules in regard to food, and the Therapeutes had laws about drink which Philo recorded.

---

\* B. J. 2, 8, 2

\* Op. cit., 1, 342



2). Zahn mentions several points in his second objection:

Die eigentuemlichsten Zuege... essenishchen Sitte und Sittlichkeit wie die Waschungen, die Verwerfung der Ehe, die unbedingte Guetergemeinschaft, die Abschaffung aller Sklaverei, die Beschraenkung auf die von den Ordenspriestern bereiteten Speisen und alles was mit dem Wesen dieser Partei als eines Moenchsordens zusammenhangt, haetten in Kl 2 nicht ohne Spur bleiben koennen. \*

This is an argument from silence. According to the same rule 1 John could not have been written against Cerinthus, since many of the essential features of the Gnosticism of Cerinthus are not mentioned.

We will note at once, however, how thoroughly the epistle written to Colosse removes the evil in the things mentioned by Zahn. Either the things mentioned in the quotation do not constitute the essence of Essenism, are harmless in themselves, or were not common to all the Essenes. But let us take the individual points:

a. In regard to the washings, we may say that this was a harmless practice in itself, and only became harmful when connected with the dualism which Paul opposes. Note how infrequently the washings of the Pharisees are mentioned in some books of the New Testament.

b. "Die Verwerfung der Ehe". This is not a general characteristic. Josephus tells us that there were some who did marry. \*\* Even those who do not marry "do not absolutely deny the fitness of marriage", but in order to subdue the flesh, they abstained from it. Paul evidently found it

\* Op. cit. , 342

\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 13; 2, 8, 2



necessary to give a command in regard to marriage ( 3, 15).

c. "die unbedingte Guetergemeinschaft": Why should Paul give the sect favorable publicity? The Christians at Jerusalem did the same thing. \*

d. "die Abschaffung aller Sklaverei" : Zahn overlooks the reason why these Essenes did not have slaves. Josephus tells us that they did not have slaves because they "tempt men to be unjust". \*\* A good reason for putting away a system which Christianity itself would finally abolish.

If Paul were opposing a system that was abolishing slavery, he could not have done it more effectively than he did in 3, 22. Why should he mention a fact that would glorify the false teachers in the eyes of the Christian slaves?

e. "die beschraenkung auf die von den Ordenspriestern bereiteten Speisen": How does Zahn then explain Col. 2, 18-21?

f. " Auch die angebliche Engelverehrung waere nicht Essenisch." We have dealt with this before. Certainly, according to Josephus, the Essenes had some mysterious angel cultus.

3). "Der Stolz auf die Beschnittenheit und die beobachtung der heiligen Tage sind allgemein juedisch." True, and the Essenes were also Jews. But the "allgemein juedisch" does not cover all the false views brought forth in Colossians, whereas the tenets of the Essenes do. \*\*\*

4). "They ( the false teachers) were certainly not Essenes, a small inconspicuous sect located near the

\* Acts 5-7

\*\* Ant. 18, 1, 5

\*\*\* Zahn: Op. cit., 342



Dead Sea."--\*

a. The sect was not small. According to Philo and Josephus, a portion of the sect numbered 4000 .\*\* Even that number comes close to the number of Pharisees at the time of Christ. But this is not the sum total of their numbers. Those were the Essenes who were strictest in their observance of asceticism. Other related sects had sprung up in different localities. \*\*\*

b. We are told by Josephus that the sect was not confined to any one place "but many of them dwell in every city." \*\*\*\* The chief settlement of Essenes was on the Dead Sea. (5 Philo names Judea, (6 Palestine and Syria (7 as the place of the Essenes.

c. Outside evidence points to the fact that there was a similar sect also in Egypt. This has the testimony of More: " Similar in some respects to the Essenes were the Therapeutae in Egypt". (8

d. Recently records of a sect on the order of the Essenes has been found near Damascus. In this connection

More says:

Recently discovered manuscripts have revealed the existence of a dissenting sect of different character in the region of Damascus. In some time of tribulation in Judea a number of Jews, including priests and Levites migrated to that country. There they subsequently bound themselves by covenant to observe the ordinances and interpretations of the Law they received from a teacher who appeared among them some time after the migration. Their organization seems

\* Lenski: Op. cit., 10

\*\* Ant. 18, 1, 5; B. J. 2, B, 13

\*\*\* Pliny: Natural History, 15 ( Chief settlement named).

\*\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 4

5. Pliny: Op. cit., 15

6. Fragm. 632

7. Quod omn. prob. lib. , 12

8. History of Religions, 11, 59



to have been modelled on the encampment of the Israelites in the desert, each camp, as they called their communities, being presided over by a supervisor, while above these stood a supervisor of all the camps. In their legal interpretation they were like all the other sects that we know anything about, more literal and in general, stricter than the scribes of Pharisaic leanings; this is peculiarly evident in the rigour of their Sabbath observations and in the dietary laws. They expected the appearance in the future of a Teacher of Righteousness sprung from Aaron and Israel - a peculiar variation of what is commonly called the Messianic hope. \*

e. Josephus leaves us with the impression that the Essenes were not without influence in his days. He mentions some outstanding men of the sect, one of them even being an army general.\*\* Certainly the sect could not have been unknown to the people beyond Judea.

f. Their teachings had an immense appeal to those who heard of the sect. Their dualism held a natural fascination for the people of the time. Josephus mentions that their teachings were in favor with all men. Their doctrine of the immortality of the soul was a bait that lured many to them. Josephus states: "These are the divine doctrines of the Essens about the soul, which lay an unavoidable bait for such as have once tasted of their philosophy." \*\*\*

---

\* History of Religions, ii, 59. In Judaism, i, 200f., More gives us the following information on this sect: The history and expectations were written in a figurative style "which was clear to those who knew the story but mystifying to others". They had rules on forbidden kinds of food. Mention is made of their purification laws. They had their judicial and private judges, oaths, witnesses and testimonials, vows, and communal charities. The obligations were assumed by those who entered "to set apart the sacred dues as they are prescribed and that a man should love his neighbor as himself and sustain the poor and needy and the proselyte".

\*\* B. J. 2, 20, 4; 2, 7, 3; 2, 20, 5.

\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 11



Evidently the theory which traces the movement at Colosse back to the Essenes is the best of those recorded by Lenski. We note that Paul is dealing chiefly with the doctrine of the strange sect in Colossians. That their practices are advanced only to illustrate the doctrines is shown by 2, 21. \*

It is not necessary for those who accept this view to point to a definite person or place as the source of the movement in Colosse. As we have noted above, the sect had spread out over a large portion of the Eastern Mediterranean world. It is easy to see why an individual member of the order of Essenes would be eager to start a new order of which he could become the curator. \*\*

Sources are not at hand to trace the details of the movement which made its appearance at Colosse. Whether it sprung directly from the Essenes, or indirectly, cannot be determined. Were the Essenes merely the models and strongholds of an ascetic dualistic movement on a much grander scale?

What was the outcome of the movement? Lightfoot points to the later teachings of Cerinthus. \*\*\* We may close this section with a quotation from Fisher:

There is a third type of Ebionitism which may be denominated Essenian Ebionitism. It embraced distinctive features of the Ebionite doctrine, with an admixture of Gnostic speculation. Its nascent tendencies are clearly seen in the heretical party in the church at Colosse, which is described

---

\* It is interesting to note how thoroughly the New Testament opposes the teachings of the Essenes. The theory which tries to trace the Christian religion back to Essenism is certainly false. The two religions are antitheses.

\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 6. \*\*\* Op. cit. , 86ff.



in Paul's Epistle to the Colossians. How far what are called the Essenian features of the system sprung out of intercourse with the Jewish Christians or were due to indirect agencies of a kindred nature it is not easy to decide. One faction of the Jewish Christian party which has its peculiarities foreshadowed in the Colossian heresy, bears the name of Elkesaites. This title is derived from Elkesai, which is not the name of a man, but of a book prized by the sect. The characteristics of the Essenian Ebionitism appear in a curious work of a much later date, the Clementine Romance written near the beginning of the third century. \*

The sect which is foreshadowed in Colossians never reached large dimensions. Some of its tenets were later incorporated into other systems, but its ascetic dualism was soon destroyed by the Alexandrine Gnostics and the heathen ideas that were drawn into the systems.

---

Fisher: Op. cit., 50



### 3. THE GNOSTICISM OPPOSED IN THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

In regard to this letter, we also follow the isagogical lectures of Arndt. Then this letter would be a circular letter, written to the churches in the neighborhood of Ephesus. This view has the support of Zahn\*, and of Foakes-Jackson. \*\*

If this view is established, then much light is shed on the Gnosticism at Colosse. We at least have proof that the heresy there condemned did not yet enjoy wide spread attention in this region, hence Paul writes a separate letter to the little village where the heresy is making its appearance. Still, since he fears that this heresy may spread, he gives general instructions also to the churches in the neighborhood of Colosse.

It would be needless to trace the parallelism of Ephesians and Colossians. But we may note a few points that contradicted the Colossian heresy:

1). Christ has gathered all things to himself, both those in heaven, and those on earth. \*\*\*

2). In Him are hid all of the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge.\*\*\*\*

3). There is no room for any intermediary beings. Christ is above all things, and still all things find their being in Him.  
(5)

4). Were there those who would teach these people mys-

---

\* Op. cit., 1, 343

\*\* Op. cit., 130

\*\*\* Eph. 1, 10

\*\*\*\* 1, 17-18

5. 1, 20ff.



teries of their own? Paul points the people to Christ: " How that by revelation he hath made known to me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ). "

5). Paul uses the term *παιδίσκος* in the Letter to the Ephesians in the same way as in Colossians. \*\*

Although Paul does not, in this letter, deal at great length with the false doctrines, still he brings two warnings;

In 4, 14, he says: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. " This warning is general, but is also written against the false views of the Gnostics. It warns against one of the outstanding features of the Gnostics, namely their cunning, and almost secretive approach to the Christians.

Another reference to the false teachers is found in 5, 6: "Let no man deceive you with vain words; For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of men " .

In conclusion, it seems best to adopt the view of Foakes-Jackson;

The Epistle to the Ephesians, which bears a strong resemblance to the Colossian letter, earnestly upholds the superiority of Christ to all heavenly powers. St. Paul is evidently hinting at the prevalence of errors similar to those at Colossae, but this letter being probably a circular epistle does not attack the false doctrine so directly as its companion letter addressed to the church of Colossae.\*\*\*

---

\* 3, 2

\*\* 1, 23

\*\*\* Op. cit. , 130



## II. THE Gnostics OF THE PASTORAL LETTERS

Paul wrote these letters to Timothy and Titus in order to instruct them concerning their pastoral duties. But he also had another purpose in mind. These young men were to defend the church against false teachers, some of which were already in the congregations.

We notice, in the first place, that many of these false teachers were Jews. St. Paul speaks of them as those who desire to be "teachers of the Law".\* They raise questions and fightings about the Law.\*\* Again Paul refers to them as "they of the circumcision".\*\*\* He warns his readers not to give heed to Jewish fables.\*\*\*\*

So the basis which these teachers used in spreading their false doctrine was evidently the Old Testament. Posing as teachers of the Law they gained the confidence of their hearers.

But these teachers abused the Old Testament. They used the Law only as a pretext. For in verse four we read: "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is faith." There has been much discussion of this passage. Should we apply it to the gnostic side of these false teachers or to the Jewish? We may note three interpretations of this verse. First we shall consider the word *γενεαλογία*.

---

\* I Tim. 1, 7

\*\* Tit. 1, 10

\*\*\* Tit. 1, 14

\*\*\*\* Tit. 8, 9

For a fuller discussion see Plummer: Expositor's Bible, Introduction to the Pastoral Letters.



This word occurs twice in the Pastoral Letters. \* It is a compound of two words : *γενεά* (descent), and *λογία* (words). So it would mean a discussion, or a systematic study of descent. But what does it refer to in these letters?

1). The first group of scholars refer it to the system of aeons which was found in all later gnostic teachings. \*\* Early in the second century, Irenaeus and others wrote of such a system of aeons. \*\*\* In favor of this view we may bring the following considerations:

a. It fits the age. The dualism that was widespread at the time called for an explanation of the existence of matter. Since this could not be traced back to God, it had to be accounted for on the premise that there were intermediary beings. We have noted such tendencies among the Jews on page twenty-one. So the objection of Lenski, namely that the systems of emanation were not yet invented, is based on a false premise. \*\*\*\* That the Mediterranean world was full of such teachings at this time, is shown by the large number of sects in different places revealed to us as soon as we have records of their activities (Tertullian and Irenaeus).

b. The word *ἀπεράττος* (endless) also fits this interpretation. For a system that tries to bridge the gulf between good and evil is necessarily endless. There is no point where the two meet.

2). The second explanation points to the Jews as the source for this "genealogia". But the one that we are here

\* I Tim. 1,4; 3, 9 in Titus. \*\* Holzmann, Pastoralbriefe, 126ff. \*\*\* Against all Heresies, 1, 25. \*\*\*\* Op. cit., 510



considering points to the Jews' family records. \* The people tried to show their skill and learning by digging into their family records, and listing their forefathers.

"They numbered up their fathers and grandfathers, that they might have the reputation of historical knowledge and research".\*\*

It is true that the people were still keeping records of their family in expectation of the Messiah. \*\*\* But it is difficult to see how this custom fits the "myths" which are mentioned in this same verse. Furthermore, it would seem that Paul would have pointed out that such records were now useless since the Savior had come into the world.

3). Undoubtedly the best explanation is the one offered by Lenski:

Paul refers to Jewish Old Testament genealogies; the Old Testament lists of ancestors were amplified, names of wives were invented, allegorical and additional tales were woven in. Wohlenburg writes: "One needs only to cast a glance into the 'Book of Jubilees' to see what rôle Old Testament genealogies, the wives not named in the Old Testament, or the incompletely listed sons and daughters of the ancient fathers, played". \*\*\*\*

This view is also set forth in the notes on Timothy, taken during a lecture by Fuerbringer:

These "genealogies" are called endless. They are an inexhaustible subject of discussion. The discussion concerning and of them is never finished. The expression, of course, is hyperbolic. The context shows that these genealogies were considered and dealt with not only as such, but they were also used in the interest of various teachings. Secret, hidden things and meanings were found in them. (5)

In favor of this interpretation we may mention the following facts:

\* Barnes on the New Testament, viii, 115

\*\* Plummer: Expositor's Bible, v. 43.

\*\*\* Matt. 1, et al.

\*\*\*\* Interp. of Tim., 510.

5. Mimeographed Notes, 4



a. In Tit. 3, 9 the word *γενεαλογία* is closely connected with the word *νομικὰς* which is evidently written concerning Jewish laws. Since the natural interpretation would place the words *ἡτησίς* and *ἐπί* in a close relation to *νομικὰς*, so we may assume that *γενεαλογία* is also closely related.

b. In I Tim. 1, 4 *γενεαλογία* is used in close connection with the word *μύθος*. These myths are described in Tit. 1, 14 as "Jewish fables".

So we have established the fact that these false teachers were mostly Jews. But are we justified in saying that they are Gnostics? We may bring the following evidence to show that these false teachers had Gnostic tendencies.

1). They themselves call their teaching a *γνώσις* (knowledge, science). Evidently they came to the Christians with a "higher knowledge" than that possessed by the ordinary man. Paul brings several charges against their teachings.

a. Their teachings are myths. Paul calls them fables.\*

By fables are not meant the fables of heathen mythology. Nor are the apocryphal accounts of Christ's life meant. In Tit. 1, 14 these fables are designated as "Jewish fables". That is the meaning which applies here in verse 4. Under "Jewish fables" are included all sorts of Jewish legends, and all kinds of fictitious stories that go beyond the Biblical record. \*\*

But these Jewish fables were evidently strongly tinged with heathen myths. For these same teachers leaned toward Persian dualism. \*\*\*

b. Their fables and janglings are foolish. Their teaching is *μεταλογία* a vain babbling and idle talking. \*\*\*\*

\* I Tim. 1, 6

\*\* Fuerbringer: Mimeographed Notes, 4.

\*\*\* I Tim. 4, 1ff.

\*\*\*\* I Tim. 1, 6



In Tit. 1, 10 the teachers are called *ματαιολόγοι* (vain babblers). Such idle talking results when a person busies himself with "mythois" and "genealogias". *ματαιολογία* is opposed to *πραγματεία*. Since this is true, the Christians should avoid it. The whole modern theology is practically *ματαιολογία*. He who gives us something else than Scripture as the only norm and foundation of faith is leaving the right path. He is missing the mark.

Paul pours contempt on their false teachings. They are only "granny tales" ( I Tim. 4, 7). The false teaching is aimless ( I Tim. 1 , 6), empty of real substance ( I Tim. 6, 20), useless ( Tit. 3, 9), ruinous of character ( II Tim. 2, 14), springs out of failure to keep a good conscience ( I Tim. 1, 19). The true Christian should abide by the words of Christ and not heed these vain words that lead only to corruption ( I Tim. 6, 3-5).

c. Paul points out that the dangers envolved in such speculations continue to grow. They progress onward in ungodliness, and their word as gangrene will have more food. \* After the ball has once been set in motion it will not stop. "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." \*\* One speculation leads to another, and finally "they shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall turn unto fables ". \*\*\*

---

\* 2 Tim. 2, 16

II Tim. 3, 13

II Tim. 4, 3-4.



2). Although the speculations of these teachers appeared to be harmless on the surface, still they led to dangerous extremes. The "gnosis" of the men opposed in this letter, seems, in general, to have been free from the gross ascetic dualism, but the general drift was either toward an ascetic or libertine dualism. \*

a. So we notice that the false speculations caused the two men, Hymenaeus and Philetus, to deny the resurrection. There are two plausible explanations for the words ἀποστασίῳ ἢ ὅτι γεγενῆσθαι. Either these teachers pointed to the resurrection of Christ, or they considered conversion, the resurrection of the souls of men from spiritual death, as the only resurrection to be expected. \*\* Had these men absorbed heathen dualism which finally caused them to deny the resurrection of the body because it was evil?

b. Furthermore, we notice a tendency toward gnostic dualism in the two extremes on the ethical side.

In the first place, we notice a tendency toward asceticism. Here we have the prophecy in 4, 1ff. The words πνεῦμα ὁητικῶς λέγει are used for prophecy. "In this case the spirit, probably through the mouth of one of the prophets among the disciples, or through a revelation made to Paul personally had ...declared that there would be a falling away from the truth in times to come\*\*\*"

Now the question confronts us whether these words refer to teachings that were not yet in existence, or whether they were to be found at that time. Certainly this prophecy

\* Zahn( 1, 468f.) claims that the people were still members of the congregation.

\*\* I Tim. 2, 17-18

\*\*\* Kretzmann, N. T., ii, 383



reached its culmination in the Roman Antichrist. \* We may also conclude that the abominations described had not yet come into the congregations which Paul exhorted Timothy and Titus to warn.

But the tendencies are in that direction. That is why Paul found it necessary to warn against dualism with the words: "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it is received with thanksgiving." \*\* To warn the Christians from such tendencies, Paul holds before their eyes the horrible example of the Antichrist. They are the spirits of error and therefore also their teachings are the teachings of demons. With a fine show of piety, the false teachers teach lies, being fully conscious of what they are doing, but their conscience is seared. Then the apostle mentions two of the marks of these false doctrines: They forbid to marry, and command to abstain from meats. \*\*\*

In the second place, in spite of their teachings, the men at Crete were libertine in character. This characteristic is mentioned in Tit. 1, 16: "They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." The later Gnostics explained their libertine spirit by pointing to the fact that the body must be abused.

Were the erring men at Crete and Ephesus similar to those at Colosse? They were similar in three respects:

a. Both were predominantly Jews

---

\* Kretzmann: Op. cit., ii, 383

\*\* I Tim. 4, 4

\*\*\* I Tim. 4, 3



b. Both had gnostic speculations.

c. The erring Christians at Ephesus and Crete seemed to lean toward dualism.

But the two groups cannot be identified, or classed under the same head. There is no indication that the men mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles reached the degree of dualism opposed in Colossians.

The libertinism of the Cretans paves the way for the Gnosticism opposed and condemned by Peter, Jude and Revelations. A drift toward such libertinism is also warned against in the second letter which Paul wrote to Timothy (3, 1ff.).



## II. THE LIBERTINE GNOSTICS OPPOSED IN PETER, JUDE, AND REVELATIONS

### 1. THE GNOSTICISM IN II. PETER

The second epistle of Peter was written to the churches in Asia Minor which had been converted by Paul. Having warned the Christians in a general way in his first letter, Peter, not long afterwards, finds it necessary to address a second letter to the same people. The Christians were becoming weak, and were offering a favorable target to those who were troubling them. \*

There is no indication in the letter pointing to the nationality of these false teachers. To what extent the Jews were mingled among those who troubled the congregations cannot be determined. Many of them came out of the congregations themselves ( 2, 15. 21), which were largely composed of Gentiles( 1, 1-6).

Is this letter a letter of prophecy, or were these teachers already in existence? In 2, 1 we read that these teachers will come among the people. In the rest of the letter, these teachers are described as being in existence.

Zahn explains this by maintaining that the letter was written to a small Jewish settlement surrounded by Gentile congregations. \*\* But that explanation seems to be out of harmony with the introduction to this epistle. We may accept the view that this epistle was addressed to the Gentile churches, and explain the seeming inconsistency as fol-

---

\* Kretzmann, op. cit. , 11, 543

\*\* Zahn, op. cit., 11, 66



lows:

1). The false teachers had not yet become known to all of the congregations. Some were acquainted with their teachings and others were not.

2). Or these false teachers had not yet reached the zenith of their heresy. Now they are abusing the letters of Paul in the interest of their own libertine principles( 3, 15), but the time will come when they will openly deny the Lord that bought them.

But now let us consider the teachings of these men. Were they Gnostics? We must answer in the affirmative for the following reasons:

1). They came with a wisdom and knowledge of their own. So they had to be warned against as wresting Scripture to their own use( 1, 20; 3, 16). They spoke great, swelling words of vanity, which caused Peter to compare them to wells without water, and clouds that were carried by the wind(3, 17.18). These men seem to have told the Christians that they had a higher knowledge than that which was offered to them in the Bible.

2). They seemed to have denied that the man Jesus was the Christ. That is why Peter tells the people that the apostles had not followed fables when they spoke of the deity of Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His glory( 1, 16. 17).

3). They spoke evil of dignities.

Während Pt ihnen Unkenntnis oder doch ungenuegende Wuerdigung der boesen Maechte welche sie laestern , nachsagt werden sie sich geruehmt haben sie erst recht zu kennen und darauf die Zuversicht gegruendet haben mit welcher sie vom Teufel und seinen Dieren als un- gefaehrlichen Wesen veraechtlich redeten.\*

---

\* Zahn: Op. cit., 11, 65



4). They denied the resurrection and ridiculed the Christians for awaiting it( 3, 1-2).

5). Their libertine principles are praised as a higher knowledge and freedom to which the Christians have not yet aspired( 3, 18. 19. Compare I Pet. 2, 16). \*

Their libertine principles are strongly condemned by Peter. They riot in the daytime, they appear among the Christians as spots and blemishes, they are filled with adultery, they have been filled with covetousness, they are the servants of corruption ( 3, 13f.).

Many of these were at one time Christians but turned from the truth, like dogs to their own vomit( 2, 21).

The manner in which they lured Christians from the truth is also described by the Apostle. They pretend to be a part of the Christian congregation by going to the love feasts(2, 13), but they use these as an opportunity for luring the Christians from the truth. They prey especially on the weak Christians who had but recently joined the church and were not yet firmly established in the Christian truths( 2, 18).\*\* They are compared to Balaam, the points of comparison being threefold( 2, 15):

- a. They charge for their teachings ( 2, 3)
- b. They went out from among the Christians( 2, 15)
- c. They gave false admonitions. \*\*\*

---

\* Zahn: Op. cit., ii, 65  
 \*\* " " " " 67  
 \*\*\* " " " " 65



## 2. THE GNOSTICISM OPPOSED IN JUDE

The Gnosticism opposed in Jude is the same as that opposed in the Epistle of Peter, only here we note that the false teachers had become worse, and that the Christians must be warned to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" ( 3 ).

Against this faith, these men opposed a knowledge of their own. They are called *ψυχικοί* men in opposition to the people who are of the Spirit ( 19 ). They had crept quietly into the church. They were men who had been of old ordained to the condemnation that is to be spoken against them. \* The writer of this Epistle shows the destruction that awaits them with three illustrations: The destruction of the Israelites who did not believe, the punishment of the fallen angels, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha.\*\*

They came with a show of wisdom. So they spoke "great swelling words" ( 16 ). This fact is also shown by the comparison to Balaam \*\*\* and Korah. The comparison to Korah seems to point to the fact that they considered themselves superior to the ordinary Christians.

Auch dasz sie Absonderungen machen, waehrend sie des heiligen Geistes ermangeln und in ihrem natuerlichen Selbstleben befangen sind, spricht nicht dagegen, dasz sie aueszerlich zur Christenheit sich rechnen, sondern scheint darauf hinzuweisen dasz sie sich gerade als die Geistesmenschen betrachten und als solche boesen unterschied zwischen sich und den gewuehnlichen Christen machen, was an sich selbst schon separatistische Neigungen bezeichnet. Diese zweite Moment liegt auch zu gruende wenn wir unter anderen als Nachfolger des Korah bezeichnet werden, welcher sich mit 250 vornehmen Glie-

\* 2 Pet. 2, 1

\*\* Kretzmann, op. cit., II, 586

\*\*\* See the discussion of this on page 54.



dern der Gemeinde gegen die Obrigkeit und die von Gott berufenen Fuehrer Israels empoeerte und zwar unter Berufung darauf, dasz die ganze Gemeinde, also auch sie selbst heilig seien, sogut wie Aaron, und dasz nicht blosz unter den Amtstraegern, sondern unter allen Gliedern der Gemeinde Gott wohne. \*

The content of their doctrine is clear in a few passages.

1). They denied both the Father and the Son. \*\* They seem to have despised all the dignities and authorities which the Christians held sacred. This seems to have been connected with their immoral life. The God who was set forth in the Bible was not the creator of the world, hence it was unnecessary to obey His commands.

2). But not only God and Christ, but also the angels, both evil and good, were included in their railings.

3). They claimed to have a deeper knowledge of the spiritual world. " Dasz sie sich eines Wissens um die Geisterwelt ruehnten, wird auch dadurch angedeutet, dasz ihnen wirkliche Kenntniss der Maechte welche sie laestern, abgesprochen wird ( 10). \*\*

Evidently we are here dealing with a sect that is very similar to the sect opposed in Revelation. "Harnack thinks that they (the latter) were shamelessly immoral. They taught a dualism of good and evil, a divine and a satanic source; they held a speculative theory of emanations in descending order from the divine Fulness." \*\*\* Certainly these teachers are foreshadowed in the false teachers of Peter and Jude.

Finally, these false teachers were libertines of the

\* Zahn, op.cit., 78

\*\* Ibid.

\*\*\* Jones: The Church's Debt to Heretics, 36



of the grossest kind. "These filthy dreamers defile the flesh" ( 8). They reject God, "but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves." They are spots at the feasts of charity, were they gorge themselves after their carnal manner ( 12). There is nothing stable either in their doctrine or in their life. For they are described as "clouds" that do not contain any water , but are "carried about of winds". They are' autumn trees without fruit, twice dead and plucked up by the roots. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame. (12. 13.) The comparison to the sea, undoubtedly points to the boisterousness with which they carried on their licentious life. Finally, they are "murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts"( 16).

They took money from the people for their "knowledge", as they were trying to lead them into their sins. (16).

Whence came these Gnostics? Here we find the heathen element coming in to mingle with the Jewish and the Christian. In Peter and Jude, as well as in Revelation , we have the forerunners of the later Ophites, who despised the God of the Old Testament. Typical of these Ophites are the Nicolaitanes , whom we shall consider in Revelations. Doubtless-ly the destruction of the city of Jerusalem gave an added impetus to the heathen who tried to scorn the God for whom the Jews reserved their adoration. That this heathen tendency had been going on before Christianity came, is shown by its widespread popularity already at this early time.\*

Irenaeus, 1 , 31 describes the Cainites for us.  
Tertullian, 11, 2, gives us a description of the Ophites.



### 3. THE NICOLAITANES OPPOSED IN REVELATION

The Gnosticism opposed and condemned in Revelations is similar to that of Peter and Jude. But, as we shall observe, the Gnosticism condemned by John shows a definite advancement over that of the earlier libertines. That the false teachers opposed in the Apocalypse lived near the end of the first century appears from the fact that their teaching is not yet as fully developed as that of the Nicolaitanes spoken of in the second century.\*

The sect of the Nicolaitanes is attacked in the three letters: to Ephesus, to Pergamos, and to Thyatira. There seems also to be a reference to this sect in the letter to the church at Smyrna. From these letters we learn that the sect had been repudiated at Ephesus (2, 2), but had several adherents in Pergamos (2, 14), while in Thyatira the majority of the church had not proved sufficiently watchful and determined against it.

The origin of these teachers must be sought outside of the church (2, 2). From the letters we may gather the below mentioned characteristics of the sect:

1). They claimed to be apostles or Jews. \* In both instances the writer of Revelation says that they were not what they made pretensions to being. We can see at once that they were not apostles. Two plausible explanations may be given for the phrase: "which say they are Jews, but are not":

a. These teachers pretended to belong to the Jewish race in order to have more influence on their hearers.

\* 2, 2; 2, 9



b. They were actually of the Jewish race, but by their terrible teachings had left the faith of their fathers. This seems to be the best explanation because the phrase is added: "but are of the synagogue of Satan."

2). They had a formulated teaching.

a. In 2, 24, Paul refers to their teachings as a doctrine. They themselves refer to it as the "depths of Satan". "The Gnostics often used the word bathos, depth or deep, as the ultimate source from which things have come forth. We find such expressions as 'depths of God' and the 'depths of Satan' or again, 'the deep things' or just 'depth'. \*

b. They had their teachers. These are referred to in 2, 2. Among these teachers we find a woman who is called Jezebel. \*\* "The woman is not to be identified with the Chaldean Sybil Sabbe, who had a shrine in Thyatira. For it is inconceivable that Christians should be led astray by a heathen prophetess! \*\*\*

c. These false teachers are accused of holding the doctrine of Balaam. The meaning of this comparison has been discussed in the letter to Peter.\*\*\*\*

3). The sect here opposed seems to have been very immoral. That is shown in the comparison with Balaam "who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication."\*\*\*\*

4). Finally, the sect has by this time received a

---

\* Jones; Op. cit., 36

\*\* We must remember that there is a variant reading on this name.

\*\*\*Harnack: The Sect of the Nicolaitans, J. L. 1923, 415 . \*\*\*\* 2, 14. 20. 21.



name. They are called the *Νικολαῖται* . \*

This name has caused some discussion. Harnack rejects the opinion that this name is a translation of "Balaamites".

The name "Nicolaitans" is not to be understood as an allegory, or translation of "Balaamites", for in this event it would be "Laaborites" or "Laophagites" (i. e. "devourers" or "consumers" of the people). Furthermore it seems improbable that the author after comparing the two would give allegorical interpreted name. "The teaching of Balaam" is itself an allegory. \*\*

Of a different nature is the theory which traces the movement back to Nicolas, the proselyte mentioned in Acts 6. There is early evidence in favor of this view. For Irenaeus says in his work "Against all Heresies":\*\*\* "The Nicolaitans are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the Apostles. They lead a life of unrestrained indulgence."

But there seems to be some difference of opinion among the Church Fathers, so we must look at this a little more closely. We may adopt one of three views:

- 1). Nicolas had nothing to do with this sect.
- 2). The proselyte of Antioch founded the sect.
- 3). The gnostics described in the Apocalypse used his name, and falsely ascribed their teachings to him.

The first view cannot be held:

---

\* Irenaeus, i, 26, 3; iii, 11, 1; i, 28, 2; Tertullian, de praescr. haer., 33; adv. Marc., 1, 29; de pudicit., 19; Clement of Alexandria, Strom., ii, 118; iii, 23; Pseudo-Tertullian, adv. omn. haers., 5; Hippolytus, Refut., vii, 36; Eusebius, hist. eccles. iii, 29; Apost. Const. vi, 8; Pseudo-Ignatius, epist. ad Trall., 11.

Accounts are also given by Augustine, Isidor, John of Damascus. The later writings are of little value.

\*\* Harnack: Op. cit., 413

\*\*\* Irenaeus, i, 26, 3



a. Irenaeus (from Asia Minor) says that they are the followers of Nicolas.

b. Clement of Alexandria, who investigated the matter both from the Christian and from the Nicolaitane side says: "Such also are those who call themselves followers of Nicolaus and who perversely bring forward a certain maxim, viz., It is necessary to abuse the flesh." \*

2). The testimony of Clement also opposes the second view:

Nicolaus held that it was necessary 'to fight and abuse the flesh', not at all meaning to give it over to the pursuit of pleasure, but for the purpose of strengthening the soul by means of faith and knowledge. \*\*

The words of Irenaeus do not contradict this view.

3). So we must accept the third view. These men appealed to the statement of Nicolas; "It is necessary to abuse the flesh." We can well picture the case to ourselves. When these false teachers were attacked for their libertinism by the Christians they referred to the the early deacon for support of their way of life. Of course they misapplied his words. But gradually either by their own choice, or through the Christians around them, they received the name "Nicolaitanes".

This form of Gnosticism flourished in the second century. It is related to the rest of the Ophite sects ( Cainites, Sethians, Barbelognosis, etc.)

---

\* Strom., 11, 118  
 \*\* " " " . Nicolaus and his followers, of course, interpreted this in an ascetic sense. The Nicolaitanes gave it a libertine meaning.



#### IV. THE CERINTHIAN GNOSTICISM OP- POSED BY JOHN

After Paul died a martyr death in Rome, John spent some time in Ephesus. While John was caring for the churches of Asia Minor, Cerinthus was also active in Ephesus.\*

That Cerinthus was in Ephesus at the time of John is now generally conceded, due to an old tradition:

And there are some who heard him (Polycarp) say that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe in Ephesus and seeing Cerinthus within, leapt out of the bath without bathing, but saying, "Let us flee, lest the bath fall in while Cerinthus the enemy of the truth is within." \*\*

From the patristic writers we can piece together the following story, though much of it seems to be fiction. He seems to have been an Alexandrian Jew strongly influenced by Philo. "Die Nachricht dasz Kerinth aegyptische Bildung genossen habe hat nichts gegen sich." \*\*\* He seems to have taken advantage of the religious chaos which we have so far found in Asia Minor and attempted to produce a fusion of Judaism, Essenian Ebionitism, Oriental faiths and the ideas and facts from Christianity. He devoted himself to the propagation of this faith and set himself against the Christian missionaries wherever he heard of their work. He seems to have formulated a crude Gnosticism which furnished some of the tenets of later Gnosticism. He believed in a single Supreme Being, far removed above the evil and chaos in the world. The world was created by angels of an

\* Irenaeus, adv. haer. 1, 26; 3, 3-4; Hippolytus, Philosophy, vii, 33; x, 21; Tert. adv. omm. haer. x; Epiphanius, haer. 28, 5; 30, 14; Philaster, de haeribus, 36; Tert. Append. ix, Against all heresies, 3; Athenagoras, A Plea for the Christians, 10; Eusebius, Eccles. Hist., 3, 28.

\*\* Irenaeus, haer., iii, 3, 4.

\*\*\*Zahn: Op. cit., ii, 583



inferior nature. He rejected all the Gospels, all of Paul's letters, and accepted only parts of Matthew and Mark. He taught that Jesus was the physical son of Joseph and that the aeon Christ was added at the time of baptism. This aeon left <sup>Jesus</sup> Christ before his suffering.

It is the opinion of the writer that Cerinthus was of a higher type than the Gnostics with which we have dealt up to this point (with the possible exception of the errors opposed in Colossians). Furthermore, his personal character seems to have been marred by his close connection with the libertine sects. This seems to be caused by his Egyptian training. We also note this from the system which he tries to bring into the Gnosticism of Asia Minor. But let us examine the evidence of the letter of John.

1). In 1 John 2, 18-19, the origin of these false teachers is spoken of. *Ἐσχάτη ὥρα* is not the "last hour" referring to the end of the world. The term is plainly used in the wider sense for the whole New Testament period.\* The final hour reaches from the appearing of such antichrists to the Parousia. So John points out to his readers that they are living in the last times, when many will appear. *Ἀντίχριστος* is not a substitution, but an opponent of Christ.

Then John gives us one of the marks of the antichrists—they originate in the church. *Ἐξ ἡμῶν* is now understood in the deeper sense. At the time when these people joined the church their hearts were not of us, i.e., they did not have

\* John 4, 21; 5, 25; 16, 2.



faith.

Sie gelten... als Leute, welche bei ihrem Eintritt in die Gemeinde nicht gruendlich und ehrlich mit den aus ihrem fruheren Religionsstand herruehenden Gedanken und Bestrebungen gebrochen haben. Sie sind aus derselben (Gemeinden) ausgeschieden(2,19) und zwar nich unfreiwillig; die asiatischen Gemeinden haben sie ueberwunden ( 4, 4). Sie selbst aber versuchen trotzdem, auf diese Gemeinden verfuehrerisch zu wirken und als christliche Brueder Freundschaft und gastliche Aufnahmen in den Hauesern der Gemeindeglieder in Anspruch zu nehmen. \*

So these people , after they had gone out from the Christian congregations , turned again and tried to seduce them ( 2, 26). The Christians were warned not to believe every spirit but to "try the spirits whether they are of God." ( 4, 1).

2). The false teachers claimed to be a brotherhood . From the context we also note that they seemed to consider themselves on a higher level than the other Christians. But John points out that they must be born of God to be in the spiritual brotherhood( 5, 1ff.)

3). From their false views in regard to their superiority over the ordinary Christians a separatistic movement arose. For this reason John points out that all the Christians are spiritual brothers, being the sons of God ( 3, 1-7) The Apostle also brings the exhortation to the Christians to love each other as true children born of God( 1 John 4, 7-10).

4). But the chief error of the false teachers which the Apostle opposes is their false view on the person of Christ. We note that this error is more than a Docetic error- a denial of the humanity of Christ. But it was the

\* Zahn: Op. cit. , ii, 580



Cerinthian dream of a heavenly aeon, Christ, a fictional being whom he substituted for the Son of one essence with the Father. This aeon was not Jesus, who was merely the son of Joseph.

John in the very introduction of his first epistle militates against this view. How could the false teachers speak of Christ? All they had to say about Him came from within their own minds. But it was different with the apostles. They had seen, they had heard, they had handled. Where was there such support for the false teachings of Cerinthus?

He calls Jesus the Word of life. John alone in the New Testament uses the term *logos*. This is the second Person of the Godhead, because He is the complete and final "Revelator of the will and the thought of God (Rev. 19, 11; 13; Rev. 3, 14)" \* Lenski is right when he says: "We must shake off the old idea that "Logos" is in a class by itself, full of special meaning. \*\* But still it is true that these words which John uses were common to the people, and were perhaps also used by the false teachers. \*\*\*

---

\* Lenski: Interpretation of I John. See under v. 1.

\*\* " " " "

\*\*\* Edersheim, op. cit., 11, 660: "The distinction between the unapproachable God and God as manifest and manifesting Himself, which lies at the basis of so much much of the theology of Philo in regard to 'intermediary beings' -- 'Potencies' -- occurs equally in Rabbinic theology though there is probably derived from a different source." God in the act of revealing Himself is described as the Memra, the "Logos", the "Word". 79 times in the Targum Onkelos, for example, the word Memra undoubtedly refers to God as revealing Himself.

Philo also made use of the term Logos. The oldest and best potency of God is called "Logos". In the highest significance it denotes the mind itself, the rational and sovereign principle in the human soul. "Logoi" is also used for the laws of harmony. The "Logos" is called the idea. Philo conceived some kind of analogy between the divine "Logos" and the spoken word of man. It is also identified with fire, etc. Drummond, op. cit., 11, 83-177



But whereas the false teachers may have abused this word in speaking of Christ, John uses it in the Scriptural meaning. He did not borrow an idea from Philo. Philo's Logos is no person but a subordinate potency of God. It designates the mystery of Christ in John's writings. \* In the Old Testament we find the Creation through the Logos. \*\* "This active omnipotent revelation in the beginning of time reveals Him as the Logos from all eternity, one with the Father and the Spirit, and yet another, namely, the Son."\*\*\* Lenksi tries to illustrate this truth with an analogy: "As the spoken word of man is the reflection of his glory so the Son is 'the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person' ." \*\*\*\*

John carefully combines Jesus and Christ. "The blood of Jesus Christ God's son cleanseth us from all sins." ( I John 1, 7). Those who walk with the Logos of God will not walk in darkness (which by this time also had come to be used as a symbol for evil in Philo's writings) but will walk in the Light. (5

But, as we have noted above, Cerinthus refused to accept Jesus, the son of Joseph, as "Christ", his invented aeon. So St. John calls him a liar who "denies that Jesus is the Christ". (6 "He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son." (6 These men evidently were unwilling to have Christ be and remain a true man. He indeed came into the flesh, but He did not remain in it. "He that denieth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God." ( I John 4, 3).

\* 2 Cor. 1, 19-20; Col. 1, 27; 2, 2; I Tim. 3, 16.

\*\* Gen. 1, 4; 1, 26; Heb. 11, 3; Ps. 33, 6-9; 107, 20.

\*\*\* Lenksi, op.cit., ad loc. Is. 63, 9; Mic. 5, 2

\*\*\*\* " " " Heb. 1, 3; John 10, 30.

5. Drummond, op. cit. ii, 163, shows Philo's use of "Light".

6. See 2, 22 for both references.



Cerinthus is the spirit of the antichrist. He is the type at this time that points forward to the antichrist that is to come. There is the Antichrist and there are many antichrists. Everyone who denies that Jesus(the man) is Christ( God) is the follower of the spirit of antichrist.

Finally John deals directly with the error of Cerinthus. Those who say that Christ came by water only (aeon descended on Him at baptism),but deny that He came also by blood ( at His death, Cerinthus denying that Christ died for men), are liars( I John 5, 6ff). For we have the three that bear testimony:

The Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost. This is the great mystery of the Trinity. And there are also the three witnesses upon earth: The Spirit (without whom no one can call Jesus Lord), the water( baptism) , and Christ's redemption. Thus we have unmistakable evidence that Christ, the Godman, completed our redemption.

5). But Cerinthus and his followers had little esteem for a Savior because they evidently regarded themselves as being without sin. \* They evidently felt that the weaknesses of the flesh were to be laid aside and the spirit would triumph. Why should they care to have their carnal sins forgiven, if their spirit would be freed from the flesh? Furthermore , Cerinthus accepted only a part of the moral commandments. The false teachers are not walking in the light because they despise their brothers( I, 1, 9).

\* Here Cerinthus and his followers were revealing another strong trait from the teachings of Philo. Drummond, 11, 292. 321: "Creatures which are wholly rational are above moral evil, and those that are wholly irrational fall below it. .. man alone with his mixed nature admits the presence of contraries. ... Philo anticipates the final triumph of good over evil... long life will bless a race which has been won to virtue and has tamed the wild beasts in the soul."



The false teachers have not yet learned the terrible nature of sin. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." ( I John 1, 8). Why? Because every time we go contrary to the Law of God we sin. The false teachers could not boast of having kept the Law of God, nor could they say that they were above it. "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is a transgression of the law." ( I John 3, 4). These people claimed to know God, but they rejected His commandments. ( 2, 4).

6). Their gods are idols. That thought seems to be expressed in the last verse of I John. John warns the Christians to stay away from idols. Everyone who changes the nature of Christ does not have a true God but mere idols. This may also refer to some rude system of emanations.

7). The false teachers also seem to have denied that there is eternal life. St. John writes this letter to assure those who continued in the faith of Christ that they would obtain eternal life ( I John 5, 13).

That concludes our study of the doctrines of Cerinthus. His false teachings are also warned against in II John 7 and in many passages in the Gospel.\*

In Cerinthus , we doubtlessly have one of the early systematizers of the Gnostic errors. He represents the

\* Kretzmann( Mimeog. Notes on John, pg. 6) lists the following passages in the Gospel as being written to offset Cerinthian or similar views on Christ; 1, 1-18; 2, 11. 13-22; 3, 13-18; 4, 14. 42; 5, 17-47; 6, 35-88; 9, 35-37; 10, 25-38; 11, 12, 28-30; 12, 37-50; 13, 1-3; 14, 6-9; 15, 1; 16, 15, 28; 17, 18, 6; 18, 36-37; 19, 11; 20, 17.28; 21, 15-17.

"These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" ( 5, 6 ). For "this is he that came by water and by blood, even Jesus Christ; not only by water but also by blood"( 20, 31).



Alexandrian Jews who systematized and spread the Gnostic errors. So Qualben is right when he says:

Recent research has proved, however, that there existed a fairly well developed Jewish gnosticism even at the time of Christ, and that the prominent early gnostic leaders--Cerinthus, Basilides, Valentinus, and others--were Jews, who in turn received their main gnostic tenets from Philo Judeas, a learned Jew of Alexandria ( 20 B. C.-- 40 A. D. ). Gnosticism originated on Jewish soil, and from the Jews the movement spread to the Gentiles. \*

We are grateful to Christ, the eternal Logos of God, that the Apostles were still alive when this movement started so that they could open the battle before they turned the field over to the lesser leaders of later decades.

---

\* History of the Christian Church, 70.



## APPENDIX I : SIMON MAGUS

Since Simon Magus is often connected with the Gnosticism which Peter opposed, it is fitting that we devote a few words to him and his teachings.\* From the account in Acts( 8, 9ff.) we glean the following facts:

1. Simon gave out that he himself was some "great" one .

The term "great" was very characteristic in the religions at this time. Men prayed to any god whom they worshipped as "great" and they revered his greatness. "The 'greatness of God' was equivalent to 'the power of God' " \*\*

2. He used sorcery to bewitch the people.

3. The people regarded him as "the great power of God".

He was an epiphany (to use the Greek term), or Avatar (to use the Hindu), of that Supreme Power, of which even the gods themselves are only partial and inferior envisagements and embodiments. The Samaritans called him the "Power of God which is called Great," a very remarkable title. An excellent parallel occurs in the Lydian inscription: "There is one God in the heavens, great Men the Heavenly, the great power of the ever-living God". \*\*\*

The word *Μεγας* was technical in the language of religion, superstition, and magic, and was one of the most common and characteristic terms in the language of superstition. *Μεγας* was what the devotees respected and worshipped. Any exhibition of power commanded their adoration.

4. He believed that religious authority could be bought.

The word *ἔσουοια* is frequently used in magical documents.

\* Origen, Contra Celsum, 6; Tert., Against all Heresies, 6; Ignatius, Philadelphians, 6; Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 13; Tert., Treatise of the Soul, 35; Against Marc., 3 et al.

\*\* Ramsay: Bearing of Recent Discoveries on the Trustworthiness of N. T., 118. \*\*\* Op. cit., 117



From these facts several truths may be deduced. Simon evidently was not a true believer in God, but taught a religion of his own. He followed the disciples to learn in what way they did their wonderful work. He did not object to the people's calling him the great power of God, but desired to learn how to continue his reputation.

We probably have an early reference to this Simon in the writings of Ignatius: \* "If anyone confesses Christ Jesus the Lord, but denies the God of the law and of the prophets, saying that the Father of Christ is not the Maker of the heaven and earth, he has not continued in the truth any more than his father the Devil, and is a disciple of Simon Magus, not of the Holy Spirit".

From the Fathers we may piece together the following story, much of which seems to be fictitious: He practiced magic art and contended against the disciples. He was from Samaria. At Tyre he redeemed a certain woman from slavery, called Helena, and spoke of her as the first conception of his mind. She was the being who had descended into the lower regions and created angels, but was captivated by them and held in subjection. The angels that ruled the world were evil. Among these angels was the God of the Old Testament. He was the Power of the Supreme Being, and by being baptized in his name they could overcome the world. His followers were licentious, and taught that the world must be overcome by subjecting the body to abuses. He taught a system of six powers ( Philo Judaeus).

What should be our attitude toward these later re-

---

\* Philadelphians, 6. There is doubt about some of the writings of Ignatius.



ferences? That there is much fiction in the accounts cannot be denied. But this is often due to the fact that the later writers attributed some of the teachings of their day to the earlier writers. Then, too, it is easy to see why the later Christian writers would try to trace heretical movements back to some earlier heretic mentioned in the Bible.

In favor of the view which makes Simon Magus the originator of a crude Gnosticism has the following points in its favor:

- a. The early testimony of Ignatius.
- b. The testimony of Justin Martyr, a countryman of Simon, being born in the province of Samaria.

Simon, a native of the village called Gitto, who in the reign of Claudius Caesar, and in your royal city of Rome did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devils operating in him. He was honored by you with a statue, which statue was erected on the river Tiber, between the two bridges and bore this inscription.... \*

After this quotation, Justin repeats some of the statements about the system of Simon as we have it given above. From this quotation it seems as if Simon was too well known to be falsely represented. \*\*

- c. The view is not rejected by the Biblical account, but is rather dimly shadowed in it.

- d. An early sect was called the Simonians. This name, however could have been given them by the early Christian writers.

This is the view which is accepted by many of the scholars of today.

\* I Apology, xxvi.

\*\* It is disputed whether the Simon mentioned by Josephus, (xx, vii, 2) is the Simon of Acts. The Simon of Josephus is said to be from Cyprus.



In regard to this Simon, Jones says: "There is one more Gnostic movement that is dimly and mysteriously in evidence in the New Testament, namely the Simonians, fathered by the famous Simon Magus of Acts VIII, 9-14".\*

---

\* Op. cit., 28

Others who hold this view are: Legge (Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity); Fisher (History of the Christian Church); Jonas (Gnosis und Späntaniker Geist, 353): "Simon Magus ist die Vor-Valentinianische Form dieses Typus."



## APPENDIX II

## NOTES ON THE ESSENES

## I. The Name.

The name is variously written in Greek:

- 1). Ἐσσηνίος . \*
- 2). Εσσηνίος . \*\*
- 3). Οσσηνίος . \*\*\*
- 4). Ἰεσσηνίος . \*\*\*\*

There are no examples of the use of this name in any early Hebrew or Aramaic. Various etymologies have been given for the word:

1). Philo connects the word with the Greek ἁγίος "holy". But it seems as if Philo is playing with words or else referring to a pre-established harmony of words. (5)

2). The word has been traced back to proper names. It is said, for example, to be derived from the name of Jesse, the father of David. Or it is also said to refer to the little town Essa. (6)

3). The best interpretations leave us a choice of five Hebrew words.

a. רפא "to heal", from which we have רפוא "a physician."

\* Jos. Ant. 8, 5, 9; 13, 10, 6; 15, 10, 5; 18, 1, 2 5; E. J. 2, 8, 13; Vit. 2; Plin. N.H. 15, 17.

\*\* Philo 11, pg. 457. Jos. B. J. 11, 7, 3.

\*\*\* Epiphan. Haer. 40 ff.

\*\*\*\* Epiphan. Haer. p. 117. The discussion of the name of this sect, together with the references are taken from Lightfoot: Dissertations on the Apostolic Age, pages 325-331

5. Lightfoot, 326.

6. Ibid.



But it seems highly improbable that the name of the Essenes should be taken from a pursuit that is only incidental and secondary.

b.  $\chi\iota\pi$  "to see", from which we have the word  $\chi\iota\pi$  "a seer". This is chosen in view of the prophetic powers of the Essenes. \* "But  $\chi\iota\pi$  is rather  $\acute{\omicron}\rho\acute{\alpha}\nu$  than  $\theta\epsilon\omega\pi\epsilon\iota\upsilon$ ; and thus it must denote the result rather than the process, the vision which was the privilege of the few rather than the contemplation which was the duty of all."\*\*

c.  $\eta\psi\upsilon$  "to do". So the word "Essene" would signify "the doers, the observers of the Law". So the Talmudic phrase "men of practice" is supposed to refer to the Essenes. But there is little to recommend this interpretation of the word.

The two which Lightfoot considers of most importance are the following:

d. Chasi or Chasyo, the Syriac for "pious". It is recommended by the fact that it resembles not only in sound but also the Greek, of which it is a common rendering in the Peshitto. So we could explain the Greek derivation of which Philo speaks. \*\*\*

e.  $\chi\psi\pi$  "to be silent". From this word we have  $\Delta\chi\psi\pi$  "the silent ones". This is the etymology which Josephus seems to have followed since he writes out  $\eta\psi\pi$  (Ant. iii. 7. 5) as  $\epsilon\omicron\omicron\eta\gamma$ . This derivation is followed by Hastings and others today. \*\*\*\*

\* B. J. ii, 8, 12

\*\* Lightfoot: Op. cit., 330

\*\*\* Lightfoot: Op. cit., 330

\*\*\*\* Encyclopedia, ad loc.



## II. Sources.

Neither the Bible nor the Rabbinical writings mention the Essenes.

The earliest reference which we have to this sect is found in Philo : Quod omnes prob. liber ( 12-13). This seems to have been written when Philo was still young, probably at the time when he was a student at Alexandria. He had just attempted to prove that people are at times to be found who are altogether virtuous. So he naturally attempts to show that the main feature of the Essenes is their ethics. "It is to ethics to which they devote their entire strength." He describes them as caring little about philosophy and devoting all their time to an ascetic life.

The second account which we have of the Essenes from the pen of Philo is said to have been found in the lost Apology for the Jews . Eusebius , however, has preserved parts of it for us. \*

In late years there have been attempts to discredit the records of Philo . But the authenticity of the records have been well established. \*\*

Another record is found in Epiphanius . \*\*\* Hippolytus has preserved for us the fact that some of the Essenes identified themselves with the active methods of the Zealots. \*\*\*\*

The various accounts of Josephus have been mentioned repeatedly.

\* Praep. Ev. viii, 2

\*\* Hastings Encyclopedia, ad. loc.

\*\*\* Haer. xix, 1-2; xx, 3.

\*\*\*\* Haer. ix, 14-23



Aside from these Jewish and Christian writers, we have an interesting note about the Essenes in the writings of Pliny. \*

### III. Variations in the Sources.

The account given by Hippolytus \*\* follows closely the one which Josephus gives us in his "Jewish Wars". But there are certain differences. For example: Josephus says that the novice swore "that he will abstain from robbery and will equally preserve the books belonging to their sect, and the name of the angels." \*\*\* Hippolytus in the parallel passage has: "And in addition to the foregoing promises, he swears to impart to no one a knowledge of the doctrines in a different manner from that in which he has received them himself."\*\*\*\* So there are variations throughout the two records.

We may explain this difficulty in one of two ways:

a. Both records are taken from an earlier source.<sup>(5)</sup> But this seems improbable. Nowhere do we have any mention of such an earlier source from which these writers could take their accounts. Josephus was well acquainted with the Jews and also with some of the Essenes, so we would expect him to write his own account.

b. The better explanation would be to attribute to Hippolytus a free rendition of the text of Josephus. This seems to be the correct explanation for the following reasons:

aa. Hippolytus often emendated the sources he used .

\* N. H. 17

\*\* Haer. ix, xiv

\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 7

\*\*\*\* Haer. ix, 19

5. This is the view expressed in the Jewish Encyclopedia, ad loc.



bb. The difficult passages in Josephus are changed in the writings of Hippolytus.

cc. The later writer would try as much as possible to harmonize the accounts of Philo and Josephus.

2). Philo: "None engage in war....nor is anyone busied in the slightest with military avocations." \*

Josephus: "John the Essene, (was sent as general) to the top archy of Thamma". \*\*

Clearly the difference here noted is due to the fact that the two writers have different branches of the same movement in mind. Philo wrote many years before Josephus, and in the section from which this excerpt is taken deals only with the Essenes around the Dead Sea. Josephus speaks of a general who is farther north. Evidently the related movements which arose from the first colony on the shores of the Dead Sea were not as strict as the original sect.

3). Philo: "They contemn philosophy.... It is to ethics to which they devote their entire strength". \*

Josephus: "They also take great pains in studying the writings of the ancients." \*\*\* "These are divine doctrines of the Essenes... which lay an unavoidable bait for such as have once come to a taste of their philosophy."\*\*\*\*

The chief interest of Philo, in the quoted section, is to show that some men are virtuous. So he was undoubtedly tempted to overemphasize the ethics of the order. If we cannot harmonize these passages we are bound to follow Josephus, since Philo

\* Philo: Quod omnes prob. liber, 12

\*\* B. J. 2, 20, 4

\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 6

\*\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 11



was young at the time when he wrote this section, and undoubtedly had no personal contacts with the Essenes( at the time).

4). Philo : "There is among the Essenes no mere child, or even a scarce bearded lad or young man; since of such as these the moral dispositions are unstable." \*

Josephus: "They neglect wedlock but choose other persons' children, while they are pliable and fit for learning and esteem them to be their kindred, and form them according to their own manners." \*\*

Either both of these accounts are right ( and then we have a change in the practice of the Essenes ) , or one of the accounts is false. We accept the former explanation. The Essenes evidently saw that they must make some arrangements for the continuation of the sect. That is why some of them at a later time also married, but tried to continue their asceticism as much as possible. \*\*\*

From the above statements we may make the following deductions:

a. The ascetic principles of the sect were gradually weakened.

b. There were Essenic sects outside the region of the Dead Sea, who were less strict and more worldly than the mother colony.

c. Men arose who leaned toward Essenism, but who did not care to carry their principles out consistently.

\* In the excerpt of Eusebius: Praep. Ev., viii, 2

\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 2

\*\*\* B. J. 2, 8, 13



Finally, we must remember that if Philo was in danger of overemphasizing the ethical side of the Essenes, Josephus was also in danger of identifying their philosophy with the Greek systems.\*

#### IV. Ethical or Mystical ?

Shall we lay the emphasis on the life of the Essenes or on their speculative tenets? This question is much discussed. We may note the following considerations:

a. We have noted that these Essenes did have strange teachings which evidently point to the East as the source from which they sprang.

b. "Deeds depend upon creeds". It seems as if we must also remember that slogan when we consider the Essenes.

c. Their refusal to bring sacrifices in the Temple points to the fact that they had teachings of their own to replace Old Testament worship.

e. Their life could be observed by any casual visitor. But their teachings were guarded with oaths. There is always a tendency to describe what has been seen.

f. They are not mentioned in Rabbinic writings. It is possible that their teachings were unknown, or else they were considered outside the pale of true Judaism.

g. The silence of the New Testament need not surprise us. The Essenes had sworn to keep their doctrine secret, and hence they would avoid drawing their tenets into public light. There was no occasion for the mentioning of their sect.

---

\* B. J. 2, 8, 11



APPENDIX III  
THE RELATION OF NEW TESTAMENT Gnostics  
TO LATER Gnosticism

We may briefly offer connecting links between the Gnosticism of the New Testament, and later Gnostic movements.

1. We have already alluded to Essenian Ebionitism in connection with the Gnostics at Colosse. We may assume that the Gnosticism there revealed either developed into the later Ebionitism, or else was crushed by the letter of Paul.

2. The Gnostics of the Pastoral Letters lean too heavily toward the Jewish side to permit of later identification. Their speculations and genealogies certainly have their counterpart in the writings of Philo. But evidently their teachings were not systematized. It seems as if they became some of the most consistent followers of the Alexandrian Gnostics of later times. These Gnostics of Alexandria were also Jews.

3. The Gnosticism opposed and condemned in Peter, Jude, and Revelation certainly points to the later Ophites. These Gnostics distinguished themselves by their godless life, and by their exaltation of all the negative elements of the Old Testament ( serpent, Cain, Esau, Korah, Sodomites, etc.).\*

4. We have touched upon Cerinthus. He tried to combine the elements mentioned above. Although he succeeded in gathering some to himself, other people continued the old Gnostic systems. It is the Alexandrian movement, of which Cerinthus was an early exponent, with which we are usually acquainted. Later leaders ( Basilides, etc. ) developed his system.

---

\* Irenaeus, haer. 1, 21; Tert.: Haer., 2, 2 ff.



## Bibliography

- Hans Jonas: Gnosis und Spaentaniker Geist, Teil I, Goettingen, 1934.
- Bousset: Hauptprobleme der Gnosis, Goettingen, 1907.
- Georg Heinrici: Die Valentinischen Gnosis und die Heil. Schrift, Berlin, 1871.
- Harnack: The Sect of the Nicolaitans, Journal of Religion, Chicago, July 1923.
- George Foot Moore: History of Religions, Scribner, 1924.
- Rufus M. Jones: The Church's Debt to Heretics, H. Doran, 1924
- Lightfoot: Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon, MacMillan, 1871
- Josephus: (Whiston Translation).
- Foakes-Jackson: History of the Christian Church to 461: Doran, 1924.
- Streeter: The Primitive Church, MacMillan, 1929.
- Fisher: History of Christian Doctrine, Scribners, 1923
- Philo, I-VII, F. H. Colson & G. H. Whitaker, William Heinemann, London.
- Wm. Ramsay: The Bearings of Recent Discoveries on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament, Hodder and Stoughton, 1915.
- Lightfoot: Dissertations on the Apostolic Age, MacMillan, 1892.
- Barnes on the New Testament, Blackie and Sons, London
- Qualben: A History of the Christian Church, Nelson, 1933
- Kretzmann: Popular Commentary.
- Apostolic Fathers ( In various editions, but especially Lightfoot's ) .
- Journal of American Lutheran Church, July, 1936.
- Eugene Caldwell: The Fulness of Christ, Princeton Theological Review, 16, 560.



Adolph Harnack: The Mission and Expansion of the Christian Church in the First Three Centuries, Moffatt, 1908.

Lietzmann: Founding of the Church Universal, Scribner's 1936.

Lietzmann: The Beginnings of the Christian Church, Scribner's 1937.

Lenski: Interpretation of....., Lutheran Book Concern, 1932.

A. T. Robertson: Word Pictures in the New Testament, vol. 4.

The Catholic Encyclopedia, Robert Appleton Co., 1907

Hastings: Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Funk and Wagnalls, 1901.

F. Drummond: Philo Judaeus, or the Jewish Alexandrian Philosophy.

G. F. Moore: Judaism ( 2 vol ) , Harvard University Press, 1927.

Maxwell Silver: The Ethics of Judaism from the Aspect of Duty.

Lake: Historical and Political Background: In: An Introduction to the New Testament.

Jewish Encyclopedia: Smith Inc. , 1930.

F. C. Porter: Judaism in New Testament Times

Zahn: Einleitung in das Neue Testament, 1924 ed.

Edersheim: Life and Times of Jesus , the Messiah, 1910.

Hallock: Coptic Gnostic Writings . In: Anglican Theo. Rev. , 1929-1930, 145

Fuerbringer: Introduction to the New Testament

Plummer: Pastoral Letters, in the Expositor 's Bible.

International Critical Commentary, Mitchell .

Mimeographed Notes



**Fuerbringer:**

Revelation

Timothy

Titus

**Kretzmann, P. E. :**

Gospel of John

Ephesians \*

**Machen: The Origin of Paul's Religion, MacMillan, 1925.****Boughton: Conscience and the Logos in Philo, in: Luth. Ch. L. v. 4, 121-133.****Farrar, F. W.: The Rules of Philo.****Anonymous: Substantia τῷ Θεῷ λόγῳ apud Philonem Judaeum et Joannem apostolum tributa. In: Ztschr. fuer hist. Theol. , XIX, 333-387**


---

\* These notes sold by the Stationary Company at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

\* Much additional material was gathered from classroom lectures.