

Abstract:

The Valentinian Gnostics and other gnostic groups use themes from the Scripture, often with a strong allegorical exegesis of the text of Genesis, exegesis which show common features with Platonism. But not only this things are in common features of the Gnostics, but also a certain religiosity that is specific to its time. As many interpreters have observed, Valentinianism is the finest form of Gnosticism; in it we have a strong Christian air, but also a philosophical form of classical Gnostic myth.

The present thesis starts from the claims of the Church writers who claim that Valentinus is a Platonic philosopher. More specifically, Hippolytus says in *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* that Valentinus is undoubtedly related to Pythagoras and Plato's philosophical doctrines. This heresiologist sees Valentinus and his followers, especially Heracleon and Ptolemy, as the followers of Pythagoras and Plato. Hippolytus is not the only one from the ancient world who makes such a statement about the Valentinians and Valentinus. About the latter, Tertullian tells us that he is a platonic heretic. In *Adversus Haereses* II.14.2-7 Irenaeus also says that the teachings of Gnostics are borrowed from ancient Greek philosophy.

Also a very important figure in the history of Platonism observed a close relation between Plato and the Gnostics. We refer here to Plotinus, who wrote in the

third century several treatises against the Gnostics, including one entitled *Against the Gnostics*. Researchers could not determine for sure against which Gnostic movement Plotinus writes, but that tractate shows that Gnostics were very active at that time and very influential, since even a pagan author has rejected their doctrines. Although the opponents of Plotinus can not be identified precisely, we can make an impression about the doctrines combated by Plotinus. The neoplatonic philosopher tells us explicitly that the Gnostics take ideas from Plato, but they distort them.

Influences of Platonism on Valentinian Gnosticism has as starting point just the accusations made by some Christian theologians and some Platonic philosophers. In this point it is important to determine which ideas are borrowed from Plato by the Valentinians. The current understanding of Gnosticism and Platonism was significantly enriched in the last century, due to the new archaeological discoveries and numerous studies signed by modern scholars. However, we do not believe that we can determine exactly which doctrines of Valentinian Gnostics are retrieved from the Platonic tradition. In the age of Gnostics, Platonism reached a history of almost seven centuries.

From this period, we do not have many documents today, which makes it very difficult, if not almost impossible, to know precisely the doctrinal development within this tradition. The lack of documents

leads to the impossibility of finding all the influences received by Gnosticism from the philosophical school mentioned. Concerning Plato, the situation is different because all the exoteric work of the philosopher is available to us. Moreover, we have testimonies about Plato's philosophy from his disciples and from other ancient thinkers. It is therefore appropriate to establish some influences exerted by Plato on thinkers as Valentin, Ptolemy or other Valentinians. Inevitably, where sources allow us, we use works of philosophers of the Platonic tradition, but our goal is to highlight some elements of Platonic philosophy in the Valentinian Gnosticism.

Gnostic literature is relatively rich in volume. About this philosophical-religious current we have both patristic and philosophical references and some original texts. The most important Gnostic texts were discovered in 1945 in Egypt, at Nag Hammadi. They comprise over 50 different works, most of them previously unknown. Although it has been more than six decades after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts and more than three decades since the first complete translation of these texts in a foreign language, there is still missing a work entirely devoted to the influences of Plato's philosophy on the Valentinian Gnosticism.

Regarding the Valentinian Gnosticism, in recent years were written works of real importance for the progress of the research in this area. This study utilizes

both modern exegesis on Valentinian School and the exegesis on Plato's work, and the writings of Christian apologists or Valentinian texts from the Nag Hammadi library.

Our scientific approach is a multidisciplinary one, since Valentinian Gnosticism is analyzed from the point of view of the history of philosophy and the history of religions. Our study is divided into two parts, the first one treats issues regarding the methodology. This part will analyze the problem of the concept of Gnosticism in general and Valentinian Gnosticism, in particular. The last part is dedicated to the analysis of the Plato's doctrines and their correspondent in Valentinian Gnosticism.

Establishing the origin of Gnosticism is a representative chapter of the history of research. Some researchers have seen in Gnosticism a Hellenization of Christianity, others considered that its origins must be sought in Iranian religion, or in Judaism, or in Platonism. In the current stage of the research, this issue doesn't have a solution for the moment and was somehow abandoned and for the modern researcher isn't now vital to find the origin of Gnosticism, but rather the definition of this concept. Nowadays, for the modern researcher is crucial not to find the origins of Gnosticism, but rather is more important to give a proper definition to this concept.

In our first chapter we made a brief history of the research, as well as issues related to the definition of Gnosticism. The theme of Christian gnosis is also the subject of this section. If for almost a century researchers have dealt with the problem of finding the origin of Gnosticism, the debate today would seem somewhat abandoned. The theory that still has followers is the one of the origin of Gnosticism in Judaism. However, this theory does not explain all the Gnostic myth unless we take into account other influences received by this religious phenomenon. This does not mean that Gnosticism is a religious syncretism. Within Gnostic movement we can also find Greek philosophical ideas. The current challenge is to define Gnosticism, and this question can not be separated entirely from the subject of the origin of Gnosticism. Clearly, we can not speak about Gnosticism as a whole, without first explaining what we mean by this concept. We believe that we can still use the concept of Gnosticism, but we must specify which form of Gnosticism is in discussion or more specifically, we must specify which Gnostic school we refer to.

For us, Gnosticism is a second-century A.D. religious movement that conveys the idea of an evil or ignorant Demiurge, along with the idea of human saving, which can be achieved only through a revealed knowledge. Also, we can't say that Gnostic movements originate in one philosophy or religion, but rather

Gnosticism is a religious phenomenon that embodies several elements specific to late Antiquity.

The second chapter is dedicated to the direct and indirect exposure of the main sources which presents the doctrines of the Valentinians. In the first part of this chapter is examined the original Valentinian texts. We analyze the Nag Hammadi documents and the heresiological texts or pagan testimonies. Here is found also a statement of the Valentinian myth as it appears in the available documents.

The third chapter is addressed to the main exponents of Valentinism. Some scholars think that Valentinus is a gnostic, but others don't consider him to be so. Therefore, in this section is analyzed the relation between Valentinus, Valentinians and Gnosticism, followed by the investigation of the problems related to Valentinus career in Rome and his relation with the Roman Church. Also, in this section there are analyzed the followers of Valentinus and their identity issues and doctrines professed by them. Valentinus and his followers played a significant role in the history of the Christian Church. Furthermore, the founder of this school has played an important role in the Church of Rome, because he came even to run for the office of bishop of Rome. From this fact, it appears that Valentinus was considered a Christian or even „a true Christian”. The Gnostic teacher reveals himself to be a

reformer of the Roman Church, and he has implemented in Christianity the Gnostic myth.

Unlike Sethian Gnostics, who doesn't pay special attention to the figure of Jesus Christ, for the Valentinians, the Saviour occupies a central role in the Gnosis professed by them. Among the followers of Valentinus, Ptolemy is the most influential figure, along with the important names of Theodotus or Heracleon. The latter is the first systematic commentator of the *Gospel of John*. Through the intellectual activity of the Valentinian Gnostics, the Church had to speed up the process of canon formation and of the establishment of dogma. Thus, the Valentinians played an important role in the history of early Christianity.

In the following three chapters are debated some Platonic topics that are found in Valentinian doctrine. In the fourth chapter is being investigated the overcoming of Being at Plato and his successors, after which we approach the Valentinian negative theology. Here we demonstrate both the dependence of the negative theology to the first parmenidian hypothesis, as well as the parallels that can be drawn between Plotinian negative theology and Valentinian texts. For the Valentinians, this ignorance of the Father has two implications. One of these is related to the realm of Pleroma, where due ineffability of the Father, Sophia will make a reckless and foolish act. The world is the product of this reckless act. Father is not accessible to

human knowledge, a situation that can be seen from the negative theology applied to the Father. The gnosis is the only one who can reveal information about the first principle to human being. Analogies between Valentinian texts and Plotinus' treaties does not show that the latter influenced the former, but shows that both Gnostics as well as the platonic philosophers based their negative theology to a common fund, represented by the whole Platonic tradition.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to those issues related to the Platonic and Valentinian cosmology. Plotinus noticed in his treatise against the Gnostics that the latter took the theme of the Demiurge from Plato. Therefore, the chapter examines the role played by the Demiurge in the Valentinian Gnosticism, Sophia's role in gnostic protology or her relation with the indefinite dyad. The Demiurge is set between ideas and matter, he is modeling the latter without knowing the eternal paradigm. Pleroma is being compared with the world of ideas in the fifth chapter.

The last chapter deals with the doctrine of the immortality of soul and its divine origin, as it appears in Plato's dialogues; then, we compare it with the theme of immortality and the soul's origin at Valentinus and his students. The theme of the threefold of the soul is also the subject of this chapter, where we see the analogies between Valentinian theories and Plato's philosophy. The image of the body as the tomb of the soul is found in

both currents, the Gnostic, as well in the Platonic philosophy. This idea does not appear first at Plato, but it is assumed by all the Platonic tradition. The same goes in the case of the soul's immortality. This faith is Orphic at origin, but Plato is the first one who gives it a philosophical content.

One can say that Valentinians apply the reverse exegesis, not only to the Old Testament. This kind of interpreting is used by the Valentinians also on Platonic dialogues. As a counter-culture phenomenon, Valentinians will not only oppose and revolt against the traditional interpretations of the Bible, but also against the philosophy that was in vogue at that time. As Dunderberg points out, Valentinians are both in accordance with the Platonic tradition, but they are also in tension with it. Gnostics used philosophical concepts to be understood by those who were knew philosophy, but they were also revolutionary, both because of their counter-culture spirit and their need to differentiate the traditions with wich they compete.