

What Has Valentinus to Do With Christianity?

The title is a play on the most famous quote by the second century heresiologist, Tertullian, who said, "what has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Tertullian said this because during that time there was much errant Greek thought invading the church. One of these Greek ideals was probably Gnosticism. "Probably" because although Tertullian definitely battled it, there isn't 100% surety that Gnosticism originated from Greek thought. It is only thought to have been born at the beginning of the first century influenced by this Greek thought.

The two main strings of Gnosticism have been classified as Iranian and Syrian. These strings trickled into other areas of thought and religion, chief among these being Christianity. In fact, this was one of its earliest areas and would sadly have a successful run at it. The kind of Gnosticism that invaded the church came to be known as Gnostic Christianity. It became so prevalent that many people both inside and outside the church thought it was just normal Christianity. This false teaching was adopted by several different Christian teachers and turned into one of the most problematic heresies of early Christianity. There were several main teachers of Christian Gnosticism who developed their own branch of this heresy. The two Christian Gnostic teachers that had the biggest influence were Marcion and Valentinus. And probably the most influential of these two was Valentinus, who became so influential in the church that he very nearly became bishop of Rome.

It might be uncomfortable to think of heretical teachers like Valentinus having a profound *positive* impact on Christianity, but in a way he and other heretics did. These false teachings had some very positive results. They were instrumental in goading the church to collect an authoritative canon that

likewise goaded it to more fully and authoritatively evaluate and form orthodox Christian doctrine based on that canon. But this collected canon of the New Testament would not become reality until the third century. For the many years prior to that, it was much harder to maintain a consensus throughout the worldwide church about the actual teachings of the Gospel. Until then there were primarily only letters and writings claiming divine authority floating about. The fact that this was the case and that there was no definite canon during these years made it so much easier for false teachings to creep into and thrive in local church doctrine. So who was this man who introduced such falsehood to Christian doctrine and what did he teach?

Valentinus and His Gnostic Christian Doctrine

Valentinus was born in Egypt sometime in the end of the first century and was educated in Alexandria. It was during these Alexandrian years that he set up the Eastern branch of Valentinian thought. He would later set up the Western branch after he moved to Rome. The primary difference between these two branches is how they viewed the body of Jesus and this was a big issue with them since anything of the flesh is evil and exactly what the "spiritual" needed to be saved from. The Eastern branch resolved this by saying that Jesus had to die to save Himself as well. The Western branch resolved this with the docetic view, which said that Jesus only *seemed* to be a man and he only *seemed* to suffer and die.

Basic Valentinus doctrine says that the first eternal being was First-Being or Profundity. He eventually united with Thought to produce the emanations (aeons) called Mind and Truth. And this production process kept on going with Mind and Truth producing two more emanations, and then those two emanations uniting to produce two more emanations, and so on and so forth. This went on until 26 emanations had been produced after First-Being and Thought. This genealogical strand of First-Being, Thought, and their 26 offspring was

called The Fullness. Every one of these succeeding pairs along The Fullness grew more and more discontent, each succeeding emanation more so than the one before it, because each had less knowledge of and contact with First-Being. This discontentment come to a head in Wisdom (Sophia), the 26th emanation. Her prideful decision to fight to build her way back up to First-Being only resulted in her fall from grace. First-Being tried his best to restore Wisdom to her correct place in an attempt to keep the perfection of The Fullness. It didn't work and therefore the entire line of The Fullness was compromised. As the first phase of a strategy to restore the former holiness of The Fullness, First-Being also produced directly from Himself the emanations of Christ and Holy Spirit. Together the two brought a joy to The Fullness that resulted in the emanations collectively producing Jesus.

In the meantime, Wisdom's passion remained below the Fullness and produced the evil Demiurge who created earth. The Demiurge is the God of the Bible who is actually and unknowingly much lower than the lowest emanation of The Fullness. To save us from him, Wisdom's passion, with the help of Savior, produced the spiritual seed of earth. They intended for the committed goal of this spiritual seed to ascend above this evil Earth to The Fullness with the help of Jesus.

The Disciples of Valentinus

Valentinus taught his false doctrine until his death in A.D. 160, after which his students continued to spread it. These students clearly made their own tweaks to their teacher's doctrine. You can see these tweaks in a set of Gnostic writings called the *Nag Hammadi Scriptures*. They are called this because they were discovered buried near the town of Nag Hammadi in Egypt. It is believed they were buried by Egyptian monks around AD 367 after Athanasius ordered the monasteries of Egypt to rid themselves of all apocryphal works.

The Nag Hammadi contains 13 codices (a codex is an ancient

book), each of which have a number of different writings. There are slightly over 50 writings in all. These writings clarify and expand on Valentinian doctrines to some degree and offer some of the aforementioned interesting tweaks. Probably the most famous of these writings is The Gospel of Truth, which some experts think was penned by Valentinus himself. Irenaeus, perhaps the greatest heresiologist of all time, first mentions this writing in his five-volume work *Against the Heresies* as an example of the great Valentinian threat to Christianity. Irenaeus was just one of a group of Christian heresiologists who arose during the second century to dispute Gnostic Christianity and other heretical teachings in the church. Irenaeus focused his war largely on the Gnostic Christians and primarily the Valentinians. Concerning Gnostic Christianity, Irenaeus concluded that "Against them one might justly exclaim: 'Oh you nonsense-blabbering pumpkins! You blameworthy and untrue sophists!'"

No, Valentinianism was not the only heresy or even Gnostic line to encourage the church to collect a final New Testament canon and to fine tune its orthodox doctrine, but it did have a huge role in that inspiration. And for all of its supposed knowledge, Valentinianism mimicked its own doctrine by itself being a definite fall of wisdom.