

## VALENTINUS Gnostic AND THE EXISTENCE OF JESUS

The Gnostic "heretic" of the Second Century, Valentinus, held that the Pastoral Letters of St Paul were forged (page 5, The Gnostic Paul). Interestingly, modern experts have come to the same conclusion so Valentinus knew something we did not. Valentinus rejected these letters not for doctrinal reasons for the other epistles of Paul which he accepted were far more rabidly anti-gnostic but for historical reasons. Valentinus then eliminated the epistle which says that Jesus spoke before Pilate which made it clear that Paul had no historical evidence for his Jesus. In the Valentinian scheme, Paul left no evidence for a historical Jesus. Valentinus didn't take the gospels seriously as history. This is as important as saying that Jesus didn't exist. When you say the life of somebody is dubious or not to be taken seriously then you cannot exclude the possibility that the person never lived. I am saying that anybody not taking the New Testament gospels that seriously on the historical level is as good as saying there is no evidence that the gospels are historically true where they speak of Jesus.

Valentinus subscribed to the language of a historical Jesus and to the whole Christian system but the only difference was that he felt that there were two equally valid understandings of this faith. The seemingly literal talk masked esoteric symbolism. For example, they said that the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus, or his historical resurrection if you like, was foolishness and quoted Paul in their defence (page 82, 84). The resurrection of Jesus signifies enlightenment and the achievement of gnosis which resurrects the soul from death to life (page 81).

The Gospel of Philip which has Valentinian influence says that the flesh of Jesus is the logos or word of God and his blood is the Holy Spirit and argues that Jesus said this himself when he stated that anybody who does not eat his body and drink his blood will be lost in death (page 99). That is a challenge to the view that Jesus was a historical personage. They did believe that he existed but only on the spiritual plane. For us, it is enough that they denied his physical sojourn on earth.

The Valentinian work Treatise on the Resurrection or as its sometimes called The Epistle to Rheiginos rejects the view that Jesus' resurrection had anything to do with the body. In fact it was salvation from the body and Jesus rose again spiritually. The letter teaches that the world and what is physical is an illusion but the resurrection alone is real. Thus we see a form of Christianity that didn't take the Bible too seriously or the New Testament but valued alleged secret teachings and religious experiences. Such an attitude towards the New Testament and the gospels is incompatible with attaching any importance to the Jesus of history.

The Valentinians were able to live like fully orthodox Christians (page 157, The Gnostic Paul). They held that they should teach traditional Christianity to their followers and reserve the secret teaching for a few suitable people among them. The Valentinians held that Paul gave secret tradition to Theudas who gave it to Valentinus (page 5, The Gnostic Paul). Paul indicated that he was keeping teachings back from the Church that only some very trusted people could be allowed to hear (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Valentinians sounded exactly like ordinary Christians. It was what they meant by what they preached that was different and they kept much of their teaching secret. But as evidenced by them and other groups, they viewed literal Christianity which took the gospels as history to be false. Christians complain that if Jesus didn't exist then why aren't there more statements to the effect from first and second century people that he didn't exist. Don't they realise that the fact that most of those who claimed to be Christians in the early Church, including the Valentinians, denied that the gospels should be afforded any historical status. That is the same thing as admitting there was no evidence for the historical gospel Jesus. For a first or second century person to say Jesus didn't exist wouldn't be enough to prove that Jesus didn't exist for the person could be lying out of hatred for Christ. But when people who like Jesus say there is no evidence that is actually better for those of us who doubt the existence of Jesus. It is confessing there is no evidence he lived and if there is no evidence there is no reason to believe in him. If there is no evidence Jesus lived, then he probably never lived at all.

The Christian scholar might reply that the Valentinians for example were heretics not Christians. Makes no difference. They had nothing to gain from denying that there was evidence for Jesus. The only evidence they were interested in was subjective evidence such as having visions of Jesus and feeling that he was with them. But subjective evidence counts for nothing for Hindus claim subjective and experiential evidence of Vishnu and various gods. They weakened their own teaching – and they didn't care because they honestly knew or believed that there was no evidence for Jesus as a historical personage.

Christian tradition such as we seen in the first century Epistle of Barnabas and most sources agreed with Valentinianism that stories about God and his deeds were to be treated as symbolic and not historical. We read in the excellent pro-Fundamentalist book, Fundamentalism and the Word of God by J I Packer that during Medieval times, the literal or historical sense of scripture or the Bible was regarded as of no importance and the whole Church agreed (page 103,

Fundamentalism and the Word of God) All they cared about was their fanciful allegorical interpretations. For example, when Jerusalem was mentioned in the Bible it was taken to mean the Church! So Jerusalem was thought to be not the real Jerusalem but a code word for the Church. The Reformation restored the idea that the historical sense of the Bible was important.

This tells us a number of things.

The faith of the Church in those days was based on tradition and subjective feelings not on evidence. The heretics such as the Valentinians taught the same thing.

The Church didn't trust the Bible so they tried to avoid having to deal with it for looking for evidence for Christ and his doings.

The Church desperately and fanatically opposed heretics such as the Valentinians and the Gnostics who also refused to take scripture literally or as history for they did it too openly. If the Church had been able to, it would have rejected the allegorical method of interpreting the Bible which can make it mean anything you want to. That way it would have been able to attack the heretics using the Bible. It would be able to argue for instance that historically Christ founded his Church and promised to remain with it forever from the Bible and that the Church that has a direct line from him is the right Church. It was the allegorical method of interpretation that led to chaos in the Early Church. Why was the Church not able to fight the Gnostics and Valentinians by treating the Bible as history? Because everybody knew the New Testament for instance wasn't true. There could be no other possible reason. Burglars are out on the street about to enter your house by the front door. You see them and you don't lock the door. The only reason you didn't lock the door was because you have no lock. Simple.

The Bible itself generally opposes the allegory method. Jesus for example spoke of the Old Testament events such as Jonah being swallowed by a big fish as true and accepted Adam and Eve as historical though we know today they never existed. Commonsense opposes the method as well for if you imagine the Bible is all symbolism you can make it mean whatever you like. So it is undeniable that for centuries the Christian Church was apostate for it was not founded on the word of God in the Bible. To turn away from God's word is to turn away from God. It proves that the Catholic Church is lying when it says that Catholic tradition like the Bible is infallible for they don't follow the anti-historical interpretation today. This is the religion that says that because Christ promised that the Church would never lose the truth, that if the whole Church believes something then it must be true.