

Le Deuxième Traité du Grand Seth (NH VII,2)

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As a fictional revelatory discourse attributed to Jesus Christ, the Son of Man (65,18-19; 69,21-22), the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* exhorts Christians to maintain their unity, and to separate from those opponents who maintain the doctrines which emerged as orthodox during 2nd century. In effect, it denounces as an error and a source of slavery the belief in the redemptive value of suffering and crucifixion, the Pauline interpretation of baptism as a participation in the death of Christ, and the positive assessment of the Jewish scriptures, the texts which would become the Christian Old Testament. The purpose of the text is clearly to persuade and not to instruct, since no systematic exposition of a well defined body of doctrines can be found. Against the opinions which it opposes, the text contrasts a docetic interpretation of the Passion, cosmogonic allusions, and a representation of salvation presupposing the doctrines set out in the Valentinian and Sethian texts of the Nag Hammadi library. This syncretic approach to diverse Gnostic trends is probably an indication of a rather late date of composition, certainly after the last quarter of the 2nd century.

If it is necessary to look to Valentinism for the sources of inspiration, particularly for themes closely related to salvation and eschatology, as well as to Sethianism, it is also necessary to observe that this text, by its central theme of the Saviour's passion, is closely related to the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Letter of Peter to Philip*.

Besides its strongly polemical element, the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* is of particular interest due to the fact that it has likely utilized source material predating its composition. This material could go back to Basilides, the Christian teacher who taught at Alexandria during the first half of the 2nd century, and who is otherwise only known to us through the testimony of the heresiologists. These two sources are found at page 56,4-13, as well as 62,27-63, 32 and 64,15-17.