

Exposé du mythe valentinien et textes liturgiques (NH XI, 2 + 2a-c). Hypsiphronne (NC XI, 4)

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Éditions Peeters (Louvain - Paris - Walpole, MA)
Presses de l'Université Laval (Québec)
«Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi [section «Textes»]»

Did the Valentinians believe in first and second class salvation? According to Bishop Irenaeus, they did: he denounces them for the arrogance of their “perfect” or “spiritual” members of the group, who believed in their own sinlessness, who looked down on the other, “psychic” Christians, and who believed in a two-level eschatology. On the other hand, the *Valentinian Exposition* and the liturgical texts found in Nag Hammadi codex XI cast a different light on things. These texts show that the Valentinian elect did not live and interact only with each other: no gap separated the “perfect” from the simple faithful. Rather, the perceptible world was seen as a school in which the workings of Providence could be revealed. According to these texts, Jesus acted out of pity for the redemption and salvation of all. It is indeed rare to find so universalized a conception of salvation in a gnostic document.

Faced with a text that is in very poor condition and that has numerous lacunas, W.-P. Funk has taken a cautious and prudent approach to reconstructing its original readings. His proposed reconstructions are drawn from logical and grammatical considerations; he has not attempted to “fill in the gaps” by introducing parallels with other gnostic texts. In this way, it has been possible to preserve the originality of this author, who presents the foundational Valentinian myth—with, it seems, knowledge of its variant versions—while nonetheless taking a distinctive and personal approach, as brought out in J.-P. Mahé’s introduction, French translation, and commentary.

The liturgical writings that follow the *Valentinian Exposition*, dealing with baptism, unction and the Eucharist, take us to the very heart of the community that produced them. They remind us that at the end of the second century CE, Valentinianism was not just a sect: rather, it was an understanding of the meaning of Christianity and Christian life as a whole, and one that saw itself as applying to all Christians.

Finally, *Hypsiphronne*, an extremely lacunous text also found in codex XI, tells the story of a headstrong young woman who escapes from the “place of her virginity,” where she lived with her brother Phainops, whose face shines like a star. The condition of the papyrus does not allow us to follow her adventures in detail, but it seems likely that her purity was threatened. She is the heroine of a gnostic tale, like Psyche in the *Exegesis on the Soul* or in the *Authentikos Logos*. It is possible—but unprovable due to lack of evidence—that this tale derives from the Sethian tradition.