

Gnostic Illumination: Sophia and the Demiurge



The ascent of the Blessed - Bosch (Goodwin)

Original Sin, repression of the Gnostics and the Early Church

Early Christian interpretations of the Fall differed radically, and depended largely on whether they were of the eastern or western Church, although they ultimately all but concurred in their deliberations regarding sexuality and sin. In the eastern Church (and with them the gnostics), the myth was seen as an allegory of the evolution of man, whilst in the west, following Paul, it tended to be treated as an historical fact. The eastern view, influenced by Plato, and later Plotinus (d.270), viewed the world of matter darkly: Man and evil had evolved through the descent of the pre-existing spiritual substance, or soul, into matter. The Alexandrian school, saw the primeval Fall from the pristine in the sinful union of spirit (Adam, the male principle) and flesh (Eve, the female principle). Man's first nature was generally believed to have been spiritual and bodiless, without and incapable of sexual differentiation; he had become a

physical being, and sexed, through his soul's sin, to desire the mundane (Haskins 73).

About two hundred BC the rabbis had propounded the idea of the *yecer ha-ra'* which roughly translates as the 'evil impulse'. Unlike the earlier Hebrews, who blamed themselves for their woes, the rabbis believed God had implanted in the 'heart', the Hebrew place of the unconscious of each individual, at his birth or conception. The *yecer* was not hereditary. It was intrinsically good and the source of creative energy, but had a strong potential for evil through appetite or greed. Only strict observance of the Law could keep the strong drives it engendered under control. To the commentators in the five centuries before Christ, Adam's death was due to his own sins, and not to any sin innate in the race of man (Haskins 72).

In Christian hands, the *yecer* would become the debilitating corrupting condition known as 'concupiscence', which each human being would inherit at birth, and which was transmitted through the sexual act, through the 'libid' which accompanied it, and which infected his every action, and was commutable in part only through baptism. Christians were born into a sinful world, a fact which Jesus constantly reiterated when he called for sinners to repent, but he never referred either to the Fall itself, except to say that mankind was fallen, or to original sin, and alluded only once to Adam and Eve when replying to the Pharisees' question concerning divorce (Haskins 72).

The first intimation in the New Testament that Adam bequeathed sin to mankind is to

be found in 1 Corinthians. This passage also makes two clear statements that Christ is the second Adam: 15:21 "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. ... And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven."

To Paul the two "becoming one flesh" when man cleaves unto his wife as ordained in Eden is a "great mystery" of Christ's marriage to the church (Eph 5:32). Paul sees Christ's death as the salvific act which made necessary a real sin by an historical Adam, in which all mankind, corrupted and lost as a result, were integrally involved. Paul's act was to link Adam, the first father, and the rest of mankind in a hereditary manner. Adam's descendants became in Eph 2:2 the 'children of disobedience', who were 'by nature the children of wrath'. In Romans 5:12, Paul condemns mankind forever in Christian teaching: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned". However the original Greek says "in that all have sinned", not "for that all have sinned". Death thus comes from sin not from Adam. This mistranslation was to become the foundation stone of Augustine's doctrine of 'original sin' (Fox R 25).

But God in his mercy had offered up his own son to atone for Adam's sin, and it was through Christ and "by grace [that] ye are saved" (Eph. 2:5). In Gal 5:17 we see the spirit and flesh at war: 'For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would'. He notes the works of the flesh in a way which became of hideous significance during the inquisition "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife seditions, heresies" (Haskins 72).

Although Paul admits Peter may have travelled with female company, despite leaving his home to follow Jesus - 1 Corinth 9:5 "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" These sister-wives adelphen gynaika may have been purely spiritual counterparts (Crossan 335). Paul took a very celibate view of sexuality, proclaiming many beatitudes of celibacy and virginity. 1 Corinth 7:29 "Blessed are they who have wives as if they had none, for they shall inherit God". 2 Corinth 6:16 "Blessed are they who have kept the flesh pure, for they shall become a temple of God."

Various passages suggest Paul may have castrated himself, just as Tertullian later said the heavenly gates were always thrown open to eunuchs, and that marriage was nothing but fornication (Briffault 3 372-3). In 2 Corinth 4:16 "but though or outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed ... for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory". Galatians 5:12 "I would they were even cut off which trouble you." Galatians 6:17 "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Romans 12:1 "I beseech you therefore brethren that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service". Whether this means celibacy or castration, the sentiment is definitely against sexual intercourse of any sort (Walker 776). Origen castrated himself. Numerous Christians adopted the same course; surgeons were besieged with requests to perform the operation (Briffault 3 372).

Virginity can also be seen as a sacrifice of the body - a limited form of martyrdom. Ambrose said that man and woman were born in virginity and that to change it was to deface the work of the creator (Briffault 3 373). Both Ambrose and Tertullian declared that the extinction of the human race was preferable to its propagation by sexual intercourse (Briffault 3 374).

However Paul entreaties sexual union as an antidote to desire for fornication: 1 Corinth 7:1 "It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. ... Defraud [deprive] ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. ... For I would that all men were even as I myself. ... But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn" (Pagels). In Ephesians 5:28 he even says: "So ought men to love their wives even as their own bodies, for he that loveth his wife loveth himself" - flesh of my flesh.

"As we learn from Acts and Paul's own epistles, women were able, like Phoebe and Junia to have important functions as bishops and deacons in the fledgling church, earning the admiration of Paul himself" (Haskins 53), not to forget Thecla (Pagels 1988 18).

However we find in 1 Cor 14:34 women barred from public ministry: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." Although these and other sayings of early Christian apostles, also including some of the early gnostics, illustrate how choosing celibacy to "undo the sin of Adam and Eve" may have disrupted traditional family life, other early Christians stressed however that Christians marry and have children but "do not destroy fetuses" (Pagels 1988 21).

The deutero-Pauline letters thus constitute in part a reaction to celibacy, stressing instead family life. However these authors also stress the lowly nature of woman as the perpetrator of original sin: 1 Timothy 2:11 "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent with all subjection; for Adam was first formed then Eve. Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (Pagels 1988 24).

By 200 AD Irenaeus ushers in the campaign of the orthodox church against the gnostics, complaining in particular that women were celebrating the Eucharist with the gnostic teacher Marcus. Tertullian expresses similar outrage: "These heretical women - how audacious they are! They have no modesty; they are bold enough to teach, to engage in argument, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures, and it may be, even to baptize!" Tertullian specified "It is not permitted for a woman to speak in church nor is it permitted for her to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer [the eucharist], nor to claim for herself a share in any masculine function - not to mention any priestly office. Marcion had gone as far as to appoint women as priests and bishops (Pagels 80-81).

This view is wedded into the orthodox literature in a way which denigrates the Montanists and assumes wisdom to male orthodoxy. The late nineteenth-century Dictionary of Christian Biography states "If Montanus had triumphed, Christian doctrine

would have been developed not under the superintendence of the Christian teachers most esteemed for wisdom, but wild and excitable women” (Trevett 151).

Occhigrosso (1996 302) even describes the consolidation of the synoptic canon as a reaction to gnosticism itself. “Marcion believed that Jesus was radically different from the Jewish tradition that preceded him and that the Gospels had been altered to conceal this. He rejected those Gospels along with the entire Old Testament and reedited the Epistles of Paul and the Gospel of Luke to prove that Jesus taught a God of love rather than fear, quite distinct from the Old Testament God, whom Marcion considered an inferior being. Marcion was denounced as a heretic, but the rapid growth of the Marcionites led the church to establish a canonical set of New Testament texts, consisting of four Gospels, 21 Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, and Revelation.” Occhigrosso notes that, despite his rhetoric, Tertullian actually crossed to the other side: “Montanus and two women named Priscilla and Maximilla led a movement of charismatic prophecy in 2nd-century Phrygia in Asia Minor, claiming they were directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, or Paraclete. Many of Montanus's followers were women, who were allowed to teach, heal, and exorcise demons. Their most famous adherent was Tertullian of Carthage (c. 203), the great early Christian theologian, who first attacked the charismatic movement and then joined it.

Although the New Prophecy (Trivett 1996) of the Montanists was a chaste movement of often celibate women they were portrayed as dangerously liberated. In fact their authority was closely associated with martyrdom for Montanist women were expected to make their apostolic faith known and those under sentence - the confessors - gained priestly status to ‘bind’ and ‘loose’ to forgive for any error. Perpetua of Carthage died in the spirit of the Montanists in their ecstasy in which baptism and martyrdom are two aspects of one ‘exalted’ reality.

Regardless, the orthodox church, led by Irenaeus, the Greek bishop of Lyons, attacked Montanism, along with other Gnostic manifestations, as heresy. The evidence indicates that these and the Gnostic sects thrived alongside orthodox Christianity throughout the Mediterranean rim and that in the early centuries the Gnostics may have outnumbered the orthodox. The founding Egyptian Christians appear to be the predecessors of the Valentinian gnostic school (Pearson 194). Irenaeus fastened on Paul's connections between Adam and Christ to say God had used a virgin substance to mold Adam from the virgin mother earth, which had never been ploughed and Jesus from the virgin womb of Mary. Mary thus also became ascendant as the Eve who remained a virgin (Spong 1992 209). What this says about Jesus' brothers James and Joses and his sisters remains a source of paradox.

According to Tertullian, man was not merely weakened, but depraved as a consequence of Adam's sin, an idea which Calvin espoused heartily in the sixteenth century. Tertullian also coined the word concupiscence (from the Latin, concupiscere, to long for, to be desirous of, to covet), which signified Adam and Eve's fatal flaw and the loss of integrity which had resulted from their disobedience to God. Tertullian makes clear the scorn and prejudice of early Church fathers towards the ‘immortal’ sex: “And do you not know that you are [each] an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that [forbidden] tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert - that is, death - even the Son of God had to die” (Haskins 79).

Tatian the Syrian specifically taught that the fruit of the tree of knowledge conveyed carnal knowledge, and that in Genesis they became sexually aware (Gen 3:7). The Hebrew word to know (yada) connotes sexual knowledge. Tatian blamed Adam for inventing marriage. Julius Cassianus, another ascetic Christian, blamed Satan instead for the same act by inducing Adam to do as the animals (Pagels 1988 27).

Clement of Alexandria (150-215) rejects such associations and declares that sexual intercourse was not sinful but was part of God's original and 'good' creation - cooperation in God's act of creation as in fact many Jews had thought before him. Clement and Irenaeus thus insist that it was hasty adolescent disobedience and not sexuality itself which was the primal break, although both would acknowledge this break did take a sexual form. Clement expressing an ambivalence sees procreation as the sole legitimate purpose in sexuality - a reverberating doctrine of the Christian church: "Our ideal is not to experience desire at all ... A man who marries for the sake of begetting children must practice continence so that it is not desire he feels for his wife ... not even at night or in the darkness is it fitting to carry on immodestly or indecently ... for even that union which is legitimate is still dangerous, except in so far as it is engaged in procreation of children" never to take place in the morning, daytime or after dinner, and never with menstruating, barren, or menopausal wives (Pagels 1988 28-9). This became a fundamental legacy for 2000 years. Clement said "Every woman ought to be filled with shame at the thought she is a woman".

To Irenaeus, Adam and Eve had been under age. Adam's lust had led them into pre-empting God's command, and their guilty reaction had been to cover themselves immediately in scratchy fig leaves, thus chastising those organs which had led therein to sin. But Irenaeus could also see that the Fall had not been entirely calamitous, for had mankind's ancestors not committed the misdeed, man himself would have had a less full and rich moral evolution; this view came to be known as the doctrine of the 'Fortunate Fall' (Haskins 75).

Despite this, both Jerome (347-420) and John Chrysostom (346-407) still associated the Fall with loss of virginity: In his letter to Eustochium St Jerome stated: "it was only after she put on a garment of skins that her married life began ... That you may understand that virginity is natural and that marriage came after the Fall, remember that what is born of wedlock is virgin flesh and that by its fruit it renders what in its parent root it had lost." John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople, an adherent of the Gnostic Christian eastern Church emphasizes this: "Scarcely had they [Adam and Eve] turned from obedience to God than they became earth and ashes and, all at once, they lost the happy life, beauty and the honour of virginity: thereupon God took virginal chastity from them ... they were ... made subject to death and every other form of imperfection; then did marriage make its appearance with the mortal and servile garment of human nature ... Do you see where marriage took its origin? How it had of necessity to be preceded by the breaking of the divine commandment, by malediction and death? For where there is death, there too is sexual coupling; and where there is no death, there is no sexual coupling either" (Haskins 79). Jerome poured scorn on motherhood "the tumefaction of the uterus, the care of yelling infants, all those fond feelings which death at last cuts short", and called sex prostituting the members of Christ (Briffault 3 373).

Augustine, the Father of Original Sin

This theme of original sin finally became fully elaborated by St. Augustine (396-430) giving Eve the dubious titles of the 'devil's gateway' and the 'desirable calamity', limiting freedom of will through the taint of original sin, which makes all humanity mortally fallible.

Uta Ranke-Heinmann describes the 'advent of Augustine' like no other can: "St Augustine, the greatest of all the Fathers of the Church, was the man responsible for welding Christianity and hostility to sexual pleasure into a systematic whole. His influence on the development of the Christian sexual ethic is undisputed, and the papal condemnations of the contraceptive Pill were heavily coloured by it. To speak of sexual hostility, therefore, is to speak of Augustine. He was the theological thinker who blazed a trail for the ensuing centuries indeed, for the ensuing millennium-and-a-half. ... Theologically, he established a relationship between original sin, which played so great a part in his redemptive system, and enjoyment of the sexual act. To him, original sin betokened eternal death and damnation for all who had not been saved, that is to say, delivered by God's grace from 'the multitude of the damne'd' to which all human beings belonged. Salvation was, however, denied to many even, in Augustine's view, to unbaptized children" (Ranke Heinmann 1988 62).

"Despite its major theological significance, Augustine's conversion in the year 387, when he was twenty-nine, was hard luck on the married. It was prefaced by his repudiation of the woman with whom he had lived since he was sixteen or seventeen ('she had sensed my unthinking ardour, albeit she was my only mistress'), and on whom he had fathered a son, Adeodatus (God-given). Augustine retained custody of the boy, by then eleven. His mistress, whose name he never mentions in his "Confessions", [although he felt a 'sharp and searing pain' on their separation] swore to remain eternally faithful to him when he sent her away. He called his relations with her "a loose bond of impure love in which children are most unwelcome, even if they subsequently constrain us to love them" ('Confessiones', IV, 2). His strict observance of contraceptive methods and attention to his partner's infertile days, foiled by the miscalculation that resulted in the birth of Adeodatus, was succeeded after his conversion by a fanatical campaign against contraception of all kinds. He had not wanted to get the girl pregnant, during his affair with her, partly because her social inferiority made him reluctant to marry her. His mother, St Monica, was chiefly responsible for undermining their relationship and persuading him to send the woman back to Africa. She was making preparations for a suitable marriage, but the wealthy prospective bride of her choice had yet to attain marriageable age. Rather than wait another two years, Augustine took another mistress" (Ranke Heinmann 1988 62).

Augustine took up Tertullian's idea of concupiscence with all the enthusiasm of 'twice-born'. He at first rejected the Christianity of his childhood and espoused Manichaeism, which saw light and dark, locked in permanent conflict and the soul, a spark of light, seeking to escape the darkness of the physical world. Later Ambrose introduced him to Christian Neoplatonism and the writings of St Paul, leading to his conversion in 387. Ambrose, a champion of orthodoxy, an ardent advocate of the Virgin Mary, taught that Adam and Eve had fallen from a state of 'original perfection' and adopting this thesis, Augustine wrote in glowing terms of the life that Adam had originally had in Paradise, exempt from all physical evils or sickness, endowed with immortal youth, and with the possibility of immortality, through eating of the tree of life. Adam's intellect and moral character had been equally elevated. He had, however, misused the free will given him by his Creator, and succumbed to tempta-

tion. As a punishment, he had acquired a moral debility, concupiscence, which was transmuted through physical heredity to his descendents, who were thus rendered a *massa damnata*. To Augustine, death had come upon all human beings by their union with Adam, and they also shared in the responsibility for the Fall; he thereby denied that humanity had a free moral choice. "For we were all in that one man ... who fell into sin through the woman who was made from him" (Haskins 76, Jones 222).

The devout British Catholic monk Pelagius also held that the Fall had come about through God's gift of free will, but denied that the sin of Adam and Eve had been passed on to their descendants - it had been theirs alone - and thus rejected St Paul's pronouncement in his letter to the Romans. God's grace was thus helpful rather than necessary. Pelagius argued that man had free-will and was liable for all his deeds, whether good or evil. Augustine disputed with Pelagius and claimed that humanity had no free will, but was doomed to transgress because original sin - estrangement from God - was congenital and universal. To allow man freedom to decide minimized the role of God and the power of the Church. Pelagius was twice accused of heresy, and vanished from history in 418.

The politics of this process are very telling. Two councils of bishops in Palestine had declared Pelagius orthodox but two in Africa, led by Augustine opposed them and persuaded Pope Innocent I to support them in 415. The next pope first declared Pelagius orthodox and then after 'vehement protests from Augustine and the Africans' excommunicated him. Augustine openly courted the emperor's support, using Nubian stallions as bribes. The emperor Honorius condemned him ordered him fined, expelled from office and exiled along with his supporters. Pelagius died soon after (Pagels 1988 129-30).

To Augustine, the sin of Adam and Eve had not been sexual intercourse but their presumption, in their desire for knowledge, to rival their Creator. Concupiscence affected the whole being, as man in his fallen state no longer had control over himself, and was prey to agitations of the flesh. Adam and Eve's sin lay not in the sexual act, but the lust accompanying a procreative process, which would otherwise have occurred with angelic apathy. Concupiscence was now needed for mankind to survive, but within it there was evil. The redeemed licentiate, who as a Manichaean prayed: "O Lord bring me chastity only not yet", thus enabled sexuality to be associated with original sin through lust, whilst still allowing the creation to be essentially good - a point denied by the Gnostics.

In *City of God* (413-26) he notes that it would be "a manifest absurdity to deny that the sexual differences were created for begetting children. But marriage would have taken place in Paradise without the accompanying - 'lust'." Augustine tells us that before the Fall, Adam had been capable of moving his sexual member with as much control as fallen man might exercise over a finger. But now, infected by the stain of original sin, the sexual organs functioned with no regard to their owner, in retribution for their sin of disobedience. "Without the allurements of passion goading him on, the husband would have relaxed on his wife's bosom in tranquillity of mind and with no impairment of his body's integrity". After their sin our first parents covered their parts of in shame of their pudenda (Latin, pudendus shameful). Eve's formation from Adam's rib rendered her the weaker part of the couple, and she compounded her subordinate role as helper by tempting Adam to fall. Adam's culpability lay merely in his desire please his spouse (Haskins 77).

In response to Augustine's destruction of Pelagius, one of his followers, Julian of

Eclanum challenged Augustine back. Augustine summoning all his eloquence and fury argued for a view of nature utterly antithetical to scientific naturalism. Augustine's error Julian believed, was to regard the present state of nature as punishment, for Augustine went further than those Jews and Christians who agreed that Adam's sin brought death upon the human race. He insisted that Adam's sin also brought upon us universal moral corruption. Julian responded that 'natural sin' does not exist. No physically transmitted, hereditary condition infects human nature, much less nature in general. We must begin by distinguishing what is natural from what is voluntary. By contrast Augustine traces most free-will to Adam and his error: "Nature which the first human being harmed is miserable ... now fertility operates under this burden" (Pagels 1988 132-3).

In reply, Augustine releases the Pandora's box of entropy and genetic abnormality: "If nothing deserving punishment passes from parents to infants, who could bear to see the image of God sometimes born retarded, since this afflicts the soul itself. You must explain why such innocence is sometimes born blind or deaf." citing even children's suffering and of course mortality as original sin.

Augustine took things to other impossible lengths, claiming that before the Fall there were no weeds, an age of innocence which defies all biological realities, by denying the very evolutionary purpose of each animal, just as in the un-biological prophecy of Isaiah 11 which came to be a foretelling of Christ's mission.

Pagels (1988 134) comments that Augustine denies nature, the existence of nature per se ... for he cannot think of the natural world except as a reflection of human desire and will.

Julian rejected the notion of natural sin and accused Augustine of retaining his Manichaean heresy, insisting the church was founded on the praise of creation, marriage, law, saints and will. In counter to Augustine's reading of pain in childbirth he pointed out naturally that [pagan] village women with good childbirth practice had easy deliveries. Julian sees childbirth pains, death, being ruled by a husband and living by the sweat of labor as conditions of nature, not punishment, noting that sweat is a beneficial, not sinful, response to exertion and that Adam anyway had to "dress and keep" the garden before the Fall. Julian's greatest feat however was to correctly realize that the fall is the existential situation that arises when we fall into the sin of separation from the whole and make the world harsh through our selfishness (Pagels 1988 136-8).

Augustine saw Julian's "vital fire" of the natural 'appetite' of sexual desire as that "which does not obey the soul's decision, but for the most part, rises up against the soul's desire in disorderly and ugly movements". The ultimate punishment - to be tormented by 'natural' sexual arousal. And by Julian, who continued to reject his arguments until Augustine's death.

Augustine's theory of original sin not only proved politically expedient since it persuaded many of his contemporaries that human beings universally need external government ... but also offered an analysis of human nature that became, for better or worse, the heritage of all subsequent generations of western Christians (Pagels 1988 xxvi). Such was Augustine's later reputation that his views were to permanently color the Christian view of sin, sexuality and the female. Augustine's doctrine was austere. As children were born full of sin they were damned if they died before baptism. Hell, he said, was paved with infants. He could not understand why God had chosen the sexual option, and the opportunity it gave for sin, for the Garden of Eden: "If it was

good company and conversation that Adam needed, it would have been much better arranged to have two men together as friends, not a man and a woman” (Jones 222).

Entropy and Original Sin

Augustine's Pandora argument raises a fundamental issue about the so-called flawed nature of the physical world. It is true that all of us in different ways are subject to the second law of thermodynamics: that entropy (disorder) is increasing. Life stands mysteriously in the universe, an open thermodynamic system, defying this trend, but the laws of nature which permit life also are subject to entropy - accident, disease and misfortune. This is the essence of the so-called flaw in nature.

However a deeper understanding tells us that without mutation there can be no evolution, without chaos there can be no regeneration of order. It is not a question of nature being evil but of nature depending on diversity. There is both joy and pain. For the genetic and evolutionary issues of original sin see: (p 165), (p 138), (p 565)).

It is true that each of us experience unique life situations in which some of us are in pain, some in mental confusion and some in terminal conditions. Some also receive hideous injuries. There is pain and suffering in the world, as Buddha noted. The key to human suffering is in all being one at heart and sharing in the ongoing immortal flow of life for together we are immortal but apart we die. There are many things which can be done to alleviate suffering. In extreme cases, some may wish to choose the right to die humanely in dignity, rather than in pain and confusion.

However what is truly awesome is that for many of us, particularly when we avoid war or famine, we can live in years of pleasure, even the majority of our lives, not in pain, but “creatively, intensively and successfully” - “to embrace the world and ingest experience without restraint” (Armstrong 1996 29).

Although we are mortal as individuals, the sense of wholeness we can achieve in two ways, psychic and physical, through both experiencing gnosis with the eternal mind, and participating with love in sustaining the immortal flow of life, gives us a meaning in existence which is both eternal and immortal. A creative meaning, in which every act of free-will participates in the becoming as we experience it. By merging our kin reciprocal and emotional altruism, we can live as one spirit in wholeness - holiness and become immortalized in the creative process.

*“No one, saint or sinner, escapes suffering, which remains unavoidable in nature.
Yet each of us holds in our hands our spiritual destiny” - Julian of Eclanum.*

As Paul and Julian noted in 1 Corinth 15:54 “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”, noting also that it is when we loose this oneness in selfishness that “The sting of death is sin”. Julian declared: “God created fully innocent creatures, capable of virtue according to their will” (Pagels 1988 139).

In the balance, the experience of life is an eternal mystery of mysteries and participating in the cosmic unfolding is a joy beyond ecstasies. Life has purpose beyond meaning, which can only be realized in creative choice.

We can only truly care for one another, achieve political liberty and justice, and protect the diversity of the living planet, if we are prepared to make real personal and financial sacrifices for the common and altruistic good. Love needs body as well as spirit, brains, muscle and stomach as well as heart.

John has Jesus make a stunning answer to the Pandora argument, used by Julian, which affirms the live nature of synchronicity elicited by gnosis: 9:2 “And his disciples asked him, saying, ‘Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.’” It is not past sin but future gnosis and its synchronicity that give the event its meaning, a meaning beyond the immediate physical cause of the blindness: congenital, accidental or pathological. It is not what caused the event but why did it happen just at that moment? (Pagels 1988 134, 147).

Luke's parable about karma and sin likewise denies that the confusion of sin has real power over circumstance, but that the sinful attitude of division will get you in the end: 13:4 “Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

The Gnostic Eden

The Gnostic interpretation of the Genesis myth is that it is a spiritual allegory rather than a history with a moral, a term Elaine Pagels' (1979, 1988) calls allegorical exegesis. The gnostics claimed to possess the inner teachings of the Christ, a tradition that was not told in the public parables and possibly even to the disciples, but only to a select few. Some aspects of gnostic teaching predate Jesus and are shared by Hermetic doctrines. As we have seen, by about 200 AD the orthodox church had identified the gnostic path as a heresy, and proceeded to stamp it out. It is only with the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts that a true appreciation has come of the major role gnosticism played in the life of the early church.

Part of the reasons for the repression of the gnostics were political. The orthodox church identified as a social movement ruled by bishops. The gnostics' inner path involved instead self-realization, a realization of the elect, which had many diverse forms. The orthodox bishops found such clandestine diversity threatening to their agenda of moral authority. While the gnostics often rejected sex as physical ensnarement they also often accepted women as equals. By contrast, the orthodox Christians had come to accept family life, but gave the key roles of worship and church authority only to men.

The gnostics displayed a variety of responses to the gender dilemma posed by Jesus. Many took a view similar to the Manichaeans and rejected sex and marriage and viewed the physical world as flawed and transitory and yearned to escape the mortal coils of the flesh for the eternal realm of the spirit. In fact one can lay at the feet of the gnostics' ascetic tradition the origins of the monastic patriarchal tradition which drove the middle ages sentiment to exclude women and became in turn the cloistered foundations of the male-dominance of science (Noble 1992).

Other gnostics, such as the Valentinians, who borrowed the mother-goddess myth from the Ophite (5.15.27) (Gk. ophis snake) (Haskins 45), took a very liberated view, seeking the divine in the union of psyche and cosmos in gnosis itself and accepted the complementation of the genders in both their priesthood and their vision of the spiritual theogeny. Some took the position that Yahweh, in forbidding one fruit, had already caused the binary division of the descent, and that to correct the imbalance, Sophia, wisdom will have to “call off Samael”, regain the fruit of the tree of life through the helpful guidance of the snake of knowledge and return life to the garden of immortality. Well this is what is going to happen, but it is a long and tortured story.

Whilst both sexes seem to have been allowed to play an equal part in religious practice and discussion the ultimate aim of the Gnostic was to achieve a state which eliminated sexual difference - which in effect meant that the women had to lose their femaleness in order to be subsumed into the larger 'male' group, whose actual sex was no longer significant. The Gnostic's use of the terms male and female to describe the division between spirit and matter, and their further equation of these terms with good and evil inevitably leads to the association of women and sexuality with evil. If woman and femaleness represented human nature and sexuality, then by rejecting these, and in particular sexual intercourse and procreation, Gnostic, as well as certain orthodox Christians influenced by this dualistic outlook, believed they could reach the spiritual heights (Haskins 42).

In Gnostic cosmology, a huge chasm divides heaven from the world of matter, and the opposites of light and dark are reflected in the concepts of a divine realm of light and a world or cosmos, the realm of darkness. According to many Gnostics, God is neither creator nor governor of the world, from which he is separated by a vast abyss, and remains always alien and unknowable to man, unless man should become the recipient of supernatural revelation. The supreme being and God of love could never have created a universe of chaos and evil; but a lesser, imperfect, deity, the 'Demiurge'. Man was also an imperfect creation of the Demiurge, and formed of flesh, soul and spirit; his ignorance and sin had been responsible for the corruption of the world. (The soul is seen by Gnostics rather as the force which motivates and gives appetite to his body.) However, imprisoned within the soul of some 'elect' men was the divine spark, the *pneuma* or spirit. Salvation took place when the *pneuma* came to know the Supreme Being, and to understand itself, its divine origins and its ultimate destiny - reunion with the supreme deity in the realm of light. In many Gnostic writings, the Redeemer, or Saviour as he is often described, is sent by the Supreme God as an emissary to give gnosis, which is in itself redemption, to those capable of salvation. A central feature of Gnostic myths, this derived from the orthodox Pauline argument that Christ was sent by God the Father to save the world (Haskins 37).

Because of the significance of the gnostic view and Elaine Pagels' outstanding contribution to the healing of Eden in the Gnostic Gospels, here is a summary in her description of ways gnostic writers have portrayed the creation as dyadic and in a way which shows no immediate parallel with the worship of the pagan Goddess:

"Some saw creation as dyadic in reality, some only in metaphor and others allowed it either nature. They generally take their viewpoint from the first genesis account in which male and female are created together in the likeness of the Elohim, in which "the divine is understood in terms of a harmonious, dynamic relationship of opposites" - a concept that may be akin to the Eastern view of yin and yang, but remains alien to orthodox Judaism and Christianity" (Pagels 1979 74).

Yahweh is a god of male epithets, king, Lord, master, judge, and father', who unlike his Near Eastern contemporaries acknowledges no consort. While Mary is the mother of the Son, she is not 'god the mother'. The trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost would closely resemble the Mother with her resurrecting Father/Son except that the Greek word for Holy Spirit (*pneuma*) is a neuter entity, although its Hebrew counterpart (*ruah*) is feminine (Pagels 1979 71).

In the Apocryphon of John we see the Holy Ghost become again the mother in a post-crucifixion vision of the totality "He said to me, 'John, ... why do you doubt, and why are you afraid? ... I am the one who [is with you] always. I [am the Father];

I am the Mother; I am the Son.' ...The Secret Book goes on to describe the divine Mother: ... (She is) ... the image of the invisible, virginal, perfect spirit... She became the Mother of everything, for she existed before them all, the mother-father [matropater]" (Pagels 1979 74).

"The Apocalypse of Adam, discovered at Nag Hammadi, tells of a feminine power who wanted to conceive by herself: '... from the nine Muses, one separated away. She came to a high mountain and spent time seated there, so that she desired herself alone in order to become androgynous. She fulfilled her desire, and became pregnant from her desire.'" (Pagels 1979 76).

Valentinus attributes the paradox of the creation of the imperfect world to Wisdom: "Desiring to conceive by herself, apart from her masculine counterpart, .. she became the 'great creative power from whom all things originate', often called Eve, 'Mother of all living'. But since her desire violated the harmonious union of opposites intrinsic in the nature of created being, what she produced was ... defective; [causing] the terror and grief that mar human existence. To author her creation, Wisdom brought forth the demiurge, the creator-God of Israel, as her agent. ... Besides being the 'first universal creator', who brings forth all creatures, [wisdom] also enlightens human beings. Followers of Valentinus and Marcus therefore prayed to her as the 'mystical, etemal Silence' and to 'Grace, She who is before all things', and as 'incorruptible Wisdom' for insight (gnosis). Valentinus reasons that Silence is the appropriate complement of the Father, designating the former as feminine and the latter as masculine He goes on to describe how Silence receives, as in a womb, the seed of the Ineffable Source; from this she brings forth all the emanations of divine being, ranged in harmonious pairs of masculine and feminine energies. Followers of Valentinus prayed to her for protection as the Mother, and as 'the mystical, etemal Silence'." (Pagels 1979 76).

"The Great Announcement ... explains the origin of the universe as follows: From the power of Silence appeared 'a great power, the Mind (nous) of the Universe, which manages all things, and is a male ... the other ... a great Intelligence (epinoia) ... is a female which produces all things.' ... This is one power divided above and below; generating itself, making itself grow, seeking itself, finding itself, being mother, father, sister, spouse, daughter and son of itself - mother, father, unity, being a source of the entire circle of existence". "A work attributed to Simon Magus suggests a mystical meaning for Paradise, the place where human life began: Grant Paradise to be the womb; ... 'I am He that formed thee in thy mother's womb' (Isaiah 44:2) ... Moses ... using allegory had declared Paradise to be the womb ... and Eden, the placenta" (Pagels 1979 75).

The divine mother is portrayed by gnostics as mystical silence, Holy Spirit, the image of thought (*ennoia*) and wisdom Sophia. Other gnostics attributed to Sophia the nourishment and self-awareness that Adam and Eve received in Paradise ... When the creator became angry with the human race because they did not worship or honor him as Father and God, he sent forth a flood upon them, that he might destroy them. But Wisdom opposed him ... "and Noah and his family were saved in the ark by means of the sprinkling of the light that proceeded from her, and through it the world was again filled with humankind" (Pagels 1979 76). Yet others point out that for Adam to produce Eve he must have been androgynous, as is suggested by the first Genesis account.

"Some concluded that the God of Israel ...was merely instrumental power whom the

Mother had created. ... They say that he believed that he had made everything by himself, but that, in reality, he had created the world because Wisdom, his Mother, 'infused him with energy' and implanted into him her own ideas. ... 'It was because he was foolish and ignorant of his Mother that he said, 'I am God; there is none beside me'. According to another account, the creator caused his Mother to grieve by creating inferior beings, so she left him alone and withdrew into the upper regions of the heavens.

The Secret Book of John notes the paradox of a sole jealous god: "he said: 'I am a jealous God, and there is no other God beside me.' But by announcing this he indicated to the angels ... that another God does exist; for if there were no other one, of whom would he be jealous? ... Then the mother began to be distressed" "Others declared that his Mother refused to tolerate such presumption: [The creator], becoming arrogant in spirit, boasted himself over all those things that were below him, and exclaimed, 'I am father, and God, and above me there is no one.' But his mother, hearing him speak thus, cried out against him, 'Do not lie, Ialdabaoth'" (ibid 79).

"According to the Hypostasis of the Archons, ... both the mother and her daughter objected when he [said], 'It is I who am God, and there is no other apart from me.' . . . And a voice came forth from above the realm of absolute power, saying, 'You are wrong, Samael' [which means, 'god of the blind']. And he said, 'If any other thing exists before me, let it appear to me!' And immediately, Sophia ('Wisdom' stretched forth her finger, and introduced light into matter, and she followed it down into the region of Chaos.... And he again said to his offspring, 'It is I who am the God of All.' And Life, the daughter of Wisdom, cried out; she said to him, 'You are wrong, Saklas!'" (Pagels 1979 79).

In the Apocalypse of Adam, it is revealed to Seth that God struck Adam and Eve apart in wrath for Eve's vision: "When God created me out of the earth along with Eve your mother, I went about with her in a glory which she had seen in the aeon from which we had come forth. She taught me a word of knowledge of the eternal god. And we resembled the great eternal angels, for we were higher than the god who had created us and the powers with him whom we did not know. Then god, the ruler of the aeons and the powers divided us in wrath. Then we became two aeons. And the glory of our hearts left us, me and your mother Eve, along with the first knowledge that breathed within us ... and went into the great aeons. ... Then we recognized the god that had created us ... and we served him in fear and slavery" (Robinson 277).

The gnostic teacher Justinus describes the Lord's shock, terror, and anxiety when he discovered that he was not the God of the universe. Gradually his shock gave way to wonder, and finally he came to welcome what wisdom had taught him. The teacher [ironically] concludes: "This is the meaning of the saying 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'." (Pagels 1979 79).

Trimorphic Protennoia (literally, the 'Triple-formed Primal Thought'), celebrates the feminine powers of Thought, Intelligence, and Foresight: "I am Thought that [dwells in the Light]. [She who exists] before the All ... I move in every creature. ... I am the Invisible One within the All. I am perception and knowledge, uttering a Voice by means of Thought. I am the real voice. I cry out in everyone, and they know that a seed dwells within. ... Now I have come a second time in the likeness of a female ... I have revealed myself in the Thought of the likeness of my masculinity. ... I am androgynous. [I am both Mother and] Father, since I [copulate] with myself ... [and with those who love] me ... I am the Womb [that gives shape] to the All ... I am ... the

glory of the Mother” (Pagels 1979 77)

'Thunder, Perfect Mind' extends this revelation into a metaphysical koan abrogating all authority except gnosis itself, and a female (or androgynous) gnosis of the valley. The awareness of the paradox of the nature of deity in this work is mysterious and profound (Pagels 1988 67):

*'Look upon me you who reflect upon me
and you hearers hear me
You who are waiting for me take me to yourselves.
For I am the first and the last.
I am the honored one and the scorned one.
I am the whore, and the holy one.
I am the wife and the virgin.
I am (the mother) and the daughter....
I am the barren one, and many are her sons
I am she whose wedding is great,
and I have not taken a husband....
I am knowledge, and ignorance....
I am shameless; I am ashamed.
I am strength, and I am fear....
I am senseless, and I am wise. ...
I am the silence that is incomprehensible
and the idea whose remembrance is frequent.
I am the one whom they call Life
and you have called death [Eve]
I am the one you have pursued
I am the one you have seized
I am the one you have scattered
and you have gathered me together [Christos].
I am the one before whom you have been ashamed
and you have been shameless to me.
I am godless, and I am one whose God is great.
I am the union and the dissolution.
I am the judgement and the acquittal.
I am the sinless and the root of sin derives from me
I am lust in (outward) appearance
and interior self-control exists within me
For many are the forms ... and fleeting pleasures
which men embrace until they become sober
and go up to their resting place.
And they will find me there
and they will live
and they will not die again.'*

In Pistis Sophia, a later work of the 4th century AD forming the central myth of the Valentinian system, Sophia becomes lost to the lower Aeons of darkness when she follows a light which she thinks will take her to the Treasure House of greatness. Jesus travels through the complex abyss to banish the evil powers of fate magic and astrology (Haskins 49) saving Sophia in the process, while confirming his mission in a dialogue with Mary Magdalen.

Jesus was worshipped by the early Ophites as Christ-Ophion, the serpent of Eden, and the serpent of Moses: John 3:15 “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up”. According to the Pistis Sophia Jesus was the serpent who “spoke from the tree of knowledge and the tree of life, which were in the paradise of Adam” (Walker 907-9).