

Apostles' Creed Background

Docetism

(probably from *Greek. dokein*, “appear, seem”). Ancient and modern view that Christ had no real but only an apparent body and that He therefore did not really suffer but only apparently; related to *Gnosticism*. (<http://cyclopedia.lcms.org/display.asp?t1=D&word=DOCETISM>)

Marcion of Sinope (c. 85 – c. 160) was an important figure in early Christianity. Marcion preached that the god who sent Jesus into the world was a different, higher deity than the creator god of Judaism. He considered himself a follower of Paul the Apostle, who he believed to have been the only true apostle of Jesus Christ. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcion_of_Sinope)

“About 140 AD there was a man by the name of Marcion in Rome and his teachings were nothing short of heretical. For instance, he taught that the God of the OT was different from the God of the New. Thus, the God of the Christian was not the creator God of the OT. Marcion taught that the God of the OT was angry and stern whereas the God of the NT is a God of love.

According to Marcion, not only was the God of the OT angry, he also created all material. And if the God who created material was a mean old god, then the material he created must not be far behind in terms of badness! Now, think of the implication. If Jesus was different from that mean OT God, then Jesus couldn't really have had a material body. Therefore, Marcion taught that Jesus only seemed to have a body. This, in particular is the heresy is docetism.

Dokew (transliteration) is Greek for “to seem.” Thus, Jesus only seemed to have a body. But Marcion wasn't the only docetist around. There were others. For instance, the Gospel of Peter, another heretical document, began to circulate in the church after 150. And notice the docetism in it. It says of Christ, “And they brought two wrongdoers and crucified the Lord in the middle of them, but He was silent as having no pain.” (<https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/apostles-creed-introduction>)

Gnosticism

(from Gk. gnosis, “knowledge”). 1. Syncretistic movement with roots in pre-Christian times; flowered in 2d–3d c. AD; continued to the 7th c.; involved occult lore, magic watchwords, and secret names; claimed to have a divinely-given secret message that held the key for a higher life.

2. The beginnings of gnosticism may be found in the fusion of religious beliefs and cultures that arose as a result of Persian power and the conquests of Alexander III (the Great; 356–323 BC; king of Macedonia 336). Scholars do not agree as to what makes religious symbols “gnostic.” Elements of gnosticism have been traced to Gk. philos., movements in Judaism, Hellenism, Orphic cults. and religious thought in such countries as Babylonia, Iran, Egypt, and India. Some, on the basis of such literature as the Dead* Sea Scrolls and Jewish apocalyptic writing, regard Judaism as a channel through which gnosticism entered the Graeco-Roman world.

3. In contrast to the rational insight of the classical mind, the basic theme of gnosticism was redemption from the material world (matter considered evil; ordered cosmos had malevolent purpose) and escape into a world of freedom, thus achieving the liberty implied in human spirit. The soul, escaping from matter, is to be reunited with the pleroma, or fullness, of God.

4. While this redemption took place through initiations, rites, mysteries, magic (each sect having its own peculiarities), the more speculative adherents needed philosophical basis. Hence the dualism* inherent in the doctrine of redemption was expanded (supreme God—demiurge; good-evil; light-darkness; cosmic fall-historic fall; spirit-matter; pleroma-hysterema) and synthesized in the good God.

5. The following reflects elements of gnosticism in Christian times: God is pure abstraction, a fathomless abyss. From Him emanate divine potencies (aeons) which in their totality constitute the pleroma (fullness, ideal world of light opposed to kenoma, or emptiness of matter). Sophia (wisdom) disturbed the harmony of the pleroma and fell into the formless chaos beyond (hysterema). Through matter sophia gave birth to a demiurge (identified with the OT Jehovah). Redemption takes place through the restoration of the harmony of the pleroma and rescue of the seeds of divine light scattered in darkness. This is done by the most perfect aeon (Soter), who entered Jesus at baptism and left Him before Calvary. Christ accomplishes His work by teaching knowledge (gnosis), which is received only by a select few (pneumatikoi, spirituals). The next class of men (psychikoi, psychics) must be content with faith; the lowest (hylics, material) are preoccupied with worldly cares. (See also par. 7 g below.) The ethical system tried to overcome flesh (matter) and developed into both strict asceticism* and extreme libertinism.

6. Some recent studies see relationship bet. gnosticism, nihilism,* and existentialism.*

7. a. Simon* Magus.

b. Cerinthus (ca. 100). Active at Ephesus; reputed opponent of John (Jn; 1 Jn); no writings survive; accounts in patristics vague and contradictory.

c. Saturninus (Satornilus; 2d c.). Said to have been a disciple of Menander (see par. a); flourished in Antioch, Syria (*Irenaeus, Adversus haereses, I, xxiv*).

d. Elkesaites promulgated their doctrine (all receive forgiveness of sins who accept their form of baptism and receive their doctrines) in the trans-Jordanic regions ca. 101; teachings still influential in Arab. in 10th c.

e. Basilides (2d c.). Allegedly claimed to be a disciple of the apostle Matthias and of Glaucias, an interpreter of Peter; perhaps a disciple of Menander; divergent accounts of his theories are in *Clement* of Alexandria, Epiphanius, *Eusebius* of Caesarea, Hippolytus, *Irenaeus,* and Origen.** His system, variously explained, holds that God did not directly create the world; Christ* Jesus human in appearance only; Simon of Cyrene died in His stead on the cross. Isidorus (2d c.) was a son or disciple of Basilides.

f. Carpocrates (2d c.). Alexandrian; antinomian (see Antinomianism); followers called Carpocratians. His son Epiphanes (2d c.) wrote *De iustitia* advocating communism (*Clement* of Alexandria, Stromata, III, ii*).

g. Valentinus (2d c.). B. Egypt; educ. Alexandria; at Rome ca. 138–ca. 160. It is hard to glean facts from the few details (often inconsistent) of his life preserved by ancients. Followers formed 2 schools, It. and Oriental, with divergent tendencies. Distinguished a phenomenal and spiritual (pleroma) sphere. In the latter there are emanations including the Holy Spirit and Christ, who united with the man Jesus. One aeon, Sophia, fell into passion and disgrace and caused emission of matter which Demiurge (God of OT) shaped into world. Classified people as pneumatics (Valentinians), psychics (other Christians), hylics (unsaved), whereas other gnostic systems divide men into children of light and children of darkness (see also pars. 4 and 5 above). Fragments of his writings are preserved in the Stromata of *Clement* of Alexandria* and other patristic writers. Followers include Heracleon (probably fl. 170–180 in It.), Ptolemy (Ptolemaeus; d. ca. 180), Florinus, Axionicus, Marcus, Secundus, *Theodotus* the Fuller*. (See also par. h) Works include letters, sermons, hymns.

h. Bardesanes (Bar-Daisan; ca. 154–ca. 222). B. *Edessa** on the Daisan; believed in a number of lesser gods subordinate to the supreme God; he and his son *Harmonius** wrote many hymns. *Hippolytus,* The Refutation of All Heresies, VI, xxx*, calls Bardesanes a Valentinian, but some disagree.

i. Ophites (Ophians; from Gk. ophis, “serpent”). Early ch. fathers grouped under this name such sects as the Barbelo-Gnostics (Barbelo derived by some from 2 Syrian words meaning “God in a Tetrad,” by others from 2 Heb. words meaning “Daughter of

the Lord"; *Irenaeus, Adversus haereses I xxix*), Naasenes (from *Heb.*, nahash, "serpent"), Perates, Sethires (or Sethians), Cainites, Archontics, and Severians; Justin the Gnostic is also included. The serpent plays various parts in the doctrine or worship of many of these. See also *par. j*.

j. Also included among Ophites: Antitactes (*Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, III, iv*); Nicolaitans (*Rv 2:6, 15; Irenaeus, Adversus haereses, I, 26; Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, III, iv*); Prodicians, named after their leader Prodicus (*Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, I xv; III, iv*).

k. Marcion (*ca. 100–ca. 160*). *B. Sinope*, Pontus; excommunicated by father, *bp. Sinope*; repudiated by *Polycarp** as the first-born of Satan; to Rome *ca. 139*; excommunicated there 144. Marcion's primary purpose was to free Christianity from Jewish influences by rejecting the *OT* entirely and purging the *NT* of all Judaistic elements. Jehovah was a just God (Demiurge); Jesus revealed the good God.

8. Recent important Gnostic discoveries include the finding of Manichean writings in Egypt by *C. Schmidt** and the uncovering of 49 Coptic treatises at Chenoboskion, near Nag Hammadi, near Luxor, Egypt, by peasants in the 1940s.

9. Prominent anti-Gnostic writers include *Irenaeus,* Tertullian,** and *Hippolytus.**

See also *Apocrypha, C 3; Docetism; Paulicians; Philosophy; Tatian.*

S. Angus, The Mystery-Religions and Christianity (New York, 1925); *A. Hilgenfeld, Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums* (Leipzig, 1884); *E. F. Scott, "Gnosticism," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. J. Hastings, VI* (New York, 1913), 231–242; *J. Knox, Marcion and the New Testament* (Chicago, 1942); *H. Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, 2d ed. rev.* (Boston, 1963); *R. K. Bultmann, Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting, tr. R. H. Fuller* (London, 1956), *Theology of the New Testament, tr. K. Grobel, 2 vols.* (New York, 1951, 1955), and "Gnosis," *tr. R. H. Lightfoot, The Journal of Theological Studies, New Series, III, Part 1* (April 1952), 10–26; *R. M. Grant, Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York, 1959); *Gnosticism, ed. R. M. Grant* (New York, 1961); *R. M. Grant and D. N. Freedman, The Secret Sayings of Jesus, with an Eng. tr. of the Gospel of Thomas by W. R. Schoedel* (New York, 1960); *G. G. Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1960); *The Gospel of Truth, ed. and tr. K. Grobel* (New York, 1960); *The Gospel According to Thomas, tr. A. Guillaumont et al.* (New York, 1959); *J. Doresse, The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics, tr. P. Mauret, with an Eng. tr. and critical evaluation of the Gospel According to Thomas* (New York, 1960); *W. C. van Unnik, Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings* (Naperville, Illinois, 1960); *W. R. Schoedel, "The Rediscovery of Gnosis," Interpretation, XVI, No. 4* (October 1962), 387–401. EL, WEG

