

REL 602: Gnosticism

Instructor: Patricia Miller
Office: 501-B Hall of Languages
Hours: Mondays, 1:00-3:00
and by appointment

This seminar investigates a collection of Graeco-Roman texts, the Nag Hammadi Library, whose religious orientation has been designated by the term "Gnosticism." The seminar will approach these texts from the perspective of the history of religions, relying heavily on the work of Prof. Jonathan Z. Smith of the University of Chicago as well as that of Gnostic specialist Michael Williams of the University of Washington. Constructions of cosmos, hermeneutics, gender and sexuality, and ritual practice are among the major topics of investigation. Students should be aware that some scholars of late antiquity now consider the term "Gnosticism" to be inadequate, even misleading, as a characterization of the Nag Hammadi texts, particularly since the term tends to petition theological evaluations regarding heresy and orthodoxy. Members of the seminar will be asked to reflect throughout the semester on the issue of the cohesiveness (or not) of the historical phenomenon of a Gnostic "movement."

Texts (available in the Orange Student Bookstore)

Robinson, James M., ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*
Smith, Jonathan Z., *Map Is Not Territory*
_____, *Drudgery Divine*
Grant, Robert M., tr., *Irenaeus of Lyons*
Williams, Michael, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*

In addition, there is a large reserve list in Bird Library, and some of the weekly readings will also be available in the Graduate Student Lounge. Students should also be aware of David Scholer's *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1948-1969* (Leiden, 1971) and its sequel, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1970-1994* (Leiden, 1997), as well as the most recent update in the journal *Novum Testamentum* 41-42 (1999-2000), pp. 58-93 (BS 410.N94).

Note: The introduction in Robinson is a valuable account of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts and their historical setting. Students are advised to read this introduction early in the semester. In addition, the translations in Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, have introductions and annotations that you may find useful.

Course Requirements

As one might surmise from the bibliographical updating that Dr. Scholer does every year, the amount of scholarship in this area is vast. In addition to the work of Smith, I have chosen articles by scholars of Gnosticism that reflect the diverse interests and emphases of the field. Because there is a lot of reading in this seminar, there is no final research paper (although there is a final project, described below). Instead, each week students are required to write a two-page essay (typed, double-spaced) in which the methodological

approach offered by writings of contemporary scholars (especially J. Z. Smith and Michael Williams) is used to evaluate one or more of the readings from the Nag Hammadi Library. Be prepared to read your essay to the seminar to initiate discussion, as well as to hand it in for the instructor's comments.

At the end of the semester, on Dec. 17, your final project is due. Choose a series of essays (from three to five, depending on length) on one text from the Nag Hammadi Library; present and evaluate them in light of the readings of the seminar. Ph.D. students *must* include at least one article in French or German. Scholar's bibliographies will be invaluable for selecting articles.

Schedule of Readings

I. Introduction (Aug. 30)

II. Issues of Origins and Essence, 1 (Sept. 6)

The Apocalypse of Adam

Smith, *Drudgery*, chs. 1-2

Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, chs. 1 and 10

III. Issues of Origins and Essence, 2 (Sept. 13)

Zostrianos

Hans Jonas, "Delimitation of the Gnostic Phenomenon" (sem. rm.)

Karen King, "Translating History: Reframing Gnosticism in Postmodernity" (sem. rm.)

IV. Issues of Identity and Heresy (Sept. 20)

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (selections in Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, pp. 59-74)

Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, in *ANF V*: peruse beginnings of
Bks. VI-VII

Smith, *Map*, ch. 12: "I am a Parrot (Red)"

Michael Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, ch. 2

Morton Smith, "The History of the Term 'Gnostikos'" in Layton, *RG II*:796-807

Yom Kippur, Sept. 27: no class

V. Issues of Comparison and Borrowing (Oct. 4)

Apocryphon of John

Smith, *Drudgery*, chs. 4-5

Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, ch. 4

N. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia: Jewish Tradition in
Gnostic Revolt" (in Layton, *RG II*)

VI. Cosmic Structures, 1 (Oct. 11)

Hypostasis of the Archons (The Reality of the Rulers)

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, chs. 13-22 (in ANF I or Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, pp. 75-88) and
Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI, chs. 34-50 (ANF V, pp. 91-99) on Marcus the (Valentinian) Magician
Hippolytus, *Ref.* V, chs. 18-23 (ANF V, pp. 69-73) on Justinus

Smith, *Map*, ch. 6: "The Influence of Symbols on Social Change"

Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, ch. 5

Van den Broek, "The Shape of Edem according to Justin the Gnostic," in
Studies in Gnos. and Alex. Christianity, ch. 8

VII. Cosmic Structures, 2 (Oct. 18)

On the Origin of the World

Smith, *Map*, ch. 4: "The Wobbling Pivot"

A. H. Armstrong, "Dualism Platonic, Gnostic, and Christian" (sem. rm.)

P. Miller, "Plenty Sleeps There" (sem. rm.)

VIII. Language and Interpretation, 1: The Bible and Creativity (Oct. 25)

Gospel of Truth

Smith, *Map*, ch. 9

Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, ch. 3

R. Greer, "The Dog and the Mushrooms" (in Layton, *RG I*)

E. Pagels, "Exegesis and Exposition of the Genesis Creation Accounts in
Selected Texts from Nag Hammadi," in Hedrick and Hodgson, ch. 12

IX. Language and Interpretation, 2: Poetics (Nov. 1)

The Thunder, Perfect Mind (The Thunder--Perfect Intellect)

Tripartite Tractate

Joel Fineman, "Gnosis and the Piety of Metaphor" (in Layton, *RG I*)

P. Miller, "Words With an Alien Voice: Gnostics, Scripture, and Canon," (sem. rm.)

Anne McGuire, "Thunder, Perfect Mind" (sem. rm.)

X. Ritual Practice, 1 (Nov. 8)

Gospel of Thomas

Smith, *Map*, ch. 1: "The Garments of Shame"

DeConick and Fossum, "Stripped Before God: A New Interpretation of
Logion 37 in the Gospel of Thomas" (sem. rm.)

XI. Ritual Practice, 2 (Nov. 15)

Gospel of Philip

J. J. Buckley, "A Cult Mystery in the Gospel of Philip" (sem. rm.)

_____, "Conceptual Models and Polemical Issues in the Gospel of Philip" (sem. rm.)

Thanksgiving Break, Nov. 21-25

XII. Sexuality and Gender, 1 (Nov. 29)

Hypostasis of the Archons
Gospel of Mary

Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, ch. 6

Karen King, "Ridicule and Rape, Rule and Rebellion: The Hypostasis of the Archons" (sem. rm.)

Karen King, "The Gospel of Mary Magdalene" (sem. rm.)

XIII. Sexuality and Gender, 2 (Dec. 6)

Exegesis on the Soul
Gospel of Thomas (logia 22 and 114)
(and aspects of other texts as appropriate)

Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, chs. 7-8

Jorunn Buckley, "Libertines or Not" (sem. rm.)

E. Castelli, "I Will Make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity" (sem. rm.)