

The Gnostic Hall of Infamy

Carpocrates

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Carpocrates, like his predecessors, taught that the world and man were created by angels. He taught that Jesus was like any other man, except that because his soul was steadfast and pure, he was able to remember all those things he had witnessed in his previous existence. This made him the peculiar target of the angels and for this reason the unbegotten God sent a power that descended on him, enabling him to escape from the creators of the world. He taught that even though Jesus was educated in the beliefs and practices of the Jews, he regarded these with contempt.

To Carpocrates and his followers, "Christ-likeness" consisted in despising the rulers and creators of the world (and consequently the God of the Jews and the physical creation). The more intensely one despised the created world, the more superior he regarded himself. Like others, they practiced magic and communicated with familiar spirits and dream-sending demons and declared that they possessed the power to rule over the princes and formers of this world and all things that are in it.

They led particularly licentious lives and declared that they had liberty in all sorts of abominable practices. They held the idea that souls are reincarnated from body to body and that in their course of successive lives one should have experience of every kind of life and every kind of action. They taught that the body is the "prison" of the soul and that the goal is to escape this prison through Gnostic knowledge.

They used special marks and brands to identify themselves. They used images, including a "likeness of Christ" that was supposedly made by Pilate and circulated among themselves.