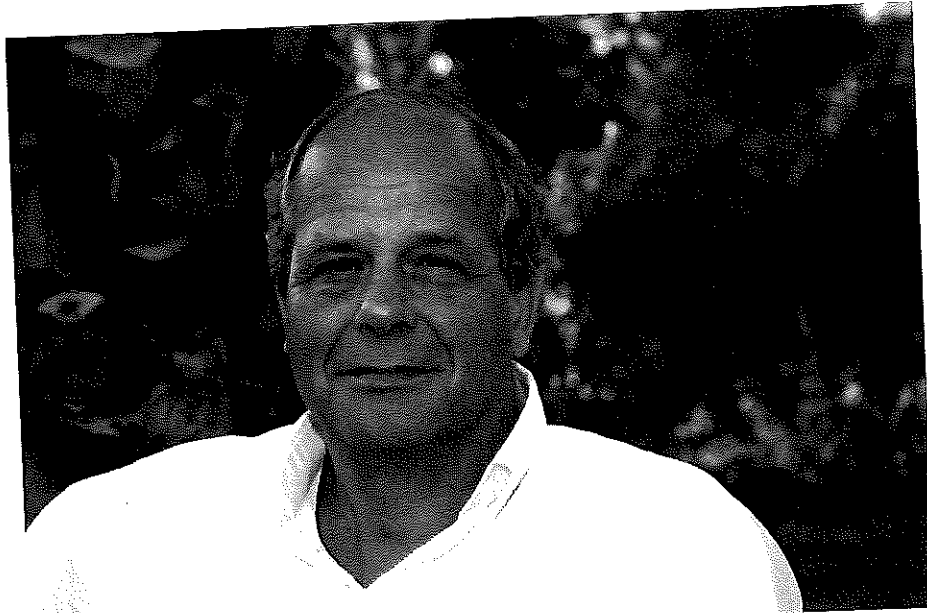


'In Search of Truth':  
Augustine, Manichaeism and  
other Gnosticism

Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty



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BRILL

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

AFTER THE *GOSPEL OF JUDAS*:  
REASSESSING WHAT WE HAVE KNOWN  
TO BE TRUE ABOUT CAIN AND JUDAS

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The discovery of the *Gospel of Judas* after almost two thousand years is nothing less than miraculous. To finally have this notorious gospel and to read it for ourselves allows us a unique opportunity in history—to re-evaluate what we have known about the *Gospel of Judas* and Gnosticism, to weigh the testimony of this text against that of the heresiologists, to appraise its Gnosis against other witnesses from Nag Hammadi, the Berlin Codex, and similar manuscripts. It provides us with a moment to pause and ask ourselves, ‘Have we got it right?’

So far, this has not been our main response to this text. So far, we have concentrated on trying to see how to fit this text into our existing schema, to discover from it what we already know to be true about Judas and ancient Gnosticism. The initial transcription (which was provisional), English translation, and interpretation published by the National Geographic Society provide a good example. Judas emerged in the National Geographic translation and interpretation as a hero of the Gnostics, a favorite disciple of Jesus who would ascend out of this world to join the holy Gnostic race.<sup>1</sup> The original release of the gospel by the Society advanced the opinion that Judas was considered by some Gnostics to be a Gnostic himself who possessed the ‘truth.’ This opinion complied with our long-held understanding of Irenaeus’ testimony about the *Gospel of Judas*, an understanding of Irenaeus’ words that has been most recently rearticulated by Johannes van Oort in his valuable close rereading of Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.31.1.<sup>2</sup>

Following the initial release by the National Geographic Society of the *Gospel of Judas*, corrections to the transcription and translation of the

<sup>1</sup> Kasser et al. 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Van Oort 2000, 42–56.

gospel were made, and a different Judas has emerged from the gospel, a Judas that is no Gnostic.<sup>3</sup> In my opinion, Judas differs little in this gospel from his portrayal in the New Testament gospels. He is a demon who brings about Jesus' death. In the gospel of Luke, 'Satan entered Judas Iscariot' before he betrayed him to the chief priests.<sup>4</sup> Even more fascinating is John's account where Jesus states early in the narrative of his mission, 'Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?' with reference to Judas Iscariot.<sup>5</sup> At the final supper, Judas is presented as one whom the devil is using to betray Jesus.<sup>6</sup> During the farewell discourses, Jesus refers to Judas and his betrayal as the coming of Satan, the chief archon or ruler of this world: 'I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world (ὁ τοῦ κόσμου ἄρχων) is coming. He has no power over me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go hence.'<sup>7</sup> These biblical texts are the seeds for the portrayal of Judas in the *Gospel of Judas* where he corresponds with the thirteenth demon, Ialdabaoth, the archon who rules the universe from his realm, the thirteenth aeon. Judas will never ascend further than Ialdabaoth's realm where his fate as an evil and doomed world-ruler lies.<sup>8</sup>

If this were not enough of a surprise, we also have found ourselves face-to-face with a Sethian gospel rather than a Cainite one. We had assumed Cainite provenance of the *Gospel of Judas* based on our former reading of the patristic evidence.<sup>9</sup> In the past, we have read Irenaeus' testimony as a straightforward presentation of facts, although our understanding of his words have been shaped by our knowledge of the testimonies of Pseudo-Tertullian (ca. 220 CE) and Epiphanius (ca. 375 CE).<sup>10</sup> While Epiphanius and Pseudo-Tertullian appear to be mutually dependent on a common source, probably Hippolytus' lost *Syntagma* (ca. 200 CE), Epiphanius,

<sup>3</sup> DeConick 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009. See also, Painchaud 2006; Brankaer-Bethge, 2007; Schenke Robinson 2008; Thomassen 2008; Turner 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 22:3.

<sup>5</sup> John 6:70-71.

<sup>6</sup> John 13:2.

<sup>7</sup> John 14:30-31.

<sup>8</sup> On Satan possessing Judas, see Luke 22:3; John 14:27. On Satan as the ruler of this world, see John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19. For more details, see DeConick 2007, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview see Gathercole 2007, 114-131.

<sup>10</sup> Iren., *Adv. Haer.* 1.31.1 (Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979b, 386); Ps.-Tert., *Haer.* 2.5-6 (*Adv. haer.* 2.5-6

Kroyman 1954, 1404); Epiph., *Pan.* 38 (Holl 1980:62-71).

at least, also represents an early interpretation of Irenaeus.<sup>11</sup> The late fifth-century testimony of Theodoret, preserved in Greek, appears to be transmitting an abstract of Irenaeus based on Irenaeus' original Greek.<sup>12</sup> Irenaeus is our primary witness, although he himself may be dependent upon Justin's own lost *Syntagma* (ca. 150 CE).<sup>13</sup> Irenaeus never says that the *Gospel of Judas* was produced by Cainites, but he does say that people who traced themselves back to Cain and other biblical villains produced (*adferô*) this fictitious (*confinctiô*) gospel.<sup>14</sup> It is Epiphanius who tells us that the authors were Cainites.<sup>15</sup> The trouble is that Cain or Esau or Korah or the Sodomites are not mentioned in the *Gospel of Judas* we possess. Rather this gospel preserves a Sethian genealogy and outlook.

What are we to make of this? Perhaps the Cainites were not an authentic social group after all, but a fiction created in the heresiological battles of the second century?<sup>16</sup> Or perhaps the Cainite mythology was dependent on Sethian mythology in some fashion.<sup>17</sup> Or maybe Irenaeus had a different edition of this gospel or an older version that was rewritten later by Sethians?<sup>18</sup> Might this older gospel have had a kinder view of Judas, and have lacked overtly Sethian references or had Cainite ones instead?<sup>19</sup> This is the kind of reasoning that I see beginning to emerge already in the scholarly literature as we put the *Gospel of Judas* through the traditional historical-critical and literary-critical paces. But as we go about doing that which we have been trained to do as biblical scholars, I wish to raise a troubling question. In so doing are we trying to make the *Gospel of Judas* conform to what we already know to be true about it?

Consider how dangerous it is to begin to remove what we identify as Sethian references in order to create a non-Sethian primary document so that we can have a *Gospel of Judas* that supports more closely the patristic evidence? When we start pulling out the so-called Sethian

<sup>11</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 4.22.

<sup>12</sup> Theodoret, *Haer. Fab.* 1.15 (PG 83, 368B). See Van Oort 2009, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion, see Wisse 1971, 205-223.

<sup>14</sup> Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979b: 386. Translation mine.

<sup>15</sup> Epiph., *Pan.* 38.1.1.

<sup>16</sup> Birger Pearson has been an advocate for this opinion for a long time and sees the discovery of the Sethian Gospel of Judas as demonstrative of this. See now Pearson 2007, 48-50. Bart Ehrman (2006, 64-65) makes a similar argument.

<sup>17</sup> Van Oort 2009, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> Wurst in Kasser et al. 2006, 126-128; Gathercole 2007, 119-123.

<sup>19</sup> On an argument for an early version lacking Sethian references, see Schenke Robinson 2008, 62-68.

references, where do we stop? The mythological section?<sup>20</sup> The reference to Barbelo?<sup>21</sup> The thirteenth demon?<sup>22</sup> The thirteenth aeon?<sup>23</sup> Judas ruling over the twelve?<sup>24</sup> The befuddled disciples performing a botched eucharist?<sup>25</sup> The nightmare of the twelve as priests of Ialdabaoth, the Deacon of Error?<sup>26</sup> Jesus' laughter which mocks Judas and the disciples?<sup>27</sup> Jesus' interpretation of Judas' temple dream where he explains that Judas is separated from the holy generation?<sup>28</sup> The Sethian reading of the Genesis story?<sup>29</sup> Jesus' insistence that Judas will offer to Saklas the worst sacrifice possible by killing him?<sup>30</sup> What stays and what goes? When you begin pulling the thread, will the whole gospel unravel? Will any Judas be left, good, bad or ugly?

I am afraid of this approach because our results are predetermined to reinforce our previous theories and because it severely compromises the integrity of the text we possess. As Gregor Wurst has duly noted from the beginning of his work on the *Gospel of Judas*, "This kind of literary criticism would obviously destroy the original text."<sup>31</sup> So I offer this suggestion—before we get carried away making this gospel conform to what we already know to be true, why not investigate this gospel as a holistic text from which we might learn something new about the *Gospel of Judas* and ancient Gnosticism or, at the very least, reassess what we already know to be true from the patristic evidence?

Since there appears to be such a disjuncture between the *Gospel of Judas* we now possess and our understanding of the patristic testimonies, it is crucial that the patristic evidence be reassessed. As I have re-examined the patristic testimonies, several questions have dominated my analysis. First, how much from the testimonies of Irenaeus and Epiphanius can be considered straight factual evidence about the *Gospel of Judas*? Second, what information about the *Gospel of Judas* did Irenaeus actually

<sup>20</sup> Gos. Jud. 47.1–53.7.

<sup>21</sup> Gos. Jud. 35.14–18.

<sup>22</sup> Gos. Jud. 44.21.

<sup>23</sup> Gos. Jud. 55.10–11.

<sup>24</sup> Gos. Jud. 46.19–24.

<sup>25</sup> Gos. Jud. 33.22–34.10.

<sup>26</sup> Gos. Jud. 37.10–40.26.

<sup>27</sup> Gos. Jud. 34.2–5; 36.22–23; 44.18–19; 55.12–20.

<sup>28</sup> Gos. Jud. 45.12–47.1.

<sup>29</sup> Gos. Jud. 52.14–54.12.

<sup>30</sup> Gos. Jud. 56.11–24.

<sup>31</sup> Kasser et al. 2006, 135.

receive?<sup>32</sup> Third, how did Irenaeus frame and pass on the traditions he had received? Fourth, how much have our own long-held modern readings of Irenaeus' words been affected by the way in which Epiphanius received and interpreted Irenaeus' testimony?

### 1. THE SOVEREIGN POWER

The primary patristic text is found in Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*. Greek fragments of this passage do not exist, although it has been reconstructed based on Theodoret's synopsis.<sup>33</sup> The later Latin translation survives.<sup>34</sup>

Alii autem rursus Cain a superiore Principalitate dicunt et Esau et Core et Sodomitas et omnes tales cognatos suos confitentur: et propter hoc a Factore impugnatos, neminem ex eis malum accepisse. Sophia enim illud quod proprium ex ea erat abripiebat ex eis ad semetipsam. Et haec Iudam proditorem diligenter cognouisse dicunt, et solum prae caeteris cognoscentem ueritatem, perfecisse proditiois mysterium: per quem et terrena et caelestia omnia dissoluta dicunt. Et confinctionem adferunt huiusmodi, Iudae Euangelium illud uocantes.

Yet others say that Cain is from the sovereign Power above, and they acknowledge that Esau, Korah, the Sodomites, and all such persons, are their relatives, and because of this, they also acknowledge that they have been attacked by the Creator, yet none of them has been harmed. For Sophia seized what belonged to her from them. They say that Judas the traitor was thoroughly acquainted with these things, and that he alone, knowing the truth as none of the others did, accomplished the mystery of the betrayal. By him all things, both earthly and heavenly, were thus destroyed. They produce a fictitious history of this kind, which they entitle the Gospel of Judas.

Irenaeus begins to describe the group that produced the *Gospel of Judas* with these words: 'Yet others say that Cain is from the sovereign Power above (*Alii autem rursus Cain a superiore Principalitate dicunt*).'<sup>35</sup> Much hinges on the words *superiore Principalitate*, 'superior Principle' which appears to be an awkward translation of the Greek expression ἡ ἄνωθεν Αὐθεντία preserved by both Epiphanius and Theodoret.<sup>36</sup> In my own

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Justin, *Apol.* 1,26,8.

<sup>33</sup> Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979a, 312.

<sup>34</sup> Iren., *Adv. haer.* 1.31.1 (Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979b, 386). Translation mine.

<sup>35</sup> Iren., *Adv. Haer.* 1.31.1. (Rousseau and Doutreleau, 1979b, 386). *Principalitate* was likely αὐθεντία (whose equivalent is ἐξουσία) in the Greek original. See Van Oort 2009, p. 45. Translation mine.

<sup>36</sup> For a reconstruction of the original Greek...

English translation of this expression, 'the sovereign Power above,' I have attempted to be faithful to the Greek, since it is quite evident this was what Epiphanius and Theodoret independently knew. It is also the case that Irenaeus uses Αὐθεντία twice in the Greek fragment of 1.26.1, which similarly has been translated into Latin as *Principalitate*.<sup>37</sup> The phrase ἄνωθεν ἢ Αὐθεντία appears in the Greek fragments of Irenaeus' account of Satornil, but it is translated into Latin, *summa Potestas*, with the meaning: supreme Power.<sup>38</sup>

Αὐθεντία is an abstract noun related to αὐθέντης, which references anyone who does something with his own hand, especially murder. It came to indicate the absolute ruler as an autocrat or despot.<sup>39</sup> The abstract noun indicates the power to act independently on one's own initiative, as well as the absolute power wielded by the sovereign. It was used to describe both divine power and human power, the authority of God and the bishop. In a bad sense, it meant unauthorized license and the tyranny of rulers and evil powers.<sup>40</sup>

It is a word that has some history in Hermetic and magical literature, taking on a more technical meaning indicating the 'supreme authority' in the spiritual world. Poimandres is called 'the mind of the sovereign Power' (ὁ Ποιμάνδρης ὁ τῆς αὐθεντίας νοῦς) and 'the Logos of the sovereign Power' (ὁ Ποιμάνδρης ὁ τῆς αὐθεντίας λόγος).<sup>41</sup> Arguably this expression is related to the name Poimandres which appears to be a Greek translation of the Coptic expression 'the knowledge of Ré' or 'the understanding of Ré'.<sup>42</sup> This means that the Greek αὐθεντία was translating the old Egyptian title for Ré the sun god, the all sovereign lord and supreme authority: *nb-r-dr*.<sup>43</sup> Not surprisingly, in the magical literature associated with the Hermetics, it is applied to Helios who is called 'Sovereign Helios!' (αὐθέντα Ἡλιε), the god entrusted with sovereignty (τὰ αὐθεντικά).<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Rousseau-Doutreleau, 1979b, 344.

<sup>38</sup> Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979b, 322.

<sup>39</sup> Liddell-Scott 1968, 275b.

<sup>40</sup> Lampe 1961, 262a-263b. See also a literature overview in Büchli 1987, 22-25.

<sup>41</sup> C.H. 1.2, 13.15; Nock-Festugière 1945, 7; Festugière 1945, 206. C.H. 1.30; Nock-Festugière 1945, 17.

<sup>42</sup> See the most recent treatment of this argument by Kingsley 2000, 41-76. For the earliest formulation of this theory, see Scott 1925, 2:16-17, who consulted F. Ll. Griffith on the subject.

<sup>43</sup> Kingsley 2000, 49-50; Westendorf 1975, 1: cols. 136-137.

<sup>44</sup> PGM 13.258; 13.138-141; Preisendanz 1973, 2:100, 93-94. See also Nilsson 1960, 3:150-151.

The Gnostics know the term *authentia* and use it. It appears to have several applications. In Irenaeus' description of the teachings of Cerinthus, the phrase ὁ ὑπὲρ τὰ ὅλα Αὐθεντία, 'the sovereign Power over all things' is contrasted with the demiurgic 'Power' (Δυνάμις) that exists separately. *Authentia* is equivalent in this passage with 'the first God' (ὁ πρῶτος θεός) and 'the God over all' (ὁ ὑπὲρ πάντα θεός). In addition, this sovereign Power sent the Christ-dove upon Jesus at his baptism. So in this instance, the term appears to be used as a reference to the supreme Pleromic God.

In Gnostic literature, the term sometimes is associated with a *heavenly* power of light that exists immediately above the demiurge and provides revelation (ΤΑΥΘΕΝΤΕΙΑ ἢ ΤΠΕ: 'the sovereign power of heaven'; ΤΑΥΘΕΝΤΕΙΑ ἢ ΠΙΧΙΣ: 'the sovereign Power above').<sup>45</sup> Is this the tradition that Irenaeus knows with reference to Satronil who taught that a luminous image of the human being was revealed to the Creator angels by the sovereign power above them? This ἢ ἄνωθεν Αὐθεντία is referred to as ἢ ἄνω Δύναμις later in the same passage, meaning that *authentia* and *dynamis* were perceived to be synonyms.<sup>46</sup>

Some Gnostics applied *authentia* to the demiurge himself, understanding him to be the sovereign or tyrannical Power over the universe. This is twice done by the author of the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. In one instance, a voice says 'You are mistaken, Samael!' from the area above Ialdabaoth who is referred to here as 'the sovereign Power': ΟΥΓΜΗ ΔΕ ΑΣΣΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΗΠΙΣΑ Ν ΖΡΕ ΝΤΑΥΘΕΝΤΕΙΑ.<sup>47</sup> In another passage, Ialdabaoth is referred to as "the sovereign Power of that part of heaven" (ΤΗΝΤΑΥΘΕΝΤΙΣ ἢ ΠΙΣΑ Ν ΤΠΕ) who became the tyrannical pattern for injustice or wrongdoing (ΑΔΙΚΙΑ).<sup>48</sup>

Did Irenaeus intend his reference to *authentia* to indicate the sovereign Power in the Pleroma or the tyrannical one ruling in the highest heaven or a power in-between? Since he used the word previously in his narrative as a reference to a power associated with the Pleroma, it may be that this was the way in which he hoped or expected his readers would understand it with reference to Cain.

<sup>45</sup> *Ap. John* NHC II 23.25; BG 60.17; Waldstein-Wisse 1995, 134-135.

<sup>46</sup> Rousseau-Doutreleau, 1979b, 322.

<sup>47</sup> *Hypo. Arch.* 96.24; Layton 1989, 252.

<sup>48</sup> *Hypo. Arch.* 96.2; Layton 1989, 256.

But Irenaeus' framing of the word in his narrative says nothing about the actual Gnostic tradition that he had received about it. He could easily have received a Gnostic teaching that Cain was from the *Authentia* above, a teaching that left open the actual identification of the *Authentia*, whether it was a pleromic or cosmic being. How do we know what type of teaching Irenaeus received? An examination the Gnostic literature itself shows that the Sethians left a rich tradition about Cain's relationship to a higher Power, but a power distant from the Pleroma.

## 2. CAIN'S FATHER

It is quite likely that Irenaeus had received an old Jewish teaching familiar to the Sethians, that recognized the ambiguity of the Hebrew text of Genesis 4:1 in relation to Cain's paternity.<sup>49</sup> According to this scriptural passage, 'Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying 'I have gotten a man יהוה יחד.' Because אִתּוֹ can mark the accusative or be read as the preposition 'with,' the sentence has a double meaning: either Yahweh was responsible for Eve's pregnancy or the child Cain, whom Eve bore, was actually Yahweh. When אִתּוֹ is read as a preposition, the sentence means: 'I have gotten a man with the help of Yahweh.' However, when אִתּוֹ is read as an accusative, the sentence rendered is entirely different: 'I have gotten a man, that is Yahweh.'

The rabbinic tradition is aware of this ambiguity and so offers examples to settle things, revealing a particular rabbinic concern to dissociate Cain's paternity from Yahweh. Among some of the rabbis, Cain is known as the son of Samael, the fallen angel who guards Eden. This tradition appears to be old since a version is preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls in a poem that alludes to the 'one who is pregnant of the serpent.'<sup>50</sup> The author of 1 John 3:12 also appears to assume this old tradition when he remarks that Cain 'is from the evil one and murdered his brother.'<sup>51</sup> In the rabbinic tradition, in order to make clear that Cain was not Yahweh nor related to him, the phrase, 'I have gotten a man, that is Yahweh,' is interpreted to mean that Eve conceived by *an angel* of Yahweh, albeit Samael, the Angel

<sup>49</sup> Ginzberg 1913, 105–107; Ginzberg 1955, 132–135; Klijn 1977, 7–10, 16, 21, 28–30; Stroumsa 1984, 47–49; Pearson 1990, 95–107; Bassler 1986, 56–64; Martínez 2003, 27–45.

<sup>50</sup> 1QH<sup>a</sup> XI 6–18. For a full bibliography of this poem, see Schuller-DiTomasso 1997, 70–72. For later references, i.e., BT *Abodah Zarah* 22b; Zohar Gen 54b, Lev 76b.

<sup>51</sup> Brown 1982, 442–443.

of Death. Along these lines, the famous passage on the subject in the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Genesis 4:1 reads, 'And Adam knew his wife Eve, who desired the angel, and she conceived from Samael, the angel of the Lord, and bore Cain; and she said, "I have acquired as man, the angel of the Lord".'<sup>52</sup>

We find in the Sethian literature an affinity with these same hermeneutics.<sup>53</sup> In the *Apocryphon of John*, Cain is begotten from Ialdabaoth's rape of Eve. Ialdabaoth is also known in this text by the names of Samael and Saklas.<sup>54</sup> From this union, Eve bears two archons, Yave (i.e., Yahweh) and Eloim (i.e., Elohim) who are also called Cain and Abel.<sup>55</sup> These Archons are associated with certain constellations, which are described as the 'bear-face' and the 'cat-face.' As such, they are believed to control the four elements, the fire, wind, water, and earth.<sup>56</sup> In the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, Cain's archonic paternity ('she bore Cain, *their* son') is assumed and contrasted with Abel's who was Adam's son from conjugal relations.<sup>57</sup> This assumption also undergirds the myth in the *Apocalypse of Adam* where Sakla(s) creates a son for himself through forced adulterous relations with Eve.<sup>58</sup> This hermeneutic must have rested, to some extent, also upon Genesis 6:1–5, where angels rape human women, who then bear giants, a tradition further elaborated in the Enochic corpus.

So Sethian interpretation of Genesis 4:1 makes the sovereign archon, Ialdabaoth, the father of Cain who himself corresponds to the unjust Archon Yahweh, Lord of water and earth. Other Sethian references to Cain recognize him as one of the twelve archons who correspond with the Zodiac constellations, while Yao (i.e., Yahweh), his alternate persona, is one of the seven archons associated with the planets.<sup>59</sup> In all these references, Cain is an archonic offspring who joins his father's evil forces as an archon himself, helping to rule the world. He is a 'lord' in Ialdabaoth's court.

<sup>52</sup> For this reconstruction and translation of the passage, see Martínez 2003, 30–31.

<sup>53</sup> Epiphanius says that the Archonites taught that Eve was raped by the devil and therefore her children Cain and Abel were sons of the devil, bringing murder and falsehood into the world (*Pan.* 40.5.3–7).

<sup>54</sup> *Apoc. John* NHC II 11,15–18. On Yahweh as Satan, see Grant 1966, 56–61.

<sup>55</sup> *Apoc. John* 24,15–26. For more discussion, see Stroumsa 1984, 38–53.

<sup>56</sup> *Apoc. John* 24,15–26.

<sup>57</sup> *Hypo. Arch.* NHC II 91,11–14.

<sup>58</sup> *Apoc. Adam* NHC V 66,25–28.

<sup>59</sup> *Apoc. John* NHC II 11,26–35; 12,14–25; 10,28–11,4//BG 40,5–18//NHC 16,20–17,7; *Gos. Egyp.* NHC III 58,6–23.

Had Irenaeus received the Sethian teaching that the father of Cain was the chief Archon, Ialdabaoth? Is this reflected in Irenaeus' statement that Cain was from the sovereign Power above? I think it quite likely, although he has reframed the teaching in such a way that Cain's father is in opposition to the Creator. Epiphanius is concerned about the ambiguity and rewrites Irenaeus so that it explicitly states that Cain is from the Pleroma. So Epiphanius writes, 'They say that Cain is from the stronger Power (*dynamis*) and the sovereign Power (*authentia*) above (Οὔτοί φασι τὸν Κάιν ἐκ τῆς ἰσχυροντέρας δυνάμεως ὑπάρχειν καὶ τῆς ἀνωθεν αὐθεντίας).'<sup>60</sup> With the expansion of Irenaeus' phrase 'from the sovereign Power,' Epiphanius makes explicit how he wishes these words to be read: that Cain's lineage is connected to a sovereign Power from the *upper* aeons. He drives home this point later in this same passage when he writes that the Gnostics were hidden from the Creator because they had been 'transported to the *upper Aeon whence the stronger Power is*.' None of these qualifications are in Irenaeus' testimony, but they dominate Epiphanius'.

I find it very compelling that Epiphanius knows that Cain and Abel were sired by the archonic powers. In fact, when he states that Cain is the offspring of the stronger power, while Abel, the weaker one, he explains its meaning by referring to the Gnostic story of the rape of Eve by the archons: 'As I said, Cain is from the stronger Power and Abel from the weaker. These Powers had intercourse with Eve and sired Cain and Abel. Cain was from one, Abel from the other ... And the children they had begotten—I mean Cain and Abel—quarreled, and the offspring of the stronger Power murdered the offspring of the lesser and weaker.'<sup>61</sup> This is explicit evidence that Epiphanius was concerned that Irenaeus' words might be reflecting the Gnostic myth that Cain was sired by Ialdabaoth, the sovereign Power in the heavens. He does not like this because it does not fit what he wishes to relate about the Cainites (that Cain is from the supreme Pleromic God), and so he goes on in the next paragraph to complicate matters by forcing his own interpretation of Irenaeus' words ('Cain is from the sovereign power above') by arguing that the Cainites choose to serve the higher Power from whom Christ and Cain came, and separate themselves from the lower Power who is the Creator of this world and associated with Abel.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Epiph., *Pan.* 38.1.2. (Holl 1980, 62–63). Translation mine.

<sup>61</sup> Epiph., *Pan.* 38.2.6–7. Trans. mine.

<sup>62</sup> Epiph., *Pan.* 38.2.6–3.1.

So what do we have here? Irenaeus transmits a teaching that Cain is from the sovereign Power above without indicating whether that ruler is a cosmic or pleromic one, although he intends for his reader to identify it as a power in opposition to the Creator. Epiphanius is concerned with this ambiguity, especially since he knows the Gnostic tradition that the cosmic powers raped Eve and sired Cain and Abel. So he attempts to fix it by reframing Irenaeus' words with direct reference to the Pleroma. From this evidence, it appears to me that the older Gnostic teaching that the sovereign Power ruling this world was the chief Archon and Cain's father was known by Irenaeus and Epiphanius who both reframe it to refer to a higher power in opposition to the Creator.

In fact, in the extant Gnostic texts, Cain is entirely a negative figure. This is even the case with the reference to Genesis 4:1 found in another Gnostic text *On the Origin of the World* which is related to the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. In the past, it has been read as the sole example from the Gnostic literature of a positive evaluation of Cain because it attaches Genesis 4:1 to the serpent who reveals gnosis.<sup>63</sup> Although it is true that Genesis 4:1 is connected to the generation of the serpent, the connection to Cain can only be made through inference. The passage itself appears to me to be peculiar in that it does *not* reference Cain explicitly, although it uses exegetical traditions associated with Genesis 4:1 to teach about the origin of the wise serpent, the 'instructor.'

Now the birth of the instructor happened like this. Sophia cast a droplet of light. It flowed upon the water and immediately an androgynous human being appeared. That droplet she molded first as a female body. Afterwards, she molded it as the body of the likeness of the mother, which had appeared. She finished it in twelve months. An androgynous human being was birthed, whom the Greeks call 'Hermaphrodites.' Its mother the Hebrews call 'Eve Zoe,' who is the female instructor of life. Her child is the creature who is lord. Afterwards, the authorities called it 'the beast' so that it might lead astray their imitations (ΠΛΑΣΜΑ). The meaning of 'the beast' is 'the instructor.' For it was found to be the wisest of all beings. Now Eve is the first virgin. Without a husband she gave birth to her first child. She was her own doctor. For this reason she is held to have said, '... I have borne a man as lord.'<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Pearson 1990, 101–103.

<sup>64</sup> *Orig. World* NHC II 113,21–114,15. Translation mine.

Eve's statement in Genesis 4:1b, 'I have borne a man as lord,' seems to me to be retooled so that it does not refer to Eve's production of Cain. Rather it is appropriated and associated with the production of an unnamed offspring of the androgynous psychic human being who had been created in a female form by Sophia Zoe. The name of this psychic being is 'Eve Zoe.' She is the 'instructor of life' and, here, the *virgin* mother of the 'man as lord.' Accordingly, she bears this child 'without a husband.' Her child is identified with the serpent, the wisest of all creatures, who later in the narrative will share gnosis with the carnal Adam and Eve as the Gnostic revealer.

The ability to argue that Eve's first child is a heavenly being is dependent upon knowledge of Jewish exegesis which played with the ambiguity of the word *אָדָם*, 'man' in this same Genesis passage. This was an unusual designation for an infant in the literature, so speculation about its meaning led to the possibility that Eve had borne a heavenly being or an angel of sorts.<sup>65</sup> Her child is, in fact, a mixed race entity, both a 'man' and an 'angel of the Lord,' similar to the giants conceived from the ravishing of the 'daughters of men' by the fallen angels in Genesis 6.<sup>66</sup> According to the *Life of Adam and Eve*, this son, Cain, was lustrous and able to run immediately upon birth.<sup>67</sup> In rabbinic literature, Eve sees that her first-born has the likeness of heavenly beings rather than earthly beings.<sup>68</sup> This exegetical tendency was further bolstered by Genesis 5:3 which states that Seth was conceived in the likeness and image of Adam. Because the same was not said about Cain, it was easily deduced that Cain was not Adam's offspring, but the son of a fallen angel.<sup>69</sup>

In *On the Origin of the World*, the author plays with these well-known traditions about Eve's first child. The author understands this child to be a 'man as lord,' a heavenly being, but he does not call him Cain. And unlike the Jewish traditions, he has no father—Adam, Ialdabaoth, Samael or otherwise—but is generated solely by his mother, the psychic Eve. To give credence to the opinion, Eve's words in the last segment, Genesis 4:1b ('I have gotten a man, that is the lord'), have been commandeered and completely separated from the first segment, Genesis 4:1a ('Adam knew

<sup>65</sup> Martínez 2003, 28–29.

<sup>66</sup> Martínez 2003, 33.

<sup>67</sup> *Life of Adam and Eve* 21.3. For additional commentary, see Tromp 2000, 277–296.

<sup>68</sup> *Pirke of Rabbi Eliezer* 21. For this interpretation of the Pirke passage, see Kugel 1998, 157. See also Martínez 2003, 33 n. 17, where *Pseudo-Jonathan* is interpreted to allude to Cain's angelic origin.

<sup>69</sup> Martínez 2003, 33–35; cf. Stroumsa 1984, 49–53.

Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain') so that each refers to a separate event rather than the same event. This means that her words are taken very literally to refer to the fact that before the birth of her human children, she first had conceived on her own volition ('I have gotten') some type of heavenly being. This fatherless child is an entity other than Cain.

It is only later in the narrative, that Genesis 4:1a ('And Adam knew Eve and she conceived and bore Cain') and 4:2 ('And again, she bore his brother Abel') is invoked to discuss the birth of Eve's physical children. Again, the verse is invoked as was done by Jewish exegetes who noticed that the words 'And Adam knew Eve' were not repeated after the birth of Cain in Genesis 4:2. The scripture simply reads that 'she bore his brother Abel.' So Eve's first pregnancy in Genesis 4:1a was associated with Abel's too even though he is not mentioned there.<sup>70</sup> Thus, in *On the Origin of the World*, Abel is produced from the carnal Eve's 'first' pregnancy. This pregnancy was the result of the rape of the carnal Eve, the fleshly counterpart of Eve Zoe, by Ialdabaoth. It is the carnal Eve who produces Abel and all her 'other children' out of sexual relations with the archons.<sup>71</sup> There is a rich Jewish tradition identifying a number of children as Eve's, including Cain and Abel's twin sisters ('Awan and Azura') who become their wives.<sup>72</sup> I presume that, in *On the Origin of the World*, Cain was understood to be one of these children since it is out of these rapes by the archons that various human races with various fates are produced. The three races mentioned in *On the Origin of the World*—the *pneumatikos*, the *psykhikos*, and the *khoikos*—are usually associated in Gnostic literature with Eve's three sons Seth, Abel and Cain, although only Abel is named in our text.<sup>73</sup>

It appears to me that the author of this text is aware of the Gnostic teaching about the origin of Cain the Archon based on a common reading of Genesis 4:1. But the author of *On the Origin of the World* chooses to refocus this teaching by severing the two segments of Genesis 4:1 from each other, so that Eve's words in Genesis 4:1b are disassociated from the production of Eve's child Cain. Genesis 4:1b is then reappropriated to describe the generation of an unnamed fatherless child, the 'beast' or

<sup>70</sup> This even led to some speculation that the brothers were twins from the same pregnancy. See *Gen. Rab.* 22:3; *Pirke of Rabbi Eliezer* 152.

<sup>71</sup> *Orig. World* NHC 2 117,15–18.

<sup>72</sup> Teugels 2003, 47–56.

<sup>73</sup> *Orig. World* NHC II 117,19–37; cf. Luttikhuisen 2006, 83–06.



serpent. In order to highlight the creation of various races of humans later in the narrative, this 'beast' is distinguished from Eve's 'other' children, human children who are conceived by Ialdabaoth's act of violence.

There is one further testimony, this from Hippolytus, that shows that there may have been some Gnostics (Hippolytus calls them 'Peratics') who thought that Cain was marked with the sign of the universal serpent, since Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable to the biblical god, while Abel's bloody one was.<sup>74</sup> It would be preferable to be able to collaborate this testimony with an ancient Gnostic writing, especially when the Gnostic writings we do possess perceive Cain as a negative figure associated with demons.<sup>75</sup> I am reminded, however, of Irenaeus' discussion of the serpent in his overview of the Sethians and Ophites.<sup>76</sup> Sophia enters into a serpent, possessing it so that she might instruct Adam and Eve with knowledge. This serpent is known as 'wiser' than all creatures.<sup>77</sup> But Irenaeus also mentions that after Adam and Eve are cast out of Paradise, so is the serpent who then generates six sons of his own. As their own hebdomad mirrored after Ialdabaoth's hebdomad, they become known as the seven demons who oppose humankind. This serpent is called by two names—Samael and Michael. After Adam and Eve have sex for the first time, the Samael serpent takes control of Cain and fills him with ignorance so that Cain murders his brother, bringing envy and death into the human experience.

What could be going on here? When we turn to the Gnostic literature we find two options. Either the serpent has numinous origins, the child of the virgin Eve Zoe as we saw in *On the Origin of the World*, or he is a creature from the archons whom a female spiritual principle possesses temporarily as is the case in the Sethian *Hypostasis of the Archons*.<sup>78</sup> This second option appears to be the story that Irenaeus knows and writes about, a story about a serpent generated by Ialdabaoth, temporarily possessed by Eve Zoe, and afterward thrown into the abyss as the leader of the league of demons who torment humankind. His first victim was Cain. Could it be that Hippolytus has confused the story of the snake when

<sup>74</sup> Hipp., Ref. 5.16.8–9.

<sup>75</sup> This is also the case for Valentinian texts. See *Gos. Phil.* NHC II 61,5–10; *Val. Exp.* NHC XI 38,24–27. Cf. patristic evidence on Valentinians: Iren., *Adv. Haer.* 1.7.5; Clem. Alex., *Exc. Theo.* 54. Patristic evidence on the Sethians: Hipp., *Ref.* 5.20.2; Epiph., *Pan.* 39. *On the Archontics*: Epiph., *Pan.* 40.

<sup>76</sup> Iren., *Adv. Haer.* 1.30.

<sup>77</sup> Iren., *Adv. Haer.* 1.30.15.

<sup>78</sup> *Hypo. Arch.* NHC II 89,31–90,34.

he became a demonic cast-off with his earlier glorious moment when he was temporarily possessed by Eve Zoe? Or did the Peratics consider Cain superior to Abel, persecuted by the chief Archon?

Whatever the case may be with Hippolytus' testimony about the Peratics, the evidence from the Sethian literature is straightforward and powerful. Cain is produced from the highest Power, but this Power is the highest of the Archons in the heavens (rather than the Pleroma). He is the Ialdabaoth god who sires him by raping Eve. It is this tradition that Irenaeus likely received, although it is subverted to serve Irenaeus' polemic. Irenaeus' misunderstanding or intentional misuse of his sources, combined with partial transmission of the traditions, allows his readers to conclude the worst—that the wicked Cain was praiseworthy among the Gnostics because he was generated by the highest Power, whom the non-Gnostic readers associated with the supreme Father-God rather than the chief Archon, Ialdabaoth.

### 3. SODOMITE ANCESTRY

The second thing that Irenaeus tells us is that the authors of the *Gospel of Judas* think that they are related to Esau, Korah, and the Sodomites (and by implication, Cain), and that because of this they have suffered persecution at the hands of the Demiurge, while Sophia helped them out. Here again the Sethian literature provides some precedent for Irenaeus' comment in terms of what sort of Gnostic tradition Irenaeus likely received, although Irenaeus' presentation of these facts is distorted to serve his polemic. Irenaeus leaves his readers believing that these Gnostics thought that their ancestors were all the wicked people of the bible, identifying themselves with the wicked Sodomites who were rebelling against the biblical god.

But what do the Gnostics say about this? Their teaching on this subject is very specific and is located almost exclusively in texts that we identify as Sethian.<sup>79</sup> The most detailed Sethian account is found in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* where Seth praises the gods above him and requests that 'his seed' be created. This 'seed' is the pre-incarnate community of Gnostics who will live on earth eventually. In response to Seth's plea, Plêsithea ('the nearby goddess') births his seed from a pre-historical mythic place, from

<sup>79</sup> This tradition was known to the author of the *Paraphrase of Shem* too, a text that advances a wombic mythology.

Gomorrah. The seed comes forth as fruit from the spring of Gomorrah. Seth takes this seed and stores it in the great light aeon, Davithe.<sup>80</sup> Later the angel Hormos places the seed of Seth into virgin mothers, and 'the great Seth came and brought his seed.'<sup>81</sup> In this way Seth's seed is distributed in the created world, 'their number being as many as were (in) Sodom.'<sup>82</sup> Sodom is known as 'the place of pasture' for the seed of the Great Seth.<sup>83</sup> Seth transplanted his seed from Gomorrah's spring to Sodom's pasture.<sup>84</sup> What appears to be at work is the belief that, when this seed was incarnated, it left Gomorrah's spring in the light aeon Davithe and came to exist in Sodom's pasture on earth. Is this text suggesting that the Sethians understood their ancestors to be the wicked Sodomites, as Irenaeus concluded?

Perhaps another Sethian text can help clarify this point. In the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the seed of Seth is protected from the biblical god's wrath at Sodom when he cast fire, sulphur and asphalt onto the city. Three great angels, Abrasax, Sablo, and Gamaliel descended in light clouds to transport the seed of Seth to the holy angels and aeons above so that they would not be destroyed. Without doubt, this reading of the Sodom story keys several biblical passages, including the reference to the three angels whom Abraham fed and sent to Sodom.<sup>85</sup> How was the rescue operation explained exegetically? According to the author of the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the fire and cloud of the conflagration darkened the skies, hiding this apocalyptic harvest of the seed of Seth from the eyes of the archons.<sup>86</sup> This explanation fits the report in Genesis that, when Abraham looked down upon the valley where the burning cities lay, he saw that 'the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.'<sup>87</sup> This is the smoke that blinded the archons and shielded the covert operation.

Who are these rescued and transported people? They are the people who have been kept away from unclean desire and evil-doing.<sup>88</sup> The author of the *Apocalypse of Adam* calls them the 'great people' who have not been corrupted by desire.<sup>89</sup> How was this meaning derived, especially

<sup>80</sup> *Gos. Egyp.* NHC III 55,16–56,22.

<sup>81</sup> For a discussion of the meaning of 'virgins,' see Williams 1985, 145, 161–163.

<sup>82</sup> *Gos. Egyp.* NHC III 60,11–12.

<sup>83</sup> *Gos. Egyp.* NHC III 60,9–18.

<sup>84</sup> *Gos. Egyp.* NHC IV 71,18–30.

<sup>85</sup> Gen 18:16.

<sup>86</sup> *Apoc. Adam* NHC V 75,10–76,7.

<sup>87</sup> Gen 19:28.

<sup>88</sup> *Apoc. Adam* NHC V 73,24–25.

<sup>89</sup> *Apoc. Adam* NHC V 75,2–4.

when the Sodom story is best known because the inhabitants of Sodom are wicked and sexually promiscuous? This reading of the Sodom story is exegetical too, relying on the implications of Genesis 18:23, when Abraham begins his long interrogation of the biblical god about the god's intentions. 'Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked?' Abraham demands to know. So the Sethians rely on this question and subsequent interchange between Abraham and the biblical god as evidence that there were righteous people living in Sodom, that Ialdabaoth-Saklas did intend to destroy them, and that they themselves were those people.

So the Sethians, far from thinking that their ancestors were the wicked Sodomites, believed that their ancestors, the seed of Seth, were the righteous people who had been saved from the wrath of the biblical god at Sodom, as well as from his flood, famines, and plagues.<sup>90</sup> All of the biblical god's persecutions, they had survived, with the help of redeemers like the Great Seth himself or Jesus, but also great angels like Eleleth.<sup>91</sup> Sophia is the ultimate helper, tricking Ialdabaoth on several occasions, making sure that her stolen power, the spirit, could be redeemed from Ialdabaoth by being distributed into the souls of those who were from the seed of Seth.

It is likely that Irenaeus received similar Gnostic teachings about Sodom, although his presentation of this material (whether intentional or not) is misleading. Instead of presenting the Gnostic teaching evenhandedly—that the Gnostics understood themselves to be the righteous people saved from the wrath of the biblical god at Sodom—Irenaeus implies that the Gnostics trace their lineage to the evil Sodomites and, to bolster his point, he includes a reference to other anti-heroes mentioned in the scripture, including Judas Iscariot.

Whether Irenaeus simply has misunderstood the Sethian position or intentionally wishes to show his prejudice by shifting the point of their Sodom exegesis, his implication is clear enough that Epiphanius picks it up and carries it to its extreme. He sews together tightly Irenaeus' statements about Cain and Sodom:

<sup>90</sup> See also *Apoc. John* NHC II 28,34–29,15//BG 72,14–18; *Gos. Egyp.* NHC III 60,30–61,22; *Apoc. Adam* NHC V 69, 3–73,30; *Hyp. Arch.* NHC II 92,5–26. On Sethian interpretations of Noah's flood, see Luttkhuizen 2006, 97–107.

<sup>91</sup> *Gos. Egyp.* NHC III 60,30–61,22; 63,5–64,10; *Apoc. Adam* NHC V 73,1–14; *Hyp. Arch.* NHC II 93,7–32.

Certain persons are called Cainites because they take the name of their sect from 'Cain.' For they praise Cain and count him as their father . . . They say that Cain is from the stronger Power (*dynamis*) and the sovereign Power (*authentia*) above as are also Esau, the company of Korah, and the Sodomites while Abel is of the weaker power. All of them are praiseworthy and their relatives. They boast of being related to Cain, the Sodomites, Esau and Korah. These, they say, are from the perfect knowledge on high. For this reason, they say, although the Creator of this world devoted himself to their annihilation, he could in no way harm them. For they were hidden from him and transported to the upper Aeon whence the stronger Power is. Sophia let them approach her, for they belonged to her. For this reason they say that Judas knew quite well all about these matters. They consider him their kinsman and count him among those possessing the highest knowledge, so that they also carry around a short writing in his name which they call the Gospel of Judas . . .<sup>92</sup>

In Epiphanius, Cain is counted as the father of the Gnostics, and Esau, Korah, and the Sodomites are said to be Cain's relatives. The Gnostics are proud of being related to Cain, the Sodomites, Esau, and Korah who are from the perfect gnosis on high. Judas too is their kinsman. The biblical god tried to annihilate them, but could do them no harm because they were hidden from him and transported to the upper Aeon where the stronger Power exists. Since they belonged to Sophia, she took care of them.

It appears to me that Irenaeus knew that the authors of the *Gospel of Judas* were some kind of Sethian gnostics. They considered themselves to be the righteous seed among the Sodomites who had been redeemed by the angels from the city's conflagration. But in Irenaeus' presentation of this information, part of the evidence is suppressed and the material is shifted so that it implies instead a wicked ancestry. Epiphanius develops this implication, making it explicit by shifting the material further. Through these subtle shifts in the presentation of the material, the authors of the *Gospel of Judas* have become the descendents of the evil Cain and the wicked Sodomites rather than the righteous race of Seth saved from the wicked actions of a jealous god. What Irenaeus received as standard Sethian tradition, has become something else. Whether or not Irenaeus intended to be disingenuous with his subject or simply misunderstood the materials he knew, his presentation of the traditions tarnishes the *Gospel of Judas* in the way that the truth could not.

<sup>92</sup> Epiph., *Pan.* 38.1.1-5.

#### 4. THE CAINITES

Irenaeus' testimony does *not* associate the *Gospel of Judas* with the Gnostic Cainites mentioned by various patristic authors.<sup>93</sup> As we have seen, Irenaeus calls the authors 'other' Gnostics. The traditions that he seems to know about the authors are found in texts that we have labeled 'Sethian,' what Irenaeus describes as Barbeloite Gnosis. It is significant that he speaks of these Gnostics in a set of coherent chapters (*Adv. Haer.* 1.29-31) devoted to the discussion of 'a multitude of Gnostics, appearing like mushrooms from the ground.'<sup>94</sup> In chapter 29, Irenaeus shares information that we find in the *Apocryphon of John*, the quintessential Sethian narrative. In chapter 30, we find material related to the *Apocryphon of John* and other Sethian texts from Nag Hammadi which focus on Eden such as the *Apocalypse of Adam* and the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. In Theodoret, this chapter is understood to refer to the 'Sethians, whom some call Ophians or Ophites.'<sup>95</sup> Then in chapter 31 we have Irenaeus' mention of the *Gospel of Judas* and the Gnostic literature he associates with a wombic Gnosis, neither of which are stated by Irenaeus to have any affinity to the Cainites.<sup>96</sup> Rather Irenaeus appears to me to have categorized the authors of the *Gospel of Judas* and the wombic Gnostics as special types of Barbeloite or Sethian Gnosticism.

Why did Irenaeus associate the *Gospel of Judas* with the Sethian tradition? He must have known that the *Gospel of Judas* contained references to Barbelo and Sethian mythology and so thought it sensible to discuss it after the Sethian texts he had just catalogued. Since he had made this association, he also likely assumed that the authors of the *Gospel of Judas* would have taken for granted the larger mythological complex found in the other Sethian texts he had just discussed. So he used his knowledge of Cain and Sodom from those other Sethian texts and attributed them to the authors of the *Gospel of Judas* as well.

So why have we thought for centuries that the *Gospel of Judas* was a Cainite gospel? The simple answer is that we relied on the later testimony of Epiphanius as factual knowledge. Epiphanius, however, does not

<sup>93</sup> Several scholars writing on the *Gospel of Judas* have erred on this point, assuming that Irenaeus does mention the Cainites: Ehrman 2006, 62-65; Porter-Heath 2007, 41-42. Patristic evidence for Cainites: Clem. Alex., *Strom.* 8.17; Tert., *Presc.* 33; *De Bapt.* 1; Hipp., *Ref.* 8; Origen, *c. Cels.* 3.13; Ps.-Tert., *Haer.* 2; Epiph., *Pan.* 38.

<sup>94</sup> Iren., *Adv. Haer.* 1.29.

<sup>95</sup> Theod., *Haer.* 1.14.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. van Oort 2009 44 n. 4.

appear to be preserving factual knowledge as much as he appears to be conflating Irenaeus' testimony about the *Gospel of Judas* with some passage from Hippolytus' lost *Syntagma*, which likely discussed the Cainites and Judas Iscariot (after the fashion preserved by Pseudo-Tertullian) with no reference to the *Gospel of Judas* at all. This has been compounded by the fact that later scribes created and inserted chapter headings into Irenaeus' work, including the heading 'On the Cainites' which introduces chapter 31.<sup>97</sup>

The patristic testimony about the Cainites tells us a few things. The Cainites were considered an actual social group of Gnostics by a number of church fathers living in different times and locales. Several witnesses include references to them alongside the Ophites.<sup>98</sup> Tertullian seems to view them as a renewal of the Nicolaitan movement mentioned in Revelation 2:6 and 2:15.<sup>99</sup> Additional evidence from his treatise *On Baptism* is difficult to assess because there exist variant readings of the name mentioned, leaving it uncertain whether the group described were actually Cainites.<sup>100</sup> Tertullian says he knows a prominent female member of this group personally, complaining that she was a successful preacher in his area, and that her teaching was threatening to destroy apostolic baptism. In fact, he appears to be writing his treatise on apostolic baptism in response to her teaching against it.<sup>101</sup>

What do we learn about his opponent's opinions about baptism? Tertullian stresses in his treatise that the Holy Spirit is not 'in' the water itself, but only prepares the initiate for receiving the Holy Spirit by cleansing the initiate of his or her sins.<sup>102</sup> He also emphasizes that death is washed away by bathing and that a material substance like water, because it has been sanctified, can affect what is happening in the spiritual realm.<sup>103</sup> This suggests that his opponents taught that the Holy Spirit did not enter the baptismal waters and, therefore, could not be attained by the initiate through this ritual. According to Tertullian, water baptism is being questioned by his opponents because it has been associated with the inferior baptism of John, which they say could not convey the Holy Spirit.<sup>104</sup> They add

<sup>97</sup> On this, see Gathercole 2007, 117–118; van Oort 2009, 44 n. 4.

<sup>98</sup> Clem. Alex., *Strom.* 8.17; Hipp., *Ref.* 8; Origen, *c. Cels.* 3.13.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Acts 6:5.

<sup>100</sup> Cosentino 2007, 214–216. I want to thank Birger Pearson for this reference.

<sup>101</sup> Tert., *De Bapt.* 1; 13.

<sup>102</sup> Tert., *De Bapt.* 3.

<sup>103</sup> Tert., *De Bapt.* 2–4.

<sup>104</sup> Acts 19:1–7; John 7:39. Tert., *De Bapt.* 10.

that Jesus himself never baptized with water, but only with fire and the spirit.<sup>105</sup> Nor was Paul sent by Christ to baptize.<sup>106</sup> Abraham's faith was sufficient. He did not need to be immersed in water to be redeemed, nor do we, they conclude.<sup>107</sup>

Because Tertullian addresses their baptismal views and appears to know at least one of their female leaders personally, I tend to think that the group he is addressing was an actual historical group. If the treatise is referencing Cainites and not some other named group, then the Cainites were more than a fiction of the fathers. But this deduction is based on the assumption that Tertullian did not make a mistake in the identification of the group which opposed him on baptism as 'Cainite' and that he was not using the term as a general designation for 'heretics,' but as a reference to a specific group.<sup>108</sup>

Pseudo-Tertullian, presumably dependent on the lost *Syntagma* of Hippolytus (which Epiphanius also shared), is the earliest author to provide any substantial details about the Cainites.<sup>109</sup> Pseudo-Tertullian traces their name back to Cain whom he said they praised, because they believed that he was conceived by a stronger Power (*potenti uirtute*) than Abel. They also admire Judas Iscariot. Some of the Cainites said that Judas carried out God's plan for salvation because, when Christ 'wished to subvert the truth,' Judas betrayed him 'that the truth might not be overthrown.' Other Cainites disagree. In their opinion, the archons opposed Christ's suffering and tried to stop his crucifixion in order to prevent the human race from being redeemed. So Judas brought about Jesus' suffering against the wishes of the archons. By betraying Christ, Judas made sure that the human race would be saved. It is difficult to substantiate these as Cainite views because we have no Gnostic literature that even comes close to the theological views he attributes to the Cainites here. Nor does the author claim personal knowledge of them.

How did the *Gospel of Judas* become a Cainite gospel? By a combination of sources in Epiphanius' *Panarion*. Chapter 38 of Epiphanius' *Panarion* appears to me to be mainly a compilation of Irenaeus' discussion of the *Gospel of Judas* and Hippolytus' lost passage on the Cainites (preserved also by Pseudo-Tertullian). When our passages are

<sup>105</sup> Matt 3:11; John 4:2. Tert., *De Bapt.* 11.

<sup>106</sup> 1 Cor 1:7. Tert., *De Bapt.* 14.

<sup>107</sup> Tert., *De Bapt.* 13.

<sup>108</sup> Birger Pearson has shown that the expression 'Cainite' was used in some contexts to designate the 'heretic' in early Judaism and Christianity. See Pearson 1990, 103–105.

<sup>109</sup> Kroyman 1954, 1404.

laid side-by-side in a synopsis, it is clear that Epiphanius is combining Irenaeus (= I) and a source held in common with Pseudo-Tertullian (= C) by stitching them together in his own paraphrastic words. They are brought together by Epiphanius because of mutual references to Cain and to Judas in source-I and -C.

In PERICOPE A, it is shown that Epiphanius begins with material from C, which identifies the group as 'Cainite' because they praise Cain. After a few words unrelated to either of his sources, he welds together the opening statement from the I-source (that Cain is from the sovereign Power above) with source-C's reference to Cain's derivation from a strong Power and Abel's from a weaker one.

#### Pericope A

*Italic* = Dependence on Irenaeus (I-source)

**Bold** = Dependence on source common to Pseudo-Tertullian and Epiphanius (C-source)

IRENÆUS <i>Adv. haer.</i> 1.31.1 Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979b, 386	PS-TERTULLIAN <i>Adv. haer.</i> 2.5-6 Kroyman 1954, 1404	EPIPHANIUS <i>Pan.</i> 38.1.1-1.2 Holl 1980, 62-63
	[5] There has burst out another heresy called Cainites (Nec non etiam erupit alia quoque haeresis, quae dicitur Cainaeorum).	[1.1] Certain persons are called Cainites because they take the name of their sect from 'Cain' (Καϊανοί τινες ὀνομάζονται ἀπὸ τοῦ Κάιν εἰληφότες τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν τῆς αἰρέσεως).
	For they praise Cain (Et ipsi enim magnificent Cain)	For they praise Cain and count him as their father (οὗτοι γὰρ τὸν Κάιν ἐπαινοῦσι καὶ πατέρα ἑαυτῶν τοῦτον τάππουσι)
		...

IRENÆUS <i>Adv. haer.</i> 1.31.1 Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979b, 386	PS-TERTULLIAN <i>Adv. haer.</i> 2.5-6 Kroyman 1954, 1404	EPIPHANIUS <i>Pan.</i> 38.1.1-1.2 Holl 1980, 62-63
[1] Yet others say that Cain is from the sovereign Power above (Alii autem rursus Cain a superiore Principalitate dicunt)	as if he had been conceived from some mighty Power which operated in him (quasi ex quadam potenti uirtute conceptum, quae operata sit in ipso).	[1.2] <i>They say that Cain came into existence from the stronger Power and the sovereign Power above as are also Esau, the company of Korah, and the Sodomites</i> (Οὔτοι φασὶ τὸν Κάιν ἐκ τῆς ἰσχυροτέρας δυνάμεως ὑπάρχειν καὶ τῆς ἀνωθεν αὐθεντίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἡσαῦ καὶ τοὺς περὶ Κορὲ καὶ τοὺς Σοδομίτας),
	For Abel was conceived, procreated from a weaker Power, and thus had been found weak (Nam Abel ex inferiore uirtute conceptum, procreatum et ideo inferiorem repertum).	while Abel is from the weaker Power (τὸν δὲ Ἄβελ ἐκ τῆς ἀσθενεστερας δυνάμεως εἶναι).

In PERICOPE B, Epiphanius focuses on the I-source exclusively, making clear what was ambiguous in Irenaeus, that the stronger Power is the Power in the *upper* Aeons. He drives home this point by stating that the biblical villains, persecuted by the Creator of this world, were transported to *the upper Aeons where the stronger Power lived*. Judas is one of these special biblical villains who had the highest knowledge, Epiphanius deduces and thus the group had a gospel in his name.

## Pericope B

*Italic* = Dependence on Irenaeus (I-source)

**Bold** = Dependence on source common to Pseudo-Tertullian and Epiphanius (C-source)

IRENÆUS <i>Adv. haer.</i> 1.31.1 Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979b, 386	PS-TERT <i>Adv. haer.</i> 2.5-6 Kroyman 1954, 1404	EPIPHANIUS <i>Pan.</i> 38.1.3-1.5 Holl 1980, 62-63
and they acknowledge that Esau, Korah, the Sodomites, and all such persons, are their relatives (et Esau et Core et Sodomitas et omnes tales cognatos suos confitentur):		[1.3] All of them and their relatives are praiseworthy (δὲ τούτους πάντας παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐπαινετοὺς και τῆς αὐτῶν <sup>110</sup> συγγενείας). <i>They boast of being related to Cain, the Sodomites, Esau and Korah</i> (σεμνύονται γὰρ συγγενεῖς εἶναι τοῦ Κάιν και τῶν Σοδομιτῶν και Ἡσαῦ και Κορέ). These, they say, are from the perfect knowledge on high (και οὗτοι, φασίν, εἰσι τῆς τελείας και ἄνωθεν γνώσεως).
and because of this, they also acknowledge that they have been attacked by the Creator, yet none of them has been harmed (et propter hoc a Factore impugnatos, neminem ex eis malum accepisse).		[1.4] <i>For this reason, they say, although the Creator of this world devoted himself to their annihilation, he could in no way harm them</i> (διὸ και τὸν ποιητὴν τοῦ κόσμου τούτου φασί περι τὴν τούτων ἀνάλωσιν ἐσχολακότα μηδὲν δεδυνῆσθαι αὐτούς βλάψαι).
For Sophia seized what belonged to her from them (Sophia enim illud quod proprium ex ea erat abripiebat ex eis ad semetipsam).		For they were hidden from him and transported to the upper Aeon whence the stronger Power is (ἐκρύβησαν γὰρ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ και μετεβλήθησαν εἰς τὸν ἄνω αἰῶνα, ὅθεν ἡ ἰσχυρὰ δύναμις ἐστι). <i>Sophia let them approach her, for they belonged to her</i> (πρὸς ἑαυτὴν γὰρ ἡ Σοφία αὐτοὺς προσήκατο, ἰδίους αὐτῆς ὄντας).

<sup>110</sup> Holl 1980, 63 prints αὐτῶν

IRENÆUS <i>Adv. haer.</i> 1.31.1 Rousseau-Doutreleau 1979b, 386	PS-TERT <i>Adv. haer.</i> 2.5-6 Kroyman 1954, 1404	EPIPHANIUS <i>Pan.</i> 38.1.3-1.5 Holl 1980, 62-63
They say that Judas the traitor was thoroughly acquainted with these things (Et haec Iudam proditorem diligenter cognouisse dicunt),		[1.5] <i>For this reason they say that Judas knew quite well all about these matters</i> (και τούτου ἔνεκεν τὸν Ἰούδαν ἀκριβῶς τὰ περι τούτων ἐπεγνωκέναι λέγουσι).
and that he alone, knowing the truth as none of the others did, accomplished the mystery of the betrayal (et solum prae caeteris cognoscentem ueritatem, perfecisse proditiōnis mysterium):		They consider him their kinsman and <i>count him among those possessing the highest knowledge</i> (και τούτου γὰρ θέλουσιν εἶναι συγγενῆ ἑαυτῶν και ἐν γνώσεως ὑπερβολῇ τὸν αὐτὸν καταριθμοῦσιν),
By him all things, both earthly and heavenly, were thus destroyed (per quem et terrena et caelestia omnia dissoluta dicunt).		so that <i>they also carry around a short writing in his name which they call the Gospel of Judas</i> (ὥστε και συνταγματίον τι φέρειν ἐξ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ, ὃ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Ἰούδα καλοῦσι)
They produce a fictitious history of this kind, which they entitle the Gospel of Judas (Et confinctionem adferunt huiusmodi, Iudae Euangelium illud uocantes).		...
Following Irenaeus' statement that they produce a book called the 'Gospel of Judas,' Epiphanius inserts other material (PERICOPE C), including his excursion into the Gnostic views of Cain's paternity, but when he returns to the subject of Judas in 38.3.1, he creates a paragraph to seamlessly make a smooth transition back to source-C. In it, he returns to the stronger and weaker Power images from the opening sentences of source-C, suggesting that Judas was from the stronger Power and was able to carry out the crucifixion when Jesus, in his weakness was unable to hand over his body to be crucified.		

## Pericope C

*Italic* = Dependence on Irenaeus (I-source)

**Bold** = Dependence on source common to Pseudo-Tertullian and Epiphanius (C-source)

IRENÆUS <i>Adv. haer.</i> 1.31.1 Rousseau- Doutreleau 1979b, 386	PS-TERTULLIAN <i>Adv. haer.</i> 2.5-6 Kroyman 1954, 1404	EPIPHANIUS <i>Pan.</i> 38.3.1-3.2 Holl 1980, 65
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They who assert this likewise defend the traitor Judas, mentioning to us that he is admirable and great, because of the advantages he is considered to have conveyed to humankind (Hi qui hoc adserunt, etiam Iudam proditorem defendunt, admirabilem illum et magnum esse memorantes propter utilitates, quas humano generi contulisse iactatur).

[3.1] These same myths they mix with the mischievous ignorance they teach, advising their disciples that every person must choose for himself the stronger power and separate himself from the inferior and feebler, namely the one which made heaven, the flesh, and the world, and pass above to the highest regions through Christ's crucifixion (τὰ δὲ αὐτὰ μνθώδη καὶ οὗτοι παραπλέκουσι τῇ περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν δηλητηρίων τῆς ἀγνοσίας δόσει, τοῖς πειθομένοις ἐπιβουλεύοντες ὅτι δεῖ πάντα ἀνθρωπὸν ἑαυτῷ ἐλέσθαι τὴν ἰσχυροτέραν δύναμιν καὶ τῆς ἥττονος καὶ ἀτόνου ἀποχωρῖζεσθαι, τουτέστιν τῆς τὸν οὐρανὸν ποιησάσης καὶ τὴν σάρκα καὶ τὸν κόσμον, καὶ ὑπερβαίνειν εἰς τὰ ἀνώτατα διὰ τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ σταυρώσεως).

IRENÆUS <i>Adv. haer.</i> 1.31.1 Rousseau- Doutreleau 1979b, 386	PS-TERTULLIAN <i>Adv. haer.</i> 2.5-6 Kroyman 1954, 1404	EPIPHANIUS <i>Pan.</i> 38.3.1-3.2 Holl 1980, 65
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[3.2] For this reason, they say, that he came from above, that a strong power might be made active in him which would triumph over the weaker power and hand over the body. Now some of them teach this, but others say something else (διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο, φασίν, ἦλθεν ἄνωθεν, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ ἐνεργηθῇ δύναμις ἰσχυρά, κατὰ τῆς ἀσθενεστέρως δυνάμεως τὸ τρῶπιον λαβοῦσα καὶ τὸ σῶμα παραδοῦσα, καὶ οἱ μὲν αὐτῶν τοῦτο λέγουσιν, ἄλλοι δὲ ἄλλα).

In PERICOPE D, Epiphanius rewrites source-C to emphasize that the Cainites thought that Judas betrayed Jesus because Jesus wanted to destroy sound teachings or because the archons opposed the crucifixion since they knew that their power would be drained and salvation effected. Therefore Judas brought about the salvation of humankind.

*Pericope D**Italic* = Dependence on Irenaeus (I-source)**Bold** = Dependence on source common to Pseudo-Tertullian and Epiphanius (C-source)

IRENÆUS  
*Adv. haer.* 1.31.1  
Rousseau-  
Doutreleau 1979b,  
386

PS-TERTULLIAN  
*Adv. haer.* 2.5-6  
Kroyman 1954, 1404

EPIPHANIUS  
*Pan.* 38.3.3-3.4  
Holl 1980, 65-66

[6] For some think that gratitude is to be given to Judas because, they say, 'When Judas observed that Christ wanted to subvert the truth, he betrayed him so that there would not be any possibility that the truth would be subverted' (Quidam enim ipsorum gratiarum actionem Iudae propter hanc causam reddendam putant. 'Animaduertens enim,' inquit, 'Judas, quod Christus uellet ueritatem subuertere, tradidit illum, ne subuerti ueritas posset').

[3.3] Some say that it was because Christ was wicked that he was betrayed by Judas, because he, Christ, wanted to distort what pertains to the law (οἱ μὲν γὰρ λέγουσι Χριστὸν παραδοθῆναι αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰούδα, βουλόμενον διαστρέφειν τὰ κατὰ τὸν νόμον). They admire Cain and Judas, as I said, and they say, 'For this reason he betrayed him, because he wanted to destroy sound teachings' (ἐπαινοῦσι γὰρ τὸν Κάιν καὶ τὸν Ἰούδα, ὡς ἔφη, καὶ λέγουσι· τούτου ἕνεκεν παραδέδωκεν αὐτὸν, ἐπειδὴ ἠβούλετο καταλύειν τὰ καλῶς δεδιδαγμένα).

IRENÆUS  
*Adv. haer.* 1.31.1  
Rousseau-  
Doutreleau 1979b,  
386

PS-TERTULLIAN  
*Adv. haer.* 2.5-6  
Kroyman 1954, 1404

EPIPHANIUS  
*Pan.* 38.3.3-3.4  
Holl 1980, 65-66

And other people dispute countering them, and say, 'Because the Powers of this world did not want Christ to suffer, lest through his death salvation should be prepared for humankind, he (Judas) was concerned about the salvation of humankind. He betrayed Christ so that there might not be any possibility at all for salvation to be impeded, which was being impeded by the Powers that were opposing Christ's passion. And thus, through the passion of Christ, there might not be any possibility of the salvation of humankind being delayed' (Et alii sic contra disputant et dicunt: 'quia potestates huius mundi nolebant pati Christum, ne humano generi per mortem ipsius salus pararetur, saluti consulens generis humani tradidit Christum, ut salus, quae impediabatur per uirtutes, quae obsistebant, ne pateretur Christus, impediri omnino non posset et ideo per passionem Christi non posset salus humani generis retardari').

[3.4] But others among them say, 'Not at all. He betrayed him, although he was good, because of his (Judas') knowledge of heavenly things. For, they say, 'the Archons knew that if Christ were given over to the cross, their feeble power would be drained. Judas, knowing this, made every effort to betray him, thereby accomplishing a good work for salvation' (ἄλλοι δὲ τῶν αὐτῶν, οὐχί, φασίν, ἀλλὰ ἀγαθὸν αὐτὸν ὄντα παρέδωκεν κατὰ τὴν ἐπουράνιον γνώσιν. ἔγνωσαν γὰρ, φασίν, οἱ ἀρχόντες ὅτι ἐὰν ὁ Χριστὸς παραδοθῆ σταυρῷ κενουῖται αὐτῶν ἡ ἀσθενὴς δύναμις, καὶ τοῦτο, φησί, γνοῦς ὁ Ἰούδας ἔσπευσε καὶ πάντα ἐκίνησεν ὥστε παραδοῦναι αὐτὸν ἀγαθὸν ἔργον ποιήσας ἡμῖν εἰς σωτηρίαν). We should admire and praise him because through him the salvation of the cross was prepared for us and the revelation of things above occasioned by it (καὶ δεῖ ἡμᾶς ἐπαινεῖν καὶ ἀποδιδόναι αὐτῷ τὸν ἐπαινον, ὅτι δι' αὐτοῦ κατεσκευάσθη ἡμῖν ἡ τοῦ σταυροῦ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ διὰ τῆς τοιαύτης ὑποθέσεως τῶν ἀνω ἀποκάλυψις).



Now that we possess the *Gospel of Judas*, it is quite clear that its authors do not hold any of these positions. The archons do not oppose the crucifixion, Jesus is not trying to destroy sound teachings nor is he weak in body, and Judas is not the gospel's hero. The association of these teachings with the *Gospel of Judas* only came about because Epiphanius wove together two sources that were commenting on independent subjects. The I-source discussed the *Gospel of Judas*, while the C-source spoke about the Cainites. Because these two sources had in common references to Cain and Judas, Epiphanius threaded them together to create a more expansive and informative narrative. But when he did this, the originally separate narratives (on very different subjects) came together as one. This served to detach the *Gospel of Judas* from its Sethian connections, and invert its actual opinion of Judas, making it a gospel of the Cainites who were said to praise Cain and other villains in the scriptures. The implications are clear. Epiphanius did not have a copy of the *Gospel of Judas*, nor had he ever read it.

It is hard to say whether or not the Cainites held the opinions about Cain or Judas outlined in source-C. But if they did so these opinions were not the ones located in the *Gospel of Judas*—at least the *Gospel of Judas* that we have and the one that Irenaeus knew about. Did the Cainites have another *Gospel of Judas*? I doubt it, since source-C makes no mention of it. The *Gospel of Judas* only becomes the possession of the Cainites when Epiphanius gives it to them in his *Panarion*.

##### 5. SETHIAN CHRISTIANITY

So have we got it right? Before the discovery of the *Gospel of Judas*, when all we had were the testimonies of the heresiologists, we thought that the authors of this text were Cainites who traced their ancestry to Cain and all the villains in the bible. Cain, Korah, the Sodomites, and Judas were their heroes. We believed that these Gnostics thought that Cain and the other biblical villains were actually clandestine agents of the supreme God working to undermine Ialdabaoth. The creator god recognized this and so sought to destroy them at every turn.

After the *Gospel of Judas* turned up, it has become clear that this previously-held opinion is not only inadequate, but wrong. It was immediately recognized that the *Gospel of Judas* is some type of Sethian Christian gospel, not a Cainite one. Far from honoring Judas as an ancestral hero, the author of the *Gospel of Judas* perceives Judas as a demon, an

opinion quite cogent with the New Testament gospels. Furthermore, he identifies Judas with a particular demon—the Thirteenth—a nickname for Ialdabaoth-Saklas in the Sethian tradition. The point of the gospel is to critique apostolic Christianity by suggesting that the leader of the apostolic church and the twelve disciples is none-other-than the wicked Judas, the one who was responsible for bringing about Jesus' death and achieving the atonement.

This has taken me back to the patristic testimonies with the question, 'What is going on?' After careful investigation of the patristic material, several points have emerged:

- (1) Irenaeus knew that the Gnostics who produced the *Gospel of Judas* traced Cain's origin to the sovereign Power above. According to the Sethian Gnostics, this tyrant was the demiurge Ialdabaoth. Irenaeus' manner of presentation of this teaching, whether intentional or not, allowed for readers like Epiphanius to think that this sovereign Power was from the upper Aeon and that the wicked Cain was their praiseworthy ancestor.
- (2) Irenaeus was familiar with a Sethian teaching that the seed of Seth had been saved from Sodom's destruction, but he mistakes or distorts this teaching. His readers are left to believe that the Gnostics who produced the *Gospel of Judas* thought that their ancestors were all the wicked people in the scripture.
- (3) Irenaeus does not say that the *Gospel of Judas* was associated with the Cainites. Rather he catalogues it with other Barbeloite or Sethian materials.
- (4) It is difficult to ascertain what the Cainites thought, if indeed they were a historical group. On the one hand, *if Tertullian's opponents in Carthage were Cainites*, then we have a fairly detailed description of their objections to apostolic baptism, and we know that one of their leaders at the end of the second century was a woman. From his description, it appears that his opponents were anti-baptismal because they associated water with the material world and John's inferior baptism, which could not convey the Spirit. This critique of apostolic baptism appears to have been common among several Gnostic groups since it is preserved also in the *Testimony of Truth* and in the *Paraphrase of Shem*. On the other hand, *if the testimony in Pseudo-Tertullian presents us with sound historical information about the Cainites*, it suggests that the Cainites were a group of Gnostics that lauded Judas and other biblical characters, including

Cain, whom they perceived to be persecuted by the biblical god. But these people were not the authors of the newly restored *Gospel of Judas*, a gospel that the author of Pseudo-Tertullian knows nothing about.

- (5) The *Gospel of Judas* becomes a Cainite gospel only when Epiphanius makes it so. Epiphanius did not have a copy of the *Gospel of Judas*, nor had he ever read it. His opinion about the text is dependent upon Irenaeus' testimony, which he interprets and expands by combining it with source-C's description of the Cainites. When he does this, the once-separate subjects come together as one, and the Cainites become the authors of *Judas*, and Judas of the *Gospel of Judas* becomes a lauded hero. About Judas, Irenaeus only says that Judas the traitor knew more than the other disciples and betrayed Jesus, bringing about the destruction of the world, an opinion which is quite cogent with what the *Gospel of Judas* actually says.

Being able to read the 'real' *Gospel of Judas* has given us a tremendous advantage. We can assess its first-hand testimony and weigh it against the second-hand testimonies of the heresiologists. When this is done, we find that our previous knowledge about Cain and Judas require drastic revision, as do many details about Gnostic exegesis and teaching. We took for granted that the heresiologists were transmitting Gnostic materials fairly when, in fact, they either misunderstood or misconstrued Gnostic instruction in their battle against it. Careful comparison of Irenaeus and the Gnostic testimonies shows that partial information about the Sethians was transmitted, which left readers to draw the worst conclusions about the *Gospel of Judas*. In the case of Epiphanius, separate-subject sources were conflated, which left the *Gospel of Judas* in the hands of the Cainites.

As for the whole subject of Sethianism, I think that the discovery of the *Gospel of Judas* further challenges us, since we are faced with a gospel that has integral Sethian features, but which is entirely focused on Jesus and matters-Christian. The *Gospel of Judas* is not a Sethian text with marginal interest in Christianity. This is a Sethian text that comports its view as the only true form of Christianity. It is engaged in an all-out war against the leaders, doctrines and practices of the Apostolic church, a church whose leaders it portrays as wicked, ignorant and useless, except to serve Ialdabaoth-Saklas.

Have we missed an entire chapter in our Sethian histories, a chapter that reveals the reconfiguration of Sethianism within the Christian

context as a thoroughly Christian expression of Gnosis that competed with Apostolic Christianity for the orthodox claim? If so, this would mean that the Sethian tradition was more diverse and became more Christian than we have recognized previously, and Irenaeus had a real reason to be very concerned about it. If our understanding of the *Apocryphon of John* is correct, the assimilation of Sethianism with Christian tradition had to have started at least as early as the end of the first century. What the *Gospel of Judas* reveals is that, by the mid-second century, Sethian Christianity had emerged as a separatist movement and was in full frontal combat with Apostolic Christianity over what it meant to be a true Christian.

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