



Gnosis and Faith in Early Christianity: An Introduction to Gnosticism

Riemer Roukema

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Gnosticism, a form of religious knowledge that dates from the early centuries of the Christian movement, has often been characterized as a bizarre and even perverse distortion of Christian theology. Its special emphasis was on knowledge of God and of the nature and destiny of human kind. Such knowledge was believed to have redeeming power, liberating the soul from the sway of cosmic forces. The earliest information on Gnosticism comes from the works of Christian opponents (Irenaeus et al.) and from certain ancient Coptic texts. A new era in the study of Gnosticism was inaugurated by the discovery in 1945 of the Nag Hammadi library. In this introductory handbook, Riemer Roukema explores the meaning of the "gnosis" phenomenon on the basis of these sources and sets forth the relationship between Gnosticism and the church. Part One provides a general orientation to Gnosticism; Part Two looks at the religious and philosophical backgrounds of Gnosticism; Part Three uses ancient texts to provide a more detailed discussion of gnosis, Gnosticism, and Gnostics; Part Four examines the relationship between "Catholic" Christianity and Gnosticism. Riemer Roukema is Lecturer in New Testament at the Theological University of Kampen, The Netherlands.

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