Christians, Gnostics and Platonists:
An overview of the ethos of late antiquity

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ABSTRACT

*Christians, Gnostics, and Platonists* attempts to characterize the ethos of late antiquity (100-500 CE) as one that despised matter and the body. It operates within the assumption that there are four criteria which establish this characterization, namely an emphasis on the evil of life, a distrust of the sociopolitical world, asceticism, and an interest in the supernatural. These four criteria are evident in the Platonists, Christians, and Gnostics of the period. As Chapter Two reveals the dissertation understands the concept of ethos in the context of R. C. Trench’s discussion of *aiōn*: “all the thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, impulses, and aspirations present in the world at any given time.”

In Chapter Three Plato and the Middle Platonists are viewed as bequeathing to late antiquity its world-denying philosophy which the Gnostics preached more incessantly than the Platonists and the Christians practiced more conscientiously than the Gnostics. The Neoplatonists were the Platonists of late antiquity. In the writings of such figures as Plotinus and Porphyry the hatred of matter and the body is boldly expressed, and it is only slightly less apparent in later philosophers like Iamblichus and Proclus. In Plotinus we discern a profound distrust of the sociopolitical world and in Proclus a thoroughgoing asceticism paired with an interest in the supernatural.

In Chapter Four it is shown that Gnosticism was more unyielding than either Platonism or Christianity in its insistence that matter and the body were evil, and it followed the late antique distrust of the social world both in its elitism and in its view of martyrdom as an act of casting pearls before swine. Gnosticism tended to accept the asceticism of late antiquity though some of its adherents practiced an extreme licentiousness that was the counterpart of asceticism in that it approached the body as worthless. The late antique emphasis on the supernatural is evidenced by such Gnostic figures as Simon Magus, Carpocrates, and Valentinus.

Chapter Five demonstrates that the hatred of matter and the body is also expressed by the Christians albeit with less consistency to their worldview. It can be glimpsed in the ante-Nicene, post-Nicene, and desert fathers as well as in the Arians. It is most notable in the attempts of Justin Martyr, Origen, and Arius to place the Son at a lower ontological level than the Father in order to protect God from the evil entity of matter. The late antique
distrust of the sociopolitical world is manifested in the Christian view of martyrdom as a way of scorning a corrupt world, a view unlike that of the Gnostics. No one possessed this distrust more strongly than the Donatists with whom the later Augustine had some kinship. Many of the Christians tended to practice asceticism and the miraculous, the form in which the supernatural took in their case. The desert fathers can be said to be the most sincere representatives of late antiquity with their intense practice of both of these expressions of the ethos.

Key terms in the dissertation are *aiōn*, the ante-Nicene fathers, Arianism, asceticism, Christ/Christian, Donatism, the early church, ethos, Gnosticism, late antiquity, Neoplatonism, Plato/Platonist, the post-Nicene fathers, and *saeculum*. 
PREFACE

This study arose from my interest in two of the peripheral figures of late antiquity, Pantaenus and Ammonius Saccas, whose fascination may well lie in the fact that so little is known about them. From there I went on to read widely in the Platonists, Christians, and Gnostics of late antiquity. For their help with various aspects of this dissertation I would like to extend my appreciation to Frank Kovács, Rikus Fick, Chris Woodall, Stuart Rochester, and Peg Evans. I would also like to thank Gabriella Reznowski, reference librarian at Washington State University, for helping me locate articles and theses on Platonism and early Christianity.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

My first exposure to the study of late antiquity left me with a sense of its internal coherence. This, as I soon discovered, was its ethos, the common intellectual and emotional features of the time. Moreover it was an ethos that was remarkably different from that of the preceding classical era. It was one that brought not only polarization and division but also a strange kind of unity among otherwise disparate social, ethical, and philosophical entities. While there have been those who have implied that pagans and Christians shared significant features associated with this ethos (Cook et al, 1965: 449) no attempt appears to have been made to develop this insight further.

Undoubtedly the post-classical Hellenistic ethos in which Christianity took root facilitated its rapid development and rate of expansion (Daniélou, 1973: 107-135). However Christianity cannot lay exclusive claim to such development. Similar expansion is discernible in other philosophical ideas and religious movements of ancient Greek influence. In turn movements that preceded Christianity may have in some measure, however small, shaped the direction that early Christian thought took (Armstrong & Markus, 1960: vii-viii). While some would consider this to be a corruption of the faith, others have not perceived it as such. Indeed Justin Martyr regarded Platonism as a kind of Gentile Old Testament, designed under God’s guidance to prepare non-Jews for the coming of Christ (Ferguson & Wright, 1993: 290). This influence may not be entirely positive, however, at least if one is viewing the situation from a contemporary Christian perspective. If the Hellenistic ethos is found to be as prevalent as has been suggested, it is possible that the patristic interpretation of the New Testament was detrimentally affected.

It is not novel to posit that there was a close relationship between early Christianity and Hellenistic culture. Hellenistic culture was, after all, the ground into which the seeds of Christianity were sown. Rudolf Bultmann (1980: 178) goes so far as to suggest that some of the New Testament writers, particularly John, were influenced by the diametrically opposed concepts of Greek thought such as light and darkness, truth and falsehood, above and below, and the insistence that a type of resurrection had already occurred. Adolf Harnack attempted a similar strategy, with arguably more success, in regard to the early church fathers. He viewed the Gnostics as Hellenizers of Christianity, effectively transforming it into a religion for the
educated. He also considered the apostolic fathers to have unwittingly initiated a parallel trend in mainstream Christianity by insisting that it was “the realisation of an absolutely moral theism” (Harnack, 1961: 175). Cornelius Van Til follows in Harnack’s wake in his criticism of the church fathers for conceding too much to the “natural man,” which in this case is primarily the Platonist. His treatment of Justin Martyr is typical of his approach. He acknowledges Justin’s belief in Christ’s divinity and co-creation of the universe but also condemns him for equating Christ with the Logos of the Middle Platonists (Van Til, 1969: 78).

More recently Richard Valantasis (1991: 147-155) has observed parallels in the master-disciple relationship among Christians, Neoplatonists, Hermetists, and Gnostics of the third century. John Rist (in Gerson, 1996: 386-413) has drawn our attention to Neoplatonic influence on post-Nicene Christianity which tended to accept the One and the Nous of Plotinus except that it made the latter God’s thoughts rather than a quasi-independent hypostasis. Dominic O’Meara (2003: 148) has investigated the affiliations between the political theory of Plato and the Neopythagoreans on the one hand and that put forward in Eusebius’ panegyric on Constantine on the other. And Abraham Bos (2000: 44-60) has urged us to consider more seriously Hippolytus’ claim that the Christian Gnostic Basilides was dependent on Plato’s pupil Aristotle.

Despite all this invigorating research, however, nothing has been written on the influence of Hellenism on Christianity explicitly as an ethos, a common intellectual and emotional ground. The central question of this dissertation, therefore, is: How may one determine the common and contrasting intellectual and emotional features of Christians, Gnostics, and Platonists from approximately 100 to 500 CE? The questions that naturally arise from this problem are: Is it possible to understand how the concept of ethos may be determined for the period under discussion? How was the ethos of late antiquity manifested through the most notable exponents of Platonism? How was the ethos of late antiquity manifested through the major advocates of Gnosticism? How was the ethos of late antiquity manifested in the early years of Christianity?
The aim of this dissertation is to determine the common and contrasting intellectual and emotional features of Christians, Gnostics, and Platonists from approximately 100 to 500 CE. The objectives of this study must be seen in their relation to the aim. I therefore intend to approach the subject from the following four angles: (1) to appreciate how the concept of ethos may be determined for the period under discussion; (2) to identify examples of the ethos of late antiquity as manifested through the most notable exponents of Platonism; (3) to identify examples of the ethos of late antiquity as manifested through the major advocates of Gnosticism; and (4) to identify examples of the ethos of late antiquity as manifested in the early years of Christianity. The central theoretical argument of this study is that, although there were many contrasting features between the systems of Platonism, Gnosticism, and Christianity in the latter’s formative stages, they also shared many common characteristics, chief of which was a dislike of matter and the body.

My religious background is one that finds most sympathy with the broad spectrum of the Protestant tradition. This being so I acknowledge a responsibility to give balanced recognition to sources that are not written exclusively by those of this persuasion in order to arrive at conclusions that might otherwise be biased. The methods I propose to employ in this historico-theological study include a definition of the terms as they are to be understood in the rest of the work, an analysis of historico-philosophical data and the literary contributions of experts in the field of Platonism, an appraisal of historical documents in conjunction with the literary output of experts in the field of Gnosticism, and an evaluative and comparative scrutiny of documented evidence from the period in the light of biblical revelation, using widely acknowledged hermeneutical principles.
2.0 THE CONCEPT OF ETHOS

2.1 Introduction

We will commence this dissertation with a brief investigation of the terms ethos and aiōn as well as the establishment of certain criteria that will enable us to ascertain the distinctive ethos of late antiquity which lasted from approximately 100 to 500 CE. Our study of ethos will be indebted to twentieth-century research on the philosophy of language, particularly that of V. N. Voloshinov. Our study of aiōn, which owes much to R. C. Trench, will trespass slightly into the domain of its Latin affiliate saeculum.

2.2 Ethos

J. S. Baumlin in his discussion of rhetorical ethos (Baumlin & Baumlin, 1994: xi-xxxiii) takes for his start Isocrates’ Antidosis. For Isocrates ethos referred to a morality that was recognized by all. If the rhetor did not conform to this ethos he would be less readily able to persuade his hearers of the wisdom of his argument. According to Isocrates the rhetor displayed ethos even before speaking or writing; his ethos was manifested in all the actions of his life (1994: xiv, xvi). The Romans picked up on this idea; ethos was for them inherited rather than constructed. A man did not own his body nor did he have ancestors, name, or personal belongings; all was his ethos (1994: xix). Nor was ethos purely moral. It referred to the character, sentiments, and beliefs of the group or time, in less precise terms its environment or milieu.

Interpreting V. N. Voloshinov, Baumlin proffers that the writer of any given time and culture speaks a language that is partly his own but also an expression of his time and culture (1994: xxii). Ethos changes over time and among cultures; it makes ideology visible and is the cultural dress of human character (1994: xxviii). Voloshinov (in Morris, 1994: 58) succinctly describes the relationship between the writer and his audience and the crucial limitation of that relationship: “Each person’s inner world and thought has its stabilized social audience that comprises the environment in which reasons, motives, values, and so on are fashioned. The more cultured a person, the more closely his inner audience approximate the normal audience of ideological creativity; but, in any case, specific class and specific era are limits that the ideal of addressee cannot go beyond.”
In this quotation the distinction between the individual person and his audience is established. The writer’s inner audience and its ethos is the means by which he interacts with his audience, but both he and they are constrained by the ethos of the time in which they live. As a result of this constraint it follows that the writer’s productions approximate the ethos of his time. Not only is the ethos of each writer an approximation of the ethos of his time, so too is the collective average of the ethoi of the totality of writers. The more cultured of them, if Voloshinov is correct, will be found to give utterance to the ethos most faithfully.

In the introduction to his book on the ethos of Indian literature K. S. Srinivasan (1985: 2) asks, “In what does the entire culture constitute?” and “How does intense awareness manifest itself?” These questions allow us to apply three more distinctions to our understanding of ethos, namely its extension to culture, its possession of some form of self-awareness, and its ability to manifest itself in various ways. We have already intimated that ethos extends to culture by our postulation of literary figures as representatives of the ethos. The self-awareness of an ethos, if it can be proven, would apply more to such figures than to the largely impersonal ethos itself. As for the manifestations of the ethos, these phenomena will occupy the bulk of our study of the ethos of late antiquity.

2.3 Aiōn and Saeculum

The Greek word aiōn, together with its Latin counterpart saeculum, forms a subsidiary concept to ethos and enables us to view the concept through a somewhat different lens. C. G. Jung (1958(11): 244) clearly draws our attention to the close relationship between the two ideas by quoting Pindar’s phrase aiōnos eidōlon (“image of aiōn”) which he applies to his psychology thusly: the image is the physical man which mirrors the aiōn. This is the selfsame situation we have described between the individual writer and the ethos of his time (Morris, 1994: 58).

According to the Byzantine Etymologicum Magnum, aiōn had five meanings: a human life, a span of a thousand years, eternity, an age, and the spinal marrow (Keizer, 1999: 8-9). The fourth meaning, which will concern us here, did not enter the Greek language until the time of the New Testament whose writers were possibly influenced by Rabbinic writings which spoke of this age (‘ōlām hazze) and the coming age (‘ōlām habbā’) (1999: 252; Jenni & Westermann, 1997(2): 862). Aiōn in this sense had two shades of meaning: age and spirit of
Aristotle derived \( \textit{aiōn} \) from \( \textit{aei einai} \) (always being), but Trench (1989: 229) rejects this for \( \textit{aēmi} \) (to breathe). This is appropriate for our purposes because one’s ethos is the intellectual air he breathes. \( \textit{Aiōn} \) is to be distinguished from \( \textit{kosmos} \). It shapes the \( \textit{kosmos} \) but is paradoxically subtler than it. It includes “all the thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, impulses, and aspirations present in the world at any given time” (1989: 230). Trench emphasizes that it may be impossible to accurately define the \( \textit{aiōn} \), but it is still “a real and effective power” (1989: 230). Since \( \textit{aiōn} \) is so all-encompassing it is fitting that the homonymous Mithraic god, with a lion’s head and a snake around its winged body, represented the union of light and darkness, male and female, creation and destruction (Jung, 1976(18): 121-122). All these elements, not only philosophical ideas but true manifestations of reality, are impartially contained in the \( \textit{aiōn} \).

The relationship between the two shades of meaning of \( \textit{aiōn} \), age and spirit of the age, may be expressed thusly: The spirit of an age is its ethos, and it bears the same correspondence to an age that its clothing fashions do; it is something unique to that age which no other age possesses. The ethos of the last century, for example, has been largely shaped by scientism and is characterized by a physical and psychological dependence on technology. The ethos of the 1980’s, the ethos of an age within an age, was characterized by lust for acquisition and a somewhat nonchalant hedonism. As we have seen, ethos sometimes has a moral connotation which \( \textit{aiōn} \) shares: Ignatius, for instance, condemned the kingdoms of this \( \textit{aiōnos} \) (\textit{Rom.} 6.1) (Ehrman, 2003a(1): 277).

The Latin counterpart of \( \textit{aiōn} \) was \( \textit{saeculum} \) which also had several meanings: a human life, a century, a long period of time, an age, the spirit of the age, the world, and heathenism (Andrews, 1879: 1613-1614), as for instance Tertullian’s “heathenish examples” (\textit{saeculi exempla}) of chastity (\textit{Exh. Cast.} 13) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(4): 57). For Augustine \( \textit{saeculum} \) meant the world of men and time (Markus, 1970: viii). It was temporal life in its interwoven and perplexed reality (1970: 71). It included the sacred and the profane and was hence tension-ridden and disordered (1970: 83, 122). Like \( \textit{aiōn} \), \( \textit{saeculum} \) often had a moral connotation. So Tacitus observed that it corrupted and was corrupted (\textit{nec corrumpere et corrumpi saeculum vocatur}) (Andrews, 1879: 1614), and the Vulgate of James 1:27 spoke of the Christian keeping himself unspotted from the \( \textit{saeculum} \) (\textit{immaculatum se custodire ab ab}. \textit{(immaculatum se custodire ab}}

2.4 Four Criteria for Determining the Ethos of Late Antiquity

The late antique ethos, I would argue, is characterized by the sharing of many common attributes among Platonists, Gnostics, and Christians, most notably the hatred of matter and the body. This was largely the legacy of Plato and the Middle Platonists and was adopted, with great consistency to their worldview, by the Gnostics and with less consistency by the Christians (Dillon, 1996: 388-389; Armstrong, 1967: 425-426). By hatred is not meant active animosity but a strong aversion bordering on revulsion. The four criteria that will be used to pinpoint the late antique ethos are (1) an emphasis on the evil of life, (2) the distrust of the sociopolitical world, (3) asceticism, and (4) an interest in the supernatural, whether this takes the form of the occult or the miraculous or a combination of these. If we can establish these four criteria operating in the late antique ethos among both Christians, Platonists, and Gnostics, we will have demonstrated our central theoretical argument.

2.4.1 An Emphasis on the Evil of Life

Hatred of matter and the body is revealed by an emphasis on the evil nature of life and reality. If matter and the body are so abhorrent there is something radically wrong with an existence that greatly depends on these two entities, which are really one entity. We will find life’s evil being preached strenuously by the Gnostics, but it will not escape the notice of the Platonist and Christian thinkers we encounter. The decayed and partially indecipherable Nag Hammadi manuscripts are not so much a last laugh on the Gnostics as a vindication of their view of reality.

2.4.2 The Distrust of the Sociopolitical World

Hatred of matter and the body is also revealed by a distrust of the sociopolitical world. The thinkers of this time wanted to forsake not only the natural world but the human world for the realm of spirit. It was in this vein that Plotinus continually praised Rogatianus for leaving the senatorship in order to become his disciple (Porphyry, Vit. Plot. 7) (Plotinus, 1991: cviii-cix). The Gnostics did not want martyrs in their midst because martyrs were pearls cast before the swine of the world as represented by the Roman authorities (Tertullian, Scorp. 15) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(3): 648; Schaff, 1970: 471). Christian groups like the Donatists
dramatically turned their backs on the Roman Empire (Frend, 1971: 160), and Augustine followed them to some extent in his view that Christian Rome was no real improvement on pagan Rome (Armstrong, 1967: 413-414).

2.4.3 Asceticism

Hatred of matter and the body is clearly manifested by asceticism which mistreated the body and which was prevalent in late antiquity. It was practiced by the Neoplatonist Hypatia as well as by Cyril of Alexandria (Damascius, 1999: 129; McGuckin, 2004: 3-4). In the case of the Gnostics we will find extreme licentiousness doing duty for asceticism since it alike had the tendency to misuse the body (Schaff, 1970: 457-458). The Socratic hedonist Aristippus wanted a life characterized by pleasure rather than victimized by it (Reale, 1987: 272). A Gnostic like Carpocrates, however, actively wanted his body to be victimized by pleasure. That his followers branded the back of their right earlobes is not unexpected (Foerster, 1972(1): 38).

2.4.4 The Supernatural

Hatred of matter and the body is described by an interest in the occult and the miraculous. The former was usually the province of the Platonists and the latter of the Christians, but in the case of Proclus both phenomena operated together. On the one hand he had visions of dead masters; on the other he was credited with healing powers (Marinus of Samaria, 1986: 43-46). In general the later Neoplatonic interest in the occult was so pronounced that its representatives are strongly resemblant of practitioners of the New Age. Simon Magus and Carpocrates were two outstanding Gnostics who were famous for their occult powers (Rec. Clem. 2.9; Hom. Clem. 2.26) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(8): 99, 233-235; Foerster, 1972(1): 37).

2.5 Summary

Ethos, then, refers to the character, sentiments, and beliefs of a specific time period. Everything a writer writes approximates the ethos of his time. Related to the concept of ethos are the classical words *aiōn* and *saeculum* which imply both age and spirit of the age. The ethos of late antiquity, which will particularly concern us, can be determined by four criteria: an emphasis on the evil of life, the distrust of the sociopolitical world, asceticism, and an
interest in the supernatural. The ascertainment of these four criteria among the Platonists, Gnostics, and the early Christians will reveal the late antique ethos as one characterized mainly by the hatred for matter and the body.
3.0 MANIFESTATIONS OF THE ETHOS OF LATE ANTIQUITY IN PLATONISM

3.1 Introduction

Our study of the ethos of late antiquity begins with the Neoplatonists, the first and greatest of whom was Plotinus. The Neoplatonists inherited from Plato and the Middle Platonists an intensely world-denying philosophy. No one reflected this trend more consistently than the Neopythagoreans who represent the last phase of Middle Platonism and who were involved in an emphasis on the mathematization of reality and the transcendent and ineffable nature of the ultimate principle (Dillon, 1996: 383). Plotinus’ teacher Ammonius Saccas was a Neopythagorean, and it was in his person that Plotinus came into contact with what Dillon calls the “Neopythagorean underground” (1996: 381).

3.2 Plotinus

3.2.1 Life

Plotinus was born in Lycopolis in Upper Egypt. We have no information about his childhood save for the startling revelation that at the age of eight he was still being suckled by his nurse who soon shamed him out of the habit (Porphyry, Vit. Plot. 3) (Plotinus, 1991: ciii). He became interested in philosophy when he was twenty-eight but until he met Ammonius Saccas in Alexandria he came away from every lecture he attended discouraged and disheartened (Vit. Plot. 3) (1991: ciii-civ). Ammonius possessed an enthusiasm for the philosophy of the Middle Platonist Numenius that he would pass on to one of his other pupils, the Christian Origen. His earliest students included Origen and the brothers Heraclas and Plutarch. His later students were Plotinus, Longinus, Erennius, Origen the Platonist, Olympius, and Antoninus.

Ammonius believed that Plato and Aristotle could be reconciled and so inspired Plotinus to take from various systems what would work best for his own. Plotinus studied under Ammonius for eleven years in company with Erennius and Origen the Platonist and with them made a vow he would never disclose his master’s teachings, a vow Dillon (1996: 383) finds “a traditional Pythagorean attitude taken with unusual seriousness.” He subsequently served in Gordian’s Persian expedition and after Gordian’s assassination by Philip the Arab
made his way to Antioch and then to Rome. For a time he was a friend of the emperor Gallienus and his wife Salonina and presented them with a proposal for a city governed in accordance with Plato’s *Laws*. The project was originally supported by the emperor but was brought to nothing by the envy of his courtiers (*Vit. Plot.* 12) (Plotinus, 1991: cxi-cxii). That the city was meant to be nothing more than a philosophical society is proven by the facts that the tract of land on which it was to stand had been a city of philosophers and that Plotinus was strongly averse to politics, more than once attempting to dissuade his friend Zethos from his interest in the subject and continually praising the senator Rogatianus for giving up his career in order to become his pupil (*Vit. Plot.* 7) (1991: cviii-cix). Here we find the late antique distrust of the sociopolitical world clearly in evidence.

When Erennus and Origen broke their pact of secrecy Plotinus felt himself free to teach Ammonius’ doctrines although he refrained from writing for ten years. At first he encouraged his students to put questions to him, a habit which is said to have led to much futile talk. He always began his lectures by reading texts by philosophers such as Atticus, Severus, Gaius, Numenius, Cronius, Aspadius, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Adrastus (*Vit. Plot.* 14) (1991: cxii). He produced ostensibly fifty-four treatises which his student Porphyry prepared for publication in six groups of nine each, nine being something of a special number among the Pythagoreans. Whenever Plotinus took pen in hand it was as though he had already written out his treatise; he seemed to copy as from a book, and he never reread what he had written. This freed him to some extent from the prison of the body, but Porphyry tells us that he had poor handwriting and made frequent errors in writing and speaking, for instance saying *anamnēmisketai* instead of *anamimnēsketai* (*Vit. Plot.* 13) (1991: cxii).

Impressed with his asceticism, a reflection of the late antique hatred of matter, many parents made Plotinus the guardian of their sons and daughters (*Vit. Plot.* 9) (1991: cix-cx). He often said that until the children took to philosophy their fortunes and revenues needed to be kept intact for them, and he looked into their accounts with a diligent thoroughness. One of his favorite wards was the boy Potamon whom he often helped with his lessons, so much so that he did not tire of hearing them repeated many times (*Vit. Plot.* 9) (1991: cx). Porphyry tells us that, living twenty-six years in Rome and acting as an arbiter on many occasions, Plotinus never made an enemy of any citizen.
Plotinus had a curious mixture of humility and arrogance, if his eagerness to conclude a lecture into which his former fellow student, Origen, had stumbled may be construed as humble. His reluctance to sit for his portrait and celebrate his birthday was explicitly because of his shame of being in the body (Vit. Plot. 1) (1991: cii). He nonetheless celebrated the feast days of Plato and Socrates and gave banquets in their honor, expecting everyone who was able to give an address. For all his gentleness he had a darker side and was not ignorant of white magic which puts him neatly in line with the late antique interest in the supernatural. One of Ammonius’ pupils, Olympius, was unable to destroy him by star spells, endangering himself more than his former friend who claimed, despite the fact that he had no foreknowledge of Olympius’ activities, that he had sensed Olympius’ attempts and that, before they were over, Olympius’ limbs “were convulsed and his body shriveling like a money-bag pulled tight” (Vit. Plot. 10) (1991: cx). This episode demonstrates less Plotinus’ skill in casting counterspells than it does his spiritual invincibility. Regardless, he did not believe that magic was effective on any but the lower levels of existence so that even if Olympius’ operation had been successful it would have only cost him his life. Nor did he believe in astrology, a subject which he had once studied with interest, holding that stars foretold the future but were not its causes (Enn. 2.3.3) (1991: 77).

Once, at an occult ceremony in Rome, a priest declared that Plotinus’ guiding spirit was not of the lower degree but a god. The priest’s assistant, who had become overwhelmed with terror, strangled the birds used in the ceremony so that the priest was unable to question the god (Vit. Plot. 10) (1991: cx-cxi). Plotinus refused to celebrate holy days, claiming that it was the business of the daemons to come to him and not for him to go to them. He once identified a thief in the house of a woman with whom he had taken lodging; the man was whipped until he confessed his crime and brought forth the stolen object. He also successfully prophesied that Polemon, one of his young charges, would be amorous and short-lived (Vit. Plot. 11) (1991: cxi).

But Plotinus did not always use his supernatural abilities for ill. Porphyry was in the throes of a suicidal despair when Plotinus, having no prior knowledge of his student’s emotional crisis, came to his house and talked him out of his melancholy, at length convincing him of the wisdom of a change of scenery (Vit. Plot. 11) (1991: cxi). During the time Porphyry knew him Plotinus was able to attain unity with the One four times. Porphyry himself claimed to have attained unity once, but no other Neoplatonist, for all their interest in theurgy, is
recorded as doing so. Unity with the One should be regarded as another occult manifestation of the late antique desire for freedom from the body. Plotinus’ description of a similar experience is revealing: “After that sojourn in the divine, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how did the Soul ever enter into my body, the Soul which, even within the body, is the high thing it has shown itself to be” (Enn. 4.8.1) (1991: 334).

At the end of his life Plotinus suffered from leprosy. Ulcers broke out on his hands and feet. His voice, once clear and sonorous, became hoarse, and his sight dim, a grim reminder of the nefarious nature of matter. He died at the age of sixty-six, attended only by his physician Eustochius. His last words, spoken to Eustochius but with all his followers in mind, express the relaxed monism that was his primary faith: “Strive to give back the Divine in yourselves to the Divine in the All” (Vit. Plot. 2) (1991: ciii).

3.2.2 Philosophy

Many of the founders of the world religions have been artists, but Plotinus is one of the few philosophers to have achieved this distinction. His teachings are enlivened by the bright, lucid, and parabolic examples of his tractates, though his inelegant and often convoluted Greek has been frequently commented on (Armstrong, 1967: 219-220). The Enneads are less a collection of philosophical treatises than priceless archaeological documents from the glittering world of the third century when a man could be a Platonist philosopher one day and a Christian martyr the next. Their author, although less concerned with the exact sciences than Plato, was acquainted with astronomy, geometry, mechanics, and optics. He was also an intelligent observer of the Greek dance (Enn. 4.4.33) (Plotinus, 1991: 320).

Plotinus developed Numenius’ three gods into the emanational triad of the One, the Nous, and the World Soul. The triad was impersonal and its hypostases existed at different levels of being, the One in fact being beyond being and personality though Plotinus used masculine pronouns to refer to it. The One’s placement beyond being tended to protect it from the evil of matter. Plotinus usually pictured his hypostases in a vertical relationship but sometimes in a concentric one. Even the rational human soul he sometimes spoke of as being situated above the lower soul and sometimes inside it like a light within a lantern during a storm (1991: xci).
Plotinus thought his philosophy was a faithful interpretation of Plato. Of the Platonic dialogues he relied the most on the Phaedo, the Phaedrus, the Symposium, the Timaeus, and the Republic (Armstrong, 1967: 214). Plato’s philosophy was inherent in the earliest mythologies of the world, hence his use of the terms Uranus, Cronus, and Zeus to describe the One, the Nous, and the World Soul. The first builders of temples and shrines were in a way cognizant of Platonism because the shrines and temples were like mirrors that caught the image of the World Soul. The World Soul in its higher aspect was often conflated by Plotinus with the Nous which was for him both the Demiurge and the abode of the Forms, mathematical formulae that included individual human souls but not ugly or artificial things (Plotinus, 1991: xcv-xcvi). The eschewal of the ugly should be regarded as an affront to matter which is often characterized by ugliness.

The World Soul emanated the material world by applying the Forms to unorganized matter. Time is the product of the World Soul which, unable to see everything simultaneously, arranges it in a progressional pattern to facilitate understanding, which is why the sensible world is temporal. The relationship between the Nous and the World Soul is like the relationship between a father and his child, and the relationship between the World Soul and the material world is like the relationship between an architect and the mansion he has built and lives in, or like the relationship between the water and a fishing net that has been flung over it. As the architect is superior to his mansion and the water is superior to the fishing net, so the World Soul is superior to matter.

The material world was an image (eidōlon) of the World Soul just as the World Soul was an image of the Nous and the Nous an image of the One. Plotinus explained emanation by his theory of a double energeia: the internal part of the Nous remains Nous, but its externalized portion emanates the World Soul. He also explained this operation another way, namely that an image is created when an object looks back to its source of emanation (Smith, 1974: 7-9; Armstrong, 1967: 241). The Nous is an illumination of the One and, like the sun’s light, is produced with no loss of power to the One.

So closely are the hypostases related that Plotinus sometimes calls the One Being and at other times speaks of Being as the first moment of the Nous’s unfolding. The emanations or illuminations from the One are less good than it because plurality is less good than unity. As in the case of the three Demiurges of Mandaeanism (Foerster, 1972(1): 135), each emanation
is morally inferior to the one preceding it, and matter is the most inferior of all. There is even a certain audacity (tolma) in the separation of the Nous from the One and in the separation of the World Soul from the Nous (Armstrong, 1967: 242), but it is not like the audacity of the individual soul which tries to exclude itself from Being and unite itself with matter which is a kind of nonbeing that derives power from the soul and imprisons it in a tomb of the soul’s making.

Plotinus’ late antique hatred of matter can be seen in his avowal that the material world is evil. The introduction of the Forms into intelligible matter by the World Soul does nothing to change its original state; it only confirms it, “bringing it into actuality, into full effect, as sowing brings out the natural quality of land or as a female organism impregnated by the male is not defeminized but becomes more decidedly of its sex.” Matter is “ugliness,” “disgracefulness,” “utter destitution of sense, of virtue, of beauty, of pattern, of Ideal principle, of quality” (Enn. 2.4.16) (Plotinus, 1991: 107). But it is an irradiation of the World Soul, and the World Soul “makes beautiful to the fullness of their capacity all things whatsoever that it grasps and moulds” (Enn. 1.6.6) (1991: 52). In addition matter possesses its own deceptive beauty. It appears “bound around with bonds of Beauty, like some captive bound in fetters of gold; and beneath these it is hidden so that, while it must exist, it may not be seen by the gods, and that men need not always have evil before their eyes, but that when it comes before them they may still not be destitute of Images of the Good and Beautiful for their Remembrance” (Enn. 1.8.15) (1991: 70).

Plotinus came close to the Gnostics not only in his hatred for matter but in his indifference to civic and moral concerns. While Plato had urged that philosophers who had been vouchsafed a knowledge of the intelligible world should reenter the cave of shadows to aid their fellow mortals, Plotinus was less certain of the wisdom of societal duty; but he was the guardian of many children (Vit. Plot. 9) (1991: cix-cx), and whenever he attained unity with the One he was in a small way generating the Forms and ensuring the well-being of the universe.

Plotinus ascribed two levels to the soul. The higher soul is the soul proper and the lower soul is the part of the soul that interacts with the body. In addition to the higher and lower soul he distinguished what Dillon (in Plotinus, 1991: xcvi-xcix) calls “a floating spotlight of consciousness” and which he termed the ‘we’ (hēmeis). The Stoics thought the human soul was part of the World Soul that binds the universe together, but Plotinus identified it more
closely with the World Soul by explaining that both were projections from the World Soul’s first phase and were hence partners, although the human soul was an inferior one since it was more closely bound to matter (1991: xcvi). He alleged that while all of the person is not aware of the pain that part of his body experiences all of him is aware of what his soul experiences. In the same way what affects one human soul affects the World Soul in its entirety, a fact which explains why one can sympathize with suffering in others (Mayhall, 2004: 43). Like the World Soul the higher human soul cannot be said to have fallen from the realm of Nous. The souls of the worst of men are connected to Nous as the best of men are connected to matter through their bodies.

Plato had said that the soul was situated between the world of Forms and the material universe and thought it was truest to its original nature when detached from the body and contemplating the Forms. He believed that one was able to see the Forms only after his death, but Plotinus held that one could participate in the higher realms of reality during his lifetime. The philosopher could live the life of the higher soul while his lower soul controlled his daily activities. Porphyry gives us an example of Plotinus’ ability to be in two realms at the same time. After he was interrupted in his writing to carry on a conversation with someone he would continue his work without having to go back and read what he had written before (Vit. Plot. 8) (Plotinus, 1991: cix). The realm he inhabited while writing was the realm of Nous and could be reached by contemplation, but only ecstasy could result in union with the One. The men likeliest to attain the level of Nous were the philosopher, the lover, and the musician. The Nous was a kind of resting place where the philosopher awaited union with the One.

The intelligible world was more real than the sensible world and the world of the One was the most real of all. “What passes for the most truly existent is most truly non-existent—the thing of extension [matter] least real of all—while this unseen First is the source and principle of Being and sovran over reality” (Enn. 5.5.11) (1991: 402). Everything in the sensible world is in the intelligible world but in a more exalted way. The civic virtues—wisdom, courage, self-control, and justice—are faint reflections of their Forms. Time is an inadequate representation of eternity, action a distorted version of contemplation. The harmonies of the sensible world are not to be compared to the harmonies of the noetic world, and the fire that burns here is nothing like the fire that burns there and which is seen with eyes more real than those of the material man. The unreality of the sensible world can be compared to one who “slept a life through and took the dream world in perfect trust; wake him and he would refuse
belief to the report of his open eyes and settle down to sleep again” (*Enn. 5.5.11*) (1991: 402).

Plotinus was not a pantheist because he did not equate the One with the universe, and he was not a complete monist because he granted unity with the One to only the higher soul (Rist, 1967: 215-216, 229-230). Unity with the One was the goal of life, and although the *Seventh Platonic Letter* alleged that the supreme being was unspeakable and indescribable Plotinus affirmed that we still speak and write of the One, “but urging towards it: out of discussion we call to vision: to those desiring to see we point the path” (*Enn. 6.9.4*) (Plotinus, 1991: 540). The vision of the One comes suddenly, and one cannot control how long it lasts. It is calm but intense, and Plotinus describes it as drunkenness, a fitting analogy which combines both the positive and negative approaches to God.

Plotinus accepted the recurring cycles of the Stoics in which the same individual relives the same life, after innumerable ages, countless times, and he also accepted the more traditional reincarnation of the Platonists. The soul received a new daemon with each metempsychosis. The soul’s daemon was on a level immediately above the soul itself so that the daemon of the perfect sage was the One. Metempsychosis consisted of incarnation into animal and plant bodies. Men who were spirited became ferocious animals, those who were appetitive became glutinous animals, those characterized by torpid grossness became plants, those who had loved song became vocal animals, unreasonable kings became eagles, visionaries became high-flying birds, and observers of the merely civic virtues became either men or bees (*Enn. 3.4.2*) (1991: 167-168). Even the sage could not escape metempsychosis which could be brought to an end only momentarily. The Gnostics, who thought even more evil of matter and the body than Plotinus, believed the cycle of incarnations could be stopped, and so did Plotinus’ pupil Porphyry.

### 3.3 Porphyry

Porphyry was a transitional figure between Plotinus and his more magically minded successors Iamblichus and Proclus. According to Socrates of Constantinople he was once a Christian but was assaulted by a group of Christians in Caesarea and in anger forsook the religion (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.23) (Schaff, 2004(II, 2): 93), writing a large volume against the Bible and Christian exegesis in which he denied certain books to their reputed authors, alleged the biblical prophecies were written after the events they described, enumerated contradictions in
the Gospels, and disclaimed Christ’s divinity, although he continued to profess admiration for the man.

Porphyry was tutored by Origen the Christian in Caesarea but afterwards traveled to Athens and studied with the intelligent but unspectacular Middle Platonist Longinus before going on to learn from Plotinus in Rome. Porphyry disliked the allegorical method employed by his first teacher (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.19) (Schaff, 2004(II, 1): 265), and though he himself employed it he was careful to do so only in the case of texts not dealing with historical events. In other words, Homer’s cave of the nymphs could be for him a valid metaphor for the ascent and descent of souls into the world (Sellew, 1989: 87).

Unlike Plotinus, who has come down as a passive participant in occult happenings, Porphyry took an active role in magic, and this is of a piece with his stronger hatred of matter. He was more outgoing than Plotinus but also more pessimistic. He once read his poem ‘The Sacred Marriage’ at the feast of Plato, and Plotinus was sympathetic to its esoteric undertones. He also commissioned his pupil to write a refutation of a scandalous commentary on the *Symposium* and in praising Porphyry’s offering quoted Homer’s words, “So strike and be a light to men” (*Vit. Plot.* 15) (Plotinus, 1991: cxiii). Porphyry appears to have gotten Plotinus and his student Amelius to write treatises rather than the ill-organized notebooks they were accustomed to writing, and Plotinus responded by selecting Porphyry to edit and arrange his works. Plotinus, as we have seen, convinced Porphyry to travel (*Vit. Plot.* 11) (1991: cxi), and the latter came to Sicily where he wrote against the Christians in language more vituperative than that which Plotinus had leveled against the Gnostics. Porphyry, almost in emulation of Apuleius of Madaura, married the wealthy Jewish widow Marcella against the will of her relatives, but he left her to rededicate himself to philosophy which in late antiquity was almost always associated with asceticism. He also made a trip to Nicomedia which influenced Diocletian’s persecution of the Christians (Digeser, 2000: 5-6).

With Porphyry the distinction between the Nous and the World Soul largely disappears which is puzzling because there is therefore less protective distancing between the One and matter in his philosophy than in Plotinus’s. Like Plotinus he thought of the sublunary sphere as the place of embodiment, the translunary sphere as the place of the soul after death (where it took the form of an astral body), and the region beyond the stars and space itself as the intelligible realm, the home of the higher soul (Smith, 1974: 61). Permanent escape from incarnation
came through philosophy, and few men could attain it, but temporary escape for the common
man lay in one of two mutually exclusive paths: theurgy and virtue (1974: 59-61). At death
the lower soul of the philosopher could no longer serve as a basis for future incarnations but
would disintegrate and its energy give life to the cosmos. Porphyry introduced the
metaphysical triad of ousia, dynamis, and energeia (which corresponded to beginning,
middle, and end) and wrote a handbook on logic that would be immensely popular during the
Middle Ages.

3.4 Iamblichus and Syrianus

Iamblichus, a student of Porphyry, probably only from book learning, lived in Apamea.
Students flocked to his house and feasted at his table less on his food than on his words. His
late antique interest in magic was so pronounced that he is said to have been able to make
spirits appear on water fountains and to transform his robes to gold, and his disciples are
reported as asking him whether he levitated when he prayed (1974: 143). He was
disappointed that Porphyry was interested in religion but was not religious, in other words
that he was a typical Platonist and not a fervent theurgic of the Neoplatonic variety, and he
introduced into the metaphysical draught of the later Neoplatonists a reverent study of the
Chaldean Oracles.

Iamblichus posited a nonattributive One beyond Plotinus’ One in order to separate it from
what the Gnostic author of the Acts of John called “the filthy madness of the flesh” (James,
1926: 269). He established certain gods or henads as links between the nonattributive One
and the material universe which of course served to protect the former from the latter. They
are to the second One what intellects are to the Nous and human souls are to the World Soul,
neither distinct from it nor, strictly speaking, illuminations from it. Each god was the head of
a series of manifestations of itself at various levels, from the intelligible down to the physical
(Dillon, 1990(26): 105). Iamblichus distinguished three parts in the Nous, the last of which
was the Demiurge which was in turn divided into seven parts. He also divided the World Soul
into triads, and his own triads were multiplied by Proclus who believed not only in vertical
but also in horizontal emanation.
Syrianus, who succeeded Plutarch of Athens as diadochus of the Athenian school of Platonism, gave allegorical interpretations of Plato and Homer and applied his allegorizations not only to the intellectual realm but to its highest levels. He postulated a One and, immediately following it, a Monad and Dyad which are to be distinguished from a lower monad and dyad (the *automonas* and *autodyas*) which are responsible for there being one or two of anything (Blumenthal & Lloyd, 1982: 2-3). Syrianus frequently confused the properties of the One and the Monad. The functions of the supreme Monad and the supreme Dyad—sameness, firmness, and eternality on the one hand, and production, procession, and plurality on the other—infuse everything that exists but for the One (1982: 3). Syrianus recognized more than one name for each of his two principles, accepting the Definite and Indefinite of the *Philebus*, the Ether and Chaos of the Orphics, the First and Second of the Pythagoreans, and the Love and Strife of Empedocles (1982: 5-9).

Syrianus’ Dyad was not evil, nor was his material world, but it was ultimately responsible for the presence of evil because it brought about otherness and plurality which were opposed to the goodness of the One. The late antique hatred of matter in Syrianus thus takes the form of an insistence that it is an inferior entity. Certain scholars believe it was Syrianus rather than Iamblichus who came up with the system of henads although he did not employ them as extensively as Proclus would and they have little correlation to his basic metaphysical scheme (Dillon, 1990(26): 102). It is likely that his Monad and Dyad are related to the henads in much the same way as being, life, and intelligence are related to the Forms (Blumenthal & Lloyd, 1982: 11).

### 3.5 Proclus

Proclus once had a dream in which it was revealed that he was the reincarnation of Nicomachus of Gerasa, and it is possible that he was born two hundred sixteen years after Nicomachus since two hundred sixteen was the number of years between Pythagoras’ incarnations (Dillon, 1990(15): 274-275). Proclus cultivated special relationships with the gods, in particular Asclepius and Athena. When he was sick as a boy he saw Asclepius in the form of a child, and in his last illness he had a vision of him in the form of a snake (Marinus of Samaria, 1986: 21, 47). Here again we see the late antique hatred of matter manifesting itself in occultism.
Proclus was educated in Alexandria and began to devote himself to philosophy after receiving special communication from Athena in a vision. He was characteristic of much of later Neoplatonism: he prayed to the sun, observed the Egyptian holy days, and was attracted to the *Chaldean Oracles* which were his scripture as Syrianus was his theologian. One of his earliest teachers was Olympiodorus the Younger who had such an indistinct and hurried manner of speaking that Proclus was obliged to recount his lecture from memory to a group of his fellow students (1986: 23). Stories of his early brilliance tended to distance him from the prison of the body. Olympiodorus wanted Proclus to marry his daughter, but nothing came of the proposal because of the command of a god that Proclus never marry.

Proclus’ thirst for philosophy drove him to Athens where his first drink was taken from a spring near a shrine devoted to Socrates. We have a report of him in Athens uncovering his shoes and bowing to the moon, and the statement of one who saw him that he would accomplish either great good or great evil in his life, but his biographer Marinus (1986: 26) alleges that he had an exceedingly good daemon. Plutarch of Athens advised Proclus, to no avail, against rigorous asceticism, fearing that it would decrease his physical stamina. His asceticism was characteristic of late antiquity’s distrust of the body.

As was fitting for a devotee of Asclepius Proclus had healing powers which he sometimes put to use although he was wary since such activities were looked down on by the Byzantine emperors. He once restored to health a young girl who seemed near death, and one of his students saw a halo above his head while he was lecturing and swore under oath that he had observed it (1986: 45-46, 40). He was also credited with being a rainmaker and with evoking radiant phantasms of Hecate, but his morality was above repute (Smith, 1974: 144). Damascius suggested that he was more interested in piety than virtue, but Proclus refused to accept the cuckold and rake Hilarius as his student even though he was undeniably talented (Damascius, 1999: 229).

Proclus wrote twice as much as Plato, but much of what he wrote has been lost and some that he contemplated writing was never written. In this category can be placed the commentary on the Orphic poems against which he was warned by a dead master in a dream (Marinus of Samaria, 1986: 43-44). What survives is more dry and scholastic than the reader of Plotinus would be prepared to countenance. Like Syrianus he accepted a One and underneath it a Definite and an Indefinite which infused everything in the universe. The One was more
ineffable than silence. The Definite and Indefinite corresponded to the first two elements of his metaphysical triad *monē*, *proodos*, and *epistrophē* (permanence, procession, and return). Proclus distinguished many levels or diacosms in the stages of reality, all designed to protect the One from the material world. At the upper boundary of Nous were Being, Life, Nous, Soul, and Body; and at the upper boundary of Soul were the One, the Definite and Indefinite, and six Nouses. He was fond of quoting Theodore of Asine, a follower of Iamblichus: “All things pray except the First.” Prayer was a turning to God, equivalent to the sunflower’s turning to the sun or the moonstone’s turning to the moon (Armstrong, 1967: 312).

In his book on the eternity of the world Proclus argued that the world was the most divine creation of the Demiurge and was therefore without beginning or end. He wrote a treatise on Providence and Fate for Theodore, a mechanical engineer who was a determinist and an advocate of philosophical hedonism. In his treatise on the existence of evils Proclus became enmeshed in the webs of an intricate theodicy. He did not explicitly identify evil with matter as Plotinus did, and like Plato he spoke of evil as necessary because it was the contrary of good. There were no evils in the divine world. Evil ultimately comes from the Good, but the Good is not the cause of evil since evil as evil never derives from the Good but is the product of weakness. God is the cause of all good things and of evil things only insofar as they possess being and participate in goodness (*Mal. Subsist. 52-54*) (Proclus, 2003: 97-99).

Proclus was influenced by the Christian idea of love and stressed that love has a downward movement as well as an upward movement, an *erōs pronoētikos* as well as an *erōs epistreptikos*. This downward movement, discerned not at all in Plato’s Forms and only vaguely in Plotinus’ One, demanded faith on the part of those who were its recipients (Rist, 1964: 218-219; Riordan, 2008: 93). *Erōs* was nonetheless a word that was never used in the New Testament because of its associations with pagan culture.

### 3.6 Summary

This chapter has given us evidence aplenty for the ethos of late antiquity manifesting itself in hatred for matter and the body. In accordance with our overall scheme we will describe this phenomenon under four headings: an emphasis on the evil of life, the distrust of the sociopolitical world, asceticism, and an interest in the supernatural.
The evil nature of life and reality is something accepted by the Platonists as given rather than strenuously preached, as in the case of the Gnostics. Porphyry’s praise of Plotinus for never having to reread what he had written was an attempt to unchain him from the tyranny of the body. This is the same reason Plotinus refused to sit for his portrait and celebrate his birthday. In Plotinus’ account of his union with the Nous he expresses shock that something as high as the Soul could ever enter his body. Each of the emanations from the Plotinian One is morally inferior to its predecessor, and the individual soul is at the bottom because it seeks to unite itself with matter. One gets the impression that Plotinus would attack matter more vigorously if he were not trying to differentiate himself from the Gnostics, but what he says is enough: matter is evil, disgraceful, and utterly destitute of the beautiful, although it has a veneer of beauty, the gift of the World Soul. Significantly he ruled out Forms of ugly things; but matter is not only ugly, it is less real than the intelligible world.

Since Plotinus did not hate matter as violently as the Gnostics he did not believe there was a complete release from metempsychosis. Porphyry, however, did so. It is therefore understandable that while Plotinus wrote against the Gnostics, Porphyry wrote against the Christians who were not technically against matter, though his youthful beating at their hands also played a part in his decision to engage with them. His posthumous soul takes the form of an astral body, a considerable and delicate improvement on the material body.

Iamblichus believed Plotinus’ One was too close to matter and postulated a nonattributive One beyond the Plotinian One, a myth similar to what the Gnostics were indulging in. We encounter more of this prophylactic stretching of the distance between the One and the evil material world with Iamblichus’ division of the Demiurge into seven parts, with Syrianus’ establishment of a Monad underneath the One, and with Proclus’ stationing of six Nouses at the upper boundary of Soul.

The distrust of the sociopolitical world operating in the late antique ethos is reflected in Plotinus’ desire to form an apolitical city of philosophers, his praise of Rogatianus for leaving the senatorship in order to become his disciple, and his indifference to civic and moral concerns. He even speculated that those who engaged in the solely civic virtues would be reincarnated as bees, though metempsychosis into insects was not a particularly damning thing in Platonic philosophy (Phaedr. 259B-D) (Plato, 1960: 511-513; Dillon, 1996: 260).
To mesh with the Neoplatonic hatred of the body there is especially in Proclus a pronounced emphasis on asceticism to the extent that he is viewed as presenting it in its institutionalized semi-monastic form (Kharlamov, 2009: 87). As for the supernatural, we have observed Plotinus’ excursions in this terrain. Porphyry, more in tune with the evil nature of reality than his master, introduced into Neoplatonic thought an increased emphasis on theurgy and magic, phenomena which are utterly alien to the sensible world. The later Neoplatonists’ interest in the occult and the magical was so pronounced that they are strongly resemblant of practitioners of the New Age.
4.0 MANIFESTATIONS OF THE ETHOS OF LATE ANTIQUITY IN GNOSTICISM

4.1 Introduction

We next turn to the Gnostics’ participation in the ethos of late antiquity. The Gnostics owed something to Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Greek philosophy. For that reason they made enemies not only among the Christians but among the philosophers. In the fourth of a four-part treatise Plotinus attacked the Gnostics who attended his lectures for their multiplication of spiritual entities and their elitism. Perhaps what disturbed him the most about the Gnostics was their appropriation of the dead philosophers whom he loved, their frequent misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Plato’s thought, and their bringing to his circle not proof but “arbitrary, tyrannical assertion” (*Enn. 2.9.10*) (Plotinus, 1991: 121). And yet Gnosticism was, however unruly, a legitimate child of Platonism whose harsh view of the body and the feminine is reflected in the Indefinite Dyad. For the Gnostics it was the woman who needed redeeming by a god or a magus or, as Christ promises Mary Magdalene in the *Gospel of Thomas*, to become a man herself (Meyer, 2007: 153).

4.2 Early ‘Jewish’ Gnosticism

4.2.1 Simon Magus

Irenaeus traced the origin of Gnosticism to Simon Magus, the biblical magician who thought he could buy the Holy Spirit with money (*Adv. Haer. 1.23.1*) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(1): 348). Because of the numerous legends that have been told of him we must be careful not to take everything attributed to Simon at face value, including his Gnosticism. Nonetheless the legends serve to reveal how the Gnostics were viewed in Christian circles. The pseudo-Clementine writings make Simon a disciple of John the Baptist’s disciple Dositheus who had thirty followers, one of them a woman named Helen. Dositheus was crippled by a too literal understanding of the Old Testament, possibly believing that one should remain in the same garment and in the same position in which he was overtaken on the Sabbath (*Foerster, 1972(1): 32*). He enforced ritual washings on his followers and forbade them to utter two of the Old Testament names for God: Yahweh and Adonai (Grant, 1966: 91). He believed himself the Messiah and wrote divinely inspired writings which disclosed he would
never die, but he came into conflict with Simon, a fellow Samaritan who claimed to be God.

It was perhaps to be expected that Dositheus and Simon would come to blows. The former, coming upon the latter holding forth among his followers, took his staff and struck Simon with it, but the staff went through his body as though through smoke (Hom. Clem. 2.24) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(8): 233). This should be regarded as descriptive of the late antique yearning for a spiritual body. Dositheus acknowledged Simon’s divinity and died not long afterwards. It was good for him that he had such a change of heart since Simon taught that the world and all that was in it but for his disciples would be destroyed. To help prop up their faith Simon had himself buried alive and unearthed after three days (Foerster, 1972(1): 31).

Simon was the Gnostic magician par excellence, and the Clementine Recognitions record his boastings: He was able to make himself invisible, to pass through rocks as though they were clay, to safely throw himself from mountaintops, to free himself from chains, to release himself from prison, to animate statues, to cause trees to spring up, to throw himself unharmed into fire, to change his appearance, to have two faces, to change himself into a sheep or a goat, to make young boys have beards, and to fly through the air (Rec. Clem. 2.9) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(8): 99). The Clementine Homilies add that he could turn stones into loaves of bread, transform himself to gold, melt iron, effect spirit materializations, and have dishes glide through the air and rest on the tabletop as though many servers carried them (Hom. Clem. 2.32) (2004(8): 235). He was able to do all this with the help of the spirit of a boy whom he had murdered and whom he was able to remake from air. At Simon’s bidding the heat of the boy’s spirit sucked in the surrounding air and was transformed, in a queasy late antique denigration of matter, into water, blood, and flesh in which form he sat for Simon who drew his portrait before compelling the spirit to reverse its changes (Hom. Clem. 2.26) (2004(8): 233-234).

Simon maintained that Ennoia, his first thought and the mother of all, descended before time into the lower regions where she generated the world creators who, ignorant of the Father, imprisoned her in one female body after another. One is here reminded of the Gnostic mantra that the body (sōma) was a tomb (sēma) (Cook et al, 1965: 467). Until Simon’s day Ennoia’s beauty troubled the world, leading to the conflict of the Trojan war when she appeared as Helen, the wife of Menelaus, and blinding and restoring the sight of the poet Stesichorus who
had alternately disparaged and praised her, a story Simon would have read in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (243A-B) (Plato, 1960: 461-463). It was as another Helen, Dositheus’ disciple, that Ennoia was redeemed by Simon who had taken human form. According to Simon the angels who had imprisoned Helen ruled the world badly and wanted to enslave its inhabitants by the laws of the Old Testament. He or one of his disciples, in attempting to put these laws in their proper perspective, said, “All earth is earth, and it makes no difference where a man sows, if only he sows” (Foerster, 1972(1): 31).

Simon went about with Helen and used her in his magic, once putting her in a tower towards which all who looked seemed to see her standing in every window. The Simonians worshipped images of Simon in the form of Zeus and images of Helen in the form of Athena who had sprung from Zeus’s head (1972(1): 31). Simon is said to have spoken of the moly plant given by Hermes to Odysseus to protect him from Circe’s power. He lectured to his followers under a plane tree, a habit he may have picked up from the *Phaedrus* where Socrates discourses with Phaedrus under one such tree (230B-C) (Plato, 1960: 423). At the time of Origen only thirty Simonians were left, and even this number may have been too high of an estimate.

### 4.2.2 Menander and Saturninus

For a time Simon’s disciple Menander claimed he himself would never die. He practiced his magic and doctrines in Antioch, announcing that he had already vanquished the world creators and giving immortality to his followers. Saturninus, another Antiochene, taught that the world was the creation of seven angels who formed man out of the dust of the ground and modeled him after a luminous image which had appeared to them briefly from above. The angels were powerless to make man stand erect until the unknown Father took pity on man and sent him a spark of life (Foerster, 1972(1): 41).

The angels had created humanity as man and woman, but man was good and woman evil according to Saturninus who claimed he could find proof of this in Genesis where Eve is quoted as saying after the birth of Cain, “I have gotten a man from Yahweh” (Genesis 4:1), which Saturninus took to mean “by Yahweh,” that is by the God of the Jews, the most evil of the seven world creators (Grant, 1966: 103). Because the world creators oppressed men who had the spark of life and desired to destroy the Father, the visible but phantasmal Christ
descended from heaven to end their reign. Saturninus was a faithful representative of late antique asceticism, judging intimacy between men and women harshly and compelling his followers to abstain from meat, marriage, and alcohol (Foerster, 1972(1): 41).

### 4.2.3 The *Apocryphon of John*

The so-called *Apocryphon of John*, once thought the work of Saturninus, was likely written by a Gnostic who reverenced the female entity Barbelo, and it exists in two versions, a longer and a shorter version. The supreme god of the *Apocryphon* is the Aeon who dwells in radiant light, the foundation of the water of life, and there are various prophylactic emanations between him and the Demiurge including the female entities Barbelo and Sophia. Sophia’s son is the Demiurge and is called Yaldabaoth, meaning Son of Chaos. He and his seven archons see a watery reflection of the Aeon and fashion man after it. In another grim late antique depiction of matter Raphao creates the crown of his head, Abron his skull, Meniggesstroeth his brain, Asterechme his right eye, Thaspmochoa his left eye until all seventy parts of his psychic body are created (Meyer, 2007: 119; Williams, 1996: 120).

The archons, made jealous by the luminosity of their creation, drag man into a cave (here the influence of Plato is in evidence) and clothe him in flesh. Man is nonetheless unable to move until Yaldabaoth breathes his mother’s spirit into him. To this spirit the Aeon adds his own and so rouses the envy of the Demiurge who seduces Eve and engenders Cain and Abel, otherwise known as Yahweh and Elohim (Meyer, 2007: 127-128). Not all men are fortunate enough to possess the Aeon’s spirit, but those who do are the inheritors of eternal life. Akin to the writer of the *Apocryphon* were the Ophites, a snake-worshipping sect that thought the fall of man had been a fall upwards. The Ophites identified the serpent that tempted Eve with the Logos and hated the God of the Old Testament whom they also called Yaldabaoth. They were divided into such groups as the Sethians, the Perates, and the Cainites (Schaff, 1970: 489-490).

### 4.3 Carpocrates

Jerome wrote that the blood of Christ was still newly shed in Judea when deniers of the reality of His flesh arose, a hyperbole which nonetheless draws our attention to the Gnostics’ participation in the late antique hatred of the body (*Alt. Lucif*. 23) (Barnard, 1963: 199; cf. Schaff, 2004(II, 6): 332). Because they viewed spirit as good and matter as evil the Gnostics
sometimes practiced asceticism, but many of them believed that the body as worthless could be given over to licentiousness. Cerinthus, a Jewish Gnostic, had such a reputation that the apostle John, on entering the baths with some associates and finding him there, is said, by Irenaeus, to have immediately left with the words, “Let us flee lest the bathhouse fall down because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is inside” (Adv. Haer. 3.3.4) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(1): 416). Cerinthus accepted of the Gospels only a truncated version of the Gospel of Matthew in which he claimed to find that Jesus was between His baptism and passion indwelled by Christ and that He would return and usher in a thousand years of voluptuous pleasure before the end of time.

The Ophite sect of the Cainites held every villain of the Old Testament for a hero and thought salvation was denied them unless they committed whatever impure act came into their minds. They acknowledged Jesus’ goodness but claimed His crucifixion and its benefits unthinkable without the interposition of Judas whose newly rediscovered Gospel they possessed (Kasser, Meyer & Wurst, 2006). They also had the Ascent of Paul which purported to be the ineffable mysteries the apostle Paul heard in heaven (Foerster, 1972(1): 43). The Nicolaitans were the Cainites’ unconscious models.

In the second chapter of the Apocalypse of John, Christ condemns the deeds of the Nicolaitans and mentions fornication as among their practices (Revelation 2:6, 14-15). The early church fathers held that Nicolas of Antioch was the founder of the sect, though Clement of Alexandria believed him innocent (Chadwick & Oulton, 1954: 52). If guilty he is a classic example of a member of any group with a promising career going over to the enemy. He was initially a Hellenistic convert to Judaism and became one of the seven deacons chosen by the apostles to administer the charitable feasts of the church of Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6). With time he came to see nothing wrong with partaking of meat sacrificed to idols. Accused of jealousy by the apostles he is said to have brought his beautiful wife before them and invited anyone who so desired to marry her (1954: 52). It is possible that after this incident he became an active antagonist and persecutor of his former colleagues.

His spiritual successor, whom history knows as Carpocrates, was influenced by a lost work about the origin of the world in which the Monad created an Idea and the two by their union brought forth the invisible powers of the universe (1954: 27). Carpocrates concluded that some of these powers or their emanations had enslaved mankind to endless incarnations.
There was little hope of release from this predicament until the historical Jesus, by exercising His Platonic ability of reminiscence (*anamnēsis*), recollected all He had seen in the divine sphere before He was born (Foerster, 1972(1): 36). When Jesus said to His disciples, “Thou shalt by no means come out till thou hast paid the last cent” (Matthew 5:26) He meant that the soul must experience life to the fullest in order to avoid further imprisonments of the spirit in matter.

The followers of Carpocrates, who branded the back of their right earlobes in an outlandish representation of the baptism of fire, practiced sorcery and worshipped images of the Greek philosophers in addition to Jesus whose original portrait they said had been commissioned by Pilate (Foerster, 1972(1): 37-38; Green, 2008: 24). They procured copies of apocryphal Gospels and Acts and inserted anecdotes about Jesus’ disciples, though this remains controversial (Smith, 1973; Akenson, 2000: 84-89, 272-274; Ehrman, 2003b: 67-89). They also celebrated their own libidinous version of the Christian love feast and were partly responsible for the Roman myth that the early Christians were immoral.

By a Cephalonian woman Carpocrates engendered a son, Epiphanes, who died in his seventeenth year and was afterwards celebrated as a god by the Carpocratians who raised a temple of vast blocks of stone and gathered there every month to feast in his honor. Epiphanes, who was familiar with Plato’s dialogues and especially the *Phaedrus* (apparently a Gnostic favorite), wrote a treatise which urged the wisdom of sexual communism and which has been described (by Chadwick in 1954: 25) as the product of an intelligent but degenerate adolescent of pornographic tendencies. Epiphanes appealed to the *Republic* for his idea of a community of women, but Clement of Alexandria, our sole source for Epiphanes’ work, thought of the Platonic community of women more as a company of marriageable girls from which the young citizen could choose his wife (1954: 45).

We do not know how long Carpocrates survived the death of his son, but his mantle was picked up by a female devotee, Marcellina, who is an illustration of the prominence women often achieved in Gnostic circles despite Gnosticism’s officially misogynistic slant. Marcellina brought the teachings of her master to Rome during the time of Anicetus, a bishop whose pontificate was also troubled by the increasing controversy over the correct date of celebrating Easter (Foerster, 1972(1): 38; Douglas, 1978: 817).
There were several other groups akin to the Carpocratians including the Antitactae who believed that the laws of the Old Testament were not made by the Father but by the Demiurge who sowed tares among the wheat the Father sowed and must therefore be disobeyed. Another Gnostic of similar views, Prodicus, denied the need for prayer since God was already aware of the needs of His people. Prodicus felt that since the salvation of the elect was assured, morality was unnecessary and apostasy a forgivable offense which only deceived a corrupt world (Tertullian, Scorp. 15) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(3): 648). Like many Gnostics, Prodicus’ followers possessed works by Zoroaster which Porphyry was to prove inauthentic (Vit. Plot. 16) (Plotinus, 1991: cxiv). Pursuers of pleasure, the group surrounding Prodicus behaved as though they were above all laws, but Clement of Alexandria observed that it was impossible for them to do everything they desired in broad daylight (Chadwick & Oulton, 1954: 54).

4.4 Valentinianism

4.4.1 Valentinus and Ptolemaeus

The Marcionite Gnostic Apelles said that the Gnostic should make use of every Scripture, selecting what was useful, but he did not take his own advice (Foerster, 1972(1): 45). Unlike the Marcionites Valentinus accepted the whole of the Old and New Testaments, except for the pastoral epistles with their injunctions against false teachers and endless genealogies; but he reinterpreted them in the light of his own system. Valentinus’ disciple Ptolemaeus would attack the Marcionites for failing to recognize the value of interpreting the Mosaic law from a philosophical perspective. The Valentinians likened the five foolish virgins in Jesus’ parable (Matthew 25:1-13) to the five bodily senses and the five wise virgins to the intellect and explained that Christ did nothing for thirty years because the number of the Valentinian Pleroma was thirty, a number which was also evident in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) who are sent out at the first, third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours, figures which when added up amount to thirty (1972(1): 128).

John Dillon (1996: 384-389) selects Valentinus to illustrate what he calls the “Platonic underworld.” Along with the Platonists the Gnostics viewed the world as imperfect, but, in addition to requiring more elaborate mythologies than the Platonists, they posited that it was the creation of an evil god and that humans were aliens in this world. Certain older Platonists,
such as Xenocrates and Ammonius, the teacher of Plutarch of Charoneia, came close to the first of these theses without embracing it (1996: 387). Valentinus was less dualistic than his Gnostic colleagues and held such a mesmerizing influence on the Christians of his time that we have more knowledge of him than of any other Gnostic. Tertullian assures us of his eloquence and intelligence (Adv. Val. 4) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(3): 505), and Jerome said, with reference to Valentinus, “No one can bring a heresy into being unless he is possessed, by nature, of an outstanding intellect and has gifts provided by God” (Foerster, 1972(1): 121).

Valentinus hailed from Alexandria and became a candidate for the bishopric of Rome in 143, but he lost the election to Pius I and separated from the church. He was not immune to late antiquity’s interest in the supernatural and claimed to have been visited by the Logos in the form of a small child. His early views are reflected in the prosaic Gospel of Truth (Meyer, 2007: 36-47), but he came to develop his theology in a more mythological direction. In the system preserved by the church father Hippolytus the Forefather begets, upon himself, Nous and Aletheia who are the first in a series of twenty-eight paired aeons, the youngest female of which is called Sophia or Wisdom. The twenty-eight aeons inhabit the Pleroma and live in mutual felicity but for Sophia who envies the Forefather’s ability to procreate alone and produces by herself the Demiurge. The Demiurge forms various demons, the physical world, and man. The repentant Sophia inserts a divine spark into man in addition to generating Christ, the Gnostic savior who will save the elect before the world comes to an end (Foerster, 1972(1): 186-193).

Ptolemaeus developed Valentinus’ mythology still further, postulating two primal forces—Bythos and Sige—which emanated pairs of aeons so that there were thirty in all. Sophia, the last of these, desired Bythos and out of her sinful and unconsummated passion produced a formless entity, Achamoth, sometimes called the lower Sophia. After this birth, or abortion as it is called, Sophia cried out for help and Bythos sent her Horos who restored her to the Pleroma while casting Achamoth outside it. Achamoth’s essentially evil emotions become the unformed material world, and she herself dwells in the Ogdoad, a region between the Pleroma and the world which is a reflection of the higher Ogdoad where the first four pairs of aeons live (1972(1): 136). The Valentinians quoted the Gospel of John as proof for the existence of the higher Ogdoad: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”
(John 1:14). In this verse Ptolemaeus claimed to find a reference to the Ogdoad by virtue of the eight powers alluded to: Logos, Anthropos, Zoe, Ecclesia, Monogenes, Pater, Charis, and Aletheia (1972(1): 145).

Achamoth’s son, the Demiurge, who can be identified with the God of the Old Testament, creates time as an imitation of eternity in addition to forming matter and organizing the material universe into seven spheres. The Valentinians likened the lower Sophia’s emanation of the Demiurge to a painter striving to paint a portrait of God. The Demiurge, called the Hebdomad because of the seven spheres he has organized, is less evil than ignorant and unable to see the higher world. He creates man as body and soul, the Left and the Right as they are tellingly called (1972(1): 147), but without his knowledge Achamoth bequeaths spirits to men, thanks to the light shed on her by the Pleromic power Christ whom all the aeons had produced. Ptolemaeus’ system reveals the Valentinians’ reciprocal relationship with Platonism and especially Middle Platonism. They borrowed from it such concepts as the World Soul and the Demiurge, and they influenced certain manifestations of it with their view of the fall of the Soul and their notion of the Demiurge as an imperfect and ignorant being (Dillon, 1996: 388-389).

The Valentinians subscribed to the typically late antique deprecation of matter and the body. The descent of the soul was an almost unmitigated calamity, and the *Exegesis of the Soul* presents the human soul falling among evil demons who cruelly abuse her before she calls on her father (Meyer, 2007: 227-228). “The heart,” Valentinus wrote in an epistle, “suffers in much the same way as an inn: for an inn has holes and trenches dug in it and is often filled with filth by men who live there licentiously and have no regard for the place because it belongs to another. Likewise the heart, so long as it is not cared for, is unclean and the abode of many demons” (Foerster, 1972(1): 241-242). The Valentinian *Letter to Rheginos* expresses views similar to those of the New Testament heretics Hymenaeus and Philetus, alleging that if one flees from the divisions and fetters of the flesh he has the Resurrection (2 Timothy 2:17-18) (Meyer, 2007: 55).

The Valentinians thought that creation consisted of the pneumatic or spiritual, the psychic or soulish, and the choic or earthly. All this was a reminiscence of the apostle Paul’s characterization of humanity as spiritual, carnal, and natural. The Valentinians associated the Gentiles of Paul’s epistles with the pneumatic and the Jews with the psychic; they also
identified Seth with the pneumatic, Abel with the psychic, and Cain with the choic. While Cain tended flocks and Abel tilled the soil, Seth engaged in the spiritual activity of producing a child, a child in whose day men began to call upon the name of the Lord (Foerster, 1972(1): 149-150). The body of Jesus of Nazareth, in whom the Pleromic Christ lived between His baptism and passion, was psychic but capable of suffering, though some of Valentinus’ followers in East Syria believed it was pneumatic since the pneumatic did not have to burden himself with asceticism as the psychic did (Chadwick & Oulton, 1954: 33). In either case His body was not physical.

Valentinus was not a representative of either the extreme asceticism or the extreme licentiousness that were characteristic of the Gnostics which is not to say he had a high view of the body. He honored marriage which he approved over the single state partly because the powers of his Pleroma are married. Valentinus allowed marriage to the pneumatic but not to the psychic whose members included the proto-orthodox (Ehrman, 2003b: 7). Earthly marriage was a foretaste of the heavenly marriage feast in which the glorified Valentinian would strip himself of his soul and pass into the Pleroma to become the bride of an angel as Achamoth would become the bride of Christ (Foerster, 1972(1): 152-153); but, in a late antique manifestation of the occult, the Valentinian could embrace his guardian angel in the Pleroma even while he was in the body. During the heavenly marriage feast the Demiurge and the psychic Christians will enter the lower Ogdoad and share the joy of the festival from afar while the fire of ignorance destroys both itself and the material universe (1972(1): 153).

4.4.2 The Gospel of Philip

The Gospel of Philip is a Valentinian production. Unlike the Gospel of Thomas and the Book of Thomas the apostle who gives his name to the work is mentioned only once. The Gospel is nothing more or less than a collection of wise, picturesque, and irreverent sayings. It contrasts the preciousness of the earthly wearer to his garments with the heavenly wearer to his far more precious garments (Meyer, 2007: 165). It compares the elect to pearls which have been cast into the mud of the material world and which lose none of their worth any more than they could gain worth if anointed with balsam (2007: 169-170). It demonstrates the Valentinian reluctance to be thought of as anything other than Christian, claiming that if anyone says he is a Jew, a Greek, a Roman, a barbarian, a slave, or a freeman, no one will be moved, but if he acknowledges that he is a Christian the whole heaven will shake (cf. 2007: 170). The Gospel
also explains why the Valentinians thought so highly of the married state, as a married man and woman are, in an almost ascetic way, free from the attentions of other women and men (2007: 183-184).

In the only passage where the apostle Philip is mentioned, Jesus’ father Joseph is said to have built a garden for his carpentry, a garden which yielded the wood of the cross on which his son was crucified (2007: 177). Jesus Himself was less of a carpenter than a dyer. He once walked into the dye works of Levi, cast seventy-two cloths of dyed colors into the cauldron, and drew the cloths out white, saying, “So the son of man has come as a dyer” (cf. 2007: 170). He was also the continual companion of his mother Mary, her sister Mary, and Mary Magdalene, and so had a Mary for his mother, sister, and companion (2007: 167). Mary was indeed a popular name among Jewish women of the time of Christ, a time that was still fascinated by the story of the young Herod and his unfaithful queen Mariamne. Jesus is pictured in the Gospel of Philip as having loved Mary Magdalene more than any of His disciples who became jealous of her and thereby earned His cryptic reproach: “Why don’t I love you like her? If a blind person and one who can see are both in darkness, they are the same. When the light comes, one who can see will see the light, and the blind person will stay in darkness” (2007: 171).

4.4.3 Bardaisan

An East Syrian Valentinian, Bardaisan, gave an ascetic corrective to the licentious views of the apostate Valentinian Marcus. A friend of the king Abgar IX and a skilled archer, Bardaisan was also the friend of the Christian polymath Julius Africanus and an acquaintance of traveling Brahmans (Cook et al, 1965: 496). Not much is known about his theology since his works were destroyed after his death on account of their heresy. He wrote in Syriac and probably hailed from the upper class which tended to be more Hellenistic than the lower class. He wrote one hundred fifty hymns composed in the isosyllabic form he invented (Ephrem the Syrian, 1989: 26), and there is a Dialogue on Fate written by his disciple Philip which discloses his beliefs. Sometimes called the Laws of the Countries it begins just as a Platonic dialogue might and gives the impression of sheer Socratic delight in theoretical discourse (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(8): 723-734).
Ephrem the Syrian held that Bardaisan and Marcion were prime movers on the system of Mani. In the beginning, Bardaisan taught, God was one of six self-existent entities that included Light, Wind, Fire, Water, and Darkness, all set in a seventh entity, Space. The entities existed in harmony until they became partly mixed, and God set Himself, like Empedocles’ Strife, the task of separating the mixed portion from the entities and so creating the universe in the hope that its components would revert to their original nature. Jesus was sent by God to raise the souls but significantly not the bodies of men, enabling them to cross over into what Bardaisan called the Bridal Chamber of Light (Cook et al., 1965: 496-497).

Bardaisanism spread quickly throughout Syria and Armenia, and the Bardaisanites found themselves at loggerheads with the Manichaeans who are lamentably outside the range of the present study (Mirecki & BeDuhn, 2001: 170). In three chapters of his Treasury Mani indicated his disenchantment with aspects of Bardaisan’s theology, namely his sympathy with the Old Testament, his lack of sufficient scorn for the body, and his deficient view of Darkness. What was for Bardaisan a powerless, blind, and ignorant entity was for Mani a malevolent and sinister reality (2001: 169). As for matter, which Mani equated with Darkness, Bardaisan thought of it as a passive substance molded by God whereas Mani thought of it as a force both creative and destructive. Bardaisan also emphasized man’s freedom of the will whereas Mani noted the soul’s inherent tendency towards evil. In the fifth century Mani’s views on evil would be represented to a degree by Augustine and the views of Bardaisan by Pelagius (2001: 171-172).

4.5 Basilides

Valentinus claimed to have derived his system from Theudas, a disciple of the apostle Paul, but Basilides traced his theology to Peter’s disciple Glaucias (Foerster, 1972(1): 76, 121). Valentinus and Basilides had much in common, reinterpreting rather than rejecting the New Testament and avoiding both asceticism and licentiousness. Basilides was the author of a psalm book and a compiler of a Gospel—a patchwork of Matthew and Luke—which he provided with a twenty-four volume commentary, probably in imitation of Homer (Bruce, 1988: 167; cf. Dillon, 1996: 259). In coming to the prohibition to not give that which is holy to the dogs nor to cast one’s pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6) Basilides said, in a reflection of the late antique distrust of the social world, “We are the men, but all the others are swine and dogs” (Foerster, 1972(1): 62).
Basilides was an Alexandrian Persian in whose thought one can discern both Jewish and Greek, particularly Aristotelian, influence. Abraham Bos (2000: 49) reminds us that the main difference between Aristotle and Plato was that the former distinguished more consistently between the activity of the intellect (noēsis) and that of the soul (phonēsis). This is followed by Basilides in his discussion of the two archons and their sons. His system begins with a nonexistent God, a nothingness beyond nothingness that, without intelligence, perception, will, resolve, impulse, or desire, emanates not the world itself but the world seed (Foerster, 1972(1): 64), just as in Plotinus’ philosophy the first stage of the Nous on passing from the One is supranoetic and therefore utterly removed from matter. From the world seed the world develops like a branching tree: roots, stem, leaves, and its own grains of seed. Within it lies a threefold Sonship, one translucent, one opaque, and one impure. The First Son can be more specifically compared to the Nous by Basilides’ terming it thought (noēma) (Jufresca, 1981: 8). It returns to the nonexistent God, “for every natural thing strives after Him because of His extreme loveliness and beauty, one in one way, one in another” (Foerster, 1972(1): 66). The Second Son likewise ascends, leaving behind its wing, the Holy Spirit, to act as a divider between the hypercosmic and cosmic worlds. The Third Son, somewhat like the internal part of Anaximander’s Indefinite, remains in the seed from which two archons emerge, each of whom creates a son.

The first archon, the Great Archon, is “more ineffable than the ineffable and more powerful than the powerful and wiser than the wise” (1972(1): 68). Inferior to the Third Sonship and holding sway only over that which is below the firmament (the wing of the Second Son) he organizes the ethereal world and sits enthroned with his own son in the Ogdoad (1972(1): 68). The Second Archon, the God of the Jews, organizes the material world and rules with his son over the Hebdomad, the sphere of the planets and everything that lies beneath them. The Great Archon is the first in a series of three hundred sixty-five archons who rule over three hundred sixty-five heavens, each consisting of decreasing splendor and increasing matter (1972(1): 68). These heavens can be viewed as a mythological attempt to explain how mind could create matter and how diversity could emerge from a primordial undifferentiated unity, but they also serve to protect the nonexistent God from the material world.
With time the gospel of light is transmitted from the nonexistent God to the son of the Great Archon who receives it as Indian naphtha catches fire from a distance, and the First and Second Archon each realize that he is not the supreme God (1972(1): 70). The gospel of light is passed down through the archons until it comes to rest on Jesus of Nazareth who separates the psychic from the pneumatic and leads the pneumatic and the Third Son upwards to the nonexistent God (1972(1): 72). After Jesus’ work is accomplished the nonexistent God will obliterate the memories of the three hundred sixty-five archons and the psychic, denying them not only salvation but even their knowledge of their need for salvation “so that the souls found below may not be tormented by striving for the impossible like a fish striving to graze on the hills with the sheep” (1972(1): 72).

Basilides’ son Isidore continued his work, writing a book on ethics as well as the Exposition of the Prophet Pachor (1972(1): 82). Sometime after Isidore’s death the Basilidians yielded to licentiousness and magic, employing gems engraved with the Greek word abraxas which had the numerical value of three hundred sixty-five (Schaff, 1970: 469-470). In contrast to their founder, who had admitted the reality of Christ’s passion, they maintained that Simon of Cyrene had taken Jesus’ image in order to be crucified in His place while Jesus stood by laughing, an allusion to Psalm 59:8: “But thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them; thou shalt have all the heathen in derision” (Foerster, 1972(1): 59). As did Prodicus the Basilidians justified apostasy in the case of persecution, viewing martyrs as pearls cast before the swine of the world (Schaff, 1970: 471).

4.6 Summary

With the Gnostics, as with the Platonists, we find the disdain for matter and the body in the late antique ethos manifesting itself in an emphasis on the evil nature of life, the distrust of the sociopolitical world, asceticism, and an interest in the supernatural. The Gnostics hated matter, the body, and the feminine, and one can relate all three to the Indefinite Dyad of Platonic oral tradition. There is a correspondence between the Indefinite Dyad and the Gnostic Sophia, though the more accurate parallel is between Sophia and the World Soul. Yaldabaoth, the God of the Old Testament, was the Gnostic version of the Platonic Demiurge, and he was more personal and more evil than the Demiurge.
The unreality and strangeness of matter are portrayed in the *Apocryphon of John* with its leisurely description of the creation of man: the crown of his skull, the lower half of his skull, his brain, his right eye, his left eye, and the succeeding sixty-five parts of his body. The Gnostics’ dislike of this entity is evident in both Christ’s phantasmal body and the legend of Dositheus’ staff passing through Simon Magus’ body as though it were smoke. For Valentinus the heart of man was thrust violently into the material world, and it suffered just as an inn suffered from the filth and lechery of its tenants. The Valentinian would ultimately be privileged to lose not only his body but his soul, the mode of articulation between his spirit and body.

The Gnostic distrust of the social world presented primarily with elitism, the revilement of the psychic, and a sincere aversion to martyrdom which was an act of casting pearls before swine. Since the Gnostics were less compromising than the Platonists on the worthlessness of the body they were easily susceptible to extreme asceticism and extreme licentiousness. In the former category we see Saturninus forbidding his followers meat, marriage, and alcohol. In the latter category we have the figure of Carpocrates who defined his licentiousness as an attempt to live life to the fullest in order to avoid further imprisonments of the spirit in matter. Carpocrates’ reputation in the sexual sphere tends to overshadow his interest in the occult, an interest which was formidable and which was shared by Simon Magus, though we have also noted the Valentinian’s ability to embrace his guardian angel in the Pleroma.
5.0 MANIFESTATIONS OF THE ETHOS OF LATE ANTIQUITY IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

5.1 Introduction

Our study in the ethos of late antiquity now brings us to the early Christians. It should be stressed that the sacred book of Christianity, the New Testament, does not countenance a hatred for matter and the body. There is undoubtedly Christ’s statement that what comes out of a man defiles him (Mark 7:15) and, more pertinently, the apostle Jude’s comment, in a work that is paradoxically anti/proto-Gnostic, about hating the clothing stained by the corrupted flesh (tēs sarkos espilōmenon) (Jude 23) (Green, 2008: 128); but these are the exceptions that prove the rule. Hatred for matter and the body enters Christianity only with the ante-Nicene fathers, and it endures in the desert fathers, the Arians, and the post-Nicene fathers.

5.2 The Ante-Nicene Fathers

5.2.1 Polycarp and Irenaeus

Polycarp was a disciple of John the Evangelist. His own disciple Irenaeus spent much time as a boy in Polycarp’s house. He was also a champion of the Gospel of John and defended it against the Roman cleric Gaius who wanted it barred from the canon because of its popularity with the Montanists. Polycarp, in his role as bishop of Smyrna, had sent his fellow worker Pothinus to Lyons in Gaul and later dispatched the teenaged Irenaeus to assist him. Not long afterwards Polycarp was arrested and compelled to denounce atheism, one of the Roman euphemisms for Christianity. The apostolic father refused and was condemned to be burned at the stake, and when he entered the arena he shook his fist at the crowd and said, “Away with the atheists!” (Mart. Pol. 9) (Ehrman, 2003a(1): 379). He had been forewarned of the manner in which he would die by a dream of his pillow catching fire, and Irenaeus, in another late antique display of the supernatural, heard an angelic voice announce his master’s death while he was away in Rome. Polycarp had been inspired by the example of Ignatius who had written that he would not shrink from being made pure bread in the mouths of the wild beasts, a covert avowal that physical existence is suspect (Rom. 4.1) (2003a(1): 275).
Irenaeus was in his thirties when he became a bishop. He was amicable to all save the Gnostics: to the Quartodecimans, the Montanists, and everyone who did not veer too sharply from the rule of faith. He was baffled, like Plotinus (Enn. 2.9.10) (1991: 121), by the Gnostics’ habit of putting themselves arbitrarily and categorically above all debate and by the fact that his childhood friend Florinus had been seduced by the Valentinians. In a letter to Florinus Irenaeus wrote, “These views, to put it mildly, are not sound, are not consonant with the church, and involve their devotees in the worst impiety and heresy” (in Pagels, 2003: 86). Most disturbing of all was the general depravity of the apostate Valentinian Marcus. Irenaeus wrote a five-volume work attacking the Gnostics titled A Refutation and Overthrow of Knowledge Falsely So Called. Perhaps more than anyone else of his time he helped set off early Christianity against Gnosticism and so prevented the latter from identifying itself with the former despite the fact that both tended to extol asceticism.

5.2.2 Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr, a contemporary of Polycarp, was born in Samaria and studied under three philosophers, the last of whom was a Pythagorean who refused to accept pupils unless they had mastered arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy (Chadwick, 2001: 93). Justin was attracted most of all to the world-denying system of Platonism, but he gave up philosophy after discussing eternal truths with an old man who convinced him that the prophecies of the Old Testament had been fulfilled by Christ (2001: 93). Even before his conversion he had been impressed by the courage of the Christians in the arena who accomplished what for the Platonists was the highest good, namely greeting their end with an equanimity that did not fear death.

After his conversion Justin continued to wear his philosopher’s cloak which he now viewed as the garb of a Christian philosopher (Cross & Livingstone, 2005: 920). He looked favorably on the Logos speculation of Heraclitus and the pagan monotheism of Socrates and saw in the Roman gods what the apostle Paul had called the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12) (Pagels, 1995: 123). Not that he was completely averse to paganism. He believed that Christ had influenced all that was good in pagan and Jewish civilization and that Socrates and Abraham were therefore Christians before Christ (Chadwick, 2001: 96). Plato was another Christian before Christ and during his sojourn in Egypt had studied the Pentateuch which he relied on heavily for his reconstruction of the
creation in the *Timaeus*. The *Second Platonic Letter*, which Justin thought an authentic work of Plato’s, was an intimation of the Trinity, and all the philosophical schools but for Epicureanism contained the seeds of truth scattered by the careless sower in Jesus’ parable (Matthew 13:1-9) (2001: 93). In Plato there were anticipations even of the Last Judgment and the cross of Christ, an image which Justin tended to see everywhere: in the mast of a ship, the human form, and the standards of the Roman army (Chadwick, 1966: 17).

As did the Gnostics, Justin combined Christianity with Platonism, but in his system Platonism did not overwhelm Christianity. He was somewhat of a subordinationist and envisioned the generation of the Son as taking place before the creation; his subordinationism was a manifestation of the late antique desire to protect God from matter. Justin spent much time in Rome and was martyred there in 165 (Cross & Livingstone, 2005: 920). At his trial, in which he was called on to renounce Christianity, he asserted that no one in his right mind would willingly turn from piety to impiety (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(1): 306).

5.2.3 Tatian

One of Justin’s pupils in Rome was Tatian who wrote a caustically scornful *Address to the Greeks* in which he expostulated against the gladiatorial games in which as many as three hundred fifty participants could be killed in a single day. Tatian was likely the founder of the Encratites and the compiler of the *Diatessaron* (Cross & Livingstone, 2005: 1590). The Encratites were members of an ascetic Syrian sect who abstained from meat, marriage, and alcohol. Because they celebrated the Eucharist with water instead of wine they were sometimes called Aquarians (Schaff, 1970: 295). Tatian himself was all but Gnostic and accepted a system in which aeons proliferated, in which the first man was forever damned, and in which the inferior Demiurgic God is described as praying to the supreme God “Let there be light” in order that his own darkness might be illuminated (Chadwick & Oulton, 1954: 22).

The *Diatessaron* was a Gospel harmony, and its title in fact means ‘fourfold harmony.’ In it Tatian excised the genealogies of Christ, caused a brightness to shine about His head at His baptism (probably to stress the entrance of a spiritual being into Him at this point), and made John the Baptist eat milk and honey rather than locusts and honey (*Diat. 4.13, 37*) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(9): 49-50). It is not known whether it was first written in Syriac, Greek, or
Latin, but it was extremely popular in its Syriac version and may be the first example of a Christian writing in Syriac. Syria was to have a rich Christian, Manichaean, and pagan literature (Young, Ayres & Louth, 2004: 161, 169-170). The insights of the Diatessaron are reflected in the Old Syriac Gospels which exhibit phraseology reminiscent of the Aramaic Targums (2004: 165). While in the more accurate Greek version the angel tells Zacharias simply that his prayer has been heard the Old Syriac has him say, “Behold, God has heard the voice of your prayer.” In Tatian we encounter an influential biblical scholar who stood close to the Gnostics in his hatred of matter.

5.2.4 Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria was born of pagan parents in the middle of the second century in Athens and was an accomplished traveler in his youth. Like many other philosophers he had gone from teacher to teacher until he found one he admired (cf. Porphyry, Vit. Plot. 3) (Plotinus, 1991: ciii-civ). He became acquainted with Pantaenus, a Christian convert from Stoicism and Pythagoreanism, when he was around thirty and succeeded him on his death as leader of the Alexandrian school where he lectured until he was forced to leave for Cappadocia during the persecution of Septimius Severus (Cross & Livingstone, 2005: 367).

Clement was the most learned of the ante-Nicene fathers. Many Christians of his time, most notably Tertullian, refused to have any dealings with pagan philosophy (Praesc. Haer. 7) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(3): 246). Clement, however, thought that God had used the Greek philosophers for His own ends. He postulated that the angels of the sixth chapter of the book of Genesis were the originators of Greek philosophy which contained many germs of truth. At other times he thought Greek philosophy was a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ or that the Greek philosophers had plagiarized the Old Testament (Chadwick, 2001: 127).

In Clement’s mind philosophy and the Old Testament came together in Christianity. He often spoke of the Christian gnostic, by which he meant the most spiritually advanced Christian, and attributed elements extolled by both Scripture and philosophy to him (2001: 127). Like the Stoic sage the Christian gnostic was a prophet, priest, and king, and like Plato he desired to attain likeness to God. Platonism was a bridge to Christianity, the Plato of the Middle Platonists anticipating Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, the creation, the cross of Christ, the resurrection, and the devil, while the New Testament contained direct references to the
Forms (2001: 127). Clement said that Plato owed his discovery of the distinction between the intellectual and sensible worlds to the two accounts of creation set forth in Genesis. This pronouncement is reminiscent of Philo who thought the first account of creation involved the Form Man, the second the first two humans. Clement, like his successor Origen, imbibed deeply at the goblets proffered by the Middle Platonists, but he was nonetheless inimical to the idea that the stars are divine, and orderly because divine, and he did not accept metempsychosis or the eternity of the world (2001: 127). He objected to Philo’s view that the coats of skin God gave Adam and Eve after their fall were material bodies, and like Origen he viewed God’s judgment as therapeutic, the divine anger being full of love (2001: 127-128).

Though his own tendency was ascetic in the late antique way, Clement wrote to a wealthy and cultured audience. In speaking about the rich man whom Christ had urged to sell everything he owned (Matthew 19:16-29), he opined that the Savior alluded to his human passions rather than his material possessions (Ferguson, 1974: 171). He allowed only men to wear rings and then only signet rings with Christian symbols, placed at the base of the little finger. He discouraged women from wearing jewelry or cosmetics unless their husbands had roving eyes (1974: 97). He thought the married state was superior to the unmarried state in that the married man had more cares and more opportunities for self-denial. He understood the apostles and even Paul to have been married although he held that they treated their wives more as sisters than wives. In his praise of asceticism he came close to the views of Porphyry who would be used by Jerome and Basil in their monastic writings (Chadwick & Oulton, 1954: 36-37).

In the Paidagogos, which was planned as the second of a three-part work, Clement distinguishes between the paidagōgos and the didaskalos. The paidagōgos forms Christian character while the didaskalos merely instructs a child. In the second book he succumbs to his usual garrulousness, digressing on the subject of the ideal firmness for one’s bed. As we might have anticipated, a bed of downy feathers is voluptuous and morally injurious (Paed. 2.9) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(2): 257).
Clement may have had Gnostic teachers at one time although he never completely accepted their teachings, disliking their pessimism and their denial of free will. Like them he believed that Christ gave special knowledge to His disciples which they subsequently communicated to only an elect band of followers, a belief that reflects the late antique distrust of the social world. In connection with this can be noted his fondness for Plato’s pronouncement in the *Phaedo*, “Many are the wand-bearers but few are the initiates” (Bruce, 1988: 188; cf. Matthew 22:14). Clement was familiar with Homer, Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, and Musonius Rufus, but he also made extensive use of anthologies and florilegia (Chadwick, 2001: 126). He often quoted from the Bible, especially Proverbs and Sirach, and was familiar with all of Plato’s dialogues but for the formidable *Parmenides* (Ferguson, 1974: 18). He thought Homer’s treatment of the gods secretly ironical and found useful analogies for the Christian in his poems, especially in the figure of Odysseus. Sometimes he portrayed Odysseus in a favorable light and sometimes in a harsh light. When Calypso offers him immortality Odysseus is censured for yearning to see the smoke of his homeland which should be equated with the material world, but when he is strapped to the mast of his ship he becomes an image of the Christian clinging to the cross for refuge from the pleasure symbolized by the Sirens (O’Meara, 1982: 10-12). In both instances the ethos of late antiquity is clearly in evidence, on the one hand by a desire to escape from matter and on the other hand by an obdurate asceticism. In another passage Clement makes the Sirens emblems of Greek philosophy, Odysseus being the Christian gnostic who can hear them without harm as opposed to the ordinary Christian who needs to have his ears plugged (1982: 12-13).

Clement provided a compendium of the philosophy of Theodotus, a disciple of Ptolemaeus who is otherwise unknown to us. Theodotus postulated certain powers that made up the Pleroma; the last of these, Sophia, fell from the Pleroma and gave birth to Christ and the Demiurge. In the person of Jesus, Christ condescended to take on a material body in order to defeat the Demiurge and redeem both Sophia and the elect mortals who had forgotten their earlier and incorporeal life (Foerster, 1972(1): 146-153).

Clement was not a biblical scholar, and his interpretations of the Bible were characteristically outlandish. He explained the injunction “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord” (Luke 12:35-36) as a warning against lying overlong in bed (*Paed. 2.9*) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(2): 258). Although he carefully avoided treating the New Testament allegorically he frequently gave
allegorical interpretations to Old Testament and apocryphal passages, likening the story of Solomon’s temple to Christ’s incarnation and equating the female whose works the Jesus of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* promises to destroy with concupiscence (Bruce, 1988: 311). The Gnostic identification of woman with sin and particularly lust is probably a contributing factor to his exegesis.

Photius, the Byzantine lexicographer, claimed that Clement in his lost *Hypotyposeis* was a heretic: he thought of Christ as subordinate to the Father; he believed in the possibility of many universes existing before the creation of the world; in the “shameful and godless” derivation of Eve from Adam; in two divine Words or Logoi, one higher and one lesser, the higher one unrevealed and the lesser one only partly revealed (Ferguson, 1974: 182-183). We know from Clement’s *Stromata* that he held that Christ did not need to eat or drink and did so only so as not to appear different (1974: 144), and his open-mindedness towards apocryphal material gives credence to Photius’ accusation of heresy. At the time Photius wrote orthodoxy was more clearly defined and Clement’s scorn of the material world was more dangerous than it had been in the second century.

5.2.5 Origen

5.2.5.1 Life

After Clement fled from Alexandria his eighteen-year-old student Origen, who was also a student of Ammonius Saccas, succeeded him at the Alexandrian school. Origen’s parents, pagans at the time of his birth, embraced Christianity sometime in his childhood. His father Leonides was eventually arrested and martyred, Origen himself being unable to be martyred with him, as he desired, because his mother hid his clothes (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.2) (Schaff, 2004(II, 1): 250). The youth contented himself with writing a letter to his father in prison, urging him not to renounce his faith for the family’s well-being. Because of his Roman citizenship Leonides was spared from torture and public execution but not death.

A wealthy woman took charge of Origen after his father’s death and the subsequent confiscation of his property. He used the money she gave him to study with Ammonius Saccas while visiting Christians in prison. He refused to have anything to do with a fellow beneficiary of his named Paul whom he regarded as a heretic (*Hist. Eccl.* 6.2) (2004(II, 1): 250). According to his early biographer Eusebius, Origen deprived himself of sleep, which he
took on the floor, went shoeless for many years, and consumed no wine and little food (*Hist. Eccl.* 6.3) (2004(II, 1): 252). He was thus a conscientious practitioner of late antique asceticism.

Because of the persecution of Septimius Severus there was a scarcity of teachers to instruct catechumens in Alexandria so the Alexandrian bishop Demetrius entrusted this duty to Origen who sold his library of literature and philosophy in order to teach without fee. Severus’ persecution targeted the upper class, and some of Origen’s students were executed. Origen himself, though not in immediate danger, fearlessly embraced Plutarch, a fellow student of Ammonius and one whose execution he attended. As head of the catechetical school Origen found himself with many learned students, some of whom were interested solely in metaphysical questions, and he was forced to recommence the study of Greek philosophy and especially Plato. Because he had students of both sexes Origen, according to Eusebius, took a certain passage in the Gospels (Matthew 19:12) “in too literal and extreme a sense” (*Hist. Eccl.* 6.8) (2004(II, 1): 254), but some scholars, based on an examination of his writings, do not accept this story. Epiphanius of Salamis’ theory that Origen lulled his sexuality with drugs has no verity but powerfully encapsulates the milieu of late antiquity (Chadwick, 1966: 67-68).

Origen’s learning brought him great fame, and he often visited Palestine where he spoke to large congregations. He was an object of fierce admiration and fanatical hatred and regretted both his admirers and haters who included the bishop of Alexandria (Chadwick, 2001: 143). Stung by Origen’s reputation Demetrius called the philosopher back to Egypt in 215. Fifteen years later, after receiving a call to speak in Athens and traveling there by way of Palestine, Origen was ordained a presbyter (Douglas, 1978: 733). During his subsequent debate with the Gnostic Candidus, who alleged that the proto-orthodox, like the Gnostics, held to dualism because they thought of the devil as beyond hope, Origen denied that the devil was originally evil and claimed that he might not be eternally damned (Chadwick & Oulton, 1954: 431). There is nonetheless a letter purporting to be Origen’s which denies he ever taught that the devil would be saved and which cites two instances in which his writings were changed by other hands.
When the proceedings of the debate were published by Candidus, Demetrius, to forestall the Caesareans who were intent on making Origen a bishop, divulged the story of his self-mutilation and gave instructions that his newly consecrated priesthood be stripped from him. When Origen learned of Demetrius’ criticism of his belief that the devil would be saved he replied that just as the archangel Michael did not speak evil of the devil (Jude 9) so he would not speak evil of the bishop (Chadwick, 1966: 99-100). He returned to Alexandria, but things were no longer as they had been and the stenographers of his patron Ambrose refused to work for him although Ambrose himself continued to support him.

When Origen left Alexandria Demetrius forbade him to return, and his proscription was upheld by his successor, Origen’s former associate Heraclas. Origen would write, with reference to a verse in the Song of Solomon, that no one could enjoy the flowers of spring if he had not bravely and manfully confronted the present winter (Chadwick & Oulton, 1954: 413). He took up his abode in Caesarea, the see of the bishop Theoctistus who was friendly to him, and accepted pupils from all over the Roman world. He was frequently called on to teach and to arbitrate theological disputes, once testing the orthodoxy of the Monarchian Heraclides. In the debate, which has been preserved almost in its entirety, Origen condemned both Adoptionist and Modal Monarchianism which respectively denied Christ’s deity and accepted only one person in the Godhead, whether called the Father or Christ (1954: 433). This last view was especially distressing because it made God suffer on the cross, a position that was anathema to a Platonist like Origen. His intensely held Platonism and controversial career give him the appearance of being a black sheep which he was not, certainly not in the late antique ethos as a whole.

The governor of Arabia called for Origen, and when Julia Mamaea, the mother of the emperor Alexander Severus, visited Antioch she sent for him and asked him various theological questions. Alexander himself was on friendly terms with the Christians (Cross & Livingstone, 2005: 918), but in 235 the soldier Maximin led a revolt against his government and the emperor was killed. Maximin, thanks in part to his hatred of Alexander, attacked the Christian clergy, and the church authorities Pontianus and Hippolytus were deported to fatal hard labor in Sardinia (2005: 778). Origen fled to Cappadocian Caesarea, a puzzling development in view of his lust for martyrdom, and lived with the virgin Juliana (Eubebius, Hist. Eccl. 6.17) (Schaff, 2004(II, 1): 264).
The persecution of Maximin was the basis for Origen’s *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, addressed to the imprisoned and eventually martyred Ambrose. In the exhortation, which can be viewed as an encomium of the severest form of asceticism available, Origen extolled non-Christian persecution of Christians because it revealed the true believers in the church, an accomplishment that would prove difficult whenever the church basked in affluence. Elsewhere he looked back with fondness on the days when the Christians buried their martyrs and returned to their churches, joyful and fearless, catechizing new converts and witnessing miraculous signs (Chadwick & Oulton, 1954: 391). In the subsequent persecution of Decius, when he was nearly seventy, Origen was imprisoned and tortured. He was released but died not long afterwards because of the injuries he had sustained.

5.2.5.2 Philosophy

Origen, less defensive about Christianity than Clement, was more prone to heresy, and one can see in this a recurrence of the cases of Clement and Justin (Chadwick, 1966: 101-102). Origen was embarrassed by portions of the Old Testament, but unlike Marcion he desired to regard the Old Testament as authoritative and therefore treated it allegorically. The Old Testament was superseded by the New Testament as the New Testament would be superseded in the heavenly estate by another gospel. For him the Bible had three senses which corresponded to the body, soul, and spirit (Greer in Origen, 1979: 31). The literal sense corresponded to the body, and the moral and spiritual senses corresponded to the soul and the spirit. Some passages of Scripture had no literal or moral meaning, but all of them had a spiritual meaning. The literal sense, since it was equated with something as insignificant as the body, was the least important of the senses (Hall, 1998: 144).

Origen held that the Greeks had three disciplines by which they attained a knowledge of the universe: the moral, the natural, and the contemplative, and found all three illustrated in the writings of Solomon: from Proverbs to Ecclesiastes to the Song of Solomon (Greer in Origen, 1979: 23). This last, potentially dangerous work he urged only the most spiritually advanced Christian to read. In his commentary on it he viewed the bridegroom as Christ, and the bride as sometimes the church and sometimes the individual Christian soul.
Origen disliked anthropomorphism, which of course places some value on the body, and to show the folly of taking human descriptions of God in a literal sense he adduced Old Testament verses in which the Creator was described as having seven eyes or wings and feathers (Contra Cels. 4.37) (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(4): 513). He also distrusted literal representations of heaven. Such a place could not be spherical and revolving, as certain passages seemed to suggest, and the earth, which is in the middle of the universe, could not be God’s footstool. As in the case of Valentinus there were five spiritual senses which surpassed the five bodily senses and were illustrated by the five wise virgins of Jesus’ parable (Dillon, 1990(19): 444-445). These senses were a sight that could see the cherubim and the seraphim, a hearing that could hear sounds which had no objective existence, a taste that fed on bread from heaven, a smell that smelled the sweet savor of Christ unto God, and a touch such as the apostle John possessed when he handled with his hands the Word of Life (1990(19): 444).

Origen’s commentary on the Gospel of John was more theological than exegetical just as contemporaneous commentaries on Plato’s dialogues were often thinly disguised philosophical treatises. It begins with an introduction reminiscent of the ancient commentaries on Aristotle (Young, Ayres & Louth, 2004: 123, 129). Origen’s desire was to refute the Gnostic Heracleon while still exploring the mystical and even anti-material interpretation of the Gospel (2004: 123). He remarks that one cannot understand the Gospel unless he has, with its author, leaned on Jesus’ breast (Chadwick, 1966: 73). He was also receptive to the Acts of John, especially its Docetic accounts of the post-resurrection appearances of Christ, a fine example of the various stages of Christian progress.

In his doctrine of the Trinity Origen influenced both Arius and Athanasius. He believed in a graded Trinity similar to Plotinus’ triad of ultimates. Jesus was to him what the Demiurge was to Plato, an entity which dirtied itself more with matter than God Himself and who was to some degree subordinate to Him just as the Spirit was subordinate to the Son although all three hypostases were divine. At times, especially when speaking of the Father and the Son, he approached the Neoplatonic way of talking about the One and the inferior Nous. Somewhat awkwardly he made the Father’s power extend over all creation, the Son’s power over all living things, and the Holy Spirit’s over what the Gnostics called the pneumatics (Dillon, 1990(21): 20).
Origen did not believe the coats of skin God gave Adam and Eve were bodies although he held open the possibility that they were a reference to their new mortality. The body was the outward symbol of the mind, reflecting how far the individual mind fell before it acquired a soul (Greer in Origen, 1979: 12). The angels were less material than man and therefore more admirable, their bodies being somewhat like the posthumous astral bodies of the Neoplatonists (Smith, 1974: 60). The souls of men can move up or down on the cosmic scale. All of them, thanks to the redemptory nature of the Incarnation, will eventually return to God and be restored to their former glory. It was the task of the advanced Christian to aspire upwards while remaining in the body in order to instruct less fortunate men.

Origen found the idea of preexistence attractive because, even though it went against Christ’s words that the blind man was not born blind because of any sin he had committed, it exonerated God from any attribution of evil. He believed that just as the Son could not see the Father so the Spirit could not see the Son (De Prin. 1.3.4) (cf. Rufinus’ version in Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(4): 253), that the heavenly bodies were indwelled by living spirits punished for their past misdeeds, that Christ’s crucifixion was a ransom paid by God to Satan, that Christians would ultimately be transformed into angels and possess nonmaterial and possibly spherical bodies, and that the world would be destroyed by fire in which even the devil and his angels would be purged from sin and restored to their Creator (Chadwick, 1966: 78-79, 99, 151).

5.2.6 Summary

The late antique ethos of hatred for matter enters Christianity with the ante-Nicene fathers. As in the case of the Platonists and the Gnostics it is revealed in four categories: an emphasis on the evil nature of reality, the distrust of the sociopolitical world, asceticism, and an interest in the supernatural. That there is something wrong with physical existence is shown by Ignatius’ speaking of the destruction of his body by wild beasts as being transformed into pure bread. Justin Martyr’s placement of the Son on a lower metaphysical plane than the Father was a continuation of the Logos speculation of the Middle Platonists who required a mediating entity between God and the evil entity of matter. Justin’s pupil Tatian seems to have forsaken Christianity for something indistinguishable from Gnosticism, even going so far as to found his own sect. In his Gospel harmony a brightness shines about Jesus’ head at His baptism in order to suggest that the spiritual Christ began to indwell this sublunary being at this point.
Clement of Alexandria condemned the figure of Odysseus for wanting to see the smoke of his homeland which can be equated with the material world. There is no doubt that he admired the Gnostic Theodotus whose system he preserved. In his Hypotyposeis, for which we admittedly have only Photius’ word, we descry Clement’s kinship with his age even more clearly. As in the case of Justin his Son is subordinate to the Father in order to separate God from matter, and it is possible that he posited two Logoi for the same reason. His belief that Christ did not need to eat or drink bordered dangerously on Docetism.

Origen compared the present material existence to winter and the future spiritual existence to spring. The allegorism of Philo Judaeus comes to full flower in Origen which is in itself revealing since Philo was a Platonist and therefore a scoarer of matter. Origen’s dislike of anthropomorphic descriptions of God can be related to his hatred of the body. As did Valentinus he equated the five senses with the five foolish virgins of Jesus’ parable and regarded them as inferior to the five spiritual senses. He insinuates that when the apostle John handled with his hands the Word of Life he was doing more than physically touching Him. It is not surprising to discover that he admired the post-resurrection appearances of Christ in the Gnostic Acts of John which elsewhere speaks of “the filthy madness of the flesh” (James, 1926: 269). Origen accepted, as did Justin, the Logos speculation of the Middle Platonists. One of his main aims in his subordinationism was to distinguish himself from the Modal Monarchians who made God suffer on the cross, an idea that was anathema to a Platonist. His resurrection body is spiritual rather than material; the possibility that it would also be spherical corresponds with his dislike of anthropomorphic depictions of the deity.

With the Gnostics the late antique distrust of the sociopolitical world was revealed by an avoidance of martyrdom, since martyrdom was an act of throwing pearls before swine; but with the early Christians, martyrdom, in addition to being the ultimate exercise in asceticism, was a way of escaping and defying a corrupt world. Polycarp’s gesture to the sadistic crowds that had gathered to see his final moments was a pregnant illustration of contempt for the social world. One also encounters it in Clement’s fondness for Plato’s elitist pronouncement, “Many are the wand-bearers but few are the initiates.”

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Asceticism is exhibited more clearly by the early Christians than by the Gnostics or the Platonists. Despite his attacks on the Gnostics, Irenaeus was strongly supportive of the Montanists whose asceticism was a reflection of the spirit of the ethos. Tatian’s Enratites practiced a by now familiar asceticism, refraining from meat, marriage, and alcohol. Related to this is the Diatessaron’s description of John the Baptist eating milk and honey rather than locusts and honey. Late antique asceticism is always an aspect of hatred for the body, even if the ascetic did not consciously share this attitude. One such ascetic was Clement of Alexandria who recommended marriage over the single state because the married man had more opportunities for self-denial than his single counterpart. Origen, more conscious of his own hatred for the body than Clement, practiced a thoroughgoing asceticism that was of a piece with the world-denying ethos of late antiquity.

The age’s interest in the supernatural is attested by the miraculous events that were often associated with martyrdoms and which we have observed in the case of Polycarp, namely his prophetic dream of his pillow catching fire, signifying the death that he would die, and Irenaeus’ hearing the angelic announcement of his master’s triumph in Smyrna while he was away in Rome.

5.3 The Desert Fathers

5.3.1 St. Anthony

The ethos of late antiquity is even more apparent in the desert fathers than in the ante-Nicene fathers. St. Anthony, a sterling example in this category, was an orphan by the age of twenty. Soon after his parents’ death he put his sister in the care of virgins and embarked on the monastic life (Vit. Ant. 2) (Athanasius, 1980: 31-32). He was so on guard against the temptations of the devil that he often kept himself awake at night and ate only once a day, but he sometimes went for days without food. The Apophthegmata Patrum quotes him as saying that the anchorite is victorious over hearing, speaking, and seeing but not over fornication (Ward, 1984: 3). When he took up his abode in the tombs a host of devils are said to have beaten him so that he lay speechless on the ground from their blows, and another time they attacked him in the form of various animals (Vit. Ant. 8-9) (Athanasius, 1980: 37-38).
Anthony often had visions of demons in different shapes, whether a woman, a black boy, a giant, a monk, or a monster that was half donkey and half man (Vit. Ant. 5-6, 40, 53) (1980: 34-35, 61, 70). These were likely hallucinations brought on by his lack of food and sleep, but their reflection of the late antique spirit should not escape us. When he was thirty-five, and seeking a more remote spot in which to live, he saw gold lying across his path but he continued on his journey and made his home in an abandoned fortress infested with reptiles, and at his coming the reptiles fled from him (Vit. Ant. 12) (1980: 40). He lived there on two large shipments of bread that he received every year, but he never saw those who delivered the loaves. He lived in the fortress for twenty years after which his admirers forcibly took down the door. He emerged from his shrine and healed and exorcised everyone whom his admirers had brought to him (Vit. Ant. 14) (1980: 42). He went throughout the desert encouraging the monks who had taken up their abodes there after his example and revealed that once the devil had come to him in his cell and had given him happiness by complaining that he no longer had a place to call his own since even the desert was full of Christians (Vit. Ant. 41) (1980: 62). Anthony had a low opinion of the knowledge of devils who did not know things ahead of time though they were very swift. Seeing water beginning to flood the Nile they announced it to a spokesman of theirs who would then give the appearance of a prophecy (Vit. Ant. 32) (1980: 55-56).

Anthony journeyed to Alexandria during the persecution of Maximin Daia, going to the prisons, strengthening the faithful, and appearing in the courts where the Christians were being tried. When the prefect in attendance demanded that no monks appear in court he alone of the monks who frequented the courts came the next day, having washed his upper garment so that he would be more readily noticed, but the martyrdom he sought was denied him (Vit. Ant. 46) (1980: 66). After the persecution Anthony returned to his cell and put himself under harsher austerities, eating less food than had been his custom and wearing a hair shirt, but since he was plagued with requests for healing he struck out for a solitary mountain, directed to him by God, between the Nile and the Red Sea and there he planted a garden so that no one would need to bring him food (Vit. Ant. 50) (1980: 69).

He was nonetheless visited by other monks. His hallucinations also returned, and he was attacked by a pack of hyenas whom he dispersed. Once while he was praying he had a vision that two men were journeying towards him and that one of them had died and another was near death. Anthony ordered a monk who was with him to rush out and give water to the man
who was still alive, and the man’s life was saved (Vit. Ant. 59) (1980: 75). He also saw the soul of a fellow ascetic, Amoun, being carried up into heaven. Amoun had convinced his bride that they should live in mutual chastity, and after her death eighteen years later he lived alone or with his followers (Ward, 1984: 31). Amoun’s participation in the late antique hatred of the body is revealed by the fact that he had once been transported across a river by divine aid so that he would not have to swim and so reveal his nakedness (Vit. Ant. 60) (Athenasius, 1980: 76).

Anthony received visitors in his mountain retreat through a receptionist who allegorically announced them as coming from Egypt or Jerusalem. If they came from the former they would receive a meal and a blessing, but if from the latter Anthony would spend the night talking with them. Although he generally disliked society he came to Alexandria a second time to dispute with the Arians, and he claimed he did not mind the company of the sick who touched his garments because they were less numerous than the spirits who oppressed him; but he declined an invitation to visit the churches of Alexandria, alleging that a monk out of his cell was like a fish out of water (Vit. Ant. 70, 85) (1980: 83, 93). Before his death at the age of over a hundred he had a prophetic dream that the Arian emperors would persecute the Christians (Vit. Ant. 82) (1980: 91). Anthony’s teeth were worn to the gums on account of his many years; he left his clothes, his only possessions, to his disciples, bequeathing a sheepskin each to Athanasius and Serapion of Thmuis. In accordance with his wishes two of his associates buried him and kept the place of burial a secret (Vit. Ant. 91-92) (1980: 97-98; cf. Deuteronomy 34:6). With St. Anthony, the first important desert father, the ethos of late antiquity expressed itself mainly through asceticism and the supernatural.

5.3.2 Paphnutius

Paphnutius, a confessor of the persecution of Maximin Daia whose blinded right eye was kissed by Constantine at the Council of Nicaea, was opposed to the enforcement of clerical celibacy, but no one could deny his own asceticism (Douglas, 1978: 746). He wrote, in Coptic, a history of the monks of the Egyptian desert, among them Macedonius and Abba Aaron. The first was a soldier whom Athanasius had ordained a priest so that he could serve the sacrament to the Christians of Aswan, only fifty miles north of the Tropic of Cancer (Budge, 1977(5): 960). He was said to be humble but was once so rash as to behead an Ethiopian hawk which was housed behind a grille in the temple of Isis. The sons of the high
priest Aristus, knowing their father’s harshness, fled the temple, and when Aristus learned what had happened he vowed to kill both Macedonius and his own negligent sons. Macedonius was urged by a Christian to flee and had a vision of the sons dying of thirst in the desert, yet another manifestation of the late antique interest in the supernatural. He saved them and subsequently baptized them, giving them the names Mark and Isaiah. Moreover he was able to convert their father to whom he gave the name Jacob (1977(5): 961-969).

Paphnutius once met the anchorite Isaac who had, as he put it, poured water on his master’s hands as Elisha had poured water on the hands of Elijah, the first Hebrew ascetic (2 Kings 3:11) (1977(5): 958). Traveling with his spiritual father Pseleusius, Paphnutius sailed south on the Nile until he came to a place where large rocks stood in the middle of the river and the waters roared loudly. Isaac came out of his cell to greet the travelers, and Paphnutius remarked both his age and gracious appearance (1977(5): 959). Isaac told them of his master Aaron who was originally a soldier and a Christian and already possessed an ascetic bent when a lion encountered him. He prayed for deliverance, killed the animal with his spear, and then became a monk (1977(5): 986-987). He attempted, among other things, to be free from anger. He often stood under the summer sun with a huge stone resting on his head or tied about his neck, the weight of which was so great that his eyes felt as though they would rupture. On winter nights he dipped his garment in the Nile and, putting it on, stood shivering by the river until dawn when he returned to his cave so that he could not be warmed (1977(5): 989, 1007). Aaron explained to Isaac that his tortures were undertaken in imitation of the sufferings of Christ who he prayed would have mercy on him in his final hour, but they were also an unconscious presentation of hatred for the body (1977(5): 990).

Once the abode of Aaron and Isaac was surrounded by lions with human voices, but the two went into an upper room and prayed until they dispersed (1977(5): 990-991). Aaron never ate and drank on the same day. If he ate bread on a certain day he did not drink, and if he drank he did not eat bread. He told Isaac that he had once stood for six days without food or water when Satan appeared bearing a golden wand and alleging that he had come to comfort him; but Aaron made the sign of the cross and he vanished (1977(5): 991). Paphnutius’ stories of Macedonius and Abba Aaron tend to elucidate the desert fathers’ acceptance of the world-denying ethos of late antiquity.
5.3.3 Paphnutius Cephala

Paphnutius’ history of the monks was addressed to Paphnutius Cephala who himself wrote a history of Abba Onnophrios which contained the stories of other monks he had met on his journeys. He once came to the cave of a far-flung monk and after entering it touched the arm of its sitting owner, but it disintegrated in his hand, a powerful image of late antiquity’s view of the body (Budge, 1977(4): 455). The same thing happened when he touched a shirt hanging up inside the cave. He buried the brother and made his way to an even more remote place where a certain Timothy lived part of his day with cape buffaloes. The story of Timothy is one of the most fascinating of all those told of the desert fathers (1977(4): 456-459). Thirty years earlier he had lived in his cell, eager to practice asceticism and entertain strangers. One of these was a young woman who often bought the baskets, mats, and sandals he made but who fell in love with him as he with her. For six months they continued this way until Timothy, realizing the mortal danger he was in, fled from his cell.

Timothy afterwards lived on spring water and the dates of a palm tree which produced twelve bunches of fruit a year. His clothes had worn out, and his long hair served as a loincloth. When he had first come to his new abode he suffered from liver pain until an angel cut out his liver, showed him where it was diseased, bound up its wounds, and reinserted it (1977(4): 458; cf. Isaac of Nineveh, 1969(2): 371). The sight of his own diseased liver could not have filled Timothy with a greater horror of matter than he already possessed. He had at first feared Paphnutius was an evil spirit, and he would not allow him to spend the night with him because he thought he lacked the strength to resist the attacks of the devils (Budge, 1977(4): 459).

Paphnutius afterwards came to the lodge of Onnophrios who was naked but for a small garment of leaves. Onnophrios told Paphnutius that he lived so far from civilization that no wandering priest could administer the sacrament and the angels themselves were forced to do so. When he grew lonely Onnophrios was taken up into heaven where he conversed with the saints and forgot his sufferings and the existence of the world (1977(4): 464). Paphnutius took bread with Onnophrios and later experienced, with four other hermits, the angelic Eucharist of which he had spoken, its consummation producing in him a sensation similar to drinking wine (1977(4): 471).
In the same Coptic manuscripts that tell us of the two Paphnutii we learn of Abba Pambo, the abbot of the monks of Scetis who lived at the time of the emperor Zeno, a hundred years after a more famous Pambo. He once went on a solitary expedition to visit anchorites even holier than himself, and all of them addressed him as “the ship of the desert that is without water” (1977(4): 382). The climax of his trip was his meeting with Abba Cyrus, a relative of Theodosius I who lived at the extreme end of the desert (1977(4): 386). Pambo saw Jesus Christ enter Cyrus’ cell and kiss him on the mouth and heard Cyrus’ prophetic utterance that a fellow saint had died that day, one who himself predictably possessed supernatural powers, once traveling through the air to visit the monastery of Macarius the Great (Vivian, 2004: 109-110). After Cyrus’ death Pambo saw Christ come into his room and weep so copiously that tears fell from His eyes onto Cyrus’ body (Budge, 1977(4): 388). The stories of such desert fathers as Timothy, Onnophrios, and Pambo again illustrate the late antique ethos, particularly its asceticism and interest in the supernatural.

5.3.4 Cenobitic Monasticism

Pachomius was the founder of cenobitic as opposed to anchoritic monasticism, and he would be followed in this by Basil of Caesarea. Pachomius, the third ex-soldier we have encountered among the late antique monks, had done military service under Maximin Daia. During that time he was won over to Christianity because of the kindness shown him by certain Christians, and on his discharge he was baptized (Douglas, 1978: 741). He subsequently resisted the attempts of the Marcionites and the Melitians to win him to their respective causes. For twelve years he lived with the hermit Palemon, never eating a full meal and sleeping while sitting on a stone, and then an angel commanded him to establish a society of monks on the Upper Nile (Sozomen, Hist. Eccl. 3.14) (Schaff, 2004(II, 2): 292). The society numbered fifty thousand members a century after his death. Pachomius called it a koinōnia and modeled it after the communal church of the book of Acts (Douglas, 1978: 741), but he often left it and went to the nearby cliff tombs to meditate alone. The Pachomian monks wore goatskins and ate with their faces covered and their heads bowed. Every Easter and August they came together for a general assembly at Pachomius’ headquarters in Pboou (1978: 741).
Pachomius had some difficulty guaranteeing the orthodoxy of his monks. A visitor once questioned Pachomius’ assistant Theodore, “Who was not born but died? Who was born but did not die? And who died without giving off the odor of corruption?” Theodore, in tune with the late antique desire to escape the body, correctly answered Adam, Enoch, and Lot’s wife who became a pillar of salt (Robinson, 1977: 18-19). After Pachomius’ death Theodore, who believed that in his time God had raised up three leaders—Anthony, Pachomius, and Athanasius—thought it necessary to distribute Athanasius’ Easter letter of 367 which condemned apocryphal writings (1977: 19). It is possible that the Nag Hammadi manuscripts, the first examples of leather-bound books, were copied by Pachomian monks with Gnostic leanings, but they were hidden early in the fifth century when Shenoute, the fanatical abbot of the White Monastery, threatened the heretics with exile and death (1977: 20). Pachomius had condemned the production of ornate books; this may explain the simplicity of the Nag Hammadi codices which are worlds apart from the jewel-studded volumes of the Manichaeans (1977: 17; Lieu, 1998: 8-9).

5.3.5 Summary

In the desert fathers we observe the late antique ethos of dislike for matter and the body in an emphasis on the evil nature of life, a distrust of the sociopolitical world, asceticism, and an interest in the supernatural. Our study seems to reveal that the Platonists gave the Gnostics and the Christians their world-hating philosophy which the Gnostics preached more vigorously than the Platonists, and the Christians practiced more sincerely than the Gnostics. The ascetics of the desert did not necessarily believe that the body was worthless, and their main objective, as in the case of Abba Aaron, was often to imitate the sufferings of Christ. Nonetheless it is not surprising to discover that the Gnostic Nag Hammadi manuscripts, austerely simple in their presentation, were copied out by Pachomian monks. The monastics’ attitude toward matter is graphically portrayed in the account of Paphnutius Cephala’s coming to a dead monk’s cell and touching his arm only to have it disintegrate in his hand. It is to be expected that a visitor to Pachomius’ koinōnia would want to know more than anything else who died without giving off the odor of corruption and that his interlocutor would know the answer to be Lot’s wife.
Certain scholars have viewed the fathers’ flight into the desert as a reflection of a profound
distrust of the sociopolitical world (Schaff, 1968: 149; Esler, 2000(1): 244), and while this
fact should not be allowed to occlude the monastics’ overriding spiritual aspirations it should
not be ignored. The substitution of Christian Rome for pagan Rome had revealed that little
had changed in the empire and that the world itself, whether Christian or pagan, was
irredeemably corrupt and therefore worthy to be forsaken (cf. Armstrong, 1967: 410).

In the desert fathers one is confronted with an intense asceticism, often undertaken as a
replacement for the no longer attainable blessing of martyrdom. Related to their asceticism
was a distrust of human sexuality which is the mode for the propagation of matter and the
body. The fathers tended to view even food as evil. In addition to their self-abnegation was an
emphasis on the miraculous. There is a parallel here with the Neoplatonist Proclus who wore
coarse garments and had healing powers (Damascius, 1999: 165; Marinus of Samaria, 1986:
45-46). Both of these phenomena, asceticism and the supernatural, saturate virtually every
page written about the desert fathers and place them, more definitely than any other group, in
the world-denying milieu of late antiquity.

5.4 The Arians

5.4.1 Arius

During the Nicene period the Arians and the Homoousians, for all their differences, shared
the same ethos that characterized late antiquity. Arius, the founder of Arianism, was an
Alexandrian deacon who was refused the presbyterate by the bishop Peter who succeeded
Theonas, the successor of Origen’s disciple Dionysius. Peter was warned against vacillation
by a supernatural dream and conveyed the purport of his dream to his coworkers Achillas and
Alexander (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(6): 263). The first ordained Arius, and the last
excommunicated him. Arius preached at the Church of Boucalis which was situated near the
Nile (Finneran, 2005: 104-105), and his sanctity made him popular with the seven hundred
Christian virgins of Alexandria who practiced the asceticism typical of late antiquity. After
his excommunication Arius lived in the caves outside Alexandria until he began to agitate
against the church by inducing some of the virgins to bring accusations against it (Theodoret,
Arius was a student of Lucian of Antioch, a scholar who prepared an edition of the Septuagint and helped establish the Byzantine Text of the New Testament (Cross & Livingstone, 2005: 1007-1008). Lucian was martyred during the last desperate persecution of Maximin Daia. Whatever his own Christological views were, his students tended to deny Christ’s deity. According to Arius Christ was a creature, generated by the Father from nothing, but a creature who acted as a mediator between God and the sensible world of which He was the fashioner. Arius went so far as to call the Father Monad and the Son Dyad (Sabo, 2008: 7). He equated the Son with the anthropomorphic Wisdom of Proverbs (8:22-31) who aids God in His creation of the world but is clearly inferior to Him and thus protects Him from the material world. Christ was capable of change and even sin, but God, foreseeing His goodness, gave Him grace so that He would not sin. Arius called Christ the created Logos, and he distinguished this from the Logos proper, the reason immanent in God. The incarnate Christ had a human body, but in place of the rational human soul was the created Logos (2008: 7).

Students of Lucian, besides Arius, were Eusebius of Nicomedia, Athanasius of Anazarbus, Theognis of Nicæa, and Asterius the Sophist (Kopecek, 1979(1): 27-28). The Arians early made a name for themselves with their sometimes dubious biblical exposition. Athanasius of Anazarbus used Jesus’ parable about the hundred sheep (Matthew 18:12-14) to prove the generated nature of the Son. He assumed that Jesus, based on other scriptural identifications of Him as the Lamb of God, was one of the hundred sheep who could not be ungenerated as God was, since to affirm so was polytheistic (1979(1): 26-27).

Asterius was the only Lucianist who, on account of his apostasy in sacrificing to the gods during a pagan persecution, could not take clerical orders (1979(1): 29). He made up for his lapse by transforming himself into the most distinguished Arian thinker before Aetius. He accepted Arius’ doctrine of the two Logoi or Wisdoms of God, but he prefigured the Anomoeans by arguing that God could be known. Again like the Anomoeans he disliked the Arian grouping of the Son with all created things. The Son was indeed generated, but He stood above the rest of creation as the creator of the world and as the metaphysical mediator between God and man. Just as the Son was generated by God so He Himself generated the universe, being to it what the physical sun was to the earth. Unlike Arius Asterius accepted the use of the term Father for God before the generation of the Son, affirming that God always had potential fatherhood just as one trained as a physician has the potential to heal diseases.
even before he receives his first patient (1979(1): 31-32).

The Arians’ emphasis on the ungeneratedness of the Father was indebted to Middle Platonic thought. Some of the ante-Nicene fathers were willing to use the idea with reference to the Father but not the Son so that the Arians in a way had respectable precedents (1979(1): 249-259). None of the fathers, however, had gone so far as to claim that the Son was generated in His divinity. Ignatius had in fact affirmed that the Son was ungenerated, and Origen distinguished between *agennētos* (unbegotten) and *agenētos* (uncreated). The Son was for Origen both *gennētos* and *agenētos*, begotten but not created (1979(1): 265).

Some spirits have thought of Arianism as Christianity in its most pristine form, but although it stressed the humanity more than the deity of Christ it was even more in step with late antiquity’s hatred of matter than orthodoxy. The Arians thought of the Logos as God’s tool in creation to prevent the indignity to His hand. The *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaum*, once thought the work of Chrysostom, demonstrates Arianism’s connections with the world-denying strain in Gnosticism. Because the Incarnation would have immeasurably reduced God to the level of a man it needed to be accomplished not by God Himself but by the Logos. The supreme God, incapable of stooping to mortality, impels the lesser God to become man, expressing His love not through any of His own actions but through the birth, death, and resurrection of His Son (Sabo, 2008: 91).

Three hundred bishops were assembled at the imperial palace in Nicaea by Constantine I in 325 to resolve the Arian controversy which was a principal source of disorder in the cities of the eastern half of the empire. Many scholars have doubted the sincerity of Constantine’s conversion from the worship of the Unconquered Sun to Christianity, but it appears that he converted out of real religious convictions (Elliott, 1996: 327-328). Like the insomniac Justinian after him (Procopius, 1966: 103, 109) he listened to sermons and studied the Scriptures long into the night. Some of his earliest legislation was influenced by Christianity, such as his prohibition against the branding of convicts on the face in order that God’s image might not be disfigured, and his repeal of the disabilities which Augustus, in a less ascetic age, had aimed against celibates and the childless (Chadwick, 2001: 209).
Before the opening of the council Constantine publicly burned the letters the bishops had written him in which they accused one another of heresy. Eusebius of Caesarea, admittedly a prejudiced observer, describes him entering the imperial palace, proceeding through the assembly like a heavenly messenger. He was accompanied by other Christians but no bodyguard. Coming to the center of the room he sat down only at the insistence of the bishops who stood behind two long benches on either side and seated themselves after him (Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.10) (Schaff, 2004(II, 1): 522).

The bishops, in opposition to Arius, adopted the word *homoousios* to describe Christ’s relationship to the Father. *Homoousios* meant ‘of one substance,’ and though it was coined by the Gnostics it had been given orthodox respectability by Tertullian. Constantine banished Arius and two of his Libyan supporters to Illyricum but recalled him eleven years later (Barnes, 1993: 17; Cross & Livingstone, 2005: 105). Shortly thereafter the heretic died in a water closet, and few of his traumatized supporters were henceforth comfortable with the label Arian. Those who opposed Nicene Christianity would become divided into three groups. The Homoiousians, who were closest to the Homoousians, favored *homoiousios*, ‘of like substance,’ to describe the Son’s relationship to the Father, while the Homoeans, the Arians most faithful to the views of their founder, were satisfied with *homoios*, ‘like.’ The radical Anomoeans employed the word *anomoios*, ‘unlike’ or ‘dissimilar.’ They were called Eunomians, Heteroousians, or Exoukontians, the last term from the word *exoukontion* which emphasized the Son’s generation from nothing (Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.45) (Schaff, 2004(II, 2): 74).

### 5.4.2 Athanasius and Later Arianism

Athanasius was the principal figure of the post-Nicene age and was not above the use of bribery and political intimidation to accomplish his objectives (Esler, 2000(2): 1109). He was at first archdeacon to the patriarch Alexander, whom he accompanied to the Council of Nicaea, but he often went into the desert to visit Anthony whose asceticism he deeply admired. Like Plotinus and Origen, Athanasius was less versed in literature than in philosophy, and his writings show little trace of the rhetorical turns of phrase employed by the Cappadocians (Barnes, 1993: 11).
When the Arians regained Constantine’s support, thanks to the efforts of Eusebius of Nicomedia, Alexander refused to admit them to communion though he was willing to communicate with Melitian schismatics who recognized his authority. The Arians were for Alexander guilty of dividing the robe of Christ, an exploit from which even His Roman executioners had refrained (1993: 16). Since Alexander’s recalcitrance troubled the emperor the patriarch sent Athanasius to explain his stubbornness, but while Athanasius was on his way to Nicomedia he received word that Alexander had died and he swiftly returned to Alexandria where fifty-four bishops were deliberating on the patriarch’s successor. As Alexander had expressed a desire for Athanasius to succeed him the archdeacon forced the outcome by gathering a handful of bishops who consecrated him at the Church of Dionysius (1993: 18). The fact that he was not yet thirty, the minimum age required by canon law, together with the ill will of the Melitians, put Athanasius on a turbulent course.

The Melitians owed their origin to Melitius, a bishop of Lycopolis who, when Peter of Alexandria was in hiding during the persecution of Diocletian, had gone throughout Egypt and Alexandria ordaining bishops and priests. Melitius resented the superiority of the Alexandrian see, and before his own martyrdom Peter excommunicated Melitius who was deported to the mines of Palestine where he founded the Church of the Martyrs, glowingly named after a race that would soon die out (1993: 14). By the time of Athanasius the Melitians had found common cause with the Arians, particularly with Eusebius of Nicomedia who was eager to gather as much calumny as the Melitians could offer on Athanasius. The patriarch was charged with bribery, with forcibly requiring linen tunics from the Melitians, and with sacrilege. Once, while he was on a visit to the Thebaid and returning through the Mareotis, Athanasius ordered his presbyter Macarius to destroy the chalice and overturn the altar of a Melitian priest (1993: 21).

When these charges were dismissed by the emperor, the Melitians accused Athanasius of devising the murder of the bishop Arsenius whose hand he was said to have kept for magical practices, a story that illustrates the late antique fascination with the occult. Constantine instructed his half brother Dalmatius to conduct a trial of Athanasius in Caesarea. The patriarch, however, was able to trace Arsenius and find him alive and unmaimed in Tyre. Eusebius then urged the Melitians to submit new accusations of violence against Athanasius, accusations which forced the emperor to convene the Council of Tyre (Esler, 2000(2): 1108). The new charges included the imprisonment of the priest Ischyras on the false pretext of
throwing stones at images of the emperor, the deposition of the Nicene bishop Callinicus who would not communicate with Athanasius, and the imprisonment of five Melitian priests (Barnes, 1993: 22). There is further evidence, in a newly discovered letter of a Melitian presbyter, that supporters of Athanasius nearly beat four Melitian monks to death and that Athanasius jailed Melitian clergymen in the prisons and meat markets of Alexandria so they would be unavailable for the Council of Tyre (Esler, 2000(2): 1108-1109). Despite its ignorance of these details the council defrocked Athanasius.

Athanasius left Tyre for Constantinople where he requested that he be allowed to defend himself before his accusers in Constantine’s presence; but when his enemies accused him of threatening to prevent Alexandrian grain from reaching the capital Athanasius lost his temper and Constantine exiled him to Trier, the first of his five banishments (Barnes, 1993: 24). After he was recalled by Constantine’s son Constantius II, Athanasius arranged that Anthony, who had already written to Constantine on his behalf, make his celebrated second tour of Alexandria in order to show his support for Homoousianism; but, as Anthony had been divinely forewarned (Vit. Ant. 82) (Athanasius, 1980: 91), Homoousianism would not long be in favor. Athanasius was removed by Constantius, who was a Homoean, in Easter of 339, an act which he compared to the rape of the Levite’s wife in Judges 20. He petitioned his fellow bishops to come to his aid as forcibly as the Israelites did when they learned of the outrage performed against the Levite (Enc. Letter 1) (Schaff, 2004(II, 4): 92). Athanasius was not exaggerating as greatly as might be supposed. When the Arian bishop Gregory took power of Alexandria his supporters burned the Church of Dionysius and tortured sailors who had helped Athanasius escape. To assist Gregory was the dux Valacius whose impending death after a fall from a horse was successfully prophesied by Anthony (Vit. Ant. 86) (Athanasius, 1980: 93-94).

Athanasius spent his second banishment in Rome in the company of two desert hermits whose eccentricity delighted the impressionable Christians of the city. One of the hermits, Ammonius, declined to visit any of the sites of Rome but the tombs of Peter and Paul. During his time there Athanasius wrote against the Arians whom he termed Ariomaniacs and whose theology he censured as effeminate, almost in accordance with the Gnostic deprecation of the feminine. He also persuaded the Western emperor, Constans I, to exert pressure on Constantius so that he could return to Alexandria, and Constantius was forced to acquiesce after Stephen of Antioch was found guilty of hiring a prostitute to compromise an elderly
Western bishop (Barnes, 1993: 87).

Five years later, after Constans was murdered by the usurper Magnentius, Magnentius tried to win the support of the Nicene bishops of the East. Athanasius remained publicly loyal to Constantius but was likely in private communication with Magnentius, an assumption which Constantius used as a justification for banishing him. The patriarch was forced to flee from Alexandria while conducting a service at the Church of Theonas in 356 (1993: 119). He lived first in the desert, then in hiding in Alexandria, and again in the desert. The dux Artemius searched the Pachomian monasteries while Athanasius was in Alexandria, and while Athanasius was in the Pachomian monasteries he searched Alexandria where he tortured the virgin EUDAEMONIS who had given him lodging (1993: 121-122).

The Homoeans were meanwhile struggling to distinguish themselves from the Anomoeans. Aetius was the founder and Eunomius the leader of Anomoeanism which attempted to synthesize Aristotelian logic with Christian and Platonic thought. Aetius had studied theology in Anazarbus with its bishop Athanasius and in Tarsus with the presbyters Antonius and Leontius who introduced him to the idea that God was comprehensible. Aetius had an ambition to be a debater, but in Cilicia he was so overmastered by a Gnostic in debate that he contemplated suicide, an act from which he was dissuaded only by a vision. The vision was fortuitous, and when Aetius again found himself in the ring in Alexandria he soundly thrashed the Manichaean Aphthonius (Kopecek, 1979(1): 74). His stay in Alexandria, then the domain of Gregory, was trebly encouraging. He learned logic and dialectic from the Aristotelians and studied medicine with the renowned Sopolis. The study of medicine in late antiquity should be regarded as primarily educative in that, as in the case of the unorthodox medical text the *Timaeus*, it brought the student face to face with the mire of life. When his former teacher Leontius was elected to succeed the disgraced Stephen, Aetius returned to Antioch to serve as his deacon, but the lay ascetics Diodore of Tarsus and Flavian pressured Leontius to defrock Aetius who returned to Alexandria. Leontius conciliated the ascetics still further by allowing them to lead the antiphonal songs at the martyria, but he continued to appoint only Arians to clerical posts (1979(1): 99-100).
Aetius, far from languishing in Alexandria, was becoming recognized as the leader of the Anomoeans. He frequently appealed to the Gospel of John to defend his subordinationism, particularly to John 14:28 in which Christ told the disciples, “My Father is greater than I” (1979(1): 275-276). When the Homoiousian Basil of Ancyra denounced Aetius to the Caesar Gallus, Gallus was intent on meeting the theologian who so impressed him that he charged him with the hopeless task of restoring his brother Julian the Apostate to Christianity. The Neoplatonist Julian was friends not only with Aetius but with the new Alexandrian patriarch George who had once been his teacher (1979(1): 140-141). Their friendship underscores the philosophical affiliations between Platonism and Arianism which alike denied to matter the dignity of the spirit. In Alexandria Aetius became the teacher of Eunomius who would give his name to the Anomoean movement and earn the sobriquet of ‘logic chopper.’ Originally a shorthand writer Eunomius was educated in Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria. After the death of Leontius he traveled with Aetius to Antioch where the latter was reinvested with the diaconate by Leontius’ successor Eudoxius (Barnes, 1993: 137).

In 359 the emperor, alleging that only Homoeanism could defeat Anomoeanism, convened two councils, an Eastern council in Seleucia and a Western council in Ariminum (Chadwick, 2001: 281). The Council of Constantinople of the following year, which published a statement that would become the creed of the northern barbarians, exiled Aetius and installed Eudoxius in Constantinople and, paradoxically, Eunomius in Cyzicus. In his inaugural sermon in Constantinople Eudoxius quipped that the Father is impious, the Son pious, because the Son reverences the Father while the Father has no one to reverence (Socrates, Hist. Eccl. 2.43) (Schaff, 2004(II, 2): 73). It was not his most outlandish remark. In Antioch he had presented a deliberately absurd account of God in the act of procreation with the dual purpose of denying that the Son was literally God’s Son and of distancing the Father from matter and the body (Chadwick, 2001: 275).

As bishop of Cyzicus, Eunomius taught Homoeanism with mental reservation, but he did not practice triple immersion when he baptized; he immersed only once in the name of the death of Christ. He was soon tricked into disclosing his Anomoeanism by dissembling Homoiousian clergymen (Kopecek, 1979(2): 393). Constantius ordered him to stand trial in Constantinople, a trial in which he dazzled everyone with his dialectical skill. In a subsequent sermon he insisted that the Virgin Mary did not remain a virgin after the birth of Jesus and alleged that the Son is the slave of the Father and the Spirit the slave of the Son, a teaching
that is reminiscent of Origen’s increasingly subordinate Trinity (1979(2): 396; Dillon, 1990(21): 20).

Eunomius might have retained his bishopric, but he refused to condemn Aetius and voluntarily resigned from his post though he continued to direct the Anomoean movement which was becoming more of a school than a religion. The Anomoeans were fiercely opposed by the Homoeans who mocked them as heaven-walkers since they claimed men could know God as much as God knew Himself. The Homoeans tended to emphasize the deity of Christ more than the Anomoeans did. Demophilus almost anticipated Eutychianism by saying that Christ’s humanity was commingled with His deity just as a pint of milk thrown into the ocean becomes one with the ocean (Kopecek, 1979(2): 435). At the same time the Anomoeans tended to put the Son at a higher ontological level than the Homoeans who wanted to keep Him at a lower level both to ensure the salvation of the human race and to establish a prophylactic mediator between God and the material world.

After the death of Constantius, Julian the Apostate recalled the Nicene bishops exiled by his predecessor in the hope that they and the Arians would destroy each other. The patriarch George, unpopular with the Homoousians and the pagans alike for his cruelty, was murdered by the Alexandrians before the return of the venerable Athanasius (Barnes, 1993: 155). The latter had been hiding with an unnamed virgin, a phenomenon similar to one we have observed with Plotinus and Origen (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 9; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.17) (Plotinus, 1991: cix; Schaff, 2004(II, 1): 264). When Athanasius took up his duties again his attempts at reconciliation with the Homoiousians were so displeasing to the emperor that he was reexiled. Julian explained his inconsistency by asserting that he had allowed bishops to return to their cities but not to their posts, and he hired two assassins to kill Athanasius (Schaff, 1968: 888).

There are two legends relating to Julian’s death which vividly portray the soul of late antiquity and particularly its supernatural bent. The spirit of Mercurius, a martyred soldier of the Decian persecution, became so incensed with Julian’s blasphemies that it vowed to destroy him. Basil the Great was vouchsafed a vision of the ethereal Mercurius slaying the emperor and sent word to the martyrium of Edfû where it was discovered that the spear in the sculpture was missing (Budge, 1977(5): 826-827). The second legend has Basil reading a tablet which contained a picture of Mercurius with his spear. The picture disappeared for an
hour, and when it returned the spear’s tip was red with blood (1977(5): 1186-1187).

Athanasius was recalled by the emperor Jovian. After Jovian’s death Valens became the emperor of the East and Valentinian the emperor of the West. Valens reinstated the creed of 360 and, although he was less vigorous in suppressing Homoousianism than Constantius had been, he exiled Athanasius for a brief time. Athanasius’ name had by then become synonymous with Nicene Christianity. He was also rumored to possess prophetic ability which his enemies attributed to the work of evil spirits and his friends to his nearness to God. He had indeed mellowed toward the end of his life. He attacked the Apollinarians with less zeal than he had the Arians, and he was willing to admit those with only a modest theological understanding into the orthodox fold. He was nonetheless out of touch with the new theological controversies, and it was left to Basil of Caesarea to lead the Nicene fight against Anomoeanism (Jurgens, 1979(2): 11-12).

5.4.3 Summary

The late antique ethos of dislike for matter and the body is evidenced in the Arian period by an emphasis on the evil nature of life, the distrust of the sociopolitical world, asceticism, and an interest in the supernatural. We might expect Arianism to have less in common with the world-denying ethos of late antiquity than Homoousianism since the Arian Savior was on a closer metaphysical plane to mankind than was his Nicene counterpart. However, as we saw earlier, the reason for positioning the Son below the Father was precisely because of hatred for matter. Arius’ Platonic affiliations can be shown by the fact that he called the Father Monad and the Son Dyad, and like Clement of Alexandria he postulated two Logoi beneath God. Asterius the Sophist, an early Arian, refused to class the Son with created things, not so much to honor Him as to establish an intermediary between God and the evil material world. The *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum* demonstrates that a God underneath God was required to descend to the squalor of earthly existence. It is understandable that a Neoplatonist like Julian the Apostate would be friendly with the Homoean patriarch George; but Platonism was not adopted solely by the Arians, and there is a Plotinian undercurrent to Athanasius’ claim that for the eye to see the sun it must become sunlike.
It stands to reason that Arius’ followers would be uncomfortable with the label Arian after their founder’s death in a water closet. Related to this repelled fascination for matter is Eudoxius of Constantinople’s denial that the Son was literally God’s Son since God would otherwise be placed perilously close to the physical act of generation. Some of late antiquity’s disparagement of the feminine, linked with the material world by the Gnostics, is in evidence in Athanasius’ censure of Arianism as effete.

The late antique distrust of the political world is given the fullest vindication in the various ways the emperors treated their subjects: the Arian emperors persecuted the Nicenes and the pagans, and Julian the Apostate persecuted the Nicenes and the Arians and sent out assassins after Athanasius. The age’s asceticism, practiced by Christians and non-Christians alike, is detected by Constantine’s repeal of the disabilities Augustus had aimed against celibates and the childless. We find Arius living in caves outside Alexandria and Athanasius going into the desert to visit Anthony. This new world, blatantly opposed to that of the classical period, is also reflected by the monk Ammonius’ refusal to visit any of the sites of Rome but for the tombs of Peter and Paul. The late antique interest in the supernatural as over against the sensible is given utterance in the beliefs that Athanasius used Arsenius’ hand for magical practices, that Anthony and Athanasius had prophetic abilities, and that Basil of Caesarea was aware of Julian’s death while it was happening.

### 5.5 The Post-Nicene Fathers

#### 5.5.1 Epiphanius of Salamis

It is now time to investigate the post-Nicene fathers’ relationship to the ethos of late antiquity. We will begin with the figure of Epiphanius of Salamis who was in many respects more of a heresy hunter than a church father. He was born in a village southwest of Jerusalem which was situated near the tomb of the Hebrew prophet Habakkuk. As a young man in Egypt he was persuaded by Gnostic women to attend one of their deplorable rituals and reported the group to the patriarch of Alexandria who expelled eighty of them from the city (Foerster, 1972(1): 325). He practiced asceticism in the desert and became the abbot of a Palestinian monastery in which capacity he unmasked an old and popular ex-presbyter and Gnostic named Peter, a hopeful glimpse of things to come (Dechow, 1988: 37). In 367 he was consecrated bishop of Salamis and devoted much of his time to the eradication of heresy.
For all his fanaticism Epiphanius possessed a reputation for holiness, and on his passing through Jerusalem with its patriarch John, the citizens crowded around him to kiss his feet and touch the hem of his cloak. On the same pilgrimage, while he was in the Palestinian village of Anablatha, Epiphanius saw a church curtain bearing an image of Christ or a saint and in his iconoclastic zeal he tore it down and promised the church that he would send it a worthier replacement (1988: 393). His iconoclasm derived from his understanding of the Old Testament injunction to refrain from the making of graven images, but he accepted the symbolism of stones since it was found in the gems mounted on the ephod and breastplate of the Jewish high priest (Exodus 28:9-21).

Epiphanius did not write in the accomplished Attic Greek of the Cappadocians but in what has been described as an elevated Koine, yet he wrote more tortuously than the New Testament writers and his meaning sometimes eludes scholars (Young, Ayres & Louth, 2004: 286). His *Panarion*, or *Medicine Chest*, was intended to supply antidotes for those unfortunate enough to have been stung by one of the eighty serpents of heresy which he compared to the eighty concubines of the Song of Solomon (6:8). He listed four pre-Christian heresies, based on the statement of the apostle Paul that in Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian nor Scythian (Colossians 3:11) (2004: 287). From these four “mother heresies” stem sixteen pre-Christian heresies and sixty Christian heresies including Gnostic and tritheistic heresies, Mariolatry, and Messalianism. The culminating heresy was that of Origen, a character for whose anathematization he obsessively labored. Some of what he attacked was not actually found in Origen’s writings but consisted of caricatures of Origenist doctrines taught by the Hieracites and the Melchizedekians who represented what might be called the Origenist left. Hieracas preached a fleshless resurrection that was very much in keeping with the late antique desire to escape the body. His speculative frame of mind can be shown by the fact that while Origen identified the Old Testament figure Melchizedek with an angel, Hieracas equated him with the Holy Spirit (Dechow, 1988: 118-119).

Until Epiphanius the Origenist monks of Egypt coexisted peaceably with the orthodox and Anthropomorphite monks. Even Anthony had something of an Origenist dream in seeing winged souls flying into paradise and numbered the Origenist Cronius among his associates (1988: 98). Epiphanius was not an Anthropomorphite, that is he did not think of God in naively anthropomorphic terms, but he preferred Anthropomorphism to Origenism whose hatred of the body he recognized as heretical. He engaged the intractable Jerome in his
campaign against Origen; Jerome tried, at first unsuccessfully, to convince Theophilus of Alexandria to persecute the Origenists, the most prominent of whom were the Tall Brothers.

The Tall Brothers—Ammonius, Dioscorus, Eusebius, and Euthymius—were monks and brothers of unusual stature and intelligence (Socrates, *Hist. Eccl. 6.7*) (Schaff, 2004(II, 2): 143). They had been banished to Diocaesarea by the emperor Valens in 374. Ammonius, who is said to have memorized the whole of the Old and New Testaments, was the eldest and most famous of the Tall Brothers. His cell contained a large library in which he perused six million lines in the writings of Origen, Didymus the Blind, Pierius, and Stephen of Thebes (Dechow, 1988: 167). He so greatly desired to remain a monk that he cut off his ear so he would be blemished and hence unacceptable for the priesthood, and he threatened to cut off his tongue to disqualify himself for the bishopric (Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl. 6.30*) (Schaff, 2004(II, 2): 368). In Ammonius we therefore see the asceticism of late antiquity carried to an extreme limit. Evagrius said he had never seen a man more free from passion than Ammonius, and in fact many of the desert monastics, in contrast to the clerics, seem to have been free from anger and vice.

The Anthropomorphite monks cannot be included in this generalization. Theophilus’ Easter letter of 399 had condemned them for their theological errors, and the Anthropomorphites convened on Alexandria in a rage and threatened the patriarch’s life. Theophilus, who eight years earlier had inflamed monkish ruffians to destroy the temple of Serapis (Finneran, 2005: 99), recanted and told the monks, “In seeing you I behold the face of God,” and afterwards, having a new and benign enemy to persecute, he turned on the Origenists (Socrates, *Hist. Eccl. 6.7*) (Schaff, 2004(II, 2): 142-143). Theophilus ordered the expulsion of three hundred monks from Egypt and burned Ammonius’ library. Fifty of the monks went to Constantinople and sought refuge with John Chrysostom (*Hist. Eccl. 6.9*) (2004(II, 2): 144-145).

It was to Constantinople that Theophilus dispatched the aged Epiphanius who refused to greet its patriarch or pray for the emperor’s dying son until the Origenist monks were expelled. Chrysostom sent his emissary Serapion to convince Epiphanius of the injustice of his behavior. Epiphanius made an unsuccessful attempt to heal the emperor’s son and agreed to speak with the Tall Brothers. When the monks claimed they admired his writings Epiphanius had to admit that he had read none of theirs and repaired to his ship, dying on the return
voyage to Salamis (Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.* 8.15) (2004(II, 2): 408-409). Ammonius and Dioscorus died from the strain of the controversy the same year, and Theophilus, who had forgotten Origenism in his new quarrel with Chrysostom, was reconciled with the remaining Tall Brothers.

5.5.2 John Chrysostom

Chrysostom, Epiphanius’ younger contemporary, was born in Antioch, the second child and only son of the civil servant Secundus who died when he was a boy. His mother Anthusa, although a Christian, did not hesitate to send her son to study with the sophist Libanius and the philosopher Andragathius (Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.3) (2004(II, 2): 138). Libanius was responsible for nurturing Chrysostom’s oratorical skills and lamented on his deathbed that he could not succeed him as teacher of rhetoric because Melitius, the patriarch of Antioch, had had a greater influence on him. Libanius was a pagan, but, like many Greeks and Romans of his day, he was halfhearted in his paganism.

It was because of Libanius that Chrysostom would become known to posterity by his epithet *Chrysostomos*, Golden-mouthed; but even in his lifetime he was called “the full-toned trumpet of the Holy Spirit” and “the golden lyre of the Holy Spirit.” It was his initial plan to become an imperial clerk, an office that was often a springboard to the senatorship, but Melitius had other ideas for him and Chrysostom renounced not only his aspirations to the senatorship but theatergoing, swearing, joking, and cursing. He was given the office of lector (*anagnōstēs*) by Melitius: he could read the Scriptures and call the people to prayer but could not preach or distribute the sacraments (Neander, 1845: 14). He wished to become a monk, but his mother forbade this. Her house therefore became his monastery, and it was one in which he kept almost totally silent to avoid the habit of slander with which he often taxed himself.

When Melitius was banished by Valens, Diodore of Tarsus took his place as Chrysostom’s spiritual mentor (1845: 15). Diodore was the official father of Antiochene theology which had its roots in the patriarch Eustathius who condemned Arianism for denying that Christ had a human soul. Two further students of Libanius—Theodore of Mopsuestia and Maximus of Seleucia—joined Chrysostom in Diodore’s ascetic school (*askētērion*) (Young, Ayres & Louth, 2004: 343). For a time Theodore contemplated marriage to the young Hermione, but
Chrysostom, in letters that are almost unbearable to read by virtue of their tyrannical sanctity, dissuaded him from spurning the monastic life (Schaff, 2004(I, 9): 91-116). Theodore would come to exhibit an almost Protestant streak and averred that the Song of Solomon should not be interpreted allegorically, a position that went against the late antique spirit both in its literalism and its rejection of extreme asceticism (Wright, 2005: xxvi).

The occultism of late antiquity is illustrated by the story that during Valens’ reign, when Antioch was filled with soldiers who were under the emperor’s orders to search for books of magic and divination and kill those who possessed them, Chrysostom and a friend were walking near the banks of the Orontes when his friend saw a roll of paper floating on the river and retrieved it; the roll was covered with magical characters. Chrysostom’s friend, hearing the approach of a group of soldiers, hid the roll in his tunic, but neither he nor Chrysostom was searched (Neander, 1845: 24-25).

Chrysostom’s friend Basil surpassed him in asceticism until he was shamed into following his example. As the office of bishop was often vacant the two vowed never to accept a bishopric unless it was at the same time, but Chrysostom deceived Basil when a bishopric was offered to him and Basil innocently took his (1845: 22-23). Not long after this incident Chrysostom’s mother died and so freed him to commence a more austere life. He and his fellow monastics, who were under the direction of the abbot Syrus, lived in separate cells (*kalubai*). Their diet was bread and water, and they wore linen tunics and coats of camel or goat hair.

It was during this time that Chrysostom committed much of the New Testament to memory, but as his life was not sufficiently rigorous he took up his abode in a cave where he did not lie down even at night. One of his fellow monks, who had laid equally demanding austerities on himself, fell victim to a condition that caused him to tremble and foam at the mouth and sometimes lose consciousness (1845: 39). His condition presents a darker side of the late antique ethos than we are accustomed to encountering. The monastic life permanently ruined Chrysostom’s own health, and he was easily persuaded to reenter society, eventually being ordained a deacon by the reinstated Melitius and five years later a presbyter by Melitius’ successor Flavian. Flavian was a wealthy Antiochene who inherited his father’s large estate but, as was typical of his time, he continued to live with extreme simplicity while helping the poor and the sick (Wilken, 1983: 10).
Chrysostom does not seem to have enjoyed writing treatises, and his existing letters are somewhat wooden. He shone only in his sermons, almost as though he accepted Plato’s theory in the *Phaedrus* (275D-E) (Plato, 1960: 565-567) that the living word was superior to the written word. In his biblical interpretation he was opposed to allegory but not *theōria*, the contemplation of Scripture’s deeper meaning (Young, Ayres & Louth, 2004: 345-346). On occasions he would give such a ‘theoretical’ slant to his exegesis, for instance when he said that the five foolish virgins, who seem to be ubiquitous in our study, sinned by lacking the oil of charity and almsgiving (*Hom. 78*) (Schaff, 2004(I, 10): 470).

Chrysostom preached twice a week, usually in the early morning because of the warm climate, and soon gained fame for his eloquence (Neander, 1845: 110). His first sermon was flowery, rhetorical, humble, and overladen with praise for Melitius and Flavian (Wilken, 1983: 10). A year later, after a tax riot in which statues of the emperor Theodosius and his family had been torn down and Flavian had gone to Constantinople to plead for mercy on the citizens of Antioch, Chrysostom calmed the congregation, which had suddenly grown larger than usual, with his message of warning and consolation. Libanius also appealed to the emperor, but his and Flavian’s pleas for mercy were less persuasive than those of the ascetic Macedonius who reminded the emperor that men were the immortal images of God and were more valuable than statues (*Theodoret, Hist. Eccl. 5.19*) (Schaff, 2004(II, 3): 146).

After the crisis passed the Antiochenes who had heard Chrysostom often came to his church, and Chrysostom was forced to warn his parishioners against pickpockets (Chadwick, 2001: 485). Sometime afterwards he was forcibly installed by the emperor Arcadius as patriarch of Constantinople at the suggestion of Arcadius’ eunuch Eutropius. Chrysostom never forgave Eutropius who, although he had recently supported a law that denied criminals the right of sanctuary in holy places, was forced to seek refuge in Chrysostom’s church when he fell from grace. Chrysostom gave Eutropius sanctuary but preached a sermon critical of his past life. The eunuch was convinced to leave the church by the authorities who gave a pledge that his life be preserved, a pledge they soon violated (*Socrates, Hist. Eccl. 6.5*) (Schaff, 2004(II, 2): 140).
So many flocked to hear Chrysostom’s sermons that the Great Church was filled with those who were not normally churchgoers but devotees of the theater and the hippodrome. As at Antioch his pulpit was in the center of the nave, two or three feet higher than the ground. There was no podium or desk and in fact nothing to separate the speaker from his listeners (Wilken, 1983: 105). His sermons were often applauded, including his fruitless diatribes against the use of applause in the church.

For all his oratorical success Chrysostom was out of his element in Constantinople, and the partially hostile historian Socrates described him as unbendingly rigid (Hist. Eccl. 6.3) (Schaff, 2004(II, 2): 139). His predecessor, the ex-senator Nectarius, had given elaborate feasts, and he was expected to follow suit but did not; in this case he was more in tune with the ethos of his age than Nectarius. He alienated the aristocrats and especially the empress Eudoxia by his repeated denunciations of their luxuriant and sometimes cruel lives (Schaff, 1968: 703), but his defeat was to come not through morality but theology.

Although he was not an Origenist Chrysostom had installed an Origenist clergyman and was amicable to Origen’s conception of God which he felt corrected the too literal representation of the Anthropomorphites. If the truth be told he was more sympathetic to Origenism than his fellow Antiochenes, and he alone was to escape censure by the Second Council of Constantinople which set the Eastern church on a course that veered sharply towards Monophysitism (Sabo, 2008: 133-134) and one more faithful to the otherworldly spirit of late antiquity. Nor was Chrysostom too scrupulous to harbor the Origenist monks who had been banished from Egypt by Theophilus. Theophilus came to Constantinople with no less a purpose than Chrysostom’s removal, being “laden with bribes like a beetle laden with dung” according to Palladius (Chadwick, 2001: 494). But Chrysostom refused to write a formal denunciation of Origen as Theophilus requested and declined the emperor’s order to attend the Synod of the Oak which was presided over by his enemies (2001: 496).

The outcome of the synod was that Chrysostom was defrocked and banished on charges that included treason against the emperor, hostility to Epiphanius of Salamis, and pride as evidenced by bathing and eating alone. Three days later he was recalled by the empress who had taken fright because of what she believed to be a supernatural earthquake (Schaff, 1968: 703), and his parishioners triumphantly bore him to the Great Church. For two months he and the empress exchanged fulsome compliments, but when the empress erected a marble statue
of herself near his church he spoke from his pulpit, with a characteristic ignorance of the politic, “Again Herodias rages, again she raves, again she dances, again she demands the head of John upon a charger” (1968: 704).

Chrysostom’s female friend, the deaconess Olympias, was intimidated, his supporters were imprisoned and tortured, and he himself was exiled to a small town in the Taurus Mountains. Three years later he was ordered to an even more remote place of banishment on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, but he died en route (Chadwick, 2001: 497-498).

5.5.3 Jerome

Jerome, one of the last of the great church fathers in the West, has become a universal type of all cantankerous righteousness. Though born into a Christian home and touring the catacombs every Sunday as part of his religious exercises he was at first more interested in Plautus than in the uncouth Old Testament prophets (Rand, 1928: 106). Unable to follow the example of a friend who had consigned himself to a rocky island in the Mediterranean he decided to live in the Syrian desert among hermits who loaded their bodies with chains. He set up his home in a cave and slept on its earth, not touching cold water or anything cooked but still dreaming of the revels of dancing girls (1928: 107). He consoled himself that he was running after God in the fragrance of His perfumes and wrote to a friend, “Here I see a strangely brighter light; here I rejoice to throw off the burden of flesh and soar to the pure radiance of heaven” (Kelly, 1975: 48).

It was while in the desert that Jerome had a dream of Christ which reveals more about him than it does about Christ. In the dream Christ accused Jerome of being a Ciceronian rather than a Christian and, reminding him that where a man’s treasure was there his heart was also, flogged him until the angels interceded for Jerome out of pity for his youth. The flogging was so severe that when he awoke the next morning he could still feel the pain of the stripes. This dream proved so traumatic that for fifteen years he refrained from opening the covers of any secular book (1975: 43) although he continued to make allusions to classical literature on every eighth page he wrote, calling them up from memory as through the mists of an ancient dream. Classical literature was a vanishing dream not only for Jerome but increasingly for the age in which he lived.
After a few years Jerome returned to civilization, first to Antioch and then to Constantinople and Rome. Although his chief object of bitter wit was wealthy Christian widows he could not refrain from attacking his fellow monks, disclaiming there was any holiness in a beard as a goat must then be the holiest of God’s creatures (Rand, 1928: 115). He was on particularly good terms with Pope Damasus whose election was bitterly and murderously contested but who had the good sense to urge Jerome to undertake a revision of the Latin Scriptures that became the Vulgate (Douglas, 1978: 528). Jerome might have succeeded Damasus as pope had not controversy erupted after the young widow Blaesilla died of austerities he recommended (Rand, 1928: 116). Disillusioned and angry he left Rome and set up a monastery and a convent in Bethlehem with the help of Blaesilla’s mother Paula (Schaff, 2004(II, 6): xviii).

The monastery drew monks from as far away as India, Persia, and Ethiopia, but Jerome warned a friend that living in the Holy Land would do him no spiritual good because the cities were filled with crowds, harlots, actors, and the basest sort of comedians. In Bethlehem he wrote the biographies of three desert ascetics—Paul the Hermit, Hilarion, and Malchus—all of which were influenced by Athanasius’ biography of Anthony (2004(II, 6): 299-318). We are indebted to him for our knowledge of the practices of these men. The legendary episodes at least were not of his making, Jerome merely handing down the common opinion.

Jerome had once been attracted to the theology of Origen whose voluminous output filled him with an envious respect (Chadwick, 2001: 135), but after he had been won against Origenism by Epiphanius of Salamis he attempted to persuade John of Jerusalem to join in the attack. When the Origenist monks were expelled from Egypt they were therefore unable to gain John’s sympathy and took refuge with Chrysostom in Constantinople. Jerome’s friend Rufinus, who like him associated himself with a celibate female companion, Melania, thought Epiphanius’ allegation of heresy against Origen extreme and postulated that Origen’s work had been overwritten by heretics. He published a laundered translation of Origen’s *De Principiis* (Roberts & Donaldson, 2004(4): 237-382) and earned Jerome’s enmity to the point that Jerome would rejoice in his death in Sicily, so close to the remains of the Neoplatonist Porphyry (Rand, 1928: 110).
In his attacks on Origen and Rufinus, Jerome was a sterling example of established and intolerant orthodoxy, and he availed himself of all contrivances that came to his hand, including lying for the truth. He also engaged in controversies with Vigilantius who was skeptical of the efficacy of relics, with Helvidius who denied the postpartum virginity of Mary, and with Jovinian who thought that marriage was no worse than virginity but who still practiced asceticism (Douglas, 1978: 551). This was not enough for Jerome who called Jovinian a modern Epicurus wantoning in his garden with his favorites of both sexes. In keeping with the spirit of his age he wrote, “Whenever I see a dandy, or a man who is no stranger to a hairdresser, with his hair nicely done and his cheeks all aglow, I know that he belongs to your herd, or rather grunts in concert with your swine. You have in your army the full-bellied, the well-dressed, the luxurious.” “To our flock belong the sad, the pale, the poorly dressed” (Pagels, 1988: 95).

Jerome engaged in a minor controversy with Augustine, tellingly reminding the bishop of the respect due an older man by a younger one and warning him that in his next letter he would not be so courteous, but thanks to Augustine’s tractability the controversy was short-lived. Augustine had been uncertain of the wisdom of Jerome’s translating from the Hebrew Bible instead of the Septuagint, especially with his emendation of ‘gourd’ to ‘vine’ in Jonah 4:6-7, and he did not fear, as Jerome did, the impending fall of the Roman Empire (Rand, 1928: 111; Armstrong, 1967: 409, 411). If the truth be told, Jerome was more compassionate than Augustine in the matter of human suffering unleashed by the barbarians, particularly the White Huns who had overrun the eastern provinces (Kelly, 1975: 204).

5.5.4 Ambrose

Jerome did not include Ambrose in his Illustrious Men, and it was left to Augustine to convince Ambrose’ stenographer to write his biography. Perhaps Jerome was jealous; he found philosophy difficult while Ambrose read Plotinus and Porphyry in the original. Jerome claimed to be widely read in Greek philosophy, but it appears that he knew of it only as it was diluted in the writings of Cicero, Brutus, and Seneca.
Ambrose’ entrance into the clerical life was something of an accident. After the death of Auxentius, the old bishop of Milan, a dispute arose between the Nicenes and the Arians as to who would succeed him. When Ambrose, then a governor, hurried to mitigate the controversy a child cried out that he should be made bishop, and everyone assembled took up its cry (Rand, 1928: 74). Ambrose, who was not yet baptized, tried to flee the city, but he at last yielded. He was baptized and within a week was put through all the clerical stations: from doorkeeper to presbyter to bishop (Esler, 2000(2): 1180-1181). Before his conversion the young Augustine was impressed with Ambrose’ ascetic imperviousness to the temptations that went with his high office. Once, when he asked him about certain church customs, Ambrose replied that when he was in Rome he followed the Roman style (Augustine, Ep. 36.14; 54.2) (Schaff, 2004(I, 1): 270, 300-301); but Augustine was initially unable to speak to Ambrose because of the throng of parishioners who surrounded him and whose spiritual infirmities he attended and because of Ambrose’ reading habits. Whenever Ambrose read he was so intent on his reading that he never observed his visitors who did not have the heart to disturb him in his moment of mental recreation (Conf. 6.3) (Augustine, 2006: 97-98).

Nor did Augustine fail to notice Ambrose’ considerable leadership abilities. When Justina, the Arian mother of the boy emperor Valentinian II, persecuted the Christians, Ambrose’ parishioners stayed day and night in the church ready to die with their bishop who instituted the singing of antiphonal hymns to give them courage (Conf. 9.7) (2006: 172-173). He ended the impasse with Justina by claiming to have been granted a vision revealing the resting place of the second-century martyrs Protasius and Gervasius whose bodies were unearthed and brought to his basilica where they healed everyone who touched them (Conf. 9.7) (2006: 173). His vision and the miracles that followed it reflect the late antique interest in the supernatural. Four years later Ambrose refused the holy sacrament to Theodosius I until the emperor did public penance for his authorization of the massacre of seven thousand Thessalonians (Esler, 2000(2): 1194-1195).

Ambrose’ influence on the young Augustine was not restricted to his courage and virtue. He convinced Augustine that belief was necessary to understanding, that allegorism could be used to combat the Manichaean claim of the crudeness of the Old Testament, and that God and the soul were immaterial, a fact not widely recognized in the Western church thanks to the Stoic tendencies of Tertullian (Douglas, 1978: 961). Ambrose had been influenced by Basil’s Hexaemeron and Origen’s commentary on the Song of Solomon. He plagiarized as
much as Jerome, but the latter, desiring to show up his culpability, translated Didymus the Blind’s treatise on the Holy Spirit which Ambrose had relied on for his own treatise (Kelly, 1975: 142-144). In harmony with the ethos of his time Ambrose was favorably affected by the Platonists whom he considered the aristocrats of thought though he was wary of the Platonic system as a whole. From the First Alcibiades he found that man was equated with his soul (130C) (Plato, 1955: 201), and from the treatises of Porphyry he learned that the body was a ragged garment destined to be cast off in the soul’s upward ascent, no high praise for the former entity.

5.5.5 Augustine

5.5.5.1 Early Life and Thought

Augustine was the last great philosopher of the early Western church. The Manichaean Secundinus claimed he was a man who was armed against everything but affirmed nothing; yet regardless of what one thinks of his personality only the hardest soul can fail to be moved by the Confessions which contains the only detailed account of the childhood of a great man of antiquity. It is almost as though Augustine doubted he would survive the grave and so wrote this touching recollection of his past and in the process immortalized his friends, his concubine, his son, and his mother. He was born in Thagaste in North Africa to a Roman father and a Christian mother. His mother Monica was likely of Berber descent, Mon being a Libyan deity. Augustine himself was to follow the Berber custom of deeming a brother more important than a son, and his own son’s name, Adeodatus, was a Christian form of the Berber Iatanbaal (Frend, 1971: 230).

In the Confessions he paints in the harshest light his youthful theft of the pears, justifying his belief in human depravity since the theft did not have even the false show of beauty by which sin tempts one (Conf. 2.6) (Augustine, 2006: 31). He absolved the sins of others, even those of Catiline who was said to have been so stupidly and savagely cruel that he practiced cruelty and evil even when he had nothing to gain by them, because he did not love his crimes as crimes but for fear that his resolution would slacken (Conf. 2.5) (2006: 30). Augustine’s belief in human depravity reflected the late antique emphasis on the evil of life, albeit transmuted to serve a Christian purpose. Both the Aeneid and the tragic plays he attended during his student days in Carthage, plays which laid up a mirror to his own misery, he came
to view as sacrifices to the fallen angels.

As a young man pursuing a legal career, and realizing that the less honest he was the more fame he would achieve, Augustine became a leader in the school of rhetoric at Carthage. He was completely without humility though not without envy of the riotous students and pity for their victims (Conf. 3.3) (2006: 40). During this time he came across a copy of Cicero’s now lost Hortensius in which Cicero answers an opponent of philosophy with its fervent defense (Conf. 3.4) (2006: 40). Hortensius turned Augustine irrevocably from literature to philosophy because it was not Cicero’s elegance of speech that moved him but his message. He read the New Testament which initially repelled him by its simplicity and wrote his first work, The Beautiful and the Fitting (Conf. 4.13) (2006: 66-67). Deceiving his mother he left Carthage for Italy where he passed from Manichaeanism to Neoplatonism, thanks in part to his association with a courteous though unlearned Manichaean bishop and his own disenchantment with astrology.

Augustine often discussed with his friends the cares and troubles of human life and considered with nine of them the prospect of putting up a common household in the clear trust of friendship, but the fact that some of his friends were married and that he himself was living with another woman dashed their proposal (Conf. 6.14) (2006: 112-113). Nonetheless his mother compelled him to put away his concubine, a major source of his sexual guilt, and his loneliness, together with his reading of two verses from Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (13:13-14), converted him to Christianity (Conf. 8.12) (2006: 160).

He passed the months immediately after his conversion with his family and friends in a villa in Cassiciacum (Conf. 9.3) (2006: 166). He was baptized with his short-lived son and his friend Alypius who, though he had once been an avid spectator at the games, had, in the late antique manner, “brought his body so powerfully under control that he could tread the icy soil of Italy with bare feet, which required unusual fortitude” (Conf. 9.6) (2006: 171). In the ensuing days he was deeply moved by the antiphonal singing of the church of Milan. Shortly after his baptism his mother, near death and having gotten her life’s desire in her son’s conversion, took part with Augustine in the ecstatic vision in the harbor town of Ostia (Conf. 9.10) (2006: 178-180), a vision in which traces of Neoplatonism have been found.
Ambrose’ associate Simplicianus had encouraged Augustine’s Neoplatonism, thinking it an ideal medium to lead him from Manichaeanism to Christianity (Douglas, 1978: 906). He had related to him the conversion of a pagan teacher of rhetoric, Marius Victorinus, the translator of Porphyry and other Neoplatonists. Victorinus was reluctant to go to church after he became a Christian, asking Simplicianus, who insisted that he do so, “Is it then the walls that make the Christian?” But he came to make a public confession of faith, to the joy of the assembly and the chagrin of his philosophical friends (Conf. 8.2) (Augustine, 2006: 143-145). Victorinus never got over his Platonic training. The Father was to him the One and the Son the Nous although a Nous sustaining an insubordinate relationship to the Father. The Father was characterized by essence, silence, and rest, the Son by life, word, and action (Armstrong, 1967: 334). The Son, or Logos, is the Form of God, revealing and manifesting the unknowable Father to mankind. As an image of the Logos the human soul is an image of an image. Like the Trinity it has three parts: being, life, and intelligence (esse, vivere, intellegere) (1967: 337).

Although Augustine came to reject Neoplatonism in its entirety, in one of his first productions written after his conversion, his dialogue The Teacher, we find him using Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas to show his son the impossibility of man knowing anything without a priori knowledge (Van Til, 1969: 125). He argues that men cannot communicate with one another if they do not already know the truth. Gestures and vocal tones express more than words which are powerless to convey the deepest realities. All speech, including thought, is recollection, memory bringing to mind the truths of which we are aware and which have words for their signs. Whether one knows or does not know what a word or sign stands for he learns nothing from it. In the biblical story of the fiery furnace we read that three young men triumphed over a wicked king who had caused them to be placed in a burning furnace. We already know what three young men are and what a king and a furnace are. The only thing really gained from the story is the particular names of the young men (1969: 126). Augustine’s argument, indebted to Plato’s Meno, was designed to show that sense knowledge is merely knowledge obtained by pointing the finger at material objects and that it is a lower kind of knowledge than knowledge fished out of the mind itself (1969: 127).
5.5.5.2 The Donatists

In Thagaste Augustine formed a Neoplatonic fellowship called the Servants of God and planned to live the rest of his life in the pursuit of contemplative philosophy (Esler, 2000(2): 1212). To this end he purposefully avoided traveling to cities in which there was a vacancy for bishop, but he made the mistake of visiting the see of Hippo which was held by the aged Valerius. There he was press-ganged into the priesthood (Douglas, 1978: 87). As a priest he founded a monastery which was both the fulfillment of his Servants of God project and a consolidation of his late antique asceticism (Brown, 1988: 395). When he was forty-one he became Valerius’ successor (Esler, 2000(2): 1212), and in this capacity he campaigned against the Manichaeans and, more urgently, against the Donatists who traced their spiritual lineage to the Carthaginian bishop and martyr Cyprian.

Cyprian was looked up to by both the Catholics and the Donatists. On the one hand he affirmed the unity of the Catholic church and urged the readmission of the lapsed. On the other hand he was a follower of Tertullian and recommended penitence and rebaptism. But if Cyprian was the patron of the Donatists, Caecilian was their Antichrist. He had been ordained bishop of Carthage by a supposed traditor of the Diocletian persecution, Felix of Apthungi, and was critical of the fanatical North African cult of the martyrs which celebrated what can be described as the last word in asceticism. Caecilian once rebuked a woman for kissing a martyr’s bone before she received communion (Frend, 1971: 18) and possibly prevented food from reaching imprisoned confessors who had been immoderately provocative (1971: 9). All of this was enough to make the rigorists oppose him and put forth the lector Majorinus as his rival. On his death Majorinus was succeeded by Donatus of Casae Nigrae (Black Huts) (1971: 14).

The emperor Constantine condemned Donatism at the Council of Arles (1971: 159), but the Donatists refused to give up their churches and when Caecilian appealed to the authorities in 317 a massacre occurred which perpetually divided the two churches and convinced the Donatists that the Roman church had replaced the empire (1971: 160). The Donatists possessed the late antique distrust of the political world more emphatically than any other group in our study. Donatus came to be extravagantly revered in North Africa, and men swore by his white hairs (1971: 154). He was a proud figure who celebrated the mysteries alone but who was nonetheless sufficiently politic to admit the Mauritanians, who were against
rebaptism, into the Donatist fold. Donatus and his fellow clergymen were powerful orators and were able to skillfully harness the religious zeal and revenge motives of the Berbers. The most zealous of the Donatists lived in south Numidia, west and south of Carthage, and applied a verse in the Old Latin Bible to their homeland: “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest in the south” (Song of Solomon 1:7) (Augustine, Ep. 93.8; Schaff, 2004(I, 1): 391). The Donatists were in many ways similar to the Protestants: they revered the martyrs, were opposed to the Catholic church, and had their liturgy in Berber rather than Latin. While the Catholic churches in North Africa were often infiltrated by the Manichaeans the Donatist churches remained untainted by the heresy.

In 346 Donatus requested Constans, Constantine’s successor in the West, to make him official bishop of the church of Carthage which he was in essence (Frend, 1971: 177). The imperial notary Macarius was sent to Africa to see if this could be arranged, but the Donatists noted Macarius’ coolness toward them and were easily convinced that he had placed a bust of the emperor on the altar of the Catholic bishop’s church and offered incense to it (1971: 178). The citizens of Bagai put up a resistance to Macarius and were massacred by the imperial soldiers, their bishop also being murdered and thrown into a well. Other prelates were killed, among them Marculus, the greatest of the Donatist martyrs (1971: 179).

The Macarian persecution energized the extreme branch of the Donatists, the Circumcellions, so called from their habit of living around the shrines of the martyrs. The Circumcellions carried metal clubs, or Israels, and traveled with relics of the martyrs which they sometimes sold. In their celebrations they drank and danced and found justification for this in Cyprian who had spoken with approval of Noah’s holy drunkenness (Genesis 9:20-21) (1971: 174-175). More disturbingly they killed Catholic priests, antagonized the pagans, and forced their way into law courts in order to be sentenced to death by apprehensive judges. Since the highest blessing of martyrdom was no longer attainable they often committed suicide by throwing themselves from the cliffs or into water or fire (1971: 175). Sometimes they broke the knees of their opponents, cut out their tongues, or applied lime and vinegar to their eyes. It was not unusual for them to offer themselves up for human sacrifice at pagan festivals or to approach Catholics on the road with the choice of killing or being killed (1971: 175). The Circumcellions ensured that no Donatist would apostasize to Catholicism, but they were officially disowned by the Donatist church. There is a report of a Catholic who was beaten by
a Circumcellion and left in a cage for twelve days and then released by a Donatist bishop (1971: 257-258), but the Catholics generally saw little difference between the Donatists and the Circumcellions who often collaborated.

Donatus was exiled by Constans to Gaul where he appointed the Spaniard Parmenian his successor (1971: 185). Parmenian and other Donatist leaders were allowed to return to North Africa by Julian the Apostate. Their return, and Julian’s insistence that their churches and basilicas be restored to them, led to much bloodshed. The Circumcellions murdered and raped while the more restrained Donatists repossessed their buildings and whitewashed their walls and altars (1971: 190). In an almost deliberate elitism the altars of the Donatists were white as were their tablets on which they wrote their martyrs’ names, perhaps in imitation of the white naming stones of the book of Revelation (2:17) (1971: 176).

There were attempts at reconciliation between the Catholics and the Donatists. Some of the Catholics such as Genethlius and Augustine’s predecessor Valerius were friendly to the Donatists, and there were Donatist moderates like Tyconius who was excommunicated by Parmenian (1971: 193). Tyconius was one of the greatest minds of his day, and numerology was only one of his speculations (1971: 205). Despite his moderation he refused to admit that there were Christians outside of Donatism, but he influenced Augustine’s theology in *The City of God* by his assertion, which brazenly manifested the late antique distrust of the sociopolitical world, that on the one side there were the patriarchs, the prophets, the disciples of Christ, and the Donatists, and on the other side Cain, Herod, Judas, and Caecilian (1971: 316). Similar to Tyconius were the puritanical but nonviolent followers of Rogatus who maintained that when Christ returned he would recognize His followers only in a few villages of Mauritania. But, in contradistinction to Tyconius and Rogatus, there were men like Optatus of Thamugadi who began to turn the Circumcellions into an army that carried not only clubs but swords and spears with which they destroyed the homes of the Catholics and the wealthy (1971: 209-210).

Augustine was the most skillful foe the Donatists would have, but he was unable to defeat them, and Donatism possibly outlasted Catholicism in North Africa (1971: 313-314). Like the Donatists he distrusted the sociopolitical world, but he was prevented from joining them by the Circumcellions who were always ready with some new outrage. He knew of the destruction of the Catholic church of Hasna and knew that the bishop of Bagai had been
beaten with the boards of his own altar by the Circumcellions and left to die in a tower (Corr. Donat. 7) (Schaff, 2004(I, 4): 643).

It was the Circumcellions who convinced Augustine to recommend the forcible reconversion of the Donatists and to complain that the singing issuing from their churches was like the lowing of cattle. In their mass suicides he found the hand of Satan because the tempter had urged Christ to throw himself from the pinnacle of the Jewish temple, and the demon-possessed boy healed by Christ had often thrown himself into water and fire (Matthew 4:5-6; 17:14-16). It was a type of asceticism that even he could not recommend. He tried to beat the Donatists at their own game by making martyrs of his clergy who died at the hands of the Circumcellions. He thought them extremely credulous. “If anyone brings them a lump of earth from the East they will worship it,” he said (Frend, 1971: 232), but he was not always fair when he wrote of the Donatists and falsely claimed that Donatus had originated the practice of rebaptism. Nonetheless he called the Donatists brothers in imitation of Lot who had used the same word for the Sodomites (Genesis 19:7).

5.5.5.3 The City of God

Augustine engaged with more polemical ability against the Pelagians and the Semi-Pelagians (Douglas, 1978: 87) who would probably not have been regarded as heretics in the Eastern church. Jerome has immortalized Pelagius, who was of British origin, as a corpulent dog weighed down with Irish porridge, and neither his supposed corpulence nor his approval of the married state helped advance his cause in Rome. Pelagius developed his theology in response to Manichaeanism, and Augustine found that he had to go back to the Manichaean in order to answer Pelagius (Mirecki & BeDuhn, 2001: 171-172). While Pelagius emphasized man’s free will and courted the possibility that the Christian could be sinless, Augustine, more in tune with the late antique recognition of the evil nature of reality, stressed man’s innate inability to do good.

Augustine had by then come to officially reject Neoplatonism (Van Til, 1969: 135). He continued to entertain a low view of sex, even within marriage and for the purpose of procreation, and urged the married couple to “descend with a certain sadness” to this latter task (Brown, 1988: 426; cf. Markus, 1990: 61), but he had freed himself from much of the metaphysical trappings of the philosophy. When he wrote The City of God he was particularly
unsettled by the Neoplatonic belief that only if things are repeated in cycles can men learn from them, and he poured scorn on the ceaseless alternations of happiness and misery which he found in the writings of Origen and in the frantic escape from these alternations by philosophers who hoped for the complete extinction of the body (Civ. Dei 21.17) (Augustine, 2007: 647). Augustine wrote The City of God in response to Alaric’s sack of Rome in 410 and the claim of the pagans that the Christians’ impiety toward the gods had provoked the sack (Armstrong, 1967: 408). While denying that Christianity had destroyed the empire Augustine did not mourn its fall so that even if it could have been proven that the empire fell because of Christianity it would not have bothered him (1967: 411). The most damning thing about early Christianity, to anyone regretful of the empire’s fall, was its message of withdrawal from the world, a message accepted by both Christians and non-Christians in late antiquity.

In The City of God Augustine divided history into six periods, five of them concerning the Old Testament and the sixth (the millennium) being equated with our own epoch which is to be followed by the eternal Sabbath (1967: 407). He put forward, in a way reminiscent of the Donatists (Frend, 1971: 316), the idea of two cities, the city of God and the earthly city, which are not separated until the Last Judgment. Sometimes Augustine calls them two loves, “one holy, the other impure; one sociable, the other selfish” (Armstrong, 1967: 412). Although he admired the virtues of republican Rome he often identified Rome with the earthly city, as he did the church with the city of God, and unlike Eusebius and Lactantius he did not see much difference between pagan and Christian Rome (1967: 410). He was therefore more consistent with the late antique distrust of the sociopolitical world than they were.

Augustine thought he could find in the story of ancient Israel the conflict between the two cities. He calls the city of God the pilgrim city of King Christ because it lives “like a captive and stranger in the earthly city, though it has already received the promise of redemption, and the gift of the Spirit as the earnest of it” (Civ. Dei 19.17) (Augustine, 2007: 591). Most men are drawn to both cities, but according to Augustine one city eventually wins out in claiming the individual soul. He cautions the inhabitants of the city of God to remember that among her enemies lie hid “those who are destined to be fellow-citizens, that she may not think it a fruitless labor to bear what they inflict as enemies until they become confessors of the faith” (Civ. Dei 1.35) (2007: 186). Ultimately the earthly city will be destroyed, and the city of God will become the holy city, “coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2).
On his deathbed, while Hippo was surrounded by the Arian Vandals, Augustine read psalms that had been hung up on the walls of his room at his request and wept for his sins (Bonner, 2002: 155). He often spoke of his concubine, his son, and his mother, but his last recorded words were a quotation from Plotinus: “One that sets great store by wood and stones or by mortality among mortals cannot yet be proficient, whose estimate of death must be that it is better than life in the body” (Enn. 1.4.7) (Plotinus, 1991: 37; Brown, 1967: 425-426). When Hippo fell the Vandals burned it to the ground, but they spared the basilica which housed his treatises and sermons which encapsulated the end of the age of primitive Christianity and imperial Rome.

5.5.6 Summary

With the post-Nicene fathers, as with the other groups in this study, we descry the ethos of late antiquity manifesting itself in an emphasis on the evil nature of life, a distrust of the sociopolitical world, asceticism, and an interest in the supernatural.

Although Epiphanius of Salamis gave the impression of supporting Anthropomorphitism, which was totally alien to the late antique hatred of the body, he himself did not accept it and regarded it as merely the lesser of two evils. In his time the Origenist Hieracites preached a fleshless resurrection even more explicitly than Origen who often presented his ideas as theories. Epiphanius’ and Theophilus’ war against the Origenist monks was a reaction against the overriding spiritual current of their time, a reaction eloquently summed up in Theophilus’ words to the Anthropomorphite monks who had convened on Alexandria. The danger, however, of Christianity surrendering hook, line, and sinker to an Origenist Platonism was very little, as shown by the Tall Brothers’ ironic admiration of Epiphanius’ writings. Except as a political maneuver to tar Chrysostom, the first Origenist controversy would be forgotten until a second and more violent controversy erupted in the sixth century (Moreschini & Norelli, 2005(2): 577-578).

We have encountered Jerome touring the catacombs every Sunday as a youth, not only to honor the early Christians but to remind him of the fetor of material existence. Ambrose and Augustine brought Platonism firmly into Latin Christianity, and this was in many respects a salutary influence since Tertullian’s Stoic proclivities had led to an ignorance of God’s immaterial nature in Western theology. We find Ambrose indulging in allegorism, ultimately
bequeathed to the Christians by the Middle Platonist Philo, and we also observe him embracing Porphyry’s view that the body was a ragged garment destined to be cast off in the soul’s ascent.

Augustine’s emphasis on human depravity was a recognition of the evil nature of life. It would take him decades to get Neoplatonism out of his system, if ever since his last recorded words were a quotation of Plotinus condemning matter and the body. His vision in the harbor town of Ostia, shared with his dying mother, was Neoplatonic, and in his theology we discern the Western Christians becoming intimately acquainted with Plotinus’ thought. His early dialogue *The Teacher* owes much to Plato’s theory of reminiscence (*anamnēsis*), a teaching also held by the Gnostic Carpocrates (Foerster, 1972(1): 36). The argument of *The Teacher* was such as to deny bodily knowledge the primacy attached to intellectual knowledge, an idea which engages with Ambrose’ and Augustine’s belief that faith was preferable to understanding. A comparable figure was Marius Victorinus, a Christian Platonist who was initially unwilling to go to church. His divine Son has distinct parallels with the Neoplatonic Nous. The Son is an image of the Father and the human soul an image of the Son; as the image of an image, and as an associate of the body, it is less real than either.

The young Augustine’s Neoplatonic fellowship, the Servants of God, can be seen as a faint echo of Plotinus’ desire to create a philosophical society that would be a haven from the political world he distrusted (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 12) (Plotinus, 1991: cxi-cxii). Both Augustine and the Donatists shared this mindset. Augustine commenced *The City of God* in response to pagan claims that Christianity had made the empire fall. In reality the world-denying ethos of late antiquity, shared by pagans and Christians alike, had led to a withdrawal from social institutions and therefore to the disintegration of an admittedly corrupt empire. Augustine distrusted the political world to the extent that he saw no difference between Christian and pagan Rome. This is similar but not identical to the view of the Donatists that the Catholic church had replaced the empire. Unlike Jerome Augustine did not fear the destruction of Rome by the barbarians, and it is ironically apt that when the Vandals destroyed Hippo they spared the basilica which housed his treatises and sermons.
The post-Nicene fathers conscientiously practiced the asceticism of their age. The self-mutilation of the Tall Brother Ammonius speaks for itself. We should also remember Chrysostom’s monastic companion falling victim to a condition that caused him to tremble and foam at the mouth. Jerome took up asceticism in Syria explicitly to “throw off the burden of the flesh,” though he continued to be plagued by visions of dancing girls. When he set up in the Holy Land he was typically irked by the presence of prostitutes. His unfair crusade against Jovinian was launched mainly for ascetic reasons, and his brand of self-abnegation was so severe that a Roman noblewoman died of austerities he recommended. Significantly he attacked wealth and luxury, matter’s glamorous veneer; the well-dressed and the luxurious seemed to him swine. Chrysostom in Constantinople voiced this same attitude but directed it toward sustaining the poor.

Throughout our study we have frequently seen asceticism paired with the supernatural. The contemporary interest in this latter world is revealed by Epiphanius’ acceptance of the popular view that he had healing powers and by Chrysostom’s friend’s discovery of a roll of parchment covered with magical characters.
6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Our study has urged the existence of four criteria operating among Platonists, Gnostics, and Christians in late antiquity: an emphasis on the evil of life, the distrust of the sociopolitical world, asceticism, and an interest in the supernatural. The facts will now be presented for the last time in order to reveal the ethos of late antiquity as one chiefly characterized by the hatred of matter and the body.

6.1 Platonist Manifestations of the Ethos

The Neoplatonists were the Platonists of late antiquity and recognized the evil nature of a life dependent on matter and the body. Hence Plotinus refused to celebrate his birthday and displayed an almost supernatural ability to write without having to reread what he had written before. Despite his attempt to distance himself from the Gnostics, his hatred of matter was much in evidence. Matter was for him evil, disgraceful, and utterly destitute of the beautiful. Porphyry’s hatred of matter was even more pronounced than his master’s, and unlike him he believed the spirit would eventually be able to escape its incarnations in the material world. The later Neoplatonists attempted to protect the One from the evil entity of matter by such techniques as dividing the Demiurge into seven parts, placing a Monad underneath the One, and positioning six Nouses at the upper boundary of the World Soul.

The Neoplatonists recognized not only the natural world but the sociopolitical world as evil. This is revealed mainly by Plotinus who wanted to form an apolitical city of philosophers, praised a senator who had forsaken his occupation, and was profoundly indifferent to civic and moral concerns, though without being unethical. All of the Neoplatonists, especially Proclus, practiced an asceticism that recognized the body as worthless. Their attempt to escape from this entity was reflected by their explorations in the occult world which grew more pronounced as Neoplatonism developed. The evidence thus bears out the observation of hatred for matter and the body as existing among the Platonists of late antiquity.
6.2 Gnostic Manifestations of the Ethos

The Gnostics combined the philosophical interests of the Platonists with the religious mindset of the Christians, and they hated matter and the body more definitely than either. The Gnostic world-creator was more evil than the Platonic Demiurge, and his creation exhibited his evil. The description of the creation of man in the *Apocryphon of John* betrays a certain revulsion at the physical makeup of this being, one that is dramatically opposed by the Gnostic Christ who possessed a phantasmal body. Valentinus’ recognition of the evil nature of reality is expressed in his opinion that the heart of man was thrust violently into the material world and suffered as an inn suffered from its unclean and immoral tenants.

The Gnostics’ recognition of the evil nature of the sociopolitical world in addition to the natural world is portrayed by their elitism and their opinion that martyrdom was an act of casting pearls before swine. Since the Gnostics viewed the body as worthless they practiced either extreme asceticism or extreme licentiousness. Both groups were interested in the supernatural, a realm that was greatly preferable to the material world. The evidence thus demonstrates the Gnostics’ participation in the late antique hatred of matter and the body.

6.3 Early Christian Manifestations of the Ethos

The late antique ethos is also manifested by the ante-Nicene, post-Nicene, and desert fathers and by the Arians. Justin Martyr, Origen, and Arius each expressed his belief in the evil nature of reality by attempting to protect God from matter. This they did by placing the Son at a lower ontological level than the Father. Origen in fact separated the three persons of the Trinity to such an extent that he could aver they were unable to see one another; they were thus similar to the aeons in the system of the Gnostic Basilides. The desert fathers’ belief in the evil nature of reality is revealed by the story of the visitor to Pachomius’ *koinōnia* who wanted to know what biblical figure was privileged to die without giving off the odor of corruption. Similarly the Arians forsook the Arian label after their founder’s death in a water closet, and the Homoean Eudoxius denied that the Son was literally God’s Son in order to protect God from the physical act of generation. By the time of the post-Nicene fathers we are confronted with the Origenist Hieracites who denied a bodily resurrection. As for the fathers themselves we encounter Ambrose accepting Porphyry’s view that the body was a ragged garment destined to be cast off in the soul’s ascent, and Augustine emphasizing a human
depravity that took the evil nature of life for granted. Augustine’s last recorded words were not unaccountably a quotation of Plotinus condemning matter and the body.

Like the Platonists and the Gnostics the Christians were wary not only of the natural world but of the sociopolitical world. While martyrdom was for the Gnostics an act of casting pearls before swine it was partly for the early Christians a way of defying a corrupt world. The distrust of the sociopolitical world has also been observed in the desert fathers’ flight into the wilderness. The group that most violently manifested this distrust was the Donatists for whom the Roman Empire had merely been replaced by the Catholic church.

The Christians of late antiquity practiced an asceticism that at least subconsciously despised the body. We find Clement of Alexandria preferring marriage to the single state because the married man had more opportunities for self-denial. Asceticism was an active lifestyle for the desert fathers who eschewed all forms of bodily pleasure. It was also practiced by such opposed personalities as Arius, Athanasius, and Jerome who viewed the luxurious as swine. The Christian interest in the supernatural world as over against the material is reflected by the miraculous events that were associated with martyrdoms. Saints were often credited with miraculous powers; this holds true both of the desert fathers and of Athanasius who is said to have possessed prophetic abilities. In their emphasis on the evil of life, their distrust of the sociopolitical world, their asceticism, and their interest in the supernatural the Christians, just as much as the Platonists and the Gnostics, embraced the world-denying milieu of their age.

6.4 Conclusion

The existence of four criteria operating among three separate groups in late antiquity allows us to characterize the late antique ethos as one that despised matter and the body. Our study has filled in the literature concerning this period by its attempt to succinctly describe this ethos. Even more obviously it helps to establish the fact that late antiquity had an ethos. The existence of an ethos is in truth often overlooked in the investigation of any age, including our own (Rapaport, 1993: 351). Further studies could of course be undertaken on the ethoi of other ages. As to our current subject, it would not be out of place to present a study delineating, for example, the desert fathers’ or the Arians’ participation in the late antique ethos. A more valuable study would be one that addressed the inherent tension involved in Christian participation in an ethos which had a low opinion of matter and the body that was
not consonant with Christian dogma itself.

The late antique ethos was very different from our own, but it serves as a much needed corrective to it. The modern ethos is largely shaped by scientism; it sees nothing strange in the material world and holds to the supremacy of matter and energy. But when the Gnostics pictured an ignorant deity shaping the universe and when Paphnutius Cephala touched the arm of a dead monk in his cell and it disintegrated in his hand, they knew there was more to the universe than matter. Today we no longer know this, and we are therefore not without the need of the wisdom of our late antique forebears.
7.0 CHRONOLOGY

Simon Magus (fl. 41-54)
Polycarp (69-155)
Basilides (fl. 117-138)
Carpocrates (fl. 135)
Valentinus (fl. 136-165)
Justin Martyr (100-165)
Tatian (110-172)
Ptolemaeus (fl. 160)
Irenaeus (130-200)
Clement of Alexandria (150-215)
Bardaisan (154-222)
Origen (185-254)
Plotinus (204-270)
Porphyry (232-309)
Iamblichus (245-325)
St. Anthony (251-356)
Arius (260-336)
Paphnutius (fl. 305-360)
Donatus (fl. 313-355)
Pachomius (290-346)
Athanasius (296-373)
Epiphanius of Salamis (315-403)
Ambrose (339-397)
Jerome (345-420)
John Chrysostom (347-407)
Augustine (354-430)
Syrianus (375-437)
Proclus (412-485)
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