

# The Doctrines of Carpocrates

This account of "The Doctrines of Carpocrates" was written around 180  
C.E. by,  
Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon

Rearrangement of the sentences by The Sibyl of The Metacan,  
Marcellina II (she/her)

Irenaeus's hostile account of the Carpocratians is the earliest and most vivid. Subsequent polemics against them over the following centuries were little more than copies of this one. Marcellina herself (who gained notoriety in Rome between 150-165 C.E.) may have still been alive when this polemic was written. The writing of Irenaeus is presented with little alteration, but rearranged by Marcellina II for coherency and emphasis.

## On Marcellina Prima

<sup>1:1</sup> [Some Carpocratians] employ outward marks, branding their disciples inside the lobe of the right ear. From among [them] also arose Marcellina, who came to Rome under [the episcopate of] Anicetus (c. 157 through 168), and, holding these doctrines of Carpocrates, she destroyed multitudes.

<sup>1:2</sup> [Marcellina's Carpocratians (sometimes called Marcellinians)] style themselves Gnostics.

<sup>1:3</sup> [Her Gnostics] also possess images, some of them painted, and others formed from different kinds of material; while they maintain that a likeness of Christ was made by Pilate at that time when Jesus lived among them.

<sup>1:4</sup> [Marcellina's Gnostics] crown these images, and set them up along with the images of the philosophers of the world that is to say, with the images of Pythagoras, and Plato, and Aristotle, and the rest.

## On The Demiurge

<sup>1:5</sup> The sensible world was made by the fabricating powers, or Builders, far inferior to the ineffable power of the unknown ingenerable Father.

<sup>1:6</sup> They also declare the “accuser” is one of those angels who are in the world, whom they call Satan, maintaining that he was formed for this purpose, that he might lead those souls which have perished from the world to the Supreme Judge. They describe him (Satan) also as being chief among the makers of the world, and maintain that he delivers

such souls [as have been mentioned] to another angel, a jailer who ministers to him, that he may shut them up in other bodies;

## **On Metempsychosis**

1:7 for they declare that the body is "the prison."

1:8 They affirm that for this reason Jesus spoke the following parable:—"Whilst you are with your adversary in the way, give all diligence, that you may be delivered from him, lest he give you up to the judge, and the judge surrender you to the officer, and he cast you into prison. Verily, I say unto you, you shall not go out thence until you pay the very last farthing."

1:9 They deem it necessary, therefore, that by means of transmigration from body to body, souls should have experience of every kind of life as well as every kind of action.

## **On Christology**

1:10 They also hold that Jesus was the son of Joseph, and was just like other men,

1:11 On this account, a power descended upon him from the Father, that by means of it he might escape from the creators of the world; and they say that it, after passing through them all, and remaining in all points free, ascended again to him, and to the powers, which in the same way embraced like things to itself.

1:12 They further declare, that the soul of Jesus, although educated in the practices of the Jews, regarded these with contempt,

1:13 The soul, therefore, which is like that of Christ can despise those rulers who were the creators of the world, and, in like manner, receives power for accomplishing the same results.

1:14 This idea has raised them to such a pitch of pride, that some of them declare themselves similar to Jesus; while others, still more mighty, maintain that they are superior to his disciples, such as Peter and Paul, and the rest of the apostles, whom they consider to be in no respect inferior to Jesus.

1:15 For their souls, descending from the same sphere as his, and therefore despising in like manner the creators of the world, are deemed worthy of the same power, and again depart to the same place. But if any one shall have despised the things in this world more than he did, he thus proves himself superior to him.

## On Soteriology

1:16 I can hardly believe that all the ungodly, unlawful, and forbidden things of which we read in their books are really done among them.

1:17 And in their books we read as follows, this is their own explanation [of their views],

1:18 'We are saved, indeed, by means of **faith and love**; but all other things, while in their nature indifferent, are reckoned by the opinion of men—some good and some evil, there being nothing really evil by nature.'

1:19 So unbridled is their madness, that they declare they have in their power all things which are irreligious and impious, and are at liberty to

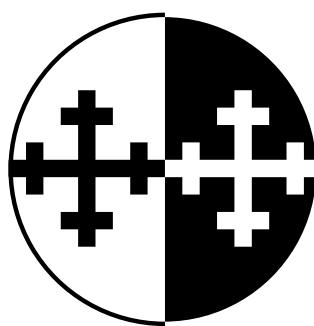
practise them; for they maintain that things are evil or good, simply in virtue of human opinion.

## On Magic

1:20 They practise also magical arts and incantations; philters, also, and love-potions; and have recourse to familiar spirits, dream-sending demons, and other abominations, declaring that they possess power to rule over, even now, the princes and formers of this world; and not only them, but also all things that are in it.

1:21 These people, like the pagans, were sent by Satan to disgrace the name of the Church—so that outsiders, hearing their teachings and assuming all Christians are alike, would turn from the truth; or seeing their conduct, would condemn us all.

1:22 We share nothing "in commonality" with them: neither doctrine, nor morals, nor way of life.



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