

Information on Questions of Mary

Epiphanius writes the following about the Gnostics, and this is our only source for the contents (*Panarion*, 26.8.1 - 26.9.5)

8:1 And they too have lots of books. They publish certain 'Questions of Mary'; but others offer many books about the Ialdabaoth we spoke of, and in the name of Seth. They call others 'Apocalypses of Adam' and have ventured to compose other Gospels in the names of the disciples, and are not ashamed to say that our Saviour and Lord himself, Jesus Christ, revealed this obscenity.

8:2 For in the so-called 'Greater Questions of Mary'—there are also 'Lesser' ones forged by them—they claim that he reveals it to her after taking her aside on the mountain, praying, producing a woman from his side, beginning to have sex with her, and then partaking of his emission, if you please, to show that 'Thus we must do, that we may live.'

8:3 And when Mary was alarmed and fell to the ground, he raised her up and said to her, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?'

8:4 And they say that this is the meaning of the saying in the Gospel, 'If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe the heavenly things?' and so of, 'When ye see the Son of Man ascending up where he was before'—in other words, when you see the emission being partaken of where it came from.

8:5 And when Christ said, 'Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood,' and the disciples were disturbed and replied, 'Who can hear this?'⁴⁰ they say his saying was about the dirt.

8:6 And this is why they were disturbed and fell away; they were not entirely stable yet, they say.

8:7 And when David says, 'He shall be like a tree planted by the outgoings of water that will bring forth its fruit in due season,'⁴¹ they say he is speaking of the man's dirt. 'By the outgoing of water,' and, 'that will bring forth his fruit,' means the emission at climax. And 'Its leaf shall not fall off' means, 'We do not allow it to fall to the ground, but eat it ourselves.'

9:1 And so as not to do more harm than good by making their proof texts public, I am going to omit most of them—otherwise I would cite all their wicked sayings and go through them here.

9:2 When it says that Rahab put a scarlet thread in her window, this was not scarlet thread, they tell us, but the female organs. And the scarlet thread means the menstrual blood, and 'Drink water from your cisterns' refers to the same.

9:3 They say that the flesh must perish and cannot be raised, and this belongs to the archon.

9:4 But the power in the menses and organs is soul, they say, 'which we gather and eat. And whatever we eat—meat, vegetables, bread or anything else—we are doing creatures a favour by gathering the soul from them all and taking it to the heavens with us.' Hence they

eat meat of all kinds and say that this is 'to show mercy to our race.'

9:5 And they claim that the same soul has been implanted in animals, insects, fish, snakes, men—and in vegetation, trees, and the fruits of the soil.

There is little to say concerning the "Lesser Questions of Mary" mentioned here, although some have attempted to identify it with otherwise known texts (such as the Pistis Sophia or the Gospel of Mary).