

***Ma'rifa* and *Gnosis*:
The System of Divine Knowledge in Sufism and Valentinianism**

Eunice Villaneda,
M.A., California State University, Long Beach

Abstract: The acquisition of divine knowledge, or *gnosis*, is a faculty that is found among Valentinian “Gnostics.” In Valentinianism *gnosis* unites an individual to the divine. As time progressed it is found in the Sufi tradition as *Ma'rifa*. *Ma'rifa* also means access to divine presence resulting from a system of knowledge. In Valentinianism, a system of knowledge has not been developed. *Ma'rifa*'s relation to *gnosis* in Valentinianism is tangible yet remains elusive. A comparative view of *gnosis* in Sufism and Valentinianism will help us understand the relationship between *Ma'rifa* and *gnosis* and help identify a system of knowledge in Valentinianism.

Keywords: Sufism, Valentinianism, *gnosis*, Gnosticism, *Ma'rifa*.

In the years that followed the death of Jesus, his followers established Christian communities throughout the Roman Empire. Though these communities were sparse, they were united by their common belief in Jesus. By the second century several of these communities developed their own ideologies that were intertwined with contemporary philosophy, such as Middle Platonism. Among the characteristic beliefs of some of these early Christian communities was an intense cultivation of *gnosis*, understood as spiritual knowledge. One of group of these “gnostics” were the Valentinians. This cultivation of *gnosis* is also found much later in the Islamic branch of Sufism, but is called *Ma'rifa*. Human beings have the capacity to know the divine which forms part of a system of knowledge in Sufism.

Ma'rifa's relation to gnosis in Valentinianism is tangible yet remains elusive, but a comparative view of gnosis in Sufism and Valentinianism will help us understand the relationship between Ma'rifa and gnosis and identify a system of knowledge in Valentinianism. It will also delineate the function of "light" in both of these systems. The results of this investigation will assist in the study of Valentinianism and the role "light" plays in the acquisition of gnosis and Ma'rifa, which are the only paths to unity with the divine and thus, salvation.

The term Gnosis (γνῶσις) means "knowledge" and was first introduced by Plato and later used by the Middle Platonists. The Valentinians perceived gnosis as something one had instead of being gnostic, and, like Plato, used it in correlation with *episteme*.¹ In the Valentinian doctrine, gnosis is spiritual knowledge that is acquired and liberated Valentinians from material bonds. This knowledge was also mystical and thus exclusive to Valentinians. Ma'rifa in Sufism is more than the acquisition of divine knowledge; it means access to divine presence, an invasion, being overcome by the reality of God and unification with him. Divine knowledge in Sufism is a gift which God has bestowed on man in order that he may understand the revelation sent down to him.²

I. Valentinianism

¹From the ancient Greek term ἐπίστωμα, meaning "to know."

² Smith, 1974, 93.

The Valentinian “gnostic” group emerged between 160-180 C.E. and was active beyond Rome.³ Their influence is seen in Egypt, Asia Minor, and Eastern Syria. According to Richard Valantasis, their beliefs are exclusive: only the knowledge of the Valentinians could make sense of the scriptures and explain how their revelations connect with each other and only they can show the way towards union with God. “They were believed to be the first [Christians] to write commentaries on the [Christian] scriptures to elucidate their deeper meanings to their followers.”⁴ The Valentinians read Christian scriptures and dedicated themselves to finding the inner meanings of literal events; such as Jesus’s life, crucifixion, and resurrection where they found ambiguous information necessary for true salvation.

Valentinianism is the development of the teachings of the Christian teacher Valentinus, whose teachings were considered heretical by heresiologists.⁵ Though Valentinus did not see himself as religious leader, his students adopted and expanded his teachings which led to the development of Valentinianism.⁶ The Valentinians believed that before the creation of the material world the Pleroma, a unity of thirty paired Aeons, existed in perfect harmony. In an attempt to know the Father, who was unknowable, the Logos, part of the last aeonic pair, overreached himself out of the Pleroma leading to a sequence of events culminating in the

³ Pagels, 1985, 177.

⁴ Valantasis, 2006, 47.

⁵ Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*.

⁶ Two schools emerged from Valentinus’s doctrine, the Eastern and Western. The Eastern school is exemplified by Clement of Alexandria and his *Excerpts of Theodotus* as well as the Valentinian texts the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Tripartite Tractate*, the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, and the *Interpretation of Knowledge*. The Western School is exemplified by the writings of Irenaeus, which are based on the system of Ptolemy and Marcus. It is also characterized by the Valentinian text *A Valentinian Exposition*. The Eastern Valentinian School refers to the disobedient male Logos. The Western Valentinians call this figure Sophia, who is female. The Eastern Valentinian School is the oldest and more original to Valentinus’s doctrine and is used throughout this discussion.

creation of the 'material world. Thus, the Valentinians believed that the material resulted from the fall of the Logos. After this creation, humanity was in need of redemption and the only way to be redeemed was to accept knowledge, or gnosis, of one's true nature. Their main goal is restore the Pleroma to harmony through the acquisition of knowledge and unity with the divine.⁷ The Valentinian doctrine is centered upon acquiring unity with the divine and, it too, is attained through knowledge.

II. The Three Substances of Valentinian Metaphysics

In order to understand how the Valentinian body transforms it is important to briefly discuss the Valentinian understanding of bodies. The cosmos, according to the Valentinians, consists of spiritual, psychic, and material substances. Material substance was created by the Logos when overreaching himself from the Pleroma. This substance manifested into the material powers that then produced material humans. The psychic substance arose from the Logos' regret. When the Logos saw that he could not produce like the Father, he became remorseful and stopped. He then turned towards "good things" and created the psychic substance which is superior to that of the material. The spiritual substance was created by the redeemed Logos, and resided with him in the intermediary. This substance came from the Pleroma through Christ. Valentinians believed in three types of human bodies: spiritual, psychic, and 'material. Each human body has a different mixture of substances. The spiritual body is a body that contains all three substances. The

⁷ The best account of these events is found in the *Tripartite Tractate*. "The Tripartite Tractate." In *Nag Hammadi Codex I (the Jung Codex)*, edited by Harold W. Attridge. Vol. 22. Leiden: Brill, 1985.

material body only contained the material substance. The psychic body, however, contains the psychic and material substance.

III. Gnosis in Valentinianism

The reception and acceptance of gnosis in Valentinianism transforms the psychic substance into a spiritual substance. This substance is united with a spiritual body, which is divine, when the material body dies. Gnosis is the first step towards union with the divine. This unity is described in the *Gospel of Truth*.⁸ “He [the Father] retains within himself their [the spiritual bodies] perfection, granting it to them as a return to him and a perfectly unitary knowledge.”⁹ Gnosis purifies the psychic body: “within knowledge he will purify himself from multiplicity into Unity, consuming matter within himself like fire, and darkness by light, death by life.”¹⁰ This purification is done to prepare the body for the divine union.

IV. Ritual in the Acquisition of Gnosis

The rituals that the Valentinians perform in preparation are the First Baptism, Chrism, which is an oil rite, Eucharist, Anointing, Second

⁸ This text is believed to have been written in the second century. This is due to the fact that Irenaeus is the first to mention it in *Against the Heresies* in 180 C.E. Its exclusion from the Bible is best described by Lance S. Owens, “these thirteen papyrus codices containing fifty-two sacred texts are representatives of the long lost ‘Gnostic Gospels,’ a last extant testament of what orthodox Christianity perceived to be its most dangerous and insidious challenge, the feared opponent that the Church Fathers had reviled under many different names, but most commonly as Gnosticism.”

⁹ *Gos. Truth*, 19:4-10.

¹⁰ *Gos. Truth*, 25:13-20.

Baptism/Redemption, and the Bridal Chamber.¹¹ In Valentinianism, these rites of initiation transform a psychic being into a pure state; it joins the psychic to the spiritual substance. The psychic substance does not yet acquire a complete spiritual existence. The psychic substance acquires that when the material body dies and it is united to the spiritual substance in the intermediary and then enters the Pleroma. The Second Baptism/Redemption seals the state of purification. Suggesting that the psychic essence is still in danger of being defiled after the First Baptism, and must undergo the Second Baptism/Redemption to seal that state. The First and Second baptismal rituals purify. The Chrism, Anointing purify and confirm the rituals they follow, making them very significant in these rituals. The Bridal Chamber is believed to be the psychic union with one's spiritual counterpart. This ritual transforms their bodies into the reflection of the Pleroma. It allows psychic bodies to be reintegrated back into it.

V. Sufism

In the ninth century C.E. "a great variety of approaches to Islamic learning had developed. The proponents of each discipline considered it essential for understanding the Koran and the Hadith,"¹² the Sufi's were among these disciplines. The main players in this school were Ḥusayn Ibn Manṣūr Al-Ḥallāj (b.244/857-d.309/922) and Al-Ḥārith Ibn Asad Al-Muḥāsibī (d.243/87). Al- Ḥallāj was a Persian born mystical author who claimed "I am the Truth" and was executed for

¹¹ This union is represented on earth through a proleptic reenactment called the Bridal Chamber. This ritual is done to reflect the 'spiritual' union that will take place after the death of the 'material' body.

¹² Chittick, 2000, 18.

blasphemy.¹³ Al-Muḥāsibī was an Iraqi mystical teacher and theorist.¹⁴ The Sufi's perceive themselves "as those Muslims who take seriously God's call to perceive His presence both in the world and in the self. They stress inwardness and outwardness, contemplation over action, spiritual development over legalism and cultivation of the soul over social interaction."¹⁵ Sufism represents an inner dimension of Islam, it serves as a "way opened to those who aspire to reach the realm of Divine Presence."¹⁶ William C. Chittick believes that they did not begin to play a major role in Islamic history until the twelfth century, but that even after that time Sufism did not necessarily entail affiliation with an order. Sufi's interpret the testimony of faith, which is the first pillar of Islam, i.e., shahāda, as the denial of the reality of "anything which does not possess its own sufficient reason."¹⁷ According to Chittick, "Sufism is the most universal manifestation of the inner dimension of Islam; it is the way by which man transcends his own individual self and reaches God. It provides within the forms of the Islamic revelation the means for an intense spiritual life directed towards the transformation of man's being and the attainment of the spiritual virtues; ultimately it leads to the vision of God."¹⁸ It deals with the "inward aspects of that which is expressed outwardly or exoterically in the *Shari'a*, the Islamic religious law."¹⁹ Sufism was restrained by mainstream Islam; this too, is seen in Valentinianism's relationship with Christianity.

¹³ Renard, 2009, 3.

¹⁴ Ibid, 162.

¹⁵ Ibid, 19.

¹⁶ Michon & Gaetani, 2006, *xxi*.

¹⁷ Ibid, *xxiii*.

¹⁸ Chittick, 2006, 21.

¹⁹ Ibid, 24.

VI. Knowledge in Islam

In his analysis of Ma'rifa in Islam, Franz Rosenthal states that "[i]n the Prophet's view of the world, 'knowledge' which in its totality is a matter of deepest concern for him consists of two principal parts. There is human knowledge, that is, a secular human knowledge of an elementary or more advance character and a religious human knowledge; the latter constitutes the highest development of knowledge usually meant in the Qur'an where it preaches the importance of human knowledge."²⁰ Aside from these two types of human knowledge, secular and religious, there is a divine knowledge. Divine knowledge is "basically identical with human knowledge," but it is at a higher level both quantitatively and qualitatively.²¹ Rosenthal, however, believes that the prophet felt that knowledge is felt and represented as interlocking and interdependent.

VII. "Gnosis" in Sufism as Ma'rifa

Several Sufi authors suggest God as the source of *'ilm*. In many instances "this root has to do with 'recognition', sometimes with a seemingly ordinary sense of identifying."²² Ma'rifa in Qur'an 5:86 is used when people recognize the truth of divine signs and revelation. Several Sufi theorists such as Muḥāsibī attempt to distinguish between ordinary, traditional, discursive, and acquired or "scientific" knowledge (*'ilm*) and more intimate, infused, experiential or "mystical" knowing

²⁰ Rosenthal, 1970, 31.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Renard, 2004, 14.

(Ma'rifa), they attempt to explain how Ma'rifa both presupposes and transcends *'-l-m*.

One of the early pioneers of Ma'rifa was Muḥāsibī. Muḥāsibī had written a book on gnosis but when faced with questions by a young dervish, he abandoned his effort because he realized that gnosis was not gained by one's self. Instead, Muḥāsibī realized that gnosis is "a gift and grace from God and no man can secure it by his own unaided striving."²³ Muḥāsibī then realized that even to say "the servant has a right to gnosis, and that it is due to him,"²⁴ is unlawful thus, leading to his abandoning this endeavor. Muḥāsibī finds that reason is a natural instinct "which makes use of experience, to acquire knowledge and to comprehend it. It is a gift which God has bestowed on man in order that he may understand the revelation sent down to him, and so may become a believer, God-fearing, abiding in Divine commands."²⁵ Muḥāsibī produced the earliest in-depth systematic analyses of the various permutations of knowledge in relation to the Sufi path. He "emphasized the importance of a depth of genuine Ma'rifa,²⁶ which alone can establish the foundation for right action. He regards action based on Ma'rifa as a blend of pure divine gift and the judicious application of rational understanding."²⁷ He argued that the three fundamental forms of knowledge have their respective goals: the outward understanding of things lawful and unlawful in this life, the inward understanding of matters pertaining to the next life and a higher level of awareness of God Ma'rifa and

²³ Smith, 1974, 11.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 93.

²⁶ Knowledge or Awareness of God.

²⁷ Renard, 2004, 21.

God's plans for all creation. The first two forms of knowledge can be acquired through acceptance of traditional learning handed down from reliable sources and through careful use of intelligent, rational reflection. The third however can be acquired through the complete reliance on God and the kinds of intimate experiences made possible only through a relationship with God. This understanding of the three forms of knowledge correlate with the forms of knowledge discussed earlier. Muḥāsibī refers to Ma'rifa as a fathomless sea, this metaphor is the presumption "of a man trying to attain to Ma'rifa by his own efforts is analogous to his seeking to be one with the ocean by drinking it all up, rather than by being drowned in it."²⁸ Thus, Ma'rifa is something that completely overpowers an individual.

The nature of knowledge in Sufism is best understood with the concept of unknowing. According to Sufis "it is by unknowing, the systematic transcendence of all limited knowledge, that one can approach the unknowable divine being."²⁹ The Sufi notion of Ma'rifa is a paradox. "On the one hand, it is described as the highest knowledge to which an individual has access; but on the other, the ultimate content of this knowledge so radically transcends the individual that it comes to be described in terms of 'ignorance.' In one respect, it is said to be a light that illumines and clarifies, but in another respect, its very brilliance dazzles, blinds, and ultimately extinguishes the one designated as a 'knower.'"³⁰ Scholar Reza Shah-Kazemi suggests that "if by 'knowledge' is meant taking cognizance of some object apart

²⁸ Shah-Kazemi, 2002, 166.

²⁹ Ernst, 1985, 33.

³⁰ Shah-Kazemi, 2002, 155.

from itself, then the highest knowledge can only be termed an ignorance.”³¹ In Sufism, “the principle of consciousness cannot itself be made an object of consciousness.”³² Thus the Sufi is aware that she can only know through God while not knowing the essence of knowledge. Why is knowledge so important for Sufis? “Knowledge of God constitutes the most profound form of worship.”³³ Sufis aim to recover the state he had immediately after the creation of Man.³⁴ When acquiring Ma’rifa, one metaphysically attains unity with God. Note that this, too, was pervasive in Valentinianism.

VIII. Ritual in the Acquisition of Ma’rifa

Sufis are immediately and permanently united with the divine upon receiving gnosis. First they are in a mystical state and once they receive Ma’rifa they are no longer in need of that state. Dhul-Nun al-Misri states that “the true ‘*ārif*’³⁵ does not constantly stay in the same state, but he stays constantly with the Lord in all his states. This is because the real has been grasped aright, there is no need to depend on the continuation of specifically mystical ‘states’: what is real for us, he says is Ma’rifa and the revelation (*kashf*) of knowledge.”³⁶ This becomes one of the fundamental differences of the acquisition of gnosis between the Sufis and Valentinians.

³¹ Ibid, 163.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid,158.

³⁴ Schimmel, 1975, 143.

³⁵ Knower it shares the same root as *ma’rifa*, ‘-r-f. This correlates with gnosis and *Gnostic*.

³⁶ Quoted in Deladrière, *La Vie merveilleuse de Dhu’l-Nun*, 167.

In Sufism, ritual is also needed for the mystical state which is not easily achieved, it is however, attained within a lifetime. Ma'rifa is itself union with God. To know God Sufis perform several rituals to reach a mystical and transcendental state. The most popular practices include devotional practices, the rhythmic repetition of God's names (*Zikr*), retreats or seclusions, and mystical experiences.³⁷ An important devotional practice in Sufism is *ḥuḏūr-i dil* which is a condition that translates to "presence of the heart." This means "complete concentration on God and the banishment of, and detachment from, any distracting thoughts."³⁸ *Ḥuḏūr-i dil* is a meditative practice that is "not only necessary for worship; it is also the result of acts of devotion."³⁹ *Zikr* is also characteristic of Sufism. The repetition of God's names "produces purity of heart."⁴⁰ Retreats and Seclusion (*chilla* or *i'tikāf*), was done to "detach oneself from everyday cares and worldly concerns and devote oneself wholly to worship."⁴¹ Mystical experience such as annihilation (*fanā*) is the ultimate closeness to God according to al-Ghazālī.⁴²

IX. Gnosis and Ma'rifa

Gnosis plays a vital role in Valentinianism for it comes from the unknowable father. When one receives gnosis one is receiving what was bestowed to them by the

³⁷ Steinfels, 2012, 81.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 82.

⁴¹ Ibid, 83.

⁴² Ibid, 84 Author is quoting Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī's Path to Sufism and His Deliverance from Error: An Annotated Translation of Al Munquidh min al- Dalāl*, trans. R. J. McCarthy (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2000). Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) was an influential Muslim theologian. He was a student and heavily influenced by Muḥāsibī.

Father himself “one who has knowledge is the one whose name the Father has uttered.”⁴³ This sentiment is echoed in Sufism where knowledge is understood to be “the bounty of God, bestowed upon us and upon mankind.”⁴⁴ Ma’rifa in Sufism is the state of reality that one becomes part of, whereas in Valentinianism, divine knowledge is knowledge of the reality that is received and accepted. A Valentinian does not become part of this reality until the death of the material body. The system of Ma’rifa in Sufism functions cohesively with Truth, Love, and Light. These elements are also found in Valentinian texts.

X. Truth

In Sufism “the supreme goal of human life is to attain Truth, which is also Reality, the source of all reality, and whose attainment, as also stated by Christ, makes us free, delivering us from the bondage of ignorance.”⁴⁵ Sufis view ignorance as bondage and deprivation of knowledge Truth, in the Qur’an is one of the divine attributes possessed by God “Allah is the (very) Truth, that makes all things manifest.”⁴⁶ Becoming one with God would require knowing the Truth, him. The knowledge of truth is described as a knowledge that “delivers and frees is one that removes the veils of separation that have caused us to forget our real identity.”⁴⁷ This knowledge is believed to remove forgetfulness of the divine Reality, which is the source of all things.

⁴³ *Gos. Truth*, 21:18-31.

⁴⁴ Waliullah, 1982, 4.

⁴⁵ Nasr, 2007, 30.

⁴⁶ Qur’an 24:25.

⁴⁷ Nasr, 2007, 57.

This theme is seen throughout Valentinian texts. In the *Tripartite Tractate*⁴⁸ death is described as the “complete ignorance of the Totality.”⁴⁹ The Totality, in this passage refers to the Aeons in the Pleroma which is the divine reality of the cosmos. This passage explains that ignorance of divine reality is death and the opposite would be knowledge of it. Thus, ignorance deprives individuals of the knowledge of the divine. In the *Tripartite Tractate*, truth also plays an important role, knowledge is described as freedom: “the freedom is the knowledge of truth.”⁵⁰ Indeed, Ma’rifa and gnosis of truth in both Sufism and Valentinianism is freedom, and ignorance deprives one of this reality.

XI. Love

Ma’rifa in Sufism encompasses love for God. “The truth is such that one cannot know It without loving It. And that love leads finally to the embrace of God, Who in turn loves those among His servants who love Him.”⁵¹ The Qur’an states that one of God’s names is Love or *al’Wadūd*.⁵² Thus, if one wishes to know God then one must know what Love is. Sufis understand Love in a view of stages: first, there is the love of God for Himself and then his love for his Creatures. Then there is the Sufis

⁴⁸ The *Tripartite Tractate* was initially believed to have been sometime in the third century because of its affinity to literature, in both form and content, to literature of that time. It was also believed to be part of the Western Valentinian school. (Pagels 1985, 178). However, scholars such as Einar Thomassen attribute it to the Eastern Valentinian school which would shift its date of composition much earlier in the second century anytime between 160-180 C.E.

⁴⁹ *Tri. Trac.*, 107:30-32.

⁵⁰ *Tri. Trac.*, 117:28-30.

⁵¹ Nasr, 2007, 60.

⁵² Qur’an 11:90.

love for the divine and their love for other beings. This love transcends ego, which transforms into love for God.

In Valentinianism, preceding the fall of the Logos, the Aeons are described as having Love for the unknowable Father. “The entire system of the aeons has a love and a longing for the perfect. Complete, discovery of the Father and this is there unimpeded agreement.”⁵³ This Love is echoed in the psychic human’s desire to be united with the unknowable Father. This desire and love is mutual, the unknowable Father loves and has given them the desire and ability to love Him in return. “He sowed in them a thought about him and an idea, so that they should think that something greater than themselves exists prior to them, although they did not understand what it was. Begetting harmony and mutual love through that thought, they acted in unity and unanimity, since from unity and from unanimity they have received their very being.”⁵⁴ Love in Valentinianism is begotten by the unknowable Father and it is what psychic bodies attempt to attain along with gnosis. The *Gospel of Philip*⁵⁵ describes love as “the wind through which we grow.”⁵⁶ In both Sufism and Valentinianism love is synonymous to Ma’rifa and Gnosis: both derive from God and are mutual between God and the individual.

XII. Light

⁵³ *Tri. Trac.*, 71:7-15).

⁵⁴ *Tri. Trac.*, 83:22-34.

⁵⁵ The *Gospel of Philip* is a text composed of a collection of theological statements concerning sacraments and ethics. It was believed to have been written in the second half of the third century. It is an Eastern Valentinian text because this gospel suggests one becomes perfect by acquiring the ‘spiritual’ resurrection. Western Valentinian texts promote the ‘psychic’ resurrection.

⁵⁶ *Gos. Phil.* 79:28-30.

Light in Sufism is a prevalent analogy to knowledge. Sufi Scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr states: “the knowledge of Truth is like the light of the sun.”⁵⁷ Light’s function in Ma’rifa stems from the calling God “Light” this is found in Qur’an 24:35. This passage led Ibn Arabi to inherit a long tradition in Sufism that “identifies Light (*nur*) with Being (*wujud*). Light/Being is contrasted with Darkness (*zulma*)/Nothingness or the impossible, and the cosmos is seen as a domain of brightness between the two.”⁵⁸ Ibn al-Arabi believes “Light is perceived, and through it perception takes place. Darkness is perceived, but through it no perception takes places.... God is sheer Light, while the impossible is sheer darkness.... Creation is the Barzakh [*isthmus*] between Light and darkness....”⁵⁹ Thus, Light is a metaphor for knowledge as opposed to the darkness of ignorance. “When it is dark we cannot observe or recognize anything. We are kept in ignorance. But when there is light and day, we can find our way around—we know.”⁶⁰ Thus, light is a guide in Sufism, this was initially found in the Qur’an which states that light provides guidance as is given by God and by God alone (24:40/40, 57:28/28). Thus, light comes from God. Sufis also distinguish between different forms of light.

In Valentinianism, light is also associated with knowledge. In the *Gospel of Truth* we read “the discovery of the light of truth which rose upon him because it is immutable”⁶¹ It is also a description of divinity “The man of the Father, that is, the

⁵⁷Nasr, 2007, 30.

⁵⁸ Ibn al-Rawandi, 2000, 127.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Rosenthal, 1970, 155.

⁶¹ *Gos. Truth*, 36:11-13.

one whom I call... the light of those whom he illumines.”⁶² Recalling the brief discussion of the Valentinian bodies earlier, the spiritual body contained the spiritual essence which comes from the Light of the Pleroma. In Valentinian texts the distinction between the bodies is made by contrasting light from darkness. The *Tripartite Tractate* describes the spiritual race as “light from light,” it describes the psychic race as “light from a fire,” and it describes the material race as dark, noting that “it shuns the shining of the light because its appearance destroys it.”⁶³ Thus, Valentinians, like Sufis, view a battle between light and dark. Earlier we saw that the Sufis equate darkness to ignorance, Valentinians too make this distinction: “[t]herefore they fell down to the pit of ignorance which is called ‘the Outer Darkness’.”⁶⁴ In Valentinianism, however, light has a larger function; it is perceived as something that can be worn. In the *Gospel of Phillip* we read that light is not only something to behold but to be enveloped in: “[t]he powers do not see those who are clothed in perfect light.”⁶⁵ This light is attained in the union. Indeed the Valentinians do seem to distinguish between two different functions of light. Light is beheld through gnosis and it is to be worn in the sacramental union after the death of the material body.

⁶² *Tri. Trac.*, 66:10, 66:19.

⁶³ *Tri. Trac.*, 119:10-13.

⁶⁴ *Tri. Trac.* 89:24-27.

⁶⁵ *Gos. Phil.* 70:5-7.

Both Sufis and Valentinians view light as derivative from the divine.⁶⁶ This light is also synonymous with knowledge. The Valentinians however describe two different functions of light: light is seen and worn.

XIII. Systems of Knowledge

Ma'rifa is attained through the coexistence of Truth Love and Light. The Sufi system of knowledge begins with rituals that provoke mystical transcendental states, this is done throughout a Sufis life but very few attain Ma'rifa. When one does attain it, they are immediately united with God and it is a permanent existence.

Truth, Love, and Light also play an important role in Valentinianism. These elements are interchangeable with the acquisition of gnosis. The Valentinian system of knowledge begins with gnosis, it is the first step towards unity with the divine. The psychic body receives gnosis and it must then undergo purification and salvific rituals to attain the spiritual essence. When the material body dies it is then united with a spiritual body of light, and is then united with the divine.

Both Sufi's and Valentinians undergo a physical transformation to be united with the divine. Sufis are transformed when attaining Ma'rifa, they recover the state he had immediately after the creation of Man. Valentinians transform their bodies through purification and salvific rituals that are performed following the reception of gnosis. These rituals transform the psychic substance into a spiritual substance.

⁶⁶ Qur'an 24:35 describes Allah as the light of the heavens and earth. *Tri. Trac.* 66:10, 66:19 describes Light as the unknowable Father.

XIV. Conclusion

This research drew intersections of the acquisition of gnosis, in Sufism and Valentinianism. Gnosis is a faculty that was dominant in gnostic groups specifically among the Valentinians. It was cultivated and was the core of Valentinian doctrine. As time progressed this phenomenon was found in Sufism, an inner dimension of Islam and was called Ma'rifa. Human beings have the capacity to know the divine through a system of knowledge. In Valentinianism, gnosis saves psychic bodies from material bonds and unites the psychic body with the divine through ritual purification. Valentinians perform rites of initiation which transform the psychic being into a pure state. In Sufism, Ma'rifa is perceived as a gift that God bestowed on man so that he may understand the revelation sent down to him. Ma'rifa has three respective goals, the outward understanding of things lawful and unlawful, the inward understanding of matters pertaining to the next life and, finally, a higher level of awareness of God's Ma'rifa and God's creation. When one metaphysically attains Ma'rifa one attains unity with the divine. Ritual, too serves an important role in the acquisition of Ma'rifa. These rituals allow Sufi's to acquire the state they had immediately after the creation of Man. So they too, can be seen as purification rituals.

This research found that for both Sufi's and Valentinians, divine knowledge relates to unity with the divine and though there are different paths, they have the same respective goals.

Sufi's and Valentinians undergo a physical transformation to be united with the divine. Sufis are transformed when attaining Ma'rifa, they recover the state he had immediately after the creation of Man. Valentinians transform their bodies through purification and salvific rituals that are performed following the reception of gnosis.

The system of knowledge in Sufism and Valentinianism suggests that we are in a state of darkness when we are ignorant of the divine. Truth, Love, and Light play an important role in this system. Truth of the divine reality breaks the bonds of ignorance in both Sufism and Valentinianism leading to the path of salvation. Love is synonymous with Ma'rifa and Gnosis; both derive from God and are mutual between God and the individual. Light derives from the divine and is also synonymous with Ma'rifa and Gnosis. Valentinians and Sufi's believe that we are in a state of ignorance without Ma'rifa and Gnosis. When we receive Ma'rifa or Gnosis we see Light. The period of spiritual adjustment, like when your eyes adjust to the light of the sun, is when Divine revelation takes place. Sufis bask in this revelation and become one with it, they become one with light. Valentinians strive to become worthy of becoming the light. Once Sufi's and Valentinians are united with the divine through the acquisition of Ma'rifa and Gnosis, they cannot be separated from it.

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