

Gnosticism: Notes Downloaded from various Websites

When writing about Gnosticism it is very difficult to present an objective view of this system of belief or its participants. The reason for this is that there are very few exhibits of first hand copies of their writings. These writings were burned by the orthodox Christians from the first century onward. Gnosticism was considered heretical and Gnostics heretics. So, until the find of Nag Hammadi in 1945 little was known of Gnosticism and the Gnostics except from the writings of their adversaries.

One of the main things which separated the Gnostics from orthodox Christians was the mysticism of their beliefs. It began with their views of God and creation. They viewed the One which they called the true God as having a feminine part which was the Spirit. In accord, they also held that Jesus came from God and the Spirit to form the Trinity.

In the Gnostic version of creation of the world the Spirit of God is referred to as the Wisdom of God or Sophia who is also a feminine creative force. It seems she wished to give birth to a creature like herself. She did so without the permission of her partner. She was able to do this by the power within her. The fruit of her desire was something imperfect and different from her in appearance. She was ashamed of it, threw it outside of the heavenly realm and hid it in a cloud so none of the Immortals would see it. According to the Gnostics this horrible child became the one they called the Demiurge. Unbeknown to him his mother gave him some of her power which contained the Spirit. The Demiurge thought the power which his mother gave him was his own, and with it he started creating the physical world. In doing this the Gnostics believed the Demiurge entrapped the Spirit in matter. They viewed the Demiurge as being the Christian God, the creator, basing their belief on the statement, "I am God, and there is no one besides me."

Also, the Gnostic differed with the orthodox Christians on two other major issues: the salvation of man and the person of Jesus. They disagreed with the theory that man was sinful by nature, but believed man erred through ignorance; by knowledge man could correct his ways and gain salvation. The special knowledge which the Gnostics subscribed to was known as "gnosis." Gnosis was not a logical type of knowledge as one might gain in the study of mathematics or chemistry, but it was an intuitive or reflexive type of knowledge which comes from the study of man's inner self or soul. Any other knowledge did not concern the Gnostics. They called this gnosis illuminated Logos because they believed it led to man's salvation.

For them the principle teacher of gnosis was Jesus; a special person who did not come from the Demiurge but had come directly from God and the Holy Spirit. The Gnostics claimed Jesus taught them secret knowledge which he did not share with the general congregation of the Church. This sort of claim did not set too well with the Church at a time when it was striving to gain strength and power. Another point concerning Jesus which caused discord was that the Gnostics did not accept that Jesus was born of a virgin. Holding that Jesus specially came from God and the Spirit, they said he entered a body brought about by sexual intercourse between Mary and Joseph. Many Gnostics scoffed at the idea of a virgin birth which other Christians held.

Within this gnosis, or secret teaching, were beliefs for escaping the clutches of the Demiurge. Since

it was held that the Demiurge had entrapped the Spirit in matter, especially in man, through creation, it was therefore believed that not to prolong or propagate life was the best way to ultimately free the Spirit. Such a belief led to a schism among the Gnostic community. The majority formed sects practicing almost total monasticism, while a minority had sects which practiced libertinism. Where marriage was permitted within the monastic sects, sexual intercourse was absolutely forbidden. Many types of sexual acts and perversions were permitted in the libertine sects. One, the Ophites -- a name which honored the snake or serpent -- was known for its love feasts. The purpose of all the sects on both sides of the schism was the same, to liberate the Spirit by stopping the propagation of life. The Gnostics took Jesus' answer to his disciple Solame's question, "How long will death reign?" literally when he responded, "As long as you women bear children." Also to disobey the laws of the Demiurge, who was evil himself, was justified to the Gnostics. Therefore, to them the Demiurge not only represented the Christian God, he represented the Devil as well.

But these nihilism beliefs embodied within Gnosticism tended to be overshadowed by other teaching of the Gnostic Jesus, and these teachings still permeate modern Gnostic teachings. These teachings concern the inner self. According to Gnosticism Jesus showed much concern for the knowledge of inner truth, or "know thyself." He wanted his disciples to be seekers and seers. In the work "Pistis Sophia" he instructed them, "Do not leave off searching day and night." He warned that inner truth would bring turmoil, but with the turmoil would come astonishment." He explained further, "Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will become troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will become astonished, and he will rule over all things."

From "Dialogue of the Savior" there is another quote attributed to Jesus: Silvanus, the teacher, says, "...Bring in your guide and your teacher. The mind is the guide, but reason is the teacher...Live according to the mind...Acquire strength, for the mind is strong...Enlighten the mind...Light the lamp within you."

The preceding passages are samples which show the differences between Gnosticism and orthodox Christianity. Gnosticism is more of an introspective teaching or philosophy to live by. It is quite different to say Jesus talked of the mind as being a light which serves as a personal guide than to quote him as saying, "Do not hide your light under a basket." In the latter quote he seems to be directing the disciples to use their spirituality and influence to persuade and direct others which the Church has done for many years.

To follow this further, one thinks that Jesus is saying one finds happiness within oneself. Within the Gnostic Gospels there are passages leading to such a conclusion. When his disciples asked when the new world or kingdom would come Jesus is to have said in the Gospel of Thomas: "...Rather the Kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will realize that you are the sons of the living Father. But if you will not know yourselves, then you will dwell in poverty, and it is you who are that poverty."

In another passage when describing the kingdom Jesus said, "What you look forward to has

already come, but you do not recognize it...the Kingdom of the Father is spread out on the earth, but men do not see it."

Within the teachings of Gnosticism the Kingdom of God seemed to represent an alternation of consciousness rather than a physical coming future event. "...Say, then, from the heart that you are the perfect day, and dwell in the light that does not fail...For you are the understanding that is drawn forth..."

Again when Jesus saw infants being nursed by their mothers he said, "These infants being suckled are like those entering the Kingdom." And the disciples asked, "Shall we, then, as little children, enter the Kingdom?" He answered them, "When you make two one, and when you make the inside the outside and the outside the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and female one and the same...then you will enter (the Kingdom)."

When reading of Gnosticism and its various teachings, except for its nihilism aspect, one might get the impression that one was reading Greek philosophy. The concept of "Know Thyself" is definitely Platonic. It is not surprising that Gnosticism contains much Platonism because many of the Gnostics were Hellenistic by birth and nature. Just as it is not surprising that Gnosticism incorporated its believers' ancient teachings, it is no more surprising that the spirit of Gnosticism is still present. In an age when the attitudes of self-awakening and self-knowledge are very much in the consciousnesses of people it is no wonder Gnostic teachings are being reexamined. Large groups of people feel alienated from the Christian God. They feel even more alienated from the Christian Church. Many have turned to the pre-Christian dieties and nature for sources of their spiritual and religious experiences. Gnosticism can be one of these sources because it makes man feel worthy of himself and his Diety. A.G.H.

Sources:

Pagels, Elaine, *The Gnostic Gospels*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

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Gnostics When the Savior appeared there were existing 2 systems of philosophy, the Grecian and the Oriental. The latter system pretended to teach the way to the knowledge of the true God. The Gnostics anticipated an ambassador from God who would impart to mortals the knowledge of the true God. The miracles of our Lord and his apostles attracted the attention of these men, and they at once concluded that our Lord was that the long-expected ambassador from God. Yet they denied his divinity, and rejected his humanity because they believed that everything material was from its very nature only evil. As Christ had no material body, according to their theory, he could not suffer. They denied the doctrine that Christ suffered for man's sake.; With regard to the Old Testament, they would not receive it as the inspired word of God. As these philosophers endeavored to accommodate the doctrines of the Christian religion to the tenets of their philosophy, it is easy to conceive that much harm must necessarily result from such a measure.

The New Gnostics and the Wisdom of Irenaeus

by Douglas Groothuis

Christian apologist par excellence, G.K. Chesterton observed in 1930 that "We hear much about new religions; many of them based on the very latest novelties of Buddha and Pythagoras." The perennial war of ideas develops few new weapons systems, but rather uses the same cognitive ammunition throughout the varied campaigns of intellectual history. Despite the dizzying diversity of religions, ideologies, and faiths simultaneously contending for our allegiance in pluralistic America, the basic world-view options are not unlimited. The intellectual combat between the New Age movement and orthodox Christianity boils down to several central points which were recognized by the early church eighteen hundred years before New Age celebrity evangelist Shirley MacLaine spoke to her first disembodied spirit.

A poster I saw at a retreat center read: "There are two important facts about the universe: 1. There is a God. 2. You are not he." This is Christianity in a nutshell. The Creator God is not confused with his creation. Humans are not now, nor will they ever be, divine. God is a personal being (a He), not an impersonal principle, force, or essence (an It). A New Age version of this poster would read: "There are two important facts of the universe. 1. There is a God. 2. You are It." Or, in the words of Joseph Campbell from the television series and book, *The Power of Myth*: "You are God, not in your ego, but in your deepest being, where you are at one with the nondual transcendent."

Campbell, who died in 1987, was a contemporary prophet of the New Age. He frequently harks back to Gnosticism for spiritual inspiration, saying that we can live out of the sense of Christ in us as Jesus lived out the Christhood of his nature. He also directly quotes from Gnostic text *The Gospel of Thomas* to the effect that Jesus' mission was to reveal the deity of all people. This is the heart of New Age spirituality: we are divine and we must rediscover this potential in order to better our world.

Neo-Gnostics, such as Campbell and many in the diverse New Age camp, imbibe at the well of gnosis, but not without straining out what offends modernity's tastes. The harsh Gnostic dualism of dark matter versus pure Spirit is ignored or redefined in psychological terms. The fantastic hierarchic cosmologies of innumerable spiritual beings is likewise winked at or interpreted, in good Jungian form, as manifestations of psychological processes. Yet the ancient appeal of Gnosticism remains: There is a hidden and secret wisdom (gnosis) that can be directly experienced by turning within. This is not found in traditional orthodoxy, which is merely exoteric or external, but in the deeper or esoteric meaning. The supreme realization of gnosis is the spark of divinity within. Underneath the illusions of ignorance burns the fire of the unlimited.

The exact origins of Gnosticism are a matter of great scholarly debate, but we find it thriving as an alternative to orthodox Christianity in the second century, and several New Testament writers such as John and Paul may have been responding to Gnostic or proto-Gnostic elements in their letter to the first century church. The greatest apologist against the Gnostics was the early church theologian Irenaeus, who wrote *Against Heresies* in approximately 180 A.D. From this work we can cull several principles for dealing with the neo-Gnostic or New Age teachings so widespread

today.

First, Irenaeus went to great lengths properly to identify and explain the beliefs of the "Gnostics so-called," those who supposedly knew reality. Reading through *Against Heresies* one discovers a careful analysis of the Gnostic system in its different forms. Until the discovery of many primary Gnostic texts near Nag Hamaddi, Egypt, in the 1940s, Irenaeus and other apologists provided nearly all of our knowledge of the Gnostics. Although some have disparaged the church fathers' treatment, historian Patrick Henry observes in his book *New Directions in New Testament Study* that they have integrity and "it is still legitimate to use [their] materials to characterize Gnosticism." Irenaeus, while opposing Gnosticism as a world-view antithetical to Christianity, labored to fairly present its views fairly.

No matter how ridiculous or blasphemous Christians find various New Age teachings, caricature is never an appropriate apologetic. Irenaeus, and all good apologists since, have tried to avoid the straw man fallacy. The Gnostics cleverly combined truth and error such that any critique of their doctrine demanded precision. As Irenaeus said,

Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced...more true than truth itself. 1.1.1.

Second, Irenaeus discerned that Gnosticism was not a minor deviation from biblical revelation but an utterly alien world-view disguised as Christianity. Therefore, in responding to the heretics, he articulated a Christian response adequate to throw the Gnostic perspective into aberrational relief. He was not content to chronicle falsehood. He demonstrated biblical truth. As Harold O. J. Brown notes in his book *Heresies*: "The fact that *Against Heresies* is so comprehensive is due in no small measure to the fact that the heresy against which it speaks was not limited to a particular point or doctrine, but was an alternative vision of religious reality spanning a wide range of doctrines."

Irenaeus should inspire us today to present "the full counsel of God" in response to New Age deviations. If New Age ideas of self-deification and unlimited human potential are infiltrating the world of psychology, let us mine the rich lode of psychological insights from the Scriptures to counter the counterfeit. The same holds true in every other area as well. Biblical alternatives must be discovered, developed and implemented. You can't fight something with nothing.

Third, Irenaeus knew that biblical misinterpretation was a key weapon in the Gnostic arsenal. Gnostics defended any number of unbiblical doctrines by appealing to Scriptural texts out of context and with no respect for the original author's intention. Irenaeus realized that they "gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures" while "they endeavor to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets and the words of the apostles" (1.8.1) Irenaeus says this ad hoc interpretation (or eisegesis) "disregards the order and connection of the Scriptures." He likens this to taking apart the individual jewels that make up a skilled artist's beautiful image of a king and rearranging them so as to make them into a dog or a fox (1.8.1).

Cults have always twisted biblical texts in service of their own unbiblical message. We, like Irenaeus, should unmask the artificiality and dishonesty of such literary license when it appears in New Age circles.

Fourth, heresy is not only unbiblical; it is illogical. Irenaeus not only defended orthodoxy as the original and legitimate faith, he also attacked the irrationality of Gnostic theology. In one memorable passage, he lampoons the common Gnostic claim that the ultimate Godhead is absolutely unknowable and unnameable. The apologist finds it odd that the Gnostics speak so much and with such metaphysical gusto about that which, on their own terms, they can neither know anything of nor say anything about! Since the Gnostics assign a wide variety of names to spiritual principles which they take to be unnameable, Irenaeus proposes his own cluster of ultimate spiritual entities consisting of Gourd, Utter-Emptiness, Cucumber, and Melon (1.11.4)!

Irenaeus's satire spotlights the stupidity of making the absolute reality beyond all words or thoughts. If this were so, any name--even the Cosmic Cucumber--would be equally appropriate or inappropriate for God. When modern, neo-Gnostic Joseph Campbell asserts in *The Power of Myth* that "God is beyond names and forms" and even "transcends thingness," we should remember the rank illogic of such remarks, especially when Campbell later goes on to say all sorts of things about the God who cannot be known!

Fifth, Christology is at the center of *Against Heresies*. Irenaeus knew that the Gnostic distortion of the meaning and work of Jesus Christ was its most dangerous aspect. Gnostics, then as now, divide the man Jesus from "the Christ" in various ways. The Christ is viewed as a spirit that temporarily visited Jesus and left him at the cross. Irenaeus realized that this perversion of Jesus leaves us fast in our fallenness because it denies that Christ died for our sins. Jesus is viewed as an enlightened man visited by the same Christ who elicits our the Christhood in each one of us. To this Irenaeus responds:

The Gospel...knew of no other man but Him who was of Mary, who also suffered; and no Christ who flew away from Jesus before the passion; but Him who was born it knows as Jesus Christ the Son of God, and that this same suffered and rose again (3.16.5)

Irenaeus argued that only through the suffering of Jesus the Christ could sinful beings be redeemed, "for...it was not possible that the man...who had been destroyed through disobedience, could reform himself" (3.18.8).

New Age versions of Jesus repeat this ancient error in similar ways. Jesus is viewed as a man who tapped into a universal Christ Consciousness. He is viewed as an example of what a self-realized master can do. The cross, then, loses all biblical significance. The resurrection, if considered, is spiritualized. It does not vindicate Jesus as the unique Lord and Savior, but provides an example of possible human attainment. The Jesus of biblical revelation must be lifted up in the face of these confusions.

The Gnostic planks of self-deification, biblical distortion, irrationality, and Christological confusion are mirrored in the neo-Gnostic elements of the New Age movement. With an eye

toward Irenaeus we can discover principles of confrontation just as applicable today as they were eighteen hundred years ago. Heresies will be with us until the End, but new heresies are hard to find indeed.

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Gnostics & The Social Revolution

* This site is dedicated to a comprehensive presentation of Modern Gnosticism, “the cyclical inner revelation of Unified Awareness through human understanding,” and its relevance to the long awaited International Social Revolution. Based on traditional spiritual sources, and expanded with contributions from Marxist Historical Materialism; the Arts, Science, and Christo-Paganism—Gnostics & The Social Revolution advocates a cultural fusion of psychic integration and multi-dimensional world-view, celebrating a Gnostic Humanist vision of The Great Work and The New Aeon of the Conquering Child.

Gnostics

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Gnosticism, its belief structures, history, and relevant texts are remarkably consistent with much of the Chronicles of Earth described elsewhere in this website. The connections to the Sumerian histories, stories of Anunnaki, Enki and Enlil, and even the modern day understanding of Mary Magdalen’s true role (as recounted, for example, by Dan Brown in his novel, *The Da Vinci Code* [1]), is nothing short of amazing. Gnosticism is thus an essential ingredient in understanding – from a wholly different viewpoint – the myriad events from the time of 600 B.C.E. to the present day.

To appreciate this concept, it is important to consider various descriptions of Gnostics by diverse modern scholars. In the recounting and brief summaries of their views, one can obtain a better understanding of Gnosticism, and periodically gleam from this description aspects which account for the whole of the Chronicles of Earth, the Star Fire, and the current bewilderment of a dysfunctional world.

We begin with: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/gnostics.html>, i.e.

Gnosticism is: “A religion that differentiates the evil god of this world (who is identified with the god of the Old Testament) from a higher more abstract God revealed by Jesus Christ, a religion that regards this world as the creation of a series of evil archons/powers who wish to keep the human soul trapped in an evil physical body, [and] a religion that preaches a hidden wisdom or knowledge only to a select group as necessary for salvation or escape from this world.” The term ‘gnostic’ derives from ‘gnosis,’ Greek for ‘knowledge’. “Some scholars have theorized that Gnosticism has its roots in pre-Christian religions, instead of being merely an offshoot of Christianity.”

<http://www.gnosis.org/gnintro.htm> provides us with an extended excellent summary of Gnosticism. For example:

“GNOSTICISM IS THE TEACHING based on Gnosis, the knowledge of transcendence arrived at by way of interior, intuitive means. Although Gnosticism thus rests on personal religious experience, it is a mistake to assume all such experience results in Gnostic recognitions. It is nearer the truth to say that Gnosticism expresses a specific religious experience, an experience that does not lend itself to the language of theology or philosophy, but which is instead closely affinitized to, and expresses itself through, the medium of myth. Indeed, one finds that most Gnostic scriptures take the forms of myths. The term “myth” should not here be taken to mean “stories that are not true”, but rather, that the truths embodied in these myths are of a different order from the dogmas of theology or the statements of philosophy.”

Relevant aspects of Gnosticism are (from: <http://www.gnosis.org/gnintro.htm>):

Gnostics hold that the world is flawed because it was created in a flawed manner. By beginning with the fundamental recognition that earthly life is filled with suffering, it becomes evident that all forms of life are living in a world which is flawed and absurd.

Gnostics blame the world's failings not on humans, but on the creator. “Since -- especially in the monotheistic religions -- the creator is God, this Gnostic position appears blasphemous, and is often viewed with dismay even by non-believers.”

“The ancient Greeks, especially the Platonists, advised people to look to the harmony of the universe, so that by venerating its grandeur they might forget their immediate afflictions. But since this harmony still contains the cruel flaws, forlornness and alienation of existence, this advice is considered of little value by Gnostics.

“Nor is the Eastern idea of Karma regarded by Gnostics as an adequate explanation of creation's imperfection and suffering. Karma at best can only explain how the chain of suffering and imperfection works. It does not inform us in the first place why such a sorrowful and malign system should exist.”

Of particular importance is the Gnostic concept of God, which unites and reconciles the recognitions of monotheism and polytheism, as well as of theism, deism, pantheism, and quite possibly humorism(?). Maybe even fundamentalism. Or just Ismism.

Gnostics believe there is a true, ultimate and transcendent God, a being who is beyond all created universes and who never created anything in the sense in which the word ‘create’ is ordinarily understood. Instead this God ‘emanated’ or brought forth from within Himself the substance of all there is in all the worlds, visible and invisible. However, much of the original divine essence has since been projected from their source and in the process has undergone some distinctly unwholesome changes in the process.

This process of change involves, in Gnostic myth, the existence of Aeons, “intermediate deific

beings who exist between the ultimate, True God and ourselves. They, together with the True God, comprise the realm of Fullness (Pleroma) wherein the potency of divinity operates fully.”

“One aeonial being who bears the name Sophia (‘Wisdom’) is of great importance to the Gnostic world view. In the course of her journeyings, Sophia came to emanate from her own being a flawed consciousness, a being who became the creator of the material and psychic cosmos, all of which he created in the image of his own flaw. This being, unaware of his origins, imagined himself to be the ultimate and absolute God. Since he took the already existing divine essence and fashioned it into various forms, he is also called the Demiurgos or ‘half-maker’.”

It is worth noting that in the first 34 verses of Genesis, “God” created the heavens and the earth. After that, the “Lord God” begins to really muck things up, expelling humans from an Eden, causing a Deluge, a massive language foul up with the Tower of Babel, and something often referred to as the “Wars of Gods and Men.”

This results in a dualism, a world consisting of the stuff created by a false God, and yet having the light of the True God. The latter in its connection with humans results in what has been referred to as the “divine spark”.

According to: <<http://www.gnosis.org/gnintro.htm>>, "Humans are generally ignorant of the divine spark resident within them. This ignorance is fostered in human nature by the influence of the false creator and his Archons, who together are intent upon keeping men and women ignorant of their true nature and destiny. Anything that causes us to remain attached to earthly things serves to keep us in enslavement to these lower cosmic rulers. Death releases the divine spark from its lowly prison, but if there has not been a substantial work of Gnosis undertaken by the soul prior to death, it becomes likely that the divine spark will be hurled back into, and then re-embodied within, the pangs and slavery of the physical world. [emphasis added]

This aspect of Gnosticism is critically important, in that its description of “archons” is plausibly a direct reference to the Anunnaki, with Enlil being “the evil god of this world (who is identified with the god of the Old Testament) and Enki being the “higher more abstract God revealed by Jesus Christ” (see the first quoted paragraph of this webpage).

Gnosticism does believe that not all humans are spiritual (pneumatics) and thus ready for Gnosis and liberation. [For example, the current administration in Washington, DC] Some are earthbound and materialistic beings (hyletics) [aka greedy, “axis of evil” types], who recognize only the physical reality. Others live largely in their psyche (psychics). Such people usually mistake the Demiurge for the True God and have little or no awareness of the spiritual world beyond matter and mind. In effect they never go beyond the physics into metaphysics [the latter which by definition is “beyond physics”].

Furthermore, Gnosticism does not believe evolutionary forces alone are sufficient to bring about spiritual freedom.

“Humans are caught in a predicament consisting of physical existence combined with ignorance of

their true origins, their essential nature and their ultimate destiny. To be liberated from this predicament, human beings require help, although they must also contribute their own efforts.”

Accordingly, the Gnosticism drill seems to be that from the earliest times – particularly around 600 B.C.E.,

“Messengers of the Light have come forth from the True God in order to assist humans in their quest for Gnosis. Only a few of these salvific figures are mentioned in Gnostic scripture; some of the most important are Seth (the third Son of Adam), Jesus, and the Prophet Mani. The majority of Gnostics always looked to Jesus as the principal savior figure (the Soter).”

At the same time, however, in the Gnostic view it is Christ’s teachings that are relevant, not his suffering and death. Ignorance – particularly of the willful kind -- is the problem. Salvation is an individual experience, stimulated and facilitated by Messengers of Light – a latter example possibly being Lucifer, “Bringer of Light” (often associated with Enki).

Interestingly, Gnosticism opposes any system of rules, such as “ethics” or “morality”. The view is that such systems (e.g. the work ethic) are the tools of the false god, and are ultimately designed to serve his nefarious purposes. Morality as an inner integrity which derives from the divine spark, on the other hand, is spiritually ideal.

According to: <http://www.gnosis.org/gnintro.htm>,

“To the Gnostic, commandments and rules are not salvific; they are not substantially conducive to salvation. Rules of conduct may serve numerous ends, including the structuring of an ordered and peaceful society, and the maintenance of harmonious relations within social groups. Rules, however, are not relevant to salvation; that is brought about only by Gnosis. Morality therefore needs to be viewed primarily in temporal and secular terms; it is ever subject to changes and modifications in accordance with the spiritual development of the individual.”

In today’s world, Gnosticism is often viewed in its classical Alexandrian form, wherein matters of conduct are largely left to the insight of the individual. This may include a non-attachment and non-conformity to the world, a “being in the world, but not of the world”; a lack of egotism; and a respect for the freedom and dignity of other beings -- something of a Common Law attitude.

When asked about death, Confucius reportedly replied, “Why do you ask me about death when you do not know how to live?” This answer is pure Gnosticism. In the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Jesus said that “human beings must come by Gnosis to know the ineffable, divine reality from whence they have originated, and whither they will return. This transcendental knowledge must come to them while they are still embodied on earth.”

Highly noteworthy is the Gnostic belief that death does not automatically bring about liberation from bondage [Bummer!]. If liberation is not forthcoming in life, then its back to the Wheel of Life of reincarnation. [Double Bummer!] The cycle of rebirths continue! Gnosticism does not directly emphasize reincarnation, but the essence of it implies a serious acceptance of the

possibility.

<http://www.gnosis.org/gnintro.htm>, and its author, Stephan A. Hoeller (Tau Stephanus, Gnostic Bishop), notes that:

“Theology has been called an intellectual wrapping around the spiritual kernel of a religion. If this is true, then it is also true that most religions are being strangled and stifled by their wrappings. Gnosticism does not run this danger, because its world view is stated in myth rather than in theology. Myths, including the Gnostic myths, may be interpreted in diverse ways. Transcendence, numinosity, as well as psychological archetypes along with other elements, play a role in such interpretation. Still, such mythic statements tell of profound truths that will not be denied.

“Gnosticism can bring us such truths with a high authority, for it speaks with the voice of the highest part of the human -- the spirit. Of this spirit, it has been said, ‘it bloweth where it listeth’. This then is the reason why the Gnostic world view could not be extirpated in spite of many centuries of persecution.”

“The Gnostic world view has always been timely, for it always responded best to the ‘knowledge of the heart’ that is true Gnosis. Yet today, its timeliness is increasing, for the end of the second millennium has seen the radical deterioration of many ideologies which evaded the great questions and answers addressed by Gnosticism. The clarity, frankness, and authenticity of the Gnostic answer to the questions of the human predicament cannot fail to impress and (in time) to convince.”

Other sources, for example, <http://members.aol.com/heraklit1/gnostic.htm>, have written that there “is no reliable body of sayings or teachings of Jesus which represent his own views beyond reasonable doubt. The four gospels are only four out of dozens that were whittled down by the formation of the church canon, and by censorship and physical destruction of rival texts.”

This led to a wide diversity in interpretations concerning the life of Christ. Two of the Gnostic gospels – the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Eve, for example – are clearly pantheistic, stating that God or Christ is present in everything and everyone. At the same time, the Gospel of Thomas (found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt) rejects the flesh and woman, while fragments from the Gospel of Eve get into lurid sexual practices, including sexual orgies and sharing mates.

Obviously, interpretation becomes a highly individual and/or collective practice!

One aspect, however, is particularly significant. Coitus interruptus was normal practice. Semen was collected and offered to the body of Christ before being consumed. The Gnostics also, apparently consumed women’s menstrual blood. This corresponds to the semen of the god being equivalent to The Golden Tear from the Eye of Horus, the semen of the Father of Heaven being the White Powder of Gold, and the menstrual blood being the Star Fire of the Goddess! Obviously, the Gospel of Eve is dealing with a wholly new interpretation than the one afforded by Thomas.

<http://members.aol.com/heraklit1/gnostic.htm>, goes on to note that, “the power of the soul was found in semen and menses. But allowing semen to beget children in this world would play into the hands of the evil archon. So if by accident a woman fell pregnant, the sect would abort the

fetus. They would pound it in a mortar, mix it with honey and spices, and eat it.” In effect, “the material world was ruled by an evil ‘archon’ or intermediate deity. The bodily flesh belonged to this archon, and would not be raised up.” The modern day equivalent to this might be in not supporting the Matrix!

Allegedly, Jesus “was the first teacher of these practices. He took Mary (probably Mary Magdalene) to a mountain, took a woman out of his side and had sex with her, then drank his own sperm saying: ‘Thus we ought to do, that we may live’” The sect even claimed that when Jesus at the Last Supper spoke of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he was referring to this practice.”

[The accounts and texts are from: Wilhelm Schneemelcher, New Testament Apocrypha, James Clarke & Co-Westminster/John Knox Press, Cambridge and Louisville, 1990, and Philip Amidon, The Panarion of St Epiphanius, Oxford University Press, 1990.]

<http://www.religioustolerance.org/gnostic.htm> provides an alternative summary of Gnosticism. It notes, for example, that Gnosticism was tolerant of different religious beliefs within and outside of Gnosticism – suggesting that Thomas’ and Eve’s differing views on sex were to be considered equally valid.

This same site also provides an excellent history of Gnosticism. This includes the contention that Gnosticism’ many syncretistic belief systems combined elements from Asian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and Syrian pagan religions, from astrology, and from Judaism and Christianity. It is also suggested that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS or Mormon Church) has adopted some of the ancient Gnostic beliefs and practices.

In terms of Gnostic beliefs, <http://www.religioustolerance.org/gnostic.htm> states that, Sophia, a virgin*, gave birth to a defective, inferior Creator-God; a lower god who created the earth and its life forms. “This is Jehovah, the God of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). He is viewed by Gnostics as fundamentally evil, jealous, rigid, lacking in compassion and prone to genocide.” Apparently, someone capable of allowing the human race to die by a Deluge. This lower god “thinks that he is supreme. His pride and incompetence have resulted in the sorry state of the world as we know it, and in the blind and ignorant condition of most of mankind.” The world had not been created perfectly and then degenerated as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, but instead, “the world was seen as evil at the time of its origin, because it had been created by an inferior God.”

[*The original definition of virgin was, “A woman beholden to no man.”]

The latter, as mentioned before, is a good description of Enlil (aka Jehovah). Enki, on the other hand, always identified symbolically as the serpent, was honored by Gnostics. “They did not view the snake as a seducer who led the first couple into sinful behavior. Rather, they saw him/it [Enki] as a liberator who brought knowledge to Adam and Eve by convincing them to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and thus to become fully human.” [emphasis added]

If humans could use their full brains and DNA genetic makeup, "become fully human" – as opposed to about the ten or fifteen percent they currently use – humans might well become, "as one of us", i.e. as one of the Anunnaki, the Gods and Goddesses. Eating of the fruit (the ORME or ORMUS?) of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil – even potentially the semen and menses of... whomever – may be the route!

The timing of Gnosticism and its arrival on the stage of history may thus be linked to 600 B.C.E., the beginning of the Age of Pisces, and the overriding influence of Enki. Being closer to the history of the ancient world, it is likely the Gnostics were more accurate in their description of ancient reality – a reality which may very well continue to exist to the present day. The so-called myths of the Anunnaki and the Gods and Goddesses, and so forth, are seen in the Gnostic tradition as the way it was. And very likely, still is.

Finally, <http://www.religioustolerance.org/gnostic.htm> notes that most Gnostic texts were destroyed during various campaigns to suppress the movement – such as the burning of the Library of Alexandria by the Catholics. Despite these set backs, however, religious historians have determined that:

Many Gnostics were solitary practitioners,

Many texts were attributed to women,

Mary Magdelene was second only to Jesus in status,

Ritual sex magic was practiced in some groups, and

In some cases, new members were baptized by saying, "In the name of the Father unknown to all, in the Truth, Mother of All, in the One who came down upon Jesus, in the union, redemption and communion of powers."

The above reference to "the union" may likely have been the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene (which explains her status in a patriarchal society). Again and again, beliefs and traditions from Gnosticism connect with the Anunnaki and History 009. This coincidence of beliefs and understanding about the world tends to mutually support each of the possibilities.

<http://www.gnostics.com> compares Gnostics with a Marxist "long awaited International Social Revolution" – which is something of a stretch! Yet at the same time, the site adds some interesting notes on the discovery of the Gnostic "secret books".

For example, the 44 papyrus documents of the Gnostic Archive was found at Gebel et-Tarif (and yet called Nag Hammadi). Furthermore, they were very nearly lost a second time – "either as a result of nationalist bureaucratic bungling and petty scholastic intrigue, or by simply vanishing on the international black market". Also, the young men who found the artifacts were unaware of their value to the extent they used some to warm their tea. "There's no way to telling how much more Gnostic history had been lost by that little tea break."

They go on to note that the Coptic Gnostic Texts are very likely far more valuable than the famous Nassene “Dead Sea Scrolls” of Qumran, “in that they reveal the essence of a religion that Christianity tried to obliterate.” At the same time, much of what we know about Gnosticism derived from a certain “Saint Epiphanius” who bravely allowed himself to be seduced by a Gnostic sect’s more attractive females – all for the cause of investigating the “cult” – and then once having infiltrated the ranks, this stalwart Christian handed a list of members to the Church for their immediate banishment!

<http://www.gnostics.com> also notes that all pagan religions of the Mediterranean and the Near East had adapted their creeds to astrology -- which as accorded the status of a science. It was in this way that human were subjected to the Determinism and shackles of the Wheel of Fate. The jury is still out on that one.

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[1] Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, Doubleday, New York, 2003.

Gnostic (Gnosis is from the Greek = Knowledge) writers are fascinating. They believed that everyone who passed through initiation (as in the earlier Mysteries) and achieved Gnosis, had the right to interpret the message of Jesus in their own way. In an introduction to the finds at Nag Hammadi, the distinguished Gnostic historian Elaine Pagels writes about Professor Gilles Quispel's discovery of a complete text of the Gospel of Thomas:

"Arriving in Cairo, he went at once to the Coptic Museum, borrowed photographs of some of the texts, and hurried back to his hotel to decipher them. Tracing out the first line, Quispel was startled, then incredulous, to read: "These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke, and which the twin, Judas Thomas, wrote down." Quispel knew that his colleague H.C. Puech, using notes from another French scholar, Jean Doresse, had identified the opening lines with fragments of a Greek Gospel of Thomas discovered in the 1890's. But the discovery of the whole text raised new questions: Did Jesus have a twin brother, as this text implies? Could the text be an authentic record of Jesus' sayings? According to its title, it contained the Gospel According to Thomas; yet, unlike the gospels of the New Testament, this text identified itself as a secret gospel. Quispel also discovered that it contained many sayings known from the New Testament; but these sayings, placed in unfamiliar contexts, suggested other dimensions of meaning. Other passages, Quispel found, differed entirely from any known Christian tradition: the "living Jesus," for example, speaks in sayings as cryptic and compelling as Zen koans ... "

Bound in with this gospel was the Gospel of Philip, with sayings quite different, or re-interpreted from the 'norma; New Testament., for instance:

". . . the companion of the [Savior is] Mary Magdalene. [But Christ loved] her more than [all] the disciples, and used to kiss her [often] on her [mouth]. The rest of [the disciples were offended] . . . They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?" The Savior answered and said to them, "Why do I not love you as (I love) her?" "

Not something you find normally quoted in church!

Other texts talk about the secret teachings of the disciples, and some of these are very critical of the 'naive' teachings of the normal gospels such as the virgin birth and the resurrection.

These were Coptic translations, made about 1,500 years ago, of still more ancient manuscripts. The originals themselves had been written in Greek, the language of the New Testament. They are dated c.. A.D. 350-400. But experts disagree about the dating of the original texts. Some of them can hardly be later than c. A.D. 120-150, since Irenaeus, the orthodox Bishop of Lyons, writing C. 180, declares that heretics "... boast that they possess more gospels than there really are ..." and complains that in his time such writings already have won wide circulation--from Gaul through Rome, Greece, and Asia Minor. Professor Helmut Koester of Harvard University has suggested that the collection of sayings in the Gospel of Thomas, although compiled c. 140, may include some traditions even older than the gospels of the New Testament, "possibly as early as the second half of the first century" (50-100) - as early as, or earlier, than Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John." The texts found range from secret gospels, poems, and quasi-philosophic descriptions of the origin of the universe, to myths, magic, and instructions for mystical practice.

Many texts claim to offer traditions about Jesus that are secret, hidden from "the many" who constitute what, in the second century, came to be called the "catholic church." These Christians are now called gnostics, from the Greek word gnosis, usually translated as "knowledge." Those who wrote and circulated these texts did not regard themselves as "heretics". Most of the writings use Christian terminology, unmistakably related to a Jewish heritage. For as those who claim to know nothing about ultimate reality are called agnostic (literally, "not knowing"), the person who does claim to know such things is called gnostic ("knowing"). But gnosis is not primarily rational knowledge.

The Greek language distinguishes between scientific or reflective knowledge ("He knows mathematics") and knowing through observation or experience ("He knows me"), which is gnosis. As the gnostics use the term, we could translate it as "insight," for gnosis involves an intuitive process of knowing oneself. And to know oneself, they claimed, is to know human nature and human destiny. According to the gnostic teacher Theodotus, writing in Asia Minor (c. 140-160), the gnostic is "one has come to understand who we were, and what we have become; where we were... whither we are hastening; from what we are being released; what birth is, and what is rebirth."

Yet to know oneself, at the deepest level, is simultaneously to know God; this is the secret of gnosis. Another gnostic teacher, Monoimus, says:

"Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. Look for him by taking yourself as the starting point. Learn who it is within you who makes everything his own

and says, "My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body." Learn the sources of sorrow:, joy, love, hate . . . If you carefully investigate these matters you will find him in yourself. "

Sounds very modern doesn't it!

Orthodox Jews and Christians insist that a chasm separates humanity from Its creator: God is wholly other. But some of the gnostics who wrote these gospels contradict this: self-knowledge is knowledge of God; the self and the divine are identical.

Second, the "living Jesus" of these texts speaks of illusion and enlightenment, not of sin and repentance, like the Jesus of the New Testament. Instead of coming to save us from sin, he comes as a guide who opens access to spiritual understanding. But when the disciple attains enlightenment, Jesus no longer serves as his spiritual master: the two have become equal--even identical.

Indian Influences?

Third, orthodox Christians believe that Jesus is Lord and Son of God in a unique way: he remains forever distinct from the rest of humanity whom he came to save. Yet the gnostic Gospel of Thomas relates that as soon as Thomas recognizes him, Jesus says to Thomas that they have both received their being from the same source:

[Jesus says], "I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become drunk from the bubbling stream which I have measured out.... He who will drink from my mouth will become as I am: I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him."

Does not such teaching--the identity of the divine and human, the concern with illusion and enlightenment, the founder who is presented not as Lord, but as spiritual guide sound more Eastern than Western? Some scholars have suggested that if the names were changed, the 'living Buddha' appropriately could say what the Gospel of Thomas attributes to the living Jesus. Could Hindu or Buddhist tradition have influenced gnosticism?

The British scholar of Buddhism, Edward Conze, suggests that it had. He points out that: "Buddhists were in contact with the Thomas Christians (that is, Christians who knew and used such writings as the Gospel of Thomas) in South India." Trade routes between the Greco-Roman world and the Far East were opening up at the time when gnosticism flourished (A.D. 80-200); for generations, Buddhist missionaries had been proselytizing in Alexandria. We note, too, that Hippolytus, who was a Greek speaking Christian in Rome (c. 225), knows of the Indian Brahmins--and includes their tradition among the sources of heresy:

There is . . . among the Indians a heresy of those who philosophize among the Brahmins, who live a self-sufficient life, abstaining from (eating) living creatures and all cooked food . . . They say that God is light, not like the light one sees, nor like the sun nor fire, but to them God is discourse, not that which finds expression in articulate sounds, but that of knowledge (gnosis) through which the secret mysteries of nature are perceived by the wise.

Could the title of the Gospel of Thomas, named for the disciple who, tradition tells us, went to India, suggest the influence of Indian tradition?

These hints indicate the possibility, yet our evidence is not conclusive. Since parallel traditions may emerge in different cultures at different times, such ideas could have developed in both places independently. What we call Eastern and Western religions, and tend to regard as separate streams, were not clearly differentiated 2,000 years ago.

Early Christianity

According to Christian legend, the early church was different. Christians of every persuasion look back to the primitive church to find a simpler, purer form of Christian faith. In the apostles' time, all members of the Christian community shared their money and property; all believed the same teaching, and worshipped together; all revered the authority of the apostles. It was only after that golden age that conflict, then heresy emerged: so says the author of the Acts of the Apostles, who identifies himself as the first historian of Christianity.

But the discoveries at Nag Hammadi have upset this picture. If we admit that some of these fifty-two texts represents early forms of Christian teaching, we may have to recognize that early Christianity is far more diverse than nearly anyone expected before the Nag Hammadi discoveries.

Contemporary Christianity, diverse and complex as we find it, actually may show more unanimity than the Christian churches of the first and second centuries. For nearly all Christians since that time, Catholics, Protestants, or Orthodox, have shared three basic premises. First, they accept the canon of the New Testament; second, they confess the apostolic creed; and third, they affirm specific forms of church institution. But every one of these - the canon of Scripture, the creed, and the institutional structure - emerged in its present form only toward the end of the second century.

Before that time, as Irenaeus and others attest, numerous gospels circulated among various Christian groups, ranging from those of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, to such writings as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, and the Gospel of Truth, as well as many other secret teachings, myths, and poems attributed to Jesus or his disciples.

In addition Pagan influences were not considered so separate as they later became, until they began to re-merge in symbolic, philosophic and mystical terms in the Renaissance. Joseph Campbell mentions that on the ceiling of the Domatilla Catacomb is Orpheus playing his lyre, where we would have expected to see the Christ. Surrounding panels show Old and New Testament scenes, and Pagan scenes. And none of these seem to be out of place.

By A. D. 200, the situation had changed. Christianity had become an institution headed by a three-rank hierarchy of bishops, priests, and deacons, who understood themselves to be the guardians of the only "true faith." The majority of churches, among which the church of Rome took a leading role, rejected all other viewpoints as heresy. Deploing the diversity of the earlier movement, Bishop Irenaeus and his followers insisted that there could be only one church, and

outside of that church, he declared, "there is no salvation." Members of this church alone are orthodox (literally, "straight-thinking") Christians. And, he claimed, this church must be catholic--that is, universal. Whoever challenged that consensus, arguing instead for other forms of Christian teaching, was declared to be a heretic, and expelled. When the orthodox gained military support, sometime after the Emperor Constantine became Christian in the fourth century, the penalty for heresy escalated.

Teachings

"Written by a Neoplatonist philosopher of about the fifth century, "the Celestial Hierarchies describes three worlds of which ours is the lowest. This is the elemental world of nature and is subject to influences from above. Above this 'sublunary' world, is what is called the 'celestial' world wherein are found the stars and their 'spirits' or 'guardians' (analogous to the Gnostic archons). Even higher is the sphere of the 'supercelestial' world, the world of nous, the 'intellectual' or 'intelligible' world of angelic spirits, of superior knowledge of reality because closer to the One, the divine source of creation, who is beyond the three worlds. Hand in hand with this concept of worlds, of which ours is the lowest projection, goes its essential counterpart; the concept of microcosm.... Going deeper and deeper into the mind of Man, illuminated by nous, man could travel farther and farther into the universe - and back again."

Tobias Churton : The Gnostics

It has already been mentioned that Gnosticism is derived from the word gnosis = knowledge. The world itself was regarded as a fallen state, an evil that was ruled over by a sub-God, the Demiurge. Salvation came from knowledge, not by intensity of faith, or even by good works.

The divine spark within each of us, had fallen from heaven through the celestial spheres. To return to our heavenly state we need to return through each of these spheres. But each sphere was guarded by its guardian, the Archon, who jealously barred passage unless certain passwords and actions were known. These could be learnt through Gnosticism.

The world itself was normally scorned, and regarded as a trap, a hell from which we needed to escape. In addition it was considered madness to try and bring more souls into such an entrapment, and celibacy became an important part of the doctrine.

There was a lot of discussion as to whether Jesus was the son of Yahweh, the old Testament God, or the son of a higher power, of which perhaps Yahweh was ignorant. Some writings call Yahweh, the fool, for thinking he was the only God, but the son had come into incarnation to show us the higher truth.

Yahweh was associated with the demiurge, who had brought about the sorrow and pain on Earth.

In the 5th century Pistis Sophia, Jesus Christ describes the ordeals he suffered after the crucifixion, when he ascended through the different spheres and the Archons who attempted to bar his passage.

Gnostic Texts

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Terms used in the text

aeons: Emanations of Being from the unknowable, ultimate metaphysical principle or pleroma

Demiurge: According to the Gnostics, an inferior deity who ignorantly and incompetently fashioned the debased physical world.

gnosis: The Greek word for "knowledge" used by the Gnostics to mean knowledge gained not through intellectual discovery but through personal experience or acquaintance which initiates one into esoteric mysteries. The experience of gnosis reveals to the initiated the divine spark within.

Pleroma: The Greek word for "fulness" used by the Gnostics to mean the highest principle of Being where dwells the unknown and unknowable God

Connections: The Albigensians (Cathars)

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