

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
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The Beauty of Holiness

*“Laid on Thine Altar, O my Lord Divine,
Accept this gift today, for Jesus' sake.
I have no jewels to adorn Thy shrine,
Nor any world-famed sacrifice to make;
But here I bring, within my trembling hand,
This will of mine — a thing that seemeth small;
And Thou alone, O Lord, canst understand
How, when I yield Thee this, I yield mine all.”*

A high accomplishment of religious life and experience is to become intensely aware of the holiness of God. This great fact — God's absolute holiness — is the essence of all revealed truth, in that it takes us behind all that God **does** in order to show us what He **is**. Behind the whole structure of the Divine Plan of Redemption is the character of God who framed it. If His redemptive plan manifests unfathomable love, it is because that love existed before the plan was made. If we talk of Bethlehem, Calvary, Olivet — the miraculous birth of a babe, the death of a man, the resurrection of the Son of God making salvation possible for all — then back of all that preparation we must see the yearning heart of one who, for a time, had lost possession of his earthly sons. If, looking down the years, we see a righteous world where no ill deed is done, and man is free from sin, then behind the whole design we must allow for the one who hated sin before that sin began.

Behind all precious doctrine and redemptive work, behind each type and shadow, behind the whole Gospel story, stands the identity of one who is greater than His works. From His own great heart the love-stream flowed; from His white-hot soul the sin-hatred sprang; and from His unfaltering will, the drive and power of accomplishment came forth. Effects spring only from adequate causes. Redemption and restoration must have a redeemer and restorer, and though others may be chosen to help reach those effects, He only is the First Great Cause.

Behind all truth, behind all development of this or that to serve His ends, stands God Most High: a God of love and pity, compassionate, merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, yet not overlooking sin. If love of man is found in men, it is because it first was found in Him. If love of truth

is found in man, again it first was found in Him. From His unsullied fullness sprang all that He has done. He **does** because of what He **is**. Because He is today all that He ever was, His purposes remain unchanged. Because eternal years to come will find Him still as He now is, the utmost bounds of time will find no variation in His ways.

Today, as yesterday, and throughout everlasting years, His integrity remains the same because His native holiness knows no change. His glorious plans, made sure by promise, arid precious blood, and “Oath” upon His own great name, assure both heaven and earth that He will uproot sin, and uplift man, till naught of Adamic or Satanic taint remain: till man, and angel too, shall savor of that holy state so like His own.

No student of God's word can feel surprise that He who dwelt with the eternal God before the round of time began should here on earth, in time, teach mortal man as the first burden of his prayer to say “Our Father ... hallowed be Thy name.” Through ages too profound to calculate, the worthy Son, as Logos of His worthy Sire, held in reverent esteem that holy name, and times unnumbered he led the undefiled in heaven to sing its worthy praise, and echo forth “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord” — a song which some day will rise from every tongue.

Come down to this sad earth, the sweetest hours which blessed his lonely life were those in which memory sped back to those far days before the world was made, when, dwelling in the presence of the eternal God, he was always God's delight. The memory of that holiness in his hour of

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need, when he walked mid sin and death, kept him, as a needle to the pole, at rest and peace, and faithful unto death. When humble earthly fishermen, desiring to know God, requested to be taught, the theme that rose from his own soul was given as pattern for their prayers. "Our Father ... hallowed be Thy name."

In his touching farewell prayer, though heavy sorrow filled his soul, the same great theme engrossed his mind. When placing his little band for their safe-keeping within his Father's care, he prayed "Holy Father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me" (John 17:11). No thought of nearing death could banish from his mind the "Holy Father" and the "Holy Name." By precept and example then, before his chosen few, the Son of Man who came from heaven held up on earth that Holy Name as worthy of all praise and adoration, because it was the name of Him who in Himself was holy beyond compare.

How extremely poor are illustrations and words to show to us mere men the incalculable heights of worthiness and excellence which natively reside in God. High as the highest heaven above the spheres of earth, so stands God's moral worth above the worth of worthiest man. No single thought, word, or act, from the far depths of everlasting years ever can know taint or flaw. No tongue of man or angel will ever need to utter accusation against the holy name, when once He deigns to show Himself such as He truly is. No truce with sin, nor irresolution to root it out will ever be charged against the holy one of Israel.

The sacred writer said "God is Light." How wonderful, and yet how inadequate is light to illustrate that greater "light." Far back along the stream of time when chaos and unending darkness reigned, and light was not, the "eternal light" dwelt in His abode, sent forth His brooding power, and drew the beams of light out of the womb of black eternal night. Greater far that "holy light" than summer's noon-day hour!

The Scriptures say He is "of purer eyes" than to behold approvingly the sins of men. But how insufficient are those mere words to tell of that undefilable purity which neither friend nor foe can taint. If whiteness be the token of inward purity then God's native holiness shall out-white the winter's virgin snow. If the white-hot glow is needed to consume the dross in order that the pure red gold may be set free, then God's fiery jealousy against sin is a flame intenser by far. Brighter than equatorial sun, purer than polar virgin snow, hotter than the any flame, is divine jealousy for the right, good, and true, and its zeal against sin, wrong, and evil in every form.

There it must be left. Our world contains no parallel to the exceeding intensity of the holiness of God. Our language has no words — not Shakespeare's facile pen nor Milton's glowing tongue — to paint the holy fire which dwells eternal in the heart of God. And here our quandary begins.

All students of the holy book admit the holiness of God. But none admit the holiness of man. How then can we be as He? If God is holy beyond compare, how can we attain to

holiness like Him? What do these words of Peter mean, "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16)? Back somewhere in an earlier day the inspired penman recorded these few words, and Peter takes them up to sharpen his appeal to win brethren to a purer life.

But can disciples live a holy life? Is it not presumptuous to speak of holiness and saintliness while here on earth? Are we not of sinful stock, and tainted by the fall? Do we not oft do things we ought not, and leave undone those we should do? Can we claim, even in our best moments, to be free from sin? Nay indeed!

But before the query arises the answer comes! Scripture describes brethren as holy (Romans 12:1, Hebrews 3:1) and often calls them saints (Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Ephesians 1:1, etc.)! In what way then can sin and holiness accord?, for "there is none righteous" (Romans 3:10). Are holiness and righteousness the same quality of heart? Holiness is generally understood to mean freedom from sin, "an absolute purity of heart." But so is righteousness; that is, when speaking other than of righteousness by faith. Wherein comes the difference then?

Righteousness is a forensic term. It indicates a state or condition in harmonious conformity with a law. It is a "law" term, and as such applies to the equitable action, the righteous balance or the just measure, in men's inter-dealings with each other. A transaction is accounted righteous or unrighteous according to its conformity or non-conformity to a code of laws. These standards vary in different communities, hence an action may be lawful (legally correct) among one people, but unlawful in another. An action may be considered right (righteous) in one community but condemned in all the rest. Herein lies much of the basic cause for the world's present distress.

Connected with the things of God and God's dealings with men, the divine code of laws determines what is right and what is wrong. Here the standard of righteousness is absolute, the same for every land and every man. It applies to angels too, it embraces heaven and earth. Not even God is exempt from its claims (John 17:25). Righteousness (in the absolute) is a state in which full compliance with divine law exists. Such compliance denotes a state of legal sinlessness. Sin is equivalent to unrighteousness — "missing of the mark" — non-compliance with law's demands. Sin and unrighteousness are thus synonymous. Righteousness is the legal opposite condition to both sin and unrighteousness.

Holiness applies to the moral aspect of an act. It describes the moral quality of a man whose action is determined as righteous. Lack of holiness, before an act, predisposes one to perform an unrighteous act. Holiness is thus the moral opposite of sin. Lack of holiness implies taint in the man, just as unrighteousness implies taint in the act. Holiness implies that man is wholesome in himself, exactly as righteousness implies that the action is wholesome in itself. Holiness is thus the basic moral quality within the man. Righteousness is the outworking of that inner quality in conduct to the accepted standard of law.



Our Holy Creator cares for our eternal blessing.

Holiness applies to what one **is** (“the holy one of Israel”) — **righteousness** to what one **does** (“Thy righteous acts are made manifest,” Revelation 15:4).

In God we have Holiness in what He is — but we also see it applied to an end, to rid the world of sin. The holiness of God’s inner self desires the holiness of His whole environment. In God’s divine plan His intrinsic holiness expresses itself by reproducing a similar intrinsic holiness (the same in kind though in less degree) in a race of men who had been once defiled by sin. God sets Himself before men as the pattern for them to imitate. He desires to produce in them the same high qualities of heart which dwell so richly in Himself — to see men love their fellows, and dwell at peace, each with his kin, and all to be at one with God.

God longs for man to reach an untainted state within in order that he may perform untainted works without. Thus, to renew righteousness in the earth God will act upon the human heart, enabling man to create a new environment. From the inner to the outer; from the centre to the circumference, from the heart to the hand; such is God’s order in the uplift out of sin. To make man’s life sound without, God will first make it sound within.

TODAY

So where do we stand today? In this world of sin and sorrow how can we become like Him? It is not nature’s gift to any man to be a saint, it is the work of Grace. We need to learn, patient and slow, how best to copy God, and then, to stand the strain. God must give Grace to help, and eyes to see, and meanwhile hold us in His hand; then by slow degrees the lesson will be learned, and we shall come to see God more lovely than all the sons of men.

The dark forbidding cloud that hides Him from men’s view will open up its folds and we shall pass within the veil of mysteries and see things there which human eye has never seen, nor mortal ear has heard, nor heart of man conceived. In there, like Moses on the mountain’s crest, God’s glory falling upon our hearts will change them day by day, until the holy supersedes the vile, and we become like Him.

— *Bible Students Committee, Assoc. Bible Students, England, 1940*

Explaining Scripture in Light of Gnostic Heresies

“Laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7).

During the latter stages of their ministries the Apostles constantly battled counterfeit Christian heresies. This is well documented in Scripture. Less understood is the specific nature of these heresies. The early stages of heretical thought recorded especially in Paul’s and John’s letters are often thought to be describing the incipient presence of what would later become the Papacy. However, a broader dynamic was taking place. Yes, there were the Nicolaitans, the “victorious over the people” (Strong 3532), or the “the masters of the people,”¹ who as Diotrephes (3 John 9), loved to have preeminence. But this represented more of a political struggle within the traditional church. Meanwhile considerable doctrinal deceptions were taking place outside of traditional Christianity by numerous pseudo-Christian sects labeled Gnostics.

It is not within the scope of this article to closely define Gnosticism.² That would take a while because it represents a broad range of beliefs and practices. However, there are overarching characteristics among its sects. In general Gnostics appeared to be nominal Christians who heavily borrowed their beliefs and practices from the pagan culture of the day. The degree to which these sects accomplished pagan infusion into Christian thinking dwarfed similar efforts made later by the Catholic Church. At their height, Gnostics represented fully half of the Christian world. Their pressure upon orthodox Christianity was immense, but Gnosticism was eventually overthrown within Christendom by the fourth century when Papacy gained temporal power and threw them out of the spiritual heavens, as it were.

The purpose of this article is to offer a clearer understanding of certain scriptures of Paul and John by laying a Gnostic template over them. The method used will be to list a pertinent scripture and then explain how the Apostle addressed Gnostic misconceptions. John is of special interest since he lived a long time and was thus able to see the more advanced stages of Gnostic growth first hand.

1 Timothy 6:20 — “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.”

The significance of the Gnostic name common to this class of heresy is found in the Greek word *gnosis*. *Gnosis* means “knowledge” (Strong 1108) and is rendered “science” in the King James version. The acquisition of knowledge as the process for obtaining greater spirituality was accepted by all Gnostic sects. This was not knowledge from the Scripture, but from one’s self — a process of self-awareness through which the divine was supposedly discovered. The concept is illustrated in this quote from the gnostic *Gospel*

of *Philip* 61:29-35. “You saw the spirit, you became spirit. You saw Christ, you became Christ. You saw [the Father, you] shall become the Father ... you see yourself, and what you see you shall [become].”

Such ethereal belief has little basis in fact, whether evidenced by Scripture, nature, or reason. This quote illustrates the vain babblings aspect of Paul’s comments (Gnostic writings are full of them). Paul also renounces vain and profane babblings that would lead to ungodliness even if just engaged in discussion. His advice is to stay far away from such sophistries and adhere strictly to the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:14-16).

Acts 8:9-24 — “But there was a certain man called Simon, which beforetime ... used sorcery and bewitched the people ... giving out that himself was some great one.”

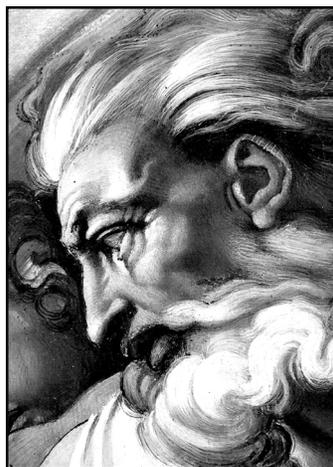
This is the one time this Simon is mentioned in Scripture. But given the extensive account, one would think it has an important purpose (especially considering Simon was more interested in his own safety than repentance). This Simon was identified as Simon Magus, the well known founder of the first Gnostic sect, both by Justin Martyr³ and by Irenaeus,⁴ both second century luminaries close to the events described in Acts. Josephus also mentions a Simon, a close friend of governor Felix (Acts 23), who used magic. This may be a non-Christian reference to Simon Magus.^{5,6}

If these authors are correct, then the Bible gives us specific insight into the beginning and nature of Gnosticism. Simon came among the Christians with the desire for power and fame. Rejected by the Apostles and without the holy Spirit, he built a pseudo-Christian theology using faked miracles to reinforce his false spiritual authority.

2 Timothy 3:1-8 — “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be ... Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof ... For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women ... Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth.”

Paul warned the recipients of his letter to turn away from such. He warned of a very present danger from those having the **form** of godliness. Pagans had little deceptive form of godliness to the Christian. Paul described counterfeit Christians, which the Gnostics certainly were. A common belief among Gnostics sects was a rejection of the holy Spirit as God’s power and influence. The holy Spirit was defined as wisdom, often in the form of a female deity. Thus they rejected the power of the holy Spirit.⁷ Also, Paul implied that these people in fact had no *gnosis* at all, despite their best efforts.

The “captive silly women” mentioned, if taken within a Gnostic context, could be Paul’s description of a dynamic he saw in the church. Gnosticism became particularly attractive to women by giving them added ecclesiastical influence and authority. They were often equal to men in office and practice. Elaine Pagel in her book *The Gnostic*



Benevolent Creator (Michelangelo)

Gospels says this. “[Bishop Irenaeus] notes with dismay that women especially are attracted to heretical groups. ‘Even in our own district of the Rhone valley,’ [Irenaeus] admits, the Gnostic teacher Marcus had attracted ‘many foolish women’ from his own congregation.”⁸

The relevance of Jannes and Jambres is difficult to understand given their absence elsewhere in Scripture. Again, we

can turn to reliable history to propose a Gnostic context. Tradition holds that Jannes and Jambres were noted magicians in Pharaoh’s court, and this is self-evident from their activity in Exodus. Magic was also a method employed by Simon and other Gnostic leaders to promote themselves and their heresies. But some ancient authors also indicate that these figures were Jewish. Pliny the Elder included Jannes and Moses among notable Jewish magicians,⁹ as did Apuleius (155 AD).¹⁰

If these sources are accurate, then an interesting analogy is drawn by Paul: Those from among Christian society who withstood Christians with their magic are compared to those from among Israelite society who withstood the Israelites with magic. The parallel between two sets of false brethren using their magic is compelling. As Paul predicted in 2 Timothy 3:9, Gnostic Christianity fell permanently silent early in Christian history and does indeed appear foolish to almost all Christians now.

1 John 5:6 — “This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.”

A significant error common to Gnostics beliefs was the idea that Jesus was a normal man who became possessed by a higher spiritual being at his baptism, which left him prior to his death, leaving only the man Jesus to die on the cross. Here John emphasizes that Jesus’ full experience included also his death on the cross.

1 John 2:27 — “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.”

Here John could be referring to Gnostic teachers who taught from their own personally derived *gnosis* to disavow the teaching of John 14:26 that the holy Spirit would instruct Christians. Gnosticism deemphasizes the influence of God’s Spirit upon the faithful in favor of self-derived knowledge.

1 John 2:18-20 — “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us ... But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (“you all know it,” Wilson Diaglott).

The prefix *anti* usually conveys just opposition. But though the sense of opposition does apply, it also carries the thought of being opposite as would be a mirror image. That is, something to correspond. This sense is used in the following Greek words. **Antithesis** (Strong 477) — a premise that is opposite to or balances another premise. **Antitupon** (Strong 499) — a counterpart type, equal in meaning yet opposite in time. **Antilutron** (Strong 487) — a counterpart price, equal in value, a positive to offset a negative, a ransom.

Therefore antichrist defines an element that is both like and opposing Christ. Thus, John is saying that many false Christian sects were then developing, prior to the ascent of the one great antichrist, the Papal system. At John’s time that system had not developed to the point of separation. However, Gnostics were separating into various sects. John was addressing Gnostic heretics as many antichrists. Further evidence of a Gnostic context comes from the emphasis placed upon the anointing of the holy Spirit — a concept denied by Gnostic teachers.

2 John 1:7 — “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”

Docetism, an early form of Gnostic Christianity (around 70 AD), taught that anything in the physical world was evil, therefore Jesus could not have come in the flesh. Instead he came in the spirit as more or less an apparition. This apparently is the error John was addressing.

1 John 2:22-23 — “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father.”

Many forms of Gnosticism view Jesus as starting life like any other man. They deny the special begetting of the baby Jesus by the holy Spirit of God. Of course this denies both the fatherhood of God and the sonship of Jesus. John here addressed a virulent Gnostic heresy, giving it the very mark of antichrist. The seed-thought of a dual nature of Christ planted by Gnosticism developed over time into the Trinity, a distinguishing mark of the great Antichrist system.

Blame for doctrinal corruption of the early church has fallen heavily upon Greek Philosophers. But that influence of thought brought both misleading and truthful perspectives. It could be argued that enlightened Greek thinking prepared men’s minds for the Gospel principles to come. Many of the misleading aspects of Greek thought were used by Gnostic thinkers, and it was by this path, we suggest, that Greek thought most negatively impacted the early church.

Today secularists opposed to the Scriptures use newly discovered Gnostic manuscripts, almost as old as the earliest Bible fragments, to challenge the canonical authenticity of the Bible itself. With evidence of the Apostles’ struggles against this evil, we can better understand the situation, and are better prepared to answer any challenge to the holy canon made by modern skeptics.

— Bro. Robert Davis

- (1) McClintock & Strong, Volume 7, Page 74, Column 2.
- (2) Gnosticism is defined in the article following this.
- (3) *The First Apology* 1:26, 56; 2:15; *Dialogue with Trypho* (a Jew), 20.
- (4) *Against Heresies* 1:22.
- (5) *Antiquities of the Jews* 20:7.
- (6) See *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Simon Magus,” also *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, “Justin Martyr,” Volume 4, page 682, also *Hastings Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, Volume 2, page 496.
- (7) Deny, Strong 720, means to reject, disavow, contradict.
- (8) *The Gnostic Gospels*, page 59.
- (9) *Natural History* 30.2.11. As a secular writer, Pliny would have not recognized Moses’ miraculous powers.
- (10) *Apologia*, or *De Magica*, 90.

Gnosticism: “Science Falsely So Called”

“Avoid ... oppositions of science falsely so called”
(1 Timothy 6:20).¹

When the Apostle Paul wrote to condemn “Science falsely so called” (1 Timothy 6:20, he referred to the confused spiritual beliefs of “Gnosticism.” The very name “Gnosticism” comes from the Greek word here translated “science” (knowledge, Strong 1108, *gnosis*). “Gnosticism” is a deceptive path of inner “knowing” that was bitterly fought against from the time of the apostles onward. In the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, Gnosticism stands second only to witchcraft as a heresy and it has always been violently suppressed.² Though we might relegate this conflict between the Church and Gnostic belief to the dark blood-stained pages of Church history, and suppose this conflict is all in the past, we live in an era where this path of inner “knowing” is enjoying new publicity and a revival of interest.

Recent publicity emerged from two widely different camps. In 2006 Hollywood put forward a movie based on the best-selling novel for a few years running called *The Da Vinci Code*. In this movie, a convincingly-acted “scholar” explains in grave tones that Gnostic writings in the early church were no more than an alternate view of the life of Jesus and that these histories were suppressed by a Church hierarchy obsessed with bringing everyone into orthodox conformity and obsessed with hierarchical control. In this case, the “knowledge, falsely so-called” is that Jesus was married, and had children. This was a secret “knowledge” to be suppressed at any cost.

GNOSTIC JUDAS

Nearly simultaneously in 2006 the National Geographic Society decided to add New Testament textual criticism to its chartered portfolio of “research projects of earth, sea, and sky.” At considerable cost, working through an antiquities dealer that National Geographic editors themselves characterized as unscrupulous, they purchased and funded the painstaking textual restoration and translation of the badly damaged *Gospel of Judas*.

The fragile and broken papyrus of *Judas* was recovered from the unauthorized pilfering of an archeological site on the Nile about 100 miles upriver from Cairo. In *Judas* — for even though “Gospel” is part of its title it is painful to use that blessed word — the Gnostic-Christ there speaks in admiration of Judas as the only apostle who truly understands his need to be free from his human body. We immediately see that the first lie, “Thou shall not surely die,” and the setting aside of the ransom-sacrifice, is at the core of Gnosticism. In *Judas*, Gnostic-Christ seeks to be free from his human body so he can rise to a higher spiritual plane. Thus Gnostic-Christ in speaking to Judas says, “You will exceed all of them [that is, the other eleven apostles]. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me.”

National Geographic was not shy about the significance of their efforts in bringing to light from its well-deserved and complete obscurity this erring and confused offering of “knowledge falsely so-called.” Lead translator Rudolphe Kasser characterized the restoration effort: “this script comes back to light by a miracle” (*National Geographic*, May 2006, page 93). A television documentary about the discovery was released to coincide with the magazine publication.

THE APOSTLE JOHN ON GNOSTICISM

The Apostle John already was confronting Gnostics in his day (1 John 4:3).³ The confrontation between the apostle and these erring ones is not always clear since the words involved: “truth,” “knowledge,” “acknowledge,” “light,” and “wisdom,” have meaning to us outside the context of Gnosticism. The Gnostic approach to spirituality, or Gnostic “consciousness,” needs to be emphasized because it represents a perverse view of reality and feeling about life that is shocking to us. There is simply little or no common frame of reference in orthodox Jewish, Christian, or even pagan belief systems such as the philosophy of Plato. Clearly more is involved with Gnosticism than differences of doctrinal understanding. June Singer, one of Gnosticism’s better published contemporary advocates, explains it is a “particular psychological approach to life.”⁴ It is indeed “particular!”

GNOSTICISM’S ROOTS

Gnosticism’s beginnings preceded Christianity and by the first century BC Gnosticism had set roots in the fringe elements of the Jewish community. The Essene sect that left behind the famed Dead Sea scrolls is one of the best known of these Gnostic groups. These inroads of Gnosticism into Judaism are described by June Singer:

“Unwilling to accept the authority of the priesthood and the Torah without question, [Gnostic] lay teachers — rabbis — asserted the revelation had not only taken place in the past, but that the divine presence continued to reveal itself in history and that these revelations were not limited to the privileged few ... any person might have a direct experience of God. Thus people need not be totally dependent upon a priesthood for religious authority. This was still the situation at the time of Jesus.”⁵

The emergence of “New Age” religion in recent decades is part of this current revival of interest in Gnostic experience and as Singer points out, we are focusing on a psychological approach to life, not just a set of doctrines. Three areas of this “psychological approach” emerge:

(1) The deceptive desire for a direct religious experience of God. Gnostics seek something akin to experiences of the prophets, without recourse to the Bible, a redeemer, or an advocate. Satan and his angels are eager to supply this desire for the experience the divine presence. Let us hear the words of Jesus, “I am the way, the truth, and the light, no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” (John 14:6). We do not directly experience the divine presence.

(2) Gnosticism has an emphasis on the error of trying to reconcile the duality of the good and evil in our nature. While we have the capacity for both good and evil, we live to do the good only. Gnostics embrace our fallen nature as well, believing that we are most Godlike and mature when we merge both the good and evil aspects of our nature into a complete “balanced” personality.

(3) There is a heightened significance of the feminine in Gnosticism.⁶ To quote from June Singer [with emphasis added] we see the arguments that *The Da Vinci Code* would later set forth:

“The [organized] Church was successful in establishing itself as preeminent ... The Gnostics had the foresight to go underground with their aberrant ideas ... Nevertheless, the Gnostic myths persisted and the particular psychological approach to life that emerged out of their world view found other forms of expression. The core ideas of gnosis have been ever-present in the culture (or perhaps one should say, “in the counterculture”) of the West as a counterpoint to those of the major religions. These ideas appear in the mystical writings of Judaism and her daughter religions Christianity and Islam, and they describe the ways in which ordinary people, as well as those specially gifted, *experience the divine presence* in the world here and now. They surface as an emphasis on the dualism between the world of light above and the world of darkness and ignorance below, and they seek out ways to support the tension of these opposites *with a view towards reconciling them.*”⁷

THE CHALLENGE OF ORTHODOXY

Simple questions within main line Christianity become complex questions within the framework of Gnosticism. Do we access God through Christ Jesus, confessing he has come in the flesh as our mediator, or do we “replace,” *anti*, Christ

Jesus with our own “direct” religious revelation? Is Christ the one mediator between God and man, or can we find atonement by an act of will? Do we seek to reconcile dark with light, or do we turn from darkness to the light? Is Christ a person who gave himself as our ransom? Did he come in the flesh, or is he an idealized mental projection? Will the dead be raised, or is the resurrection a spiritual concept?

The strange Gnostic answers to these questions moves one from building upon a foundation of solid rock to trying to build upon a foundation of quicksand.

A GNOSTIC JESUS NOT HERE IN THE FLESH

Some quotes from the Gnostic texts translated from the *Nag Hammadi* Coptic Egyptian manuscripts will better illustrate the Gnostic views that John was writing against in his first epistle:

“Jesus took them all by stealth.
He did not appear as he was,
but in a manner in which they would be able to see him.
He appeared to them all.

He appeared to the great as great,
and to the small as small.

He appeared to the angels as an angel,
and to men as a man.

Because of this, his word hid itself from everyone.

Some indeed saw him, thinking they were seeing themselves,
but when he appeared in glory on the mount he was not small.

He became great, but he made the disciples great,
that they might be able to see them in his greatness.”

— *Gospel of Philip* (Gnostic)⁸

How different is Jesus the “lamb that taketh away the sin of the world” in the New Testament. How more than an appearance of the spiritual! As John writes, “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” The Gospel of Philip denies such a view of Jesus entirely.

THE GNOSTIC “RESURRECTION”

Other Gnostic errors, such as those regarding the resurrection, are addressed in the New Testament. Gnosticism seems to be the basis for the errors of Hymenaeus and

Gnosticism Defined

Because of modern confusion, it is necessary to dig into the historical setting of the epistles of both the Apostles Paul and John against Gnosticism, for Gnosticism is strange even within pagan belief. Two scholarly definitions will show this. The first comes from *McClintock & Strong's Cyclopaedia* (1887):

“GNOSTICISM, General Principles — The ultimate aim of Gnosticism was to present a perfect solution of the great problem of the origin and destiny of the universe ... specially of the origin of evil. The three ideas ... fundamental to all its speculations were: (1) A supreme being, unconnected with matter, and incapable of being affected by it, (2) Matter, eternal, the source of evil, and opposed to God; and, (3) A series of beings intermediate between these two.

The primary source of all spiritual existence was an eternal abyss, so utterly beyond human representation that no one should venture to name him, or even to conceive of him. He was the absolute one ...”

McClintock and Strong scholarship relied heavily on the writings of early Christian fathers who were opposed to Gnosticism and on the early 19th century recensions of the still extant Gnostic texts such as the *Gospel of Thomas*. Archeological discovery of new Gnostic texts in Coptic and Greek after World War II added considerably to the scholarship on this confused and strange set of beliefs.

Below is a current definition from the influential contemporary historian of religion and philosopher Mircea Eliade, editor-in-chief of Macmillan's *Encyclopedia of Religion*, who spent thirty years as director of the History of Religions department at the University of Chicago.

Mircea Eliade, *World Religions*, HarperCollins (1991): “GNOSTICISM was an outlook contemporary with early Christianity [in general there] ... are variants of two basic myths ... the myth of a female Trickster, the heavenly goddess Sophia (Wisdom) who produces the catastrophe or at least the unpleasant situation that leads to the creation of the visible world; and the myth of a male Trickster, the miscarried son of Sophia, who makes the world. ... This demiurge or fashioner of this world is usually identified with the Old Testament God. He is not unequivocally evil, except in a few testimonies; he is said to be ignorant, proud, and “mad” in a number of Coptic texts that are part of the collections of Gnostic codices, the largest of which was dug up in Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt in 1945.

In testimonies pertaining to the gnosis of Valentinus (fl. 140-150), the ignorant demiurge repents and is pardoned for having created the world. ... Within the spectrum of ideas of the epoch, Gnosticism is revolutionary insofar as it contradicts the two principles asserted both by the Bible and by Plato: the principle of an ecosystemic intelligence, according to which the world has been created by a benevolent and intelligent cause, and the anthropic principle, according to which this world has been purposefully created for this human species and this human species has been created for this world.

On the contrary, Gnosticism asserts that the demiurge of the world is bumbling and ignorant, so that consequently the world is bad and human beings are superior to both the world and its creator for being endowed with a spark of Spirit stemming from the distant and good Father of the divine emanations. The goal of the Gnostic is thus to escape from the prison of the world.”

Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17-18) “who concerning the truth have erred, saying the resurrection is already past, and overthrow the faith of some.” The Gnostic *Gospel of Philip* is very direct on this point:

“You who say you will die first and then rise are in error. If you do not receive the resurrection while you live, when you die you will receive nothing.”
— *Gospel of Philip* (Gnostic)⁹

The same error on the resurrection reappears in other Gnostic writings. Bearing in mind that in Greek “soul” (Strong 5590, *psyche*) is a feminine noun, see what happens as the Gnostic imagination reflects on “soul” and this shy maiden moves out into the larger world:¹

“When the soul had again adorned herself in her beauty, she enjoyed her beloved and he also loved her. And when she had intercourse with him she got seed from him that is the life-giving spirit, ... now it is fitting that the soul regenerate herself and become again as she formerly was. The soul then moves of her own accord. She receives the divine nature from the Father for her rejuvenation so that she might be restored. This is the resurrection from the dead, the ransom from captivity. This is the way of ascent to the Father.”
— *The Exegesis on the Soul* (Gnostic)¹⁰

It is not our present beauty as a church that seduces the beloved, for the church is an espoused virgin to Christ, elect by the grace of God (2 Corinthians 11:2). Since our Lord likened the Kingdom class to virgins (Matthew 25:1-11), the contrast between our Lord’s actual teaching and this Gnostic invention can hardly be more striking. There is only one ransom through Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:6) and there is only one way of ascent to the Father (John 14:6). The church is of course a virgin bride.

THE TRINITY AS VIEWED BY GNOSTICS

Like Gnosticism, Trinitarian belief had its roots in Egyptian religion long before it was brought into the Christian church. An amulet in the British Museum (100 AD) contains the following entreaty:

“One is Basit, one is Hator, one is Ahori, to these belong one power. Be greeted, father of the world, be greeted, god in three forms [*trimorphos theos*].”¹¹

One last Gnostic manuscript bears on their view of Trinitarian doctrine. Please observe that nowhere in true scripture does the image presented undergo a metamorphosis before the viewer:

“I John heard these words ... in the light I beheld a youth who stood beside me. Even as I looked he became like an old man, and then like a servant ... He said to me, ‘I am the father, I am the mother, I am the son’ ” (*The Apocryphon of John*, Gnostic).¹²

How ironic that John, the fighter against Gnosticism, is misused by this Gnostic author as the mouthpiece for this invention. The consternation of the Roman Catholic Church over this proposed Trinitarian formula speaking of father and mother can only be imagined, yet in the final analysis any form of Trinitarian belief embraces error.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Gnostic consciousness is so counter to the culture of main line Christian thinking and belief that it is difficult for us to comprehend. Without the balance of sound doctrine, it leads to spiritual shipwreck as the quotations from these Gnostic writings illustrate. However, we should not dismiss it as without power, particularly when it is presented in such an appealing “alternate view of Jesus” through the modern media. We have not yet heard the last of this error.

— Bro. Richard Doctor

(1) In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of Gnostic belief, the frequently distressing texts of Gnostic writings have been included without editing or other editorial interpretation stating the obvious to the reader, namely, that they are “unedifying.” The sensitive readership of *Beauties of the Truth* may find some of them unsavory and offensive, nevertheless, letting these witnesses speak for themselves seems the best course to illustrate their true nature. — Editor

(2) The crusade against the Albigenses, or Cathari (pure ones) was a particularly bloody suppression of the Gnostic community that was gaining a foothold in France. Pastor Russell cites these as brutal acts of power by Roman Catholicism (*The Time is at Hand*, 1916, pages 334-337). This most brutal crusade inside of Europe left blood flowing in the streets throughout the districts of Southern France as the Albigensian Crusade (1209 AD) violently exterminated the “Cathari” teachings emanating from the diocese of Albi.

(3) Antichrist does not solely mean “against” Christ, although it certainly means that. It also has the sense of what displaces, or replaces Christ. John uses the Greek word *anti* this way when in his Gospel he translates Jesus saying, “grace for (that is, “in place of,” *anti*) grace” (John 1:16).

(4) Singer, J., *A Gnostic Book of Hours: Keys to Inner Wisdom*, Harper Collins (1992), page 154.

(5) Singer, J., op. cit., page 151.

(6) The theological debate over feminine consciousness now going on seeks to bring into balance both feminine and masculine consciousness. To illustrate this debate, as well as to capture the scriptural thought, the following quotation from: Ruether, R.R., *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, Harper, 1992, page 149, may be of interest, italics added:

“Christianity and other religions of patriarchal transcendence have taught us to look away from the mutable world of nature [*i.e. feminine consciousness*] with its cycles of birth, death and decay, and regeneration, and its tragic costs of eating and being eaten. These religious cultures have taught us to identify our true selves with our capacity for abstract consciousness and to allay this abstracted self with an intellectual God outside of this process of mutability.”

(7) Singer, J., op. cit., page 154.

(8) Singer, J., op. cit., page 138.

(9) Singer, J., op. cit., page 144.

(10) Singer, J., op. cit., page 110.

(11) Morenz, Siegfried, *Egyptian Religion*, (trans. Ann E. Keep), Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1973, page 255.

(12) Singer, J., op. cit., page 4.