

## Understanding Gnostic beliefs

December 09, 1987

A Shared Vision

by

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June 23, 1988 11:36 PM

Gnosticism is a religious/philosophical tradition that began sometime in the last century before the present era<sup>1</sup>. The word "tradition" should be stressed because one of the tenets of Gnosticism is that of a general disdain for authority or orthodoxy. The Gnostics adhered to a belief in strict equality among the members of the sect; going so far as to chose the role of priest by drawing lots among the participates at gnostic gatherings<sup>2</sup>. They also stressed direct revelation through dreams and visions and an individual interpretation of the revelations of fellow Gnostics and sacred scriptures.

The Greek word gnosis (from which we have "Gnosticism") and the Sanskrit bodhi (from which we have "Buddhism") have exactly

<sup>1</sup> see J.M. Robinson, Introduction, in The Nag Hammadi Library (New York, 1977); hereafter cited as NHL, for a general dicussion of the origins of Gnosticism.

<sup>2</sup> Pagels, Elaine; The Gnostic Gospels;(New York, 1979); p 49

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the same meaning. Both gnosis and bodhi refers to a knowledge that transcends the knowledge that is acquired through means of empirical reasoning or rational thought; it is intuitive knowledge derived from internal sources. To the Gnostic this knowledge is necessary for salvation<sup>3</sup>.

"I say, You are gods!"

-John 10:34

The Gnostic sects were essentially eschatological; concerned with salvation, with transcendence from the world of error (as opposed to sin) towards a knowledge of the Living God, who is knowable only through revelatory experience. The object of gnosis is God- into which the soul is transformed monistically.

This notion of assimilation into a divine essence is known in Gnostic Circles as "immanentizing the Eschaton"<sup>4</sup>.

"Christ redeemed us from the Curse of the Law."

-Gal.3:13

<sup>3</sup> Barnstone, Willis, ed.; *The Other Bible*; (San Francisco, 1984); p 42

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, Robert A.; *The Illuminati Papers*; (Berkeley, 1980); p 46

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The Gnostic defiance towards authority took on many levels.

They developed an elaborate cosmogony, in defiant opposition to traditional Jewish and Christian beliefs. For the Jew and

Christian, it was a good, though authoritarian, god that created Adam and Eve. It was through their own sin that they fell into corruption. Yet for the Gnostic, the creator was not good at all, rather he became known to the Gnostics as the Demiurge<sup>1</sup>, a secondary god below Sophia, Mother Wisdom, and the unknown God-who-is-above-all-else.<sup>2</sup> To the Gnostics, the Demiurge- who is also known as Ialdabaoth, Sabaoth, and Saclas- acted in error when he created the material universe and mistakenly thought of himself as the only god.

In Gnostic literature, Adam and Eve are seen as heroic figures in their disobedience; aided by the serpent, who gave them knowledge and who will later return in some sects as Jesus, to redeem humanity by teaching disobedience to the curse of the laws of Yahweh the Creator<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Greek for "craftsman", much like the Masonic "Architect of the Universe". From Plato's Timaeus.

<sup>2</sup> I have come up with Greek term "Theoseulogetes" to describe "God-who-is-above-all-else" which I found in Paul's Epistle to the Romans (9:5), but I hesitate to make use of it because I am not sure how it should be pronounced.

<sup>3</sup> Hypostasis of the Archons 89:32-91:3 (NHL p. 155)

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Many writers when discussing Gnosticism approach the subject with a scholarly morbidity. They tend to look upon the Gnostics as a cult of dreadful ascetics who shunned the world of error and

delusion. Yet as a neo-gnostic, I can not help but see a gnostic world-view as that of looking upon the universe not as some sinister mistake, but more as a complex and complicated cosmic joke.

When one first begins reading the Gnostic literature contained in the pages of the Nag Hammadi Library (cf. note p. 1), one is tempted to filter the language and the symbols of Gnosticism through a mindset of `hellfire' fright conjured by images brought from the Book of Revelations or Daniel. The key to reading the NHL is not to be frightened or distressed by some of the images, but to realize that the tractates of the NHL were collected as consciousness raising tools. To the Gnostic, the pages of NHL are not to be meant to be taken as the authoritative, apostolic writings of the Christian bible or the prophetic and patristic writings of the Jewish bible, but rather as visions shared with fellow Gnostics. The following discourse is meant to be just that- a Gnostic sharing his vision.

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"When the Elohim began to create..."  
- Gen 1:1

As all religious thought has as its ultimate aim the thought of God, it is best that I begin my "vision" by imparting my perception of God.

To me, God is indescribable, inscrutable, and ultimately

"nonexistent". Any attempt at describing God invokes, what a friend termed, the "great syntax catastrophe"<sup>2</sup>. It is wrong, I believe, even to use the pronouns he or she when speaking of God; and it seems better to speak of what God is "not" rather than to speak of what God "is". To paraphrase the Chinese philosopher, Lao Tse "The god that can be named is not the God"<sup>3</sup>.

It is best not to even attempt a description of God, but to think of God as inscrutable by definition: that which cannot be

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion on this translation of the opening verses of Genesis cf. Asimov, Issac; Asimov's Guide to the Bible; Vol. II; (NY, 1968); pp 16-17

<sup>2</sup> A friend tells me that he picked up this term from an evangelical Christian in Georgia.

<sup>3</sup> "The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name." Lao-Tse; Tao teh Ching (I,1)- trans. by James Legge

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easily understood, completely obscure, mysterious, unfathomable, and enigmatic; the "Mystery of the Ages"<sup>1</sup>.

Many Gnostics speak of God as being "non-existent"; not in the atheistic sense, but in the sense that God does not exist in the same sense as you or I or anything else in the Universe exists. In some Gnostic writings God is referred to as the "unbegotten one"<sup>2</sup>.

As a Gnostic Christian, one who emphasizes the salvic

influence of gnosis (knowledge) over the influence of pistis (faith), it is not enough for me merely to believe that God exists; I must know that God exists.

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul tells us that ignorance of God is a form of bondage<sup>3</sup>; and in his epistle to the Colossians, he tell us that man's purpose is to "be filled with the knowledge of [God's] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,.. and increasing in (gnosis) knowledge of God"<sup>4</sup>.

Many Christian sects teach that "faith" is an unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence. To understand

1 Col 1:26

2 Tripartite Tractate; 51.24-52.6; (NHL p. 55)

3 Gal. 4:8-9

4 Col. 1:9-10

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"faith" properly it requires knowing that belief and opinion are not one and the same. A mere opinion is something that is asserted or accepted without any basis at all in evidence or reason<sup>1</sup>. Whereas, to believe in something is to exercise one's faith or trust in something. Faith then could be said to be "trust"; and `faith in God' is, therefore, the same as `trust in God'.

The basis of any degree of trust must be a certain degree of

knowledge concerning a given object or situation. The more knowledge one has concerning, say, a person, determines the amount of trust allowed that person. For example, if you know a person to be completely unreliable, you then have very little faith in that person. Conversely, You have a great deal of faith that that person is not to be trusted. If you know that a person is highly reliable, you then have built up a degree of trust in that person based on your knowledge of him.

Therefore, knowledge of God must parallel faith in God. Yet how can God be known when we are not even sure that he exists? If we say that God is essentially 'unknowable' and can only be spoken of in terms of what God is not, then how can we come to have any knowledge of God?

<sup>1</sup> See Adler, Mortimer J.; *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*; chap. 4; (New York, 1985); for a detailed discussion of knowledge and opinion.

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There are basically two ways to know God. The first is by way of reason or logic and second, by way of intuitive knowledge or gnosis. We shall see in following paragraphs how the former method may help us in understanding the problems we are faced with in our attempts to know God, and many will see, also, how severely lacking the path of logic can be compared to that of the gnostic path.

In studying the problem of 'logical proofs' of God's existence I have come across several historical arguments of which I have grouped into what I call "The Seven Arguments and the General Argument for the Existence of the Almighty." I have labeled these arguments the Ideological (ideo as in idea), the Aetiological ('aetio' meaning cause), the Teleological ('teleo' meaning final outcome), the Cosmological ('cosmo' meaning universal), the Ontological ('onto' meaning being), the Pantheological ('pantheo' as in 'pantheism'), and the Psychological ('psyche' meaning soul) Arguments. I will provide a brief discussion of each.

## 1] The Psychological Argument

Before anything can be said concerning the reality of God or of anything else for that matter. One must take a skeptical stance. A skeptical stance would be that of doubting the reality of absolute or universal truths. In other words one

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could say that the certainty of knowledge is impossible and that one can achieve only 'probable' knowledge, i.e., ideas whose validity is highly probable. An example of this would be to say that it is only highly probable that you are reading this page, but that neither you nor I can be absolutely certain of this.

Yet probable knowledge implies the existence of absolute



knowledge. For instance a skeptic could deny that the objects of his perceptions exist, but he could not deny that his perceptions exist. St. Augustine stated that the person who doubts all truths is caught in a logical dilemma, for he must exist in order that he may doubt. As Descartes, put it "I think, therefore I am." In the act of doubting one establishes the absolute reality of one's own consciousness or "psykhei".

For Augustine the "psykhei" comprises the entire personality of the living being, who becomes aware through self-consciousness not only that he or she is a real integrated existing person but also that he knows with absolute certainty his own activities and powers of memory, intellect, and will.

Thus the being `remembers' what it is doing in the act of self-doubt; it understands or knows the immediate experience; and it can will to act or not to act as it does. Hence three aspects of the individual "psykhei" may be described as powers of memory, intellect, and will, or as activities of being, knowing, and willing.

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## 2] The Ideological Argument

Prior to the history of any object the ideal had to exist as the source imparting reality to the particular object. Humanity must exist as a universal ideal before any individual human being

can possibly exist. An object's essence (ideal) must be a reality before the particular object can come into existence.

Many people, when first confronted by this argument fail to understand it. One fellow thought the argument was perposterous, because he thought it somehow denied that things could be discovered by accident. He gave a convoluted example involving a chemist seeking to invent a glue and in the course of his research accidently discovering a cure for cancer. What this fellow failed to realize is that the notion of a death dealing disease such as cancer and the idea of a needed cure for cancer existed long before this bumbling chemist started on his glue project. Both the psychological and ideological arguments are really not arguments for the existence of God, but are intended as an introduction to the following arguments.

### 3] The Aetiological Argument

God, by definition, must have existed as a first cause because every effect requires a cause and this must have been true of entire universe. The material world is contingent, unable

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to create itself, hence requires something else, a necessary, spiritually uncreated Being to bring it into existence and impel it to continue its progress.

The same fellow who debated the ideological argument said

that the aetiological argument "hurt his head" and that it reminded him of "the old chicken and the egg argument". The key words in this argument are "contigent" (meaning, "dependent on chance"; "conditional"), "necessary", and "uncreated" (see the General Argument below). The cosmological argument is almost identical to the aetiological argument, yet the wording is quite different.

#### 4] The Cosmological Argument

There must have been a time when the universe did not exist, for all things in the universe are mere possibilities dependent on some other objects for their being and development; the fact that the universe does exist implies that a necessary or noncontigent Being exists who was capable of creating the universe.

#### 5] The Ontological Argument

Since we possess an idea of a perfect Being (and we can think of nothing greater or more perfect), such a Being must necessarily exist because perfection implies existence. Any idea

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that is lacking in reality (any concept which has no objective reality of its own) would be imperfect, whereas one of the attributes of a perfect Being is actual existence (not merely an idea in any person's mind, but real existence external to any

mind which happens to conceive of it).

The ontological argument is possibly the oldest argument and dates back to the 4th C. of the present era. This argument has caused a great debate that rages to this day in the pages of modern textbooks on philosophy and theology. The key to this argument is "perfection" and the statement: "any concept which has no objective reality of its own would be imperfect" (and therefore not exist) is the thin thread upon which the validity of argument hangs.

## 6] The Teleological Argument

The presence of design in the world, the fact that objects are designed with a purpose, to function for a given end, implies the existence of an intelligent, competent designer, who planned the purpose of each thing that exists.

The teleological argument poses problems of its own. The same fellow who debated the previous arguments insisted that he needed proof of a design to the world and that everything has a purpose. The problem in replying to his argument is that I can not think of one useless thing existing in the universe. My mind

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draws a blank in this respect and I would invite anyone to show me one thing that exists in this universe which is without design or purpose.

## 7] The Pantheological Argument

God, the supreme unity, the original Being, and the Ideal of all ideals, has caused all things to become manifest by means of a logical unfolding of particulars from their ideals. To speak of creation is to speak of particularization, a process of unfolding that makes individual objects out of ideals. Conversely, immortality is an opposite process whereby the particulars return to their universal essence or archetypes. Immortality means the return of things to God (apocatastasis), that is their deification, so that there is complete unity of all things in God; pantheism.

The Pantheological vision of God is negative in the sense that God can be characterized only in terms of comparison on the ground that the infinite is beyond human comprehension; however not beyond human contemplation. When speaking of the nature of God and using the terms of argument #1 in speaking of the nature of the psyche as that which possess memory, intellect, and will, one may say that God is Omniscient, possessing absolute memory and intellect; Omnipotent, possessing absolute will; and in the terms of the pantheological argument, Omnipresent, possessing

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pure randomness and non-localized in time and space.

The General Argument for the Existence of the Almighty is as

follows and derived in part from the argument as put forth in *How to Think About God* by Mortimer J. Adler:

1. The existence of an effect requiring the concurrent existence and action of an efficient cause implies the existence and action of that cause.

2. The cosmos as a whole exists.

3. If the existence of the cosmos as a whole is radically contingent, which is to say that, while not needing an efficient cause of its coming to be, since it is everlasting, then it nevertheless does need a efficient cause of its continuing existence, to preserve it in being and prevent it from being replaced by nothingness.

or

3a. If the cosmos which now exists is only one of many possible universes that might have existed in the infinite past, and that might still exist in the infinite future, and if a cosmos which can be otherwise is one that also can not be; and conversely, a

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cosmos that is capable of not existing at all is one that can be otherwise than it now is, then the cosmos, radically contingent in existence, would not exist at all were its existence not caused.

4. If the cosmos needs an efficient cause of its existence or of

its continuing existence to prevent its annihilation, then that cause must be one the existence of which is uncaused, and one which has reason for being in and of itself; i.e. The ultimate cause and being of the cosmos.

5. If the ultimate cause and being of the cosmos is that about which nothing greater can be thought, that being must be thought of as omnipotent, possessing absolute will; omniscient, possessing absolute knowledge; and omnipresent; non-localized in time and space.

## PART TWO

Intuition differs from reason in that as man is a finite being possessing limited sensual contact with the universe; it is impossible for man to fully understand God through his senses or by empirical means. This, therefore, involves the understanding

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of abstract concepts. We must understand the universe as being "conceptusensual"; that parallel to the objective universe there is a universe made up of abstracts. This abstract universe is viewable to us through means of symbols; objects not possessing objectivity. These symbols cannot be known by means of empirical reasoning, but by means of gnosis; without the conscience use of reasoning, immediate apprehension or understanding.

It should be realized that while this abstract universe,

that sits parallel to the material universe, and is sometimes referred to as the spiritual world or heaven, is beyond logic and reasoning; it is supported by logic and reasoning. You will recall that imperfection or "degrees of perfection" implies the existence of perfection (cf. Arg #3 and Arg #5). Perfection is an abstract ideal having no analog in our material world, yet it is intuitively known to exist.

Just as there are degrees of knowledge concerning mundane truths in the material world, there are degrees of gnosis concerning revealed truths in the spiritual world. Because man in his human form is by nature limited there is a certain limit to his understanding and knowledge. Yet as all things are in a constant state of flux and change, man's knowledge is constantly growing. For everything that is known objectively there is an abstract idea that precedes the object.

The Scriptures speaks about angels and devils, the creation

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of the world in seven days, etc., and many Christian sects require of their followers acceptance of these "revealed truths" by way of faith or trust. Many speak of the Bible as being infallible and without error even when portions are contradictory or counter to logic. I, however, assert that the Bible is first and foremost an anthology of religious/philosophical tradition



compiled over the centuries from about 750 BCE to around 150 BCE.

It should, in no way, be advertised as a "closed canon" or a compilation of the sum of man's knowledge of truth, revealed or otherwise. The Bible was written by men and is therefore subject to human error. This does not, however, discount the presence of revealed truths within the Bible or within any scripture (religious writings).

If any of the above arguments fall short of convincing an individual of God's existence, the one argument that cannot be denied is the argument which provides for the proof of one's own existence (cf. Arg #1). Here we spoke of "taking a skeptical stance"; one of doubting one's own existence. Through the process of self-doubt we become faced with the reality of our existence; we cannot deny the object of our perceptions-ourselves.

The question, then, is raised concerning "life and death".

One may wonder: "If I exist now, was there ever a time when I did not exist and will there be a time when I will not exist?" We can

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limit this by asking: "Did I exist before this lifetime and will I exist after this life?" Perhaps before these questions can be broached more should be said concerning the subject of gnosis.

As stated above, the Apostle Paul spoke of ignorance of God

as being a form of slavery; and told us that it was our purpose to know (gnosis) and obey God<sup>1</sup>. This is reiterated in his first epistle to the Corinthians, when Paul gave "thanks to God... that in every way [they] were enriched in [Christ] with all speech and all knowledge"<sup>2</sup>.

In John's first epistle, we are told that we may come to know (gnosis) God, if we keep God's Law and "walk in the same way in which [Christ] walked"<sup>3</sup>. This echoed in John's Gospel chapter 14, verses 20-21; and at verse 26 he adds that the Holy Spirit will be sent to "teach [us] all things, and bring to [us] remembrance all that [Christ had] said to [us]." I have emphasized the word "remembrance" as an important part of the process of gnosis. This will be discussed in detail below.

In another epistle Paul spoke of the "riches of assured understanding and knowledge (epi-gnosis) of God's mystery, of

1 See above p. 4

2 1 Cor. 1:4-5

3 1 Jn 2:3-4

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Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"<sup>1</sup>. In the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel, Christ tells us that gnosis, knowing God, is equivalent to eternal life<sup>2</sup>; and in his epistle to the Philippians, Paul tells us that

gnosis supersedes all<sup>3</sup>.

In Matthew's Gospel we are told that spiritual knowledge comes to us through Christ:

"I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto the little ones; yes, Father, for such was thy great pleasure. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one whom the Son chooses to reveal him.<sup>4</sup>"

When we read the thirteenth chapter of Paul's first epistle

1 Col 2:2-3

2 Jn 17:3

3 Phil 3:8-10

4 Matt 11:25-27 & Lk 10:21-22

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to the Corinthians, we learn that "love" is the key to maintaining spiritual knowledge (gnosis) and faith (pistis)<sup>1</sup>; and in John's first letter we are told that "he who does not love, does not know God; for God is love"<sup>2</sup>.

Besides the necessity of loving God, we are told that knowledge of truth equals knowledge of God. In Paul's letter to Titus, Paul greets his "child in common faith" by describing

that, as an apostle of Christ, his main purpose is to "further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness"<sup>3</sup>. In John's Gospel we are told that the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of truth, whom the (material) world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you"<sup>4</sup>. Jesus tells us: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"<sup>5</sup>.

1 1 Cor 13

2 1 Jn 4:7-8

3 Titus 1:1

4 Jn 14:17

5 Jn 8:31-32

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At some points this saving knowledge is referred to as a secret knowledge. In his closing remarks to his disciple, Timothy, Paul tells him to guard closely the knowledge that has been entrusted to him and to avoid those who "chatter" about false knowledge<sup>1</sup>; and in first Corinthians, he speaks of those who imagine that they know, yet do not know as they ought to know<sup>2</sup>. In second Corinthians, Paul tells us that the mystery of the Gospel is "veiled" to those who have been blinded by the god

of this world<sup>3</sup>. This concept of the "hardening the hearts" and "shuting the eyes" of the people can be found in Isaiah<sup>4</sup>, Mark<sup>5</sup>, Luke<sup>6</sup>, and Acts<sup>7</sup>. Paul speaks of the process of gnosis as spiritual maturity when he tells the Corinthians that they were "fed with milk, not solid food; for [they] were not ready for

1 1 Tim 6:20-21

2 1 Cor 8:2

3 2 Cor 4:3-6

4 Isaiah 6:9-10

5 Mark 8:17-18

6 Lk 10:23

7 Acts 28:26-27

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it."

We are told that Jesus spoke in parables because "seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear"<sup>1</sup>; and that "not all men can recieve this [knowledge] but only those to whom it is given (revealed)"<sup>2</sup>. He said that in order that those who could not understand, be allowed to understand that they would have to "turn again" and be forgiven<sup>3</sup>. This "turning again" or being "reborn" will be discussed in greater detail below.

In Colossians, Paul speaks of this mystery as having been hidden from angels and men (aeons and generations)<sup>4</sup>. There is

evidence in many of the books of the Bible that books which are known to authors have either been lost or intentional kept out of the Bible for a variety reasons. In his epistles, Paul speaks of epistles that do not appear in Bible. There is evidence of a third epistle to the Corinthians; perhaps one that went between the first and second epistles<sup>5</sup>; and in his closing remarks to the

1 Matt 10:13-17

2 Matt 19:11

3 Mk 4:11-12

4 Col 1:26

5 1 Cor 5:9 & 2 Cor 2:3-9; 7:10

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Colossians, Paul speaks of an Epistle to the Laodiceans<sup>1</sup>. First Chronicles speaks of the Book of Nathan and the Book of Gad<sup>2</sup>; while Second Chronicles, also, speaks of a Book of Nathan and a Book of Shemaiah the Prophet<sup>3</sup>. In Jude's Epistle there is a quote from the Book of Enoch<sup>4</sup> Could these books have contained "secret knowledge" that could not be understand by all?

Turning to the "apocrypha", those books which are not considered by some Christian sects to be a part of the "closed canon" of the Bible, we are able to discover a possible answer to our question. The Apocrypha, or "hidden" books, were never really hidden, but were kept apart from the Bible. Each Christian sect

has a different "list" of books that belong in their individual "canon" and because those "lists" overlap each other many Christians today are quite familiar with a majority of the books contained in the Apocrypha.

One book contained in the Apocrypha, 2 Esdras, a book that is found in many Roman Catholic Bibles, has the following information to impart to us concerning "hidden books":

1 Col 4:16

2 1 Chr 29:29

3 2 Chr 9:29; 12:15

4 Jude 9 quotes Enoch 1:9

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"Therefore write all these things that you have seen in book, and put it in a hidden place; and you shall teach them to the wise among your people, whose hearts you know are able to comprehend and keep these secrets.1"

(It is curious to note that this portion of 2 Esdras was added to original sometime in the third century AD; when at the same time Gnostic Christians were compiling the Nag Hammadi in Egypt!)2

Yet it seems that nothing can remain hidden forever. In

Luke's Gospel Jesus prophesies that "nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known

and come to light"<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps this prophecy came true when, following the dreadful destruction of WW II, two astonishing discoveries of hidden works were made; the first at Nag Hammadi, Egypt in December of 1945, and the second at Q'umran, Palestine

<sup>1</sup> 2 Esdras 12:37-38, cf. 2 Esdras 14:37-48

<sup>2</sup> see introduction to "The Second Book of Esdras" in the The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha; Apoc p 23

<sup>3</sup> Lk 8:17

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in 1947.

### PART THREE

Even in the Bible itself there is found "secret knowledge"

that is never spoken of amongst the christian sects that consider themselves to be "orthodox". The best example of this is in the creation account of the Book of Genesis. The opening line of the first book of the Bible has been translated throughout history to read: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth<sup>1</sup>."

Yet if we translate the first verse literally we find it to read:

"When the Elohim began to create the heavens and the earth<sup>2</sup>."

The term "Elohim" should not be translated directly to read

"God" or "god", because it is the feminine plural of god (Eloah)

and should probably be translated "goddesses" or "offspring of the Goddess" . Now, to many "orthodox" christians the notion that



there exists "gods", in the polytheistic sense, most likely is a bizarre notion. Yet the early Hebrews were not "monotheistic", that is, a person who believes in the existence of one God, as is usually thought; but, rather, they were "henotheistic", and while believing in a multitude of gods, they focused all their worship

1 Gen 1:1

2 Cf. p 3 note 1

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on their "national god". Examples of Hebrew henotheism can be found in throughout the Old Testament. In 1 Kings, chapter 18 there is an account of the prophet Elijah, a prophet of the Israelite god Yahweh, engaged in a contest with the prophets of the god Ba'al and the goddess Asherah (Ishtar)<sup>1</sup>. In 2 Kings, chapter 3 we are told that when Mesha, king of the Moabites, sacrificed his son to the Moabite god Chemosh "there came a great wrath upon " the army of the Israelites<sup>2</sup>. Further on in 2 Kings there is the story of Naaman, a Syrian general who is afflicted with leprosy. Following a raid in Israel, Naaman is told by one of his captives that there is a prophet living in Samaria who has the power to cure leprosy. Naaman then visits Elisha, where he is told to go and bathe in the Jordan river. After bathing seven times in the Jordan, Naaman is cured of leprosy, and as a result he converts and becomes a worshiper of Yahweh, god of the

Israelites. He is now faced with a dilemma; as he must return to Syria, he must take "two mule's burden" of Israelite soil back with him. This is done so that he may have a plot of Yahweh's land upon which to offer sacrifice to the Israelite god. Elisha does not argue this matter with Naaman, but only tells him to "go in peace"<sup>3</sup>.

1 1 Kngs 18:19

2 2 Kngs 3:27

3 2 Kngs 5:1-19

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Perhaps the strongest suggestion of Hebrew henotheism is contained in line from Ezekial that tells of the women weeping for the Sumerian harvest god, Tammuz<sup>1</sup>. The Jewish calendar contains the month of Tammuz (usually in the summer) and one of the titles for Tammuz, "Adonai", was adopted by the Hebrews as a title for their god. The phrase "Adonai Elohim" is translated in the english Bible to read "Lord of Hosts". The Greeks, also, adopted "Adonai" and called him "Adonis"; a term used today in the english language to describe a good looking young man.

In the New Testament, we are told by Saint Paul that there are "many gods and many lords"<sup>2</sup>. In Colossians, he refers to them as the "elemental spirits of the universe" or Archons<sup>3</sup>. Could it be that the Archons and the Elohim were one and the same:

"elemental spirits of the universe"? In Ephesians, he refers to

them as the "world rulers of the present darkness"<sup>4</sup>. In John's Gospel, Jesus puts us on equal footing with the Archons by quoting Psalms<sup>5</sup>; and in Acts we are called "God's offspring"<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 8:14

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 8:5

<sup>3</sup> Col 2:8

<sup>4</sup> Eph 6:12

<sup>5</sup> Jn 10:34 & Ps 82:6

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The scriptures in places speak of the concept of pre-existence. God tells Jeremiah, "before I formed you in the womb I knew you"<sup>1</sup>. In Ephesians, we are told that God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world"<sup>2</sup>.

Could it be that the "secret message" that the Scriptures have to impart to us is that we and the Elohim are one and the same? That we were present at the creation? That we created our own universe under God's guidance, but because we were not in harmony with each other, because a few of us tried to "lord" over the others, because we were not in agreement on how to go about making the universe, and instead of making the universe according to God's design, we made it according to our design, in "our image"; could this be why the universe is such an imperfect place?

Between chapters 16 and 19 of the Book of Genesis there is a curious exchange that deserves to be followed. In chapter 16 we are told the story of Hagar, the mother of Ishmael. Hagar, one of Abraham's concubines, is sent out into desert by Sarai, the first wife of Abraham. At verse seven Hagar is met by an "angel of the Lord". Later, after conversing with this "angel of the Lord", she refers to the angel as a "god of vision". She is shocked to think that she has actually seen "God" and has lived<sup>1</sup>. In the next chapter, Abraham is visited by a being who describes himself as "El Shaddai"<sup>2</sup>. Most english language Bibles translate this to read "God Almighty", but a literal translation would render it "El, one of the gods". In chapter 18 Abraham, we are told, is visited again by the "Lord", and upon looking up he sees "three men". The persons that appear to Abraham in this chapter of Genesis are usually described as being God and two of his angels, yet strangely enough the one who is thought to be God, the Almighty (omniscient and omnipresent) does not know what's going on in a city on the planet Earth and remarks: "I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which

has come to me; and if not, I will know"<sup>3</sup>. After wrangling with Abraham over whether or not he would destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, we are told that "the Lord rained... fire from the Lord out of heaven"<sup>4</sup>.

1 Gen 16:7-14

2 Gen 17:1

3 Gen 18:21

4 Gen 19:24

29

The "main of event" occurs in the first chapters of Genesis.

Here is where the Elohim see light for the first time<sup>1</sup>, and go about the process of the first creation<sup>2</sup>, that of "calling and creating" the material world<sup>3</sup>. The Elohim cause a separation to be made between the spiritual world, "the waters which were above the firmament, and the material world, "the waters which were under the firmament"<sup>4</sup>. Genesis 1:9-31 details this "ordering" of the material world.

In Genesis 1:27, we are told that the Elohim created, or developed the idea of mankind in an image that the Elohim perceived. According to Rabbinic tradition this image was the image of the Higher God that the Elohim saw reflected in the firmament which they took to be that of their own. In the second creation, that of "making and forming" the material world in the

"day that the Lord made the earth and the heavens"<sup>5</sup>, we are told that the Elohim actually "formed" man out of dust, but it was

1 Gen 1:4

2 Gen 1:1 - 2:3

3 Isaiah 43:7

4 Gen 1:7

5 Gen 2:4

30

only after the Elohim breathed into man's nostrils the "breath of life", did man become a living being<sup>1</sup>.

Yet it seems that the Elohim had made a mistake. In Genesis

1:28, we are told that the Elohim had created man as an

androgynous being, "male and female [they] created them." Most

Gnostic Christians take this to mean that we were originally

intended to possess both soul and spirit combined. It appears the

Elohim had made a mistake and formed a "sleeping" soul which they

attempted to manipulate<sup>2</sup>, and when they realized that they were

mistaken they found it necessary to pull the "spirit" (Eve) out

of the soul (Adam) in order to bring it to life; hence Adam calls

Eve "the Mother of the living"<sup>3</sup>.

The events that follow in the third chapter of Genesis

deserve to be looked at in detail. In chapter 2, verse 9 we have

been told that there are two trees in the center of the Garden of

Eden; the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. In verse 17 of that same chapter we were told that the Creator had ordered Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge, for if Adam were to eat from that tree he would die. In chapter three a serpent appears to Eve

1 Gen 2:7

2 Gen 2:16-17

3 Gen 2:21

31

and the following exchange takes place:

Serpent: "Did [the Creator] say, `You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

Eve: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but [the Creator] said, `You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

Serpent: "You will not die. For [the Creator] knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you be like [the gods] knowing good and evil."

Later, after eating from the tree, and, by the way, not dying, Adam and Eve "heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden"<sup>1</sup>. It is curious to note that from the exchange that follows that the Creator does not seem to know what has taken place in their "absence", just as they did not seem to know what

was happening in Sodom and Gomorrah or what occurred to Cain's brother, Able<sup>2</sup>. Upon learning what has transpired the Creator

1 Gen 3:8

2 Gen 4:9

32

then put a curse upon the serpent, Eve, and Adam. We then learn that the Creator had lied to Adam and Eve when they told them that they would die and in remarking reveal: "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever..."<sup>1</sup>. This speaking in the plural is echoed in the Tower of Babel incident: "Come, let us go down and there confuse their language"<sup>2</sup>.

Throughout time the serpent has stood as symbol of immortality. Many ancient cultures upon seeing the shedded skin of a snake believed that the snake never died; only shedding one body for a new one. In Greek mythology the god Prometheus is often depicted as a winged serpent bringing the gift of fire to man. Later Prometheus was replaced by the image of the wing-footed Hermes holding aloft the caduceus or "serpent entwined staff" as he brought the secret knowledge of the gods to mankind.

These images of winged and fiery serpents can be found in the Old Testament. In Numbers "the Lord sent fiery serpents among



the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died"<sup>3</sup>. To counteract this attack, Moses is told to "make

1 Gen 3:22

2 Gen 11:7

3 Num 21:6

33

a fiery serpent and set it on a pole" so that when the people see the "brazen serpent" they would not die<sup>1</sup>. This symbolic gesture of the serpent lifted up in the wilderness is reminiscent not only of the serpent in the garden, but that of Jesus on the cross<sup>2</sup>. In Isaiah's vision of God, he describes the throne of God as being surrounded by "seraphim". Seraphim may be defined as "fiery winged serpents". In 2 Kings we are told that the "brazen serpent" survived down into reign of Ahaz, king of Israel. It seems Ahaz did some house cleaning and broke the "brazen serpent" into pieces and threw it out. Is this some how a prophetic gesture of Israel's rejection of the Messiah<sup>3</sup>?

## CONCLUSION

It should be remembered that when approaching the subject of "hidden works" or "secret knowledge" that "there is nothing hid,

1 Num 21:8-9

2 Jn 3:14-15

3 2 Kngs 18:4

except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret, except to come to light"1. In other words, there is nothing hidden that cannot, or will not, be found. Christ extolls us to seek and find, and that when we knock at the door of mystery it will be opened to us2. It can be found that God has a "divine plan" in which God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"3. In Acts we are told that the end of time will not come until all things have been restored to God. This "restoration of all things" became known to the early christians as the Doctrine of Apocatastasis4. Ephesians speaks of the "plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth"5.

Yet what happens to us when we die in a pre-gnostic state before the Apocatastasis? In Mark's Gospel, we are told to take heed of what we hear in the message, for "the measure you give will be the measure you get"6. This is the Doctrine of

1 Mark 4:22

2 Matt 7:7-8

3 1 Tim 2:4

4 Acts 3:21

5 Eph 1:10

6 Mk 4:24

Metrethesis; the "measure for measure" spoken of in Matthew 7:2 and the "sowing" and "reaping" in Galatians 6:7. This is the plan by which God allows all souls in the universe to eventually redeem themselves in the prison of Metempsychosis.

Metrethesis and Metempsychosis are doctrines that are not unique to Christian Gnosticism. In Buddhism and the Vedic religions these doctrines are known as

The text is lost at this point.