

A Few Facts About Gnosticism

Gnosis means knowledge and gnostic one who has this knowledge. Gnosticism was the real enemy of Christianity as a heresy and still is. It was the basic philosophy of the Roman Empire and took many forms. One primary principle that ran through this philosophy was that matter of the material world was essentially evil. Only the spirit was good. Therefore, Gnosticism despised the body. It held that in the body was a spirit, like a seed in the dirty soil. The same principle in modern liberalism maintains that there is a spark of good in everyone and that each person is to develop that spark of good. Gnosticism sought to cause the “seed”, the spirit within them (the good) to grow. They tried to get rid of the evil in the body.

There were two extreme methods of accomplishing this goal as practiced by the Stoics and the Epicureans. Paul encountered these two sects of Gnostics in Acts 17:18, “And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, “What would this idle babbler wish to say?” Others, “He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities”--because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection”.

- The Stoics were pantheists. Pantheism teaches that God is in all things and therefore all things are God. There is a God in all waiting to be realized or let out. They taught that wise men should be free from passion and unmoved by joy or grief. That they should be submissive to natural law. And they also observed rigid rules and self-discipline.
- The Epicureans considered pleasure rather than truth the pursuit of life. Originally they sought to satisfy intellectually, not sensually the quest for “knowledge”. But later they taught their followers to satisfy the body’s desires so it would not bother them any more and that way they could reach “gnosis” or knowledge.

Both considered the Incarnation impossible since God could not unite Himself with anything evil such as a body. They taught Jesus only seemed to have a body, but actually He did not. Or they taught there was both a human Jesus and a divine Christ. Divinity came upon Him at His baptism and left Him at the cross, read: just before the cross.

There are some Gnostic gospels according to commentaries I read. Some were the Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Thomas, the Acts of Jesus, The Secret Gospel, The Hidden Gospel – all of these are known to have been written centuries after our New Testament Books. Sometimes you will see them advertised as some new discovery or something hidden from us for centuries.

The main teaching affecting the early church was that since the body and spirit were separate that what the body did had no effect on the spirit. Therefore the body could do as it pleased and it would not affect the spirit. Nothing the body did was a sin, because sin is a spiritual thing!!!

Some modern day examples of Gnostic teachings are many New Age Cults, Metaphysics, Religious Science, Divine Science, Net Thought, Unity, Christ Unity Science, and Christian Science. Buddhism and Taoism are similar thought patterns also. (Sources: “*The Kingdom of the Cults*” by Walter Martin and “*Larson’s Book of Cults,*” by Bob Larson)

The Jesus of Christian Science: Gnosticism was revived by Mary Baker Eddy and she became its 20th century exponent. She “discovered” that “God was all and in all, that God was good. Therefore since God is in all and was good that which was not good, (evil) did not really exist.” Some examples would of course be sickness, death, pain, hell, Satan, and so on. (Yes this is what Christian Science believes today). Mrs. Baker declared concerning “her” Jesus: “The Christian who believes in the First Commandment is a monotheist. Thus he virtually unites with the Jew’s belief in one God and recognizes that Jesus Christ is not God as Jesus Christ Himself declared, but is the Son of God”– *Science and Health, pg 152*”. Mrs Eddy spelled out her view so that no one could possibly misinterpret her when she wrote: “The Spiritual Christ was infallible: Jesus, as material manhood, was not Christ: – *Miscellaneous Writings, pg 84.*”

I John 4:3, “Every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God”.

Gnosticism was around before Christianity but the danger came when they began to add their teachings to those of Christianity. Such as that Jesus had given them secret Gnosis or Knowledge, and that they could not sin because the body and spirit were completely separate. By denying basic Christian doctrines such as the virgin birth, total sufficiency of the cross, denying that Jesus was God, they became the spreaders of the first heresy in the church. These same things and beliefs are used by the cults today. They change key Christian doctrines, subtle changes, but drastic and essential to what we believe, and to what God said in HIS WRITTEN WORD.