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## GNOSTICISM UNSCRAMBLED

by

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The following précis of the vast subject called GnosticisM and its myriad sects will clarify much scholarly confusion, and prove these principles:

1. Gnosticism can be DEFINED.
2. Gnosticism can be CLASSIFIED, though scholars waste much time on this UNNECESSARY PROCESS.
3. Gnosticism is PRE-CHRISTIAN (except for the doctrine of Christ's redemption) and existed before 30 A. D. in the Greek, Egyptian and Syro-Babylonian world).
4. Gnosticism as a complete system BEGAN WITH SIMON MAGUS, when he combined (syncretized) Babylonian-Hellenic Gnosticism with his perverted form of Christianity.
5. Gnosticism therefore IS NOT JEWISH IN ORIGIN as modern scholars think, but SAMARITAN.
6. Gnosticism was a DISTINCT RELIGION, but did not STAY OUTSIDE of the Church, rather WORMED ITS WAY INTO THE CHURCH.
7. Gnosticism developed in three stages, and the third stage had strong influence upon the CATHOLIC CHURCH.

## THE GNOTTY, GNAUGHTY, GNASTY GNOSTICS

Why should we remain in confusion about Gnosticism? The BIBLE gives us the clues we need to understand this "new religion of knowledge" (gnosis). Beginning with Acts and Simon Magus (a Gnostic), and ending with Revelation, the Bible reveals "Gnosis falsely so called" (I Tim. 6:20) -- a false religion using the name of Christ, but in actuality opposed to the true Christ. Here is the story.

### WHAT IS GNOSTICISM?

"In logical order we ought to begin by defining Gnosticism ... a point on which WRITERS ON THE SUBJECT ARE NOT AGREED."

--Dictionary of Christian Biography,  
Vol. II, article "Gnosticism,"  
pp. 678.

"No question, however, has more perplexed historians than that which refers to the direct origin of Gnosticism."

--Biblical, Theological and  
Ecclesiastical Cyclopaedia,  
McClintock and Strong, Vol. 3,  
article "Gnosticism," pp. 591.

"DEFINING GNOSTICISM IS AN EXTRAORDINARILY DIFFICULT TASK, since modern writers use the term to cover a wide variety of speculative religious phenomena."

--Gnosticism in Early Christianity,  
R. M. Grant, pp. 6.

We say -- on the basis of the Bible -- that Gnosticism IS EASY TO DEFINE:

A Satanic religion of dualism, combining Oriental superstition with Greek philosophy, denying God as Creator, and promising "REDEMPTION" by special knowledge (gnosis) of the angelic (demon) realm.

HOW can the bewildering variety of Gnostic sects be CLASSIFIED?

Scholars are in bitter disagreement over classifying the labyrinthal maze of Gnostic systems and speculations --

"Speculations so wild and so baseless that it is irksome to read them and difficult to believe that time was when acquaintance with them was counted as what alone deserved the name of 'knowledge'." (Dictionary of Christian Biography, Vol. II, pp: 678.)

As McClintock and Strong say "It has been found very difficult to arrange the several Gnostic sects according to any principle of classification" (Biblical Cyclopaedia, Vol. III, pp. 892).

Let us solve this bitter controversy in the following manner. FORGET the classification controversy -- it does NOT PROFIT! Gnosticism, being a religion of demons, is chaos. Being chaotic, Gnosticism could be classified from myriad points of view.

However, the serious student -- if he desires more detail -- will find two classifications helpful:

- 1) Division of all sects into "Judaistic" vs. Anti-Judaistic (depending on their view of God's law and the Old Testament) -- Neander's system.
- 2) Division of all sects into Ascetic vs. Licentious (sexual profligacy) -- Clement of Alexandria<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Another classification into three groups -- Baur's -- at first appears helpful: 1) Sects combining Christianity with both Judaism and Hellenism; 2) Christianity against both Hellenism and Judaism; 3) Christianity identified with Judaism, but opposed to Heathenism. But on analysis we find only one actual sect each fits groups 2 and 3, and all others fall into group 1 -- thus no progress with Baur's method.

WHEN AND WHERE did Gnosticism arise?

If the controversy among scholars this time is not bitter, it is at least thoroughly settled. Some say Gnosticism began in the time of Christ. Others say Gnosticism definitely pre-Christian.

Origin is Clear!

If only the scholars would understand! Two simple facts -- abundantly proved -- would clarify all chaotic confusion. First, THERE WAS A PRE-CHRISTIAN GNOSTICISM. That answers the question "when?" Secondly, our earliest witnesses -- once we carefully analyze them -- all agree that Gnosticism is not Jewish, BUT IS SAMARITAN! That tells us where.

PRE-CHRISTIAN GNOSIS. The best explanation of the pre-Christian "gnosis" is McClintock and Strong, Vol. III, p. 392:

"Ever since the conquests of Alexander the Great, an intense interest had been felt throughout Asia Minor and Egypt in Hellenistic philosophy and Oriental theology. . . The result was that, near the time of the first promulgation of Christianity, a number of new systems of belief independently spring up independently in different countries, and exhibited similar characteristics. They were usually formed by incorporating with the national religion what seemed attractive elements in foreign systems, and softening down what was harsh and incredible in the popular faith and worship. In this way we discover a nearly simultaneous origin of the Judaistic philosophy at Alexandria, of Benjamin and Therapeutism in Egypt and southern Palestine, of the Cabalistic literature in Syria and the East, and of New Platonism among the Hellenistic nations. THESE WERE ALL OFFSHOOTS FROM THE SAME GENERAL ROOT, and not necessarily deriving anything original, but unquestionably drawing much assistance from one another."

Thus we see SATAN laying a very good preparation for Christ's gospel! God would not allow Satan to destroy the truth. But He did allow Satan to confuse and deceive. Satan used his already existing heathen religions to prepare for Gnosticism. And Satan used Gnosticism as at least one major -- if not the major -- INFILTRATORS, SAB-

Going back to pre-Christian gnosis, we find the Platonic doctrine of a god withdrawn entirely within himself, intelligible only to the initiated, dualism, and a fall of spirit beings; the Pythagorean doctrine; the Brahminic doctrine of emanation and hypostatizing of the divine attributes; the Parsic representation of God as light, of a dualism in which God is continually attacked by a world of matter, and the eternal conflict between good and evil (darkness); and the Buddhist notions of a God in process of development and of souls longing to be freed from matter.

"The Alexandrian literature, in which most of these elements had found a place, was diffused among the educated classes in all those countries in which Gnosticism flourished, and might have been the mediating agency through which the mind of the East was brought into communication with that of the West." (Ibid)

Let two very authoritative sources prove once and for all there was a PRE-CHRISTIAN GNOSIS. "Thus the essential part of most of the conceptions of what we call Gnosticism was already in existence and fully developed BEFORE the rise of Christianity."

--Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., Vol. 12, p. 157.

"...The accounts given of Simon Magus, Menander and Dositheus [Simon's teacher], who have become almost mythical, at least prove that in Syria Gnostic tendencies made their appearance at an early period."

--K. R. Hagenbach, History of Doctrines, Vol. I, p. 54.

GNOSTICISM IS SAMARITAN, NOT JEWISH. "Simon's doctrines were substantially those of the Gnostics, and he is not without reason regarded as the first who attempted to engraft theurgy and egotism of the Magian philosophy upon Christianity."

--Biblical Encyclopaedia, ed. by Fallows, p.1591.

Here we must refute R. M. Grant, professor Quispel and some other modern scholars who endeavor to prove that Gnosticism is Jewish. Grant says that the earliest account "we possess of its [Gnosticism's] origin treats it as based on Hellenistic Judaism (Gnosticism and Early Christianity, p. 14). Careful! "Hellenistic" is correct; but not "Judaism." Grant says that the earliest account was provided about the year 170 by the Jewish Christian writer Hegesippus. Hegesippus tells us that James the Just preached Jesus to seven "Jewish" sects: Essenes, Galileans, Hemerobaptists, Masbotheans (also baptizers), SAMARITANS, Sadducees, and Pharisees." Before we comment on the Samaritans, let's hear from an even earlier authority. Actually, Justin Martyr wrote his first apology at Rome about A.D.130. Justin was a Samaritan by birth. His information is even earlier than Hegesippus. ". . . after Christ's ascension into heaven the devils put forward certain men who said that they themselves were gods; . . . There was a Samaritan, Simon, . . . and almost all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations, worship him, and acknowledge him as the first god . . . .

--The First Apology of Justin Martyr, Chaps. 22-24. Found in Vol. I, Ante-Nicene Fathers, p.172.

The historical context of Justin shows he deems Simon to be the first Gnostic; Justin mentions him first.

The third earliest Catholic authority as to the origin of Gnosticism is Irenaeus. "According to Irenaeus the <sup>3</sup>oldest Gnostic systems are those he ascribes to SEMON MAGUS, Menander, and Saturninus."

--R. M. Grant, Gnosticism and Early Christianity, p. 15  
--Irenaeus, Against Heresies I. 23-24.

"Any account of the development of Gnosticism has to be concerned with the elusive person and doctrine of Simon Magus, since such Christian writers such as Justin, Hegesippus, Irenaeus, and the author of the Acts of the Apostles regard him as the earliest Gnostic." An amazing admission for Dr. Grant!

--R.M. Grant, *ibid*, p. 70.

And one modern scholar is correct in his insistence against the "Jewish origin" theory -- Hans Jonas. See his excellent refutation of professor Quispel in The Bible in Modern Scholarship, ed. by J. Phillip Hyatt pp. 279-93. Jonas shows that there are no early Hebrew Gnostic writings, there is only one Jewish name in early Gnosticism -- AND THAT NAME IS SIMON. "But NEITHER HAD IT [Gnosticism] ITS ULTIMATE ORIGIN IN JUDAISM; from the strong heathen-eclectic philosophy, undergoing manifold modification and accommodation in the process."

--Encyclopaedia Biblica, ed. by Cheyne and Black, p. 1742.

#### Gnosticism's Real Origin

Modern scholars are claiming more and more that Gnosticism started as an offshoot of Judaism. This is not true!

What relation did Gnosticism have then with Judaism? Let a renowned authority, Hans Jonas answer: "The nature of the relation of Gnosticism to Judaism -- in itself an undeniable fact -- is defined by the anti-Jewish animus /spirit/ with which it is saturated." (emphasis Jonas)

--*ibid*, p. 288.

Thus when Grant says that Hegesippus traces the origin of Gnosticism of the first century, we must look closely at the list Hegesippus gives us. We again call your attention to the seven "Jewish" sects (page 6) and remind you that SAMARITANS are among them.

Listen to the sarcastic answer of Jonas to the "Jewish origin" theory, and to the idea that a Jewish desire for "Gnosis" eventually led to the origin of Gnosticism, properly speaking, at the "fringe of Judaism" (an assertion of Professor Quispel):

"But Jewish orthodox "Gnosis" of itself just cannot lead to something basically different from itself. Somebody must have taken it and made it into something new, turned it upside down. Who did so? Gnostics ("properly speaking") to be sure . . . ." after showing that Jews would hardly have attacked their own traditions, their own people, their own religion, so fiercely as did Gnosticism, he asks if it might be Simon the Magician from Samaria who "is, as it happens, the earliest of them all."

"We must not forget that he Simon was the member of a very specially placed community, a group discriminated against, rejected, despised. Here we have a palpable motive for a response of resentment, aggression and spite; and here for once we can connect a definite meaning with much invoked, hazy term "fringes (or outskirts) or Judaism," "at" which, we are told, Gnosticism originated, a term that usually prompts me to ask: inside or outside the line? The Samaritans were partly in and partly out, and some of them apparently very far out." (Emphasis Jonas'.)

--Hans Jonas, *ibid*, p. 291.

At last we see what the vague "fringe of Judaism" really is! It is SAMARIA. Church history and church tradition tell us, and as even some modern scholars do not realize, ~~Christianity~~ Christianity came into being (as a religion) first through SIMON



MAGUS,

Simon had plenty of Babylonian (and Persian) material to work with in Samaria. We remind you that it is not strange for Babylonian mysteries to be in Syria and Samaria. The Samaritans were a hybrid race originally from Babylon and Persia -- II Kings 17 and Ezra 4 reveal. For proof that Babylonian customs and religions were imported from Babylon and Syria to Rome, see Dr. Ernest Martin's paper entitled "The Face Change in Ancient Italy!" Dr. Martin's paper conclusively proves that Babylon had funnelled much of its racial stock -- and also its religious ideas -- to Syria, and later to Rome.

We have thus abundantly proved that Gnosticism is "pre-Christian" as to its preparation, and Simon Magusite as to its foundation.

#### WHY Gnosticism?

Only important question remains. Why, or for what purpose, did Satan devise Gnosticism? Remember, what Satan cannot destroy he must CONFUSE OR CAPTURE.

We will now prove that Gnosticism intended to become a UNIVERSAL RELIGION.

Evidence is so abundant that, even though Gnosticism had a syncretistic (hybrid religion) background, it nevertheless was as Hans Jonas said "a religion of its own." Gnosticism was an intentional deviation from the truth -- from orthodoxy. Listen to Neander: "When these Gnostics, WITH THEIR SYSTEM ALREADY MADE, looked into the New Testament, they could easily find it their new religion all there, since they only sought for points to which they might attach it."

--Neander's Church History,  
Vol. II, p. 30.

"They [Gnostics] undertook to set forth Christianity as the ABSOLUTE RELIGION, and they therefore placed it in opposition to the other religions, to that of the Old Testament as well (not alone to Judaism); but the absolute religion, which they coupled with Christ, was to them essentially identical with the results of the philosophy of religion, for which they had now found the basis in a revelation. They were accordingly a class of Christians who essayed through a sharp onset TO CONQUER Christianity for Hellenic culture, and Hellenic culture for Christianity. . . ."

--Harnack, History of Dogma,  
page 60.

"The later Gnosticism is, in fact, as Chiflet has well expressed it, 'The spirit of Asiatic antiquity seeking to assert its EMPIRE over the soul of Man by insinuating itself into the Christian Church!'"

--C. W. King, The Gnostics and Remains, p. 9.

We now show Gnosticism had two goals -- pervert, confound and confuse the true Church, if possible; bring more error into the Catholic Church at a later date.

Armed with their deliberate perversions of Old Testament scripture (what Jones calls the anti-Semitic animus), fully intending to pervert Christianity according to Satan's plan, they wormed into the church. "These Gnostics for the most part had no intention of separating from the rest of the church, and establishing distinct communities of their own. . . they were for UNITING WITH THE ORDINARY CONGREGATIONS, and establishing in connection with them a kind of theosophic school of CHRISTIAN MYSTERIES."

--Neander's Church History,  
Vol. II, p. 33.

One other important fact about Gnosticism must not be overlooked. The German scholar Lipsius (Gnosticism, Its Essence, Origin, and Development, 1860) shows the

development of Gnosticism is similar to a curve which began only slightly "off" from the truth, diverged far out, and finally returned closely to the Catholic Church!

"...finally, under the Marcionites, the Gnostic speculation APPROXIMATES VERY NEARLY that of the more liberal CATHOLIC TEACHERS."

--McClintock and Strong, Op. cit.  
p. 893. See Dictionary of Christian Biography, Vol. II,  
page 682.