

What is at Stake?

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It might be well to consider the question whether or not the Gnostics actually believed their stories to be literally true. Doubtless, many of them did. But the real answer to this question is that *it does not matter* whether they believed them to be literally true or not. The nature of mythology is that stories are told for the purpose of expressing certain mystical “truths.”

What are the so-called “truths” of Gnosticism? Where do they exist in modern thinking? And most importantly, what Gnostic ideas exist today in the teaching and thinking of the church?

To be sure, there are true Gnostic associations and a genuine Gnostic movement in the world today. People who fully and consciously embrace this movement actively promote the very same original Gnostic teachers (such as Valentinus, Simon, Menander etc.) and Gnostic writings (Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Judas etc.) that were refuted by Irenaeus. Our concern here, however, is to point out where *elements* of Gnostic thinking exist in the church as a *corruption* of otherwise orthodox teaching and thinking. By now it is hoped that the reader will have recognized and identified at least some elements of the Gnostic world view that have infiltrated the church and become part of our thinking. In this final article, let us suggest some of these elements we have identified. The easiest and most practical way to do this is in list form. At stake is the essence and purity of our faith.

1. The most serious encroachment of Gnostic thinking within the church concerns the way some view Jesus Christ. A hundred years ago or so, there was a strong attack on the Deity of Jesus. This in large part gave rise to the fundamentalist movement that rightly sought to defend the doctrine of Christ's Deity. Unfortunately, in so focusing on His Deity, many Christians have completely lost an understanding that He is also fully human. We would go so far as to assert that [u]most[/u] Christians today do not understand or even believe that Jesus Christ is fully human with a human body and a human soul just like any other man. After His resurrection, His body was made incorruptible and immortal to be sure; nevertheless, He was resurrected in the same body of flesh and bone in which He suffered and died, and He ascended in this body to the right hand of the Father. Moreover, He will one day return in that same body of

flesh to take His throne in this world. It is probably modern preterism that has done the most damage in this area of theology. Any denial of the literal, physical resurrection of the body, either of Christ's or of mankind in general, is Gnostic.

For more information, refer to this article on Preterism

<http://www.pfrs.org/preterism/pret03.html>.

2. Another related error within the church is our view of the material creation. The *Biblical* view is that the material creation was created "very good," not flawed. It is subjected to the curse because of man's sin. But it will be restored and redeemed to its pristine condition. Unfortunately, many Christians do not look at the physical creation this way. Like Carpocrates, they seem to think spirituality consists in despising the created world. They long to escape planet earth and fly away to Heaven. Even though this idea forms a large part of our hymnody, it is a purely pagan and Gnostic idea and runs exactly opposite to the Hope laid out for us in Scripture, which is that our destiny, eternity, and reward is to be resurrected like Jesus and to dwell right here on this planet with Him forever.

For more information see the series on Chiliasm.

<http://www.pfrs.org/pd/index.html>

3. Another pagan and Gnostic concept prevalent within the church is a belief in fatalism or divine determinism and a denial of free will. Contrary to the fervent insistence of our Calvinistic brethren, this doctrine is not part of the faith delivered once for all to the saints and was never part of the orthodox teaching of the early church. It is a capitulation to Gnosticism that took place 400 years after the apostolic era.

For more information see our series on Calvinism / Reformed Theology

<http://www.pfrs.org/calvinism/index.html>

4. The rejection of baptism for the remission of sins has its origins with Gnosticism and is tied with the belief that salvation is only for the spirit, not for the body.

For more information see <http://www.pfrs.org/baptism/index.html>

5. The doctrine of unconditional eternal security for a privileged group of elect saints is a Gnostic teaching foreign to Scripture.

See <http://www.pfrs.org/osas/index.html>

6. Any propensity to shun the meek and humble reliance on the Scriptures, literally interpreted, as the revealed truth of God, in favor of human speculation, subjective (private) interpretation, conjecture and philosophy has its roots in Gnosticism.

7. Any denial of the goodness, benevolence and kindness of God is a step in the direction of Gnosticism. Any assertion that he is the author of evil is to land flatly in the Gnostic camp.

8. The rejection of the literal interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures is Gnosticism – if not in doctrine, then certainly in practice. The first thing the followers of Simon, Valentinus, and Marcion did was to repudiate the Old Testament Scriptures as the rantings of a defective angel. While modern Christians would never say such a thing, many never think twice about rejecting the plain teachings of the Old Testament via the mechanism of allegorical interpretation, especially in the Old Testament prophetic books. Not surprisingly, those who do this come to the exact same conclusions regarding the physical creation and a “heavenly destiny” for man as the ancient Gnostics.

9. The dabbling with mystical, occult beliefs and practices so common among Christians is toying with Gnosticism and paganism. These include: ascending to alternate planes of existence, astrology, magic, pantheism, dualism, metaphysics, among others.

10. The reliance on psychology, even “Christian psychology,” is a capitulation to worldly philosophy and a thoroughly Gnostic world view. This is especially true when it involves psychotherapy and the use of mind altering drugs.

The recent propensity to compromise with pseudo-Christian cults is deadly. It should be obvious by now that the modern explosion of new and various cults is in reality a revival of ancient Gnosticism. Some are more overtly Gnostic than others. By now the reader should easily be able to recognize the Gnostic nature of Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Science, Scientology, Unity, etc.