

The Dean Burgon Society

"Christian" Gnosticisms Corruption of the Western/Alexandrian Manuscripts

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>>> <http://www.deanburgonsociety.org/Versions/gnosticism.htm> <<<

• INTRODUCTION

There is a *Gnostic Revival* going on today. It has been fueled by the Gnostic fairy tale, *The Da Vinci Code*, the National Geographic Societies sponsorship, television special and publication of the Gnostic Gospel of Judas and a renewed interest in The Nag Hammadi Codices. With that in mind, I present this paper titled "Christian Gnosticisms Corruption of the Western/Alexandrian Manuscripts" for your consideration.

Please note that the word "Christian" is between quotation marks. By using the quotation marks I am indicating to the reader that I am saying that the "Christianity" of the Gnostics is not really Christianity at all. In fact, the only way that the Gnosticism that I am speaking of can be considered Christian is in the sense that they scrounged words, writings and ideas from Christianity, and then redefined, rearranged, edited and rewrote them to fit their own purposes and to advance their own false teachings. I present this paper to you, so that you will realize that the "scholarly" community is all in a frenzy about the so called Gnostic Gospels, and are in the process of rewriting early Christian History with a Gnostic spin to reflect the findings at Nag Hammadi Egypt and the recently discovered Gospel of Judas. I trust this information will be helpful.

Let me tell you a little bit about the Nag Hammadi manuscripts...

The Gnostic Discovery at Nag Hammadi Egypt & The Da Vinci Code

Nag Hammadi is a village in Egypt near the Nile River. In 1945 Six Bedouin camel drivers were digging for fertilizer when one of them uncovered a human skeleton. Next to the skeleton was an earthenware jar. Inside the jar, they found thirteen leather-bound volumes containing fifty-two treatises, hence they were called the Nag Hammadi codices. This library of ancient documents, dated around 350 AD contained texts relating to an early Christian Heresy called Gnosticism. Dan Brown's book titled *The Da Vinci Code* falsely characterizes these writings as "the earliest Christian records" and the "unaltered gospels".

These thirteen leather-bound volumes contained fifty-two treatises including - The Gospel of Thomas and Philip. They also found the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles, A letter of Peter to Philip and the Apocalypse of Peter and Paul. In his book *The Gnostic Discoveries*, Marvin Meyer makes it clear all of the writings were Gnostic in nature, and they were **all written in Coptic**. Now, there is another important fact you need to know. The Nag Hammadi texts were all written in the second and third centuries AD. In *The Da Vinci Code*, Teabing claims that the Nag Hammadi texts are "the earliest Christian records DVC p.245. **The truth is that every book in the New Testament was written in the first century AD!** In fact, Gnostic beliefs did not begin to be mixed with Christianity until about 150 AD and so-called Christian Gnostic sects virtually disappeared by the 6th century. The only known exception was the Mandaean sect of Iran/Iraq.

There is also something further I should draw to your attention. Scholars regard the Gnostic gospels as not genuine, spurious, counterfeit.

• A BRIEF DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION OF GNOSTICISM

Peter Jones, professor of New Testament at Westminster Seminary California and director of *Christian Witness to a Pagan Planet* says this about Gnosticism -

“Gnosticism is formed from the Greek term *gnosis* meaning knowledge, but it means here a particular form of knowledge, namely spiritual experience.’ Like all pagan spirituality, so-called Christian’ Gnosticism engages in sacred technologies’ (occult meditations, chanting mantras, drumming, etc.) to access the higher, spiritual self, the self that is part of God. In this essentially out-of-body experience, all physical and this-worldly restraints, like rational thinking and a sense of specific gender, fall away. In a word, the experience of enlightenment’ is both the rejection of the goodness of the physical creation and an acquisition of the knowledge of the divinity of the human soul”.

Basically, Gnostics see the human soul as divine. You look within for God.

There was no consensus on a Gnostic canon of scriptures. Gnostic groups had no scruples about rewriting and adapting other religions sacred writings to fit their fancy. Many of their own works were circulated in different versions. Various sects had their own preferred rendition. Further, Gnostic groups had no unified doctrinal statement within Gnostic groups. In fact, the Nag Hammadi find revealed that a variety of different beliefs existed among different groups and individuals. For instance, some taught celibacy and others did not.

• THE HISTORY OF EARLY CORRUPTION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Early Corruption of The Word of God

Purposeful efforts to alter and corrupt the New Testament began almost immediately after each Gospel and letter were written. Turn to **2 Corinthians 2:17** “For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ”. The word *corrupt* here is a translation of the Greek word *kaphleuontev - kapaleuontes* (kap-ale-loo-entace) which means a huckster. One scholar said this about the word - The word was used to describe shady “wine-dealers *playing tricks with their wines*; mixing the new, harsh wines, so as to make them pass for old. They not only sold their wares in the market, but had *wine-shops* all over the town..”. where then peddled their corrupt wine claiming it was genuine. They made a bundle of money by their deception.

So how is this word used in reference to the Word of God? Gnostic hucksters, and others, took the pure word of God and, like the shady wine dealers, mixed in their own philosophies, opinions and perversions and they peddled it all over as the real thing.

We know that false gospels and false letters were written and circulated while the Apostles were still alive. Turn to **2 Thessalonians 2:2** “That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand”. It is obvious that someone had written a letter and was circulating it, claiming that it was from the Apostle Paul and other disciples. Paul says the letter is a bogus, fake, a fraud”.

Turn in your Bibles to **2 Peter 2:1-3** “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. 3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not”. These false prophets and teachers are said to “**privily...bring in damnable heresies**”. That is, they secretly introduced spurious (unauthentic, counterfeit or bogus) teachings that were “damnable heresies” or perversion of the truth. They sought to peddle these heresies among believers. And how would they do that? Certainly by their slick teachings but likely also in their writings and corruptions of what God had given in the New Testament.

• AN OVERVIEW OF GNOSTIC HERESIES

Let's look at some of the Early Heresies that developed in the days of the Apostles, and shortly afterwards. The beginnings of these heresies are alluded to in the Epistles John, Paul and Jude. Let's look at several of these places.

Galatians 1:6-8 "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed".

Someone was promoting a false perverted letter or letters, and many in the church of Galatia were buying into the lie. Next, lets look at...

1 John 4:3 in the King James Bible -- "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God...".

The NIV says, "Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not of God...". You see that the NIV leaves out the word "**Christ**". Why? It is because it was translated from the Alexandrian line of Greek texts that had been corrupted by the Gnostics. The so called "Christian" Gnostics believed in a dualistic Jesus Christ. Jesus was the physical Jesus and Christ was the spiritual Jesus. I will explain that more later in this paper. However, suffice it to say that this corrupt teachings influences some of the scribes who changed the Apostolic texts to reflect their Gnostic beliefs. Next in your Bibles to...

Jude 1:3-4 "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. 4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ". This verse makes it obvious that "ungodly men" were turning the "grace of our God into lasciviousness". That is what Gnostics did. They taught that the flesh was evil and therefore, it does not matter what you do with it.

Next, we are going to look at three early heresies - *Gnosticism in general, Docetism, and Marcionism*. Docetism and Mariconism are types of Gnosticism. There are others, but time will not allow us to consider them. But, know this, Gnosticism, had the biggest on early Christianity and also had a major influence on the transmission of New Testament, and accounts for many of the differences between the Apostolic-Traditional line and the Alexandrian-Western line of manuscripts.

• GNOSTICISM IN GENERAL

I remind you of what was mentioned earlier in this paper: There was no unified doctrinal statement among Gnostic groups. There was no consensus on a Gnostic canon of scriptures. Gnostic groups had no scruples about rewriting and adapting other religions sacred writings to fit their fancy. Many of their own works were circulated in different versions. Various sects had their own preferred rendition.

While my research indicates that Carpocrates was the founder of the "Christian" Gnostics in the first half of the second century A.D., I do not know for sure that there were not others that preceded him. There were sects of Gnostics before him that used other religions and philosophies as their basis. However, we know that Carpocrates corrupted Christian teachings because of what Irenaeus wrote. The earliest and most vivid account of the Carpocratian Gnostics can be found in Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.) work titled *Against Heresy*. This sect did **not** believe Jesus was divine. His followers did not believe they had to follow the Law of Moses or any morality. They were very licentious (immoral) in their behavior.

Gnosticism, in all of its varieties, was the most influential heresy faced by the early Church. Not only did the Gnostic corrupt many readings found in the New Testament, but offered their own writings as inspired scriptures, such as the *The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Peter, The Gospel*

of Philip, The Gospel of Judas, The Gospel of the Ebionites, The Gospel of The Twelve, The Gospel According To The Hebrews (also called The Gospel According To Matthew, not to be confused with the real Gospel of Matthew), The Gospel According to the Egyptians, The Gospel of Mary (Magdalene), The Acts of Andrew, The Acts of Peter, The Acts of John, etc. Gnosticism had a variety of forms and sects, which broadened its base and growth. Historian Will Durant calls Gnosticism “the quest of godlike knowledge (gnosis) through mystic means” (*The Story Of Civilization* Vol. III, p. 604). Durant is correct. **Gnosticism is thinly veiled Pantheism.** Pantheism is the doctrine that identifies God with and in the whole universe, every particle, tree, table, animal, and person being are part of GOD. Or, to explain it in a very basic way, the Greek word *pan* = all. The Greek word *theos* = God). Therefore it literally means “God is All” and “All is God”.

The Gnostics taught that the physical (material) is evil and the spiritual (non-material) is good. Thus, a good god (spiritual) could not have created a physical world, because good can not create evil (that is the spiritual would not create the physical). So the Gnostic god created a being (or a line of beings called *aeons*) removing himself from direct creation. One of these aeons, or gods, created the world. The so-called **Christian Gnostics** believed that Jesus was one of these aeons who created the world. Some Gnostic taught that Jesus did not have a physical body. When he walked on the earth, he left not footprints because he never really touched the earth (he being spiritual and the world physical). Others taught that only our spiritual bodies were important, so the physical body could engage in whatever acts they desired because only the spiritual body would be saved. Still other Gnostics taught that the physical body was so evil that it must be denied in order for the spiritual body to gain salvation, thus shunning marriage and certain foods (**1 Timothy 4:1-3**).

The influence of Gnosticism can be seen in some of the heresies of today. **For example**, many of the teachings stated above are found, in revised form, in the teachings of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. To the Jehovah’s Witness, Jesus is a created god, not God manifest in the flesh. It is no wonder that the Watchtower’s New World Translation **changes** “God was manifest in the flesh” in **1 Timothy 3:16** and replaces it with “He was made manifest in flesh”. In the TR Greek which underlies our King James Bible reads it reads *yeov (theos)* (God) <2316> *efanerwyh (Ephanerothe)* (was manifested/revealed) <5319> (5681) *en (in)* <1722> *sarki (sarki)* (the flesh) <4561>. However, the Greek text which underlines the NWT has made a change, so it is natural for the Jehovah Witnesses to choose the reading which reflects their false doctrine. What is interesting is that the NIV, NASB, ESV, and perhaps others says “**He**” instead of “God,” thus following part of the Gnostic corruption. Why, because the NWT, NASB, NIV and, ESV have as their base the corrupt Alexandrian text.

The same is true of **John 1:18** where the NWT reads, “the only-begotten god” (Gk. *monogenes theos*). Again, this is because the Greek text of the NWT reads differently from the Textus Receptus Greek text that the King James Bible was translated from - “only begotten Son” (Gk. *monogenes heios*).

1881 Westcott & Hort - θεον ουδεις εωρακεν ποποτε μονογενης θεος ο ων εις τον κολπον του πατρος εκεινος εξηγησατο.

1894 Scrivner - θεον ουδεις εωρακεν ποποτε ο μονογενης υιος ο ων εις τον κολπον του πατρος εκεινος εξηγησατο

Again, in both of these examples, the NASV, and ESV agrees with the NWT because, they are both based on the same Greek text. It is clear that Gnostic false doctrine have influenced the various Western/Alexandrian manuscripts, and as a result of the modern translations using Greek texts based on Western manuscripts, Gnosticism influences translations today.

Before I move on, I want to point out that the phrase “**only begotten god**” is supported by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Jerome, papyrus 66 and the Alexandrian (Western) line of manuscripts. The phrase “**only begotten Son**” is quoted by Chrysostom, Tertullian, Basil, the Old Latin and Old Syrian translations and the majority of all Greek manuscripts. Hence, you can see that the Western line of manuscripts, that underlies the modern translations, were corrupted by the Gnostics who introduced those corruptions in the texts originally. However, the Eastern or Traditional lines of manuscripts, which underlie our King James Bible were not corrupted.

• DOCETISM

Docetism is a one of many types of Gnosticism. It dates back to Apostolic times. The name comes from the Greek word *dokesis*, “appearance” or “semblance”, because they taught that Christ only “**appeared**” or “**seemed**” to be a man, to have been born, to have lived and suffered. This particular type of Gnosticism taught that Christ’s body was a phantom and that he did not have a real physical body. Some denied the reality of Christ’s human nature altogether, some only the reality of His human body or of His birth or death. The word *Docetae* which is best rendered by “**Illusionists**”, first occurs in a letter of Serapion, Bishop of Antioch (190-203 A.D.) to the Church at Rhossos, where troubles had arisen about the public reading of the **apocryphal Gospel of Peter**. Serapion at first unsuspectingly allowed it to be read, but soon after forbade it, saying that he had borrowed a copy from the sect who used it, “whom we call Docetae”.

Another variety of *Docetism* taught that the nature of Christ was dualistic (two-fold), spiritual and physical. **Jesus** was the physical, **Christ** was the spiritual. The Christ departed Jesus at the crucifixion, and left him on the cross to suffer and die. There was no literal bodily resurrection, just a spiritual resurrection. This certainly differs from that the New Testament Teaches. Consider the following passages of Scripture -

Colossians 2:6-9 “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in him: 7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. 8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. 9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”.

Hebrews 10:5-12 “Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: 6 In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hast had no pleasure. 7 Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. 8 Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *offering* for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure *therein*; which are offered by the law; 9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. 10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: 12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;”

Luke 24:39 “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have”.

The Docetic Gnostics wrote their own *Gospels* including *The Acts of John* and, as mentioned above, *The Gospel of Peter*. The Gospel of Peter was cited by Justin Martyr, Origen, and Eusebius, but was not discovered by scholars until 1886. While excavating the grave of a monk, a French archaeological team discovered this manuscript in Egypt. Only a small portion of it remains, but what does remain, gives a differing account of the crucifixion than the four Gospels. This separation of the Christ from Jesus is seen in the following quotation - “And many went about with lamps, supposing that it was night, and fell down. And the Lord cried out, saying, “My power, my power, thou hast forsaken me. And when he had said it he was taken up. And in that hour the veil of the temple of Jerusalem was rent in twain”. (Gospel of Peter, verse 5). Thus, according to the Docetics, the power of Jesus, that is the Christ, was taken up left Jesus while to die on the cross and be buried in the tomb. There was no bodily resurrection!

I point this out, because we see the same idea in **Matthew 8:28**. The King James Bible reads “And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” **Matthew 8:29**

The NIV says, **Matthew 8:29** “What do you want with us, Son of God?” This reading is from Nestle-Aland 21 and reflects the Alexandrian reading. Note that the NIV does not deny the exorciser is the “Son of God,” but that He is **JESUS the Son of God**. This reading clearly reflects Gnostic dualistic teaching about Jesus Christ as we see exemplified in their false Gospel of Peter.

There is another interesting fact that you should know. The *Docetic Gnostics* used an altered version on the Gospel of Mark according to Irenaeus. He wrote - "Those who separate Jesus from Christ and say that Christ remained impassible while Jesus suffered, and try to bring forward the Gospel According to Mark, can be corrected out of that, if they will read it with a love of the truth". (Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, cited from *Early Christian Fathers Vol 1*; translated by Cyril C. Richardson and published by The Westminster Press, page 382).

Let's move on to Marcionism...

• MARCIONISM

Marcion was **born** in between 85 to 110 A.D. No one knows for sure. He founded his own Gnostic oriented heretical sect in about 144 A.D. He taught that the God of the Old Testament could not have been the Father of Jesus Christ, because Christ speaks of His Father as a God of love, but the God of the Jews was a God of wrath. Marcion taught that Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, created the world, but that all created flesh was evil. The soul/spirit of man was created by a greater god, one who was above Jehovah. This greater god created the spiritual realm and was the true Father of Jesus Christ. To release man's soul from his flesh, this greater god sent Christ. Christ appeared, in the form of a thirty-year-old man, in a spiritual body that appeared to be physical but was not a physical body. **Salvation was gained by renouncing Jehovah and all things physical.** Marcion rejected the Hebrew Scriptures, and the quotations of those Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament. **The followers of Marcion issued their own New Testament composed of Luke and Paul's letters revised to their liking.** The followers of Marcion made their revisions to support and reflect their doctrines. Ultimately, these Marcionian revisions reflect their private interpretations, and these perversions have survived in some of the ancient Greek New Testament manuscripts and account for the differences between the eclectic Greek text and the Textus Receptus.

Let me explain. Irenaeus points out that "Marcion cut up that Gospel According to Luke" (Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, p. 382). This would account for the large number of changes found in varying manuscripts of Luke and the large number of verses that are left out. It is, for example, understandable why the phrase "And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet". (**Luke 24:40**) would be omitted by Marcion, since he did not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus but only in a spiritual resurrection. In fact, the apparatus of the United Bible Society's Greek text points out **that this verse is omitted by both Marcion and Codex D** (UBS, 2nd ed., p. 317). This verse is omitted from the text of the NEB and RSV. Thus we see that Codex D, which is a Western line of manuscripts in the Gospels, and the RSV reflect some of the tampering done by Marcion and his followers.

There were many other "Christian" Gnostic sects that existed between about 150-300 A.D. besides the two I have named above -- The Valentinians, Simonians, Ophites, Basilidianians, Cainites, Nicolaites, Mandaeisites and many more. Many of the Gnostic corruptions of New Testament Scripture have made their way into the alleged "oldest and best" manuscripts.

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away". Matthew 24:35