

The Gnosis of Homo sapiens

Gnosis is a term which means 'knowing' - subjective inner-knowing or insight, as opposed to analytic knowledge. Gnosticism is broadly the following which seeks and celebrates this form of direct knowing. In a narrower sense it is applied to the gnostic movement of early Christianity.

The Gnostic Background in the Perennial Philosophy

All religions in some sense claim to take us to the core of enlightenment. They approach it in different ways. Although some Christians were professed mystics, despite coming within the orthodox tradition, in Christianity generally there is an attitude that forgiveness of sins comes only through Christ who is God, not through the transcending of ignorance in our own self-realization. Both the Vedantic tradition and Buddhism have embraced deeply this path of self-realization and convey some of the deepest insights within their traditions. Sufis also have such insight traditions as does the Kabbala. At an opposite extreme, nature shamanism has retained a primal sense of intimate spiritual contact with nature and with circumstance as had Taoism.

Gnosis represents for Christianity the lost esoteric tradition which claimed to carry the inner teachings of Jesus. This puts gnosticism in a very special position. Of all traditions and in common to the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions Christ has a unique status as the herald of the transformative epoch. The two millennia of Christianity pivots on this sense of historical culmination. For Buddhism and Vedanta, the epochs culminate in the Kali-yuga but in a more endless cyclic manner in the round of incarnation and the void, although we have incarnations of Vishnu and Maitreya.

Despite the repression of the gnostics, the anti-sex attitudes of the Christian church originate from the very divided physical and mental world the more severe Manichaeism practiced. Furthermore, even the softer Valentians and others still avoided procreation as entrapment of the soul in the flesh - clearly a subtly anti-life and anti-physical attitude. Augustine in setting the trend of original sin was merely inverting the Manichaean perspectives. We can thus lay at the door of gnosticism and its ascetic attitudes much of the blame for the Christian church's preoccupation with the evil of sex and women and the dominion of cloistered celibate men. This cloistered world of men became the founding theme of the scientific revolution and has led to a domination of science by men and by transcendent mechanistic views cosmology.

The Gnostic Inner Way of Christ-nature

Gnosticism is one of the most esoteric of the mystery traditions, because it was repressed in the first three centuries AD. Although historians had always known there were early heretical gnostic Christian sects from a few scraps of literature and the diatribes of the Orthodox bishops, it was only when the Nag Hammadi texts, which had lain buried in jars since being sequestered at the time the gnostics were repressed, were discovered that the full diversity of gnosticism and the very early nature of some of the key texts came to be fully appreciated. The Nag Hammadi texts are a diverse spectrum ranging from source sayings [Gospel of Thomas and The Dialogue of the Savior], and esoteric treatises of later origin.

“Scholars have attributed the origins of gnosticism to a number of sources: the Greek mystery cults; the Hermetic practices of Harran; Zoroastrianism; the Kabbalah of Judaism; and Egyptian religion. It has also been suggested it represents the original

tradition of Egyptian Christianity. The early Christians considered Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24) the founder of gnosticism. His doctrine, like that of other gnostic teachers, had nothing in common with the knowledge of the mysteries of God that Saint Paul called wisdom (1 Cor. 2:7)." - Grollier 93

Gnostics had a much more multifaceted view of divinity in which God was revealed as a demiurge who assumed dictatorial power over the primal silence, the feminine spirit of Wisdom in Sophia and even the shocking paradoxical feminine 'Magdalen' in Thunder - Perfect Mind, as noted in the Gnostic Eden (p 769). Many gnostics took a literal view of the second law of thermodynamics and saw the world as a dualistic one in which the darkness of matter a product of the demiurge bound them from spiritual liberation and the light, and in Manichaeism, females and sexuality were seen as physical snares. Such movements regarded procreation as a snare to be avoided to prevent the spirit being again entrapped in the flesh. They thus embraced contraception. Certain of the gnostics including the Carpocratians, Valentinus and Marcion had relatively liberated attitudes to sexual relationship and particularly to sexual equality in the church to the ire of orthodox bishops like Irenaeus. There was even a gnostic group following Carpocrates headed by a female bishop Marcellina who claimed a secret tradition going back to Mary, Martha and Salome. Although these self-styled themselves as gnostic, some authors prefer to refer only to the body-hating ascetic forms as gnostic. This belies the root title of 'knowing'.

As noted in the Gospel of Miriam (p 439), several gnostic texts document a tension between Magdalen and Peter which represents the overthrow of Magdalen's founding exaltation tradition by the orthodox male-dominated clergy - a metaphor of the repression of the gnostics noted in the Consummation of Eden (p 760).

Although the gnostics included many separatist sects, which embraced diverse exotic philosophies and beliefs, some of the gnostic traditions exemplified by The Gospel of Thomas and possibly The Dialogue of the Saviour extend back even further than the synoptic gospels of the Bible (Robinson, Crossan).

Traditional Christianity asks us to worship Jesus as a forgiveness-granting God, far removed from ourselves into cosmic stature. Although this attitude of submission is good for overcoming ego, it is devastating to our sense of personal enlightenment. This is precisely where gnosticism is utterly democratic. As Elaine Pagels has so poetically pointed out, in the Gospel of Thomas, the Christ state is shared between Jesus and his 'twin' Thomas in a metaphor which extends to all humanity as gnostic Christs - 'that which you find within yourselves will save you if you have it within you'. When asked who am I (Christ) he answers "I am not your master, you have drunk from the bubbling stream that I have measured out". Ignorance, not sin (missing the [moral] mark) is the source of suffering.

"In the dualistic view transcendent God was removed from all matter by a succession of intermediary eternal beings called aeons. The aeons emanated as couples (male and female); the complete series constituted the Pleroma, the fullness of the Godhead. Beyond the Pleroma were the material universe and human beings to be saved. In gnostic thought, a divine seed was imprisoned in every person. The purpose of salvation was to deliver this divine seed from the matter in which it was lost." (Grollier 93)

The gnostic sense of experiential knowledge *gnosis* also embraced a sense of metaphysics or even physics. It is also the knowledge of the elements of the universe, a

significant point when the Genesis of Eden is considered as a gnostic work.



An orthodox man debates with a begherd accompanied by a donkey in mendicant garb, while a citizen in the distance runs up to offer him bread (Lerner).

The Heresy of the Free Spirit

Throughout the middle ages, a variety of gnostic movements existed, from the Cathars and Albigenses who were 'pure in spirit' and partook of nakedness to resume the innocence of Eden but were effectively exterminated in a bloody crusade against them in France to the Heresy of the Free Spirit whose followers also embraced sexual freedom and enlightened amorality, allowing all actions to be permissible to the initiates who had experienced the godhead in inner ecstasy. They sanctified the sexual act as 'Christerie'.

The traditions of such gnosticism appear to source back to the first centuries AD and in the fourth century around Edessa and Har-

ran. Wandering Euchites sexually-liberated ascetics become noted as a problem from the beginning of the Armenian church. Later these ideas were promulgated via the Sufis to Europe where they again took root to sustain five centuries of Inquisition and burning for heresy, because of the popularity of the cult, especially among women.

Two works by women have given the Free Spirit movement much of its spiritual identity. The first is the famous "Mirror of Simple Souls" by Marguerite Porete (Cohn, Lerner) and the anonymous Sister Catherine. The Mirror of Simple Souls was a famous work of gnostic illumination which invokes the realms of enlightenment, outstripping the Christian orthodox view as the higher levels of illumination are reached with an autonomous realization of God-nature or Christ-nature. The Mirror was very popular throughout Europe and was translated into many European languages. Marguerite herself, like Joan of Arc was burned at the stake for her beliefs, remaining even more steadfast than Joan in the face of annihilation (p 643).

"Sister Catherine" (Cohn, Lerner) is a different type of work although it portrays the same path of initial humility and final realization of Christ-nature. This is an anonymous work in which Catherine after wandering in humility achieves gnosis at the encouragement of a Begherd male associate who is entitled Meister Eckhart. In fact this underscores a great difficulty for while Meister Eckhart (Lerner, Zweig) claimed to reject the heresies, he was himself tried for heresy and took such a position that he had an avid following on both sides of the iron curtain of orthodoxy. It is testament in

itself that Christianity's most renowned mystic can never be fully disentangled from the Free Spirit movement.

Historians have great difficulty characterizing the Free Spirit movement and all have tended to project their own ideologies on to the movement. This is partly a consequence of the mysterious indefinability of a movement whose individuals varied in their perspectives in the very freedom they entertained. Several historians have tended to describe the Free Spirits as indulgent, self-absorbed and sexually deceitful. This is a classic misunderstanding of gnostic empowerment. To realize the divine within is not self-preoccupation but the abyss of mysticism and the source of enlightenment. Norman Cohn and Paul Zweig both perceive the Free Spirits in this way.

However Free Spirits, like Kabbalists and Sufis were following the natural divine source - the source of free-will and self-realization, not merely self-absorption. This is the unspeakable truth the orthodox would have us banish to maintain the civility of social control. But the cost is angst, alienation and fall from grace into mortal fallibility. Zweig's essays span a huge sweep from the pre-Christian gnostic tradition origination around Harran through the Free Spirits to the modern era. As his theme is narcissism, the entire gnostic tradition is discussed with a narcissistic gloss.

Others have seen them as political anarchists in chaotic struggle against the orthodox political order. Lerner invests the Free Spirits with a much more virtuous but at the same time more conventional honesty. He denies their insincerity and self-cherishing perceiving them to be spiritually committed and humble but classes the Free Spirits as much closer to dissident orthodox, again diminishing the gnostic condition. Central to the historians misperception of the Free Spirits is the notion that non-acceptance of social orthodoxy is either self-absorbed anarchy or sincerely devoted escapism.

All of these historical perspectives display a "seeing through a glass darkly" at a distance from the divine personal realization that gnosis represents. It's capacity to transform society is at the source of the Christian

These perspectives on the Free Spirit movement show how gnostic empowerment can become inverted if it is not balanced by a caring for and reverence for the physical world, for according to Cohn, the free spirit movement became so intoxicated with becoming God they both went beyond God and then imagined they had become the creative masters of destiny, displaying indifference to the affairs of the world and using all creatures in their creative act. Of course this is true in an important sense, but the measure of our meaningfulness is in fulfilling natural paradise, not indifference.

Jungian Archetype and Gnosis

Carl Jung founded his psychology on alchemy as a bridge between gnosticism and the modern unconscious (p 372): "As far as I could see, the tradition that might have connected gnosis with the present seemed to have been severed, and for a long time it proved impossible to find any bridge that led from gnosticism - or neo-Platonism - to the contemporary world. But when I began to understand alchemy, I realized that it represented the historical link with gnosticism, and that a continuity therefore existed between past and present ... This was of course a momentous discovery. I had stumbled upon the historical counterpart of my psychology of the unconscious. The possibility of a comparison with alchemy and the uninterrupted intellectual chain back to gnosticism gave substance to my psychology" (Jung 1963 227-231).

Jung poses acutely the incarnational dilemma - that existence is an historical quandary in which the subject and the universe live out a psychodrama:

“The meaning of my existence is that life has addressed a question to me. Or, conversely I myself am a question which is addressed to the world, and I must communicate my answer, for otherwise I am dependent on the world's answer. That is a supra-personal life task, which I accomplish only with effort and with difficulty. Perhaps it is a question which pre-occupied my ancestors, and which they could not answer. Could that be why I am so impressed by the fact that the conclusion of Faust has no solution? Or by a problem on which Nietzsche foundered: the Dionysian side of life to which the Christian seems to have lost the way?” (Jung 1963 350).

In addressing evil, Jung moves directly and very powerfully to the gnostic prototype in stating first that current myth has no solution, and then stating that the solution is that we all become God through Christ-nature twinning - the *filatio*:

“The old question posed by the gnostics, “Whence comes evil”? has been given no answer by the Christian world, and Origen's cautious suggestion of a possible redemption of the devil was termed a heresy. Today we are compelled to meet that question, but we stand empty-handed, bewildered and perplexed, and cannot even get into our heads that no myth will come to our aid, although we have such an urgent need for one. As a result of the political situations and the frightful, not to say diabolic, triumphs of science, we are shaken by secret shudders and dark forebodings, but we know no way out, and very few persons indeed draw the conclusion that this time the issue is the long-since forgotten soul of man.

A further development of myth might well begin with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, by which they were made into sons of God, and not only they, but all others who through them and after them received the *filatio* - sonship of God - and thus partook of the certainty that they were more than just autochthonous animalia sprung from the earth, that as the twice-born, they had their roots in divinity itself” (Jung 1963 350).

This is very significant because it is saying that the solution to the problem of evil is to undo the Christian schizophrenia in which Christ-nature is removed from humanity by a resurgence of the gnostic transference. This is born-again in the psychic as opposed to evangelical sense, just as the adoption of the Nagual in Toltec shamanism is secondary to one's natal Tonal persona.

Natural Gnosis

Gnosis is actually a natural manifestation of our consciousness. Just as dreaming is a natural condition of brain function, so gnosis is a wider and deeper manifestation of incarnational and synchronistic reality. That's why this article is called the gnosis of Homo sapiens. It is our natural insight, not some contrived or learned condition. It is illumination in which the natural and transcendental meet in space-time. It is this fusion which gives it awesome potential in our lives and in healing the planet and despite its occluded and repressed past give it a central status within the Western tradition as the source of historically-conscious illumination.

This sense of historicity is pivotal when we come to see the power of archetypal myth in capturing the existential condition of humanity. In terms of the western tradition gnosticism in a sense represents the lost holy grail of knowledge of the divine condition, which when released in us is an enlightenment not only from our attachments but

into true knowing.

What can this mean? Valentinus put it very well when he described the gnostic church: "The church is that portion of humanity that recognizes and celebrates its divine origin." The awesome unstoppable power of gnosis is this. The most complete immediate manifestation of the divine is in our illuminated natural selves.

This is utterly awesome cosmology which brings it all back home to us. We are here somehow carrying out the divine act. Given these circumstances you could say it is all the more horrific if we live out the universe without coming to know this natural condition, for our actions then become devastating to the natural condition and to ourselves.

It is this sense of divine indwelling that the gnostic carried as a democratic inner empowerment of Christ nature. The key difference of perspective is that we all become Christ nature through recognizing the 'self' within us. Gnostics describe this self in the masculine as the Anthropos or archetypal man. Christ as the Son of Man is then the Son of the Anthropos archetype as noted by Carl Jung. This is a spiritual condition which enters the physical condition and allows for the person to be simultaneously physical persona and illuminated psyche. This is very similar in a sense to the Aztec notions of *tonal* and *naqual* (p 157) and raises an important illustration of just how deep the essence of gnosticism goes into the stream of consciousness.

One can also draw a parallel between moksha, samadhi or enlightenment, and gnostic illumination. However gnosis is conceived as a natural insight in the source sayings of Thomas 'that which you have within you'. The Eastern tradition tends to see this condition more as a perfection through dedicated practice than a natural state of knowing. Gnosis comes closer to the shamanistic descent down the world tree.

Although gnosticism often tended to duality in which the physical was regarded as bondage, there is a continuing theme of redemption through gender union. In the Gospel of Philip it says: "Redemption is the holy of holies. The holy of holies is the bride chamber. ... If the woman [Eve] had not separated from the man [Adam] she should not die with the man. Christ came to repair the separation which was from the beginning and again unite the two." This is a major theme of gender reunion 'the two become one' which is the source of a new gnostic vision of the male/female complementary rather than dualistic idea of reality healed.

For me gnosticism has grown from a quaint antiquated mystery cult into an expression of quantum-nonlocality in action, embracing synchronicity and archetype with a stunning prophetic validity which is historicity and consciousness in interaction.

The two becoming one in gnosticism embraces a tradition in which the spiritual and physical become one in illuminated action attuned to our relationship with nature and destiny. This type of awareness is somehow more immediate than enlightenment, something more akin to the ideal of the bodhisattva.

It comes also as an awesomely powerful image of spiritual incarnation, perhaps the most powerful cosmic source vision. This is that we are all utterly ancient spirits of the creation, the one ancient spirit manifesting in many individual forms. Each of us carries the eternal divine archetype. We are this archetype incarnated in individual form. This ancient spirit is invincible and compassionate. It returns in each of us to make the journey of incarnation to be the physical manifestation of the divine realizing itself in the flesh.

If we try to conceive of the power of the divine essence, how much greater that power when it comes in complete attunement with the most complex and subtle piece of matter in the known universe, the conscious human brain. This is at once lifting us to a position of immense responsibility because we are in this sense creators of paradise or hell “That which you have within you will save you if you have it within you. That which you do not have within you will kill you if you do not have it within you” - Gospel of Thomas.

This provides a new sense of illumination, not just seeking peace from suffering through meditative equanimity, but the eternal creative condition, in which even the natural world is saved through insightful action. Indeed the gnostic vision brings us directly to recognizing the divine in the natural world “the Kingdom is spread before you but you yourselves do not see it” - Gospel of Thomas.

The Marcellina Source Papers

This collection of background source passages gives what little is known about Marcellina and her gnostic following. She was said to be a disciple of Carpocrates and to follow a tradition sourcing from Magdalen, Martha and Salome. Carpocrates' teachings supported sexual liberation in a precursor movement to the Free Spirit following in the Middle Ages and he was purported to have used and amended the secret version of Mark's gospel.

Both the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary mention the rejection of Magdalen's teaching by Peter in terms which equate the orthodox church with the patriarchal Peter rejecting the gnostic illumination of Mary.

Many historians say that all the later sects derive from Simon Magus. Saturnilos of Syria was an ascetic who also taught at Antioch in the early 2nd century. Cerinthus (mid-1st century) from Asia Minor, taught ideas about the Unknown God and the overshadowing of Jesus by the Christ. Carpocrates (c. AD 117-138) headed a Gnostic school in Alexandria, and Marcellina, a female disciple, spread his teaching to Rome about AD 160. These were the early teachers, of whom little is known. More can be said about the ‘heros’ of Gnosticism such as Marcion and Valentinus.

Having a somewhat different character are the Montanists or Priscillianists, including Priscilla, Maximilla and Quintella. These also involved a millennialist prophetic movement with women leaders, but here the emphasis was on chastity. Montanus was said by Tertullian to be a eunuch. Nevertheless they were portrayed by the orthodox as allegedly sexually adventurous, verbally and theologically untrammled, divorced from her rightful (private) sphere. As put by the Dictionary of Christian Biography “If Montanus had triumphed, Christian doctrine would have been developed, not under the superintendence of the Christian teachers most esteemed for wisdom, but of wild and excitable women” (Trevett 151).

1: Irenaeus Against Heresies: “From among these also arose Marcellina, who came to Rome under [the episcopate of] Anicetus, and, holding these doctrines, she led multitudes astray. They style themselves Gnostics.” Irenaeus, (p 760) b. Anatolia, c.140-60, d. c.200, known as the father of Catholic theology, is the most important theologian of the 2d century AD.

2: Celsus: “While some of the Christians proclaim [that] they have the same god as do the Jews, others insist that there is another god higher than the creator-god and opposed to him. And some Christians teach that the Son came from this higher god.

Still others admit of a third god - those, that is to say, who call themselves gnostics - and still others, though calling themselves Christians, want to live according to the laws of the Jews. I could also mention those who call themselves Simonians after Simon, and those naming themselves Helenians after Helen, his consort. There are Christian sects named after Marcellina, Harpocratian Christians who trace themselves to Salome, and some who follow Mariamne and others who follow Martha, and still others who call themselves Marcionites after their leader, Marcion (c. 90)".

Celsus was a 2nd-century Greek philosopher, who in his *True Discourse* (c.178) criticized the Christian belief in Jesus as the incarnation of God and attacked Christianity as a threat to the state. The book, now lost, is known through the reply made in the 3rd century by Origen in his *Contra Celsum*.

3: Heracleon: Fragment 49, on Matthew 3:11 "I baptize you with water, but there comes after me one who baptizes with spirit and fire." He baptized no one with fire. But some have marked with fire the ears of those who are sealed, and have thus understood the apostolic word. (referring to the gnostic group lead by Marcellina.)

Heracleon was one of the most respected teachers of the Valentinian school at Rome in the late second century.

4: Clement: on Carpocrates and the secret Mark: After Peter's death, Mark brought his original gospel to Alexandria and wrote a "more spiritual gospel for the use of those who were being perfected." This text is kept by the Alexandrian church for use only in the initiation into "the great mysteries." However, Carpocrates the heretic, by means of magical stealth, obtained a copy and adapted it to his own ends. Because this version of the "secret" or "mystery" gospel had been polluted with "shameless lies," Clement urges Theodore to deny its Markan authorship even under oath.

Theodore has asked questions about particular passages of the special Carpocratian Gospel of Mark, and by way of reply Clement transcribes two sections which he claims have been distorted by the heretics. According to an apocryphal finding by Morton Smith, the first fragment of the Secret Mark Gospel, records the Lazarus' resurrection followed by a secret night empowerment of the man, who loves Jesus, into the mystery of the Kingdom. The second fragment inserted into Mark 10.46. reads "Then he came into Jericho. And the sister of the young man whom Jesus loved was there with his mother and Salome, but Jesus would not receive them." (Wilson I 26).

5: Concerning Justice Ephiphanes, from Clement's *Stromata* "The righteousness of God is a kind of sharing along with equality. There is equality in the heaven which is stretched out in all directions and contains the entire earth in its circle. ... He did not make a distinction between female and male, rational and irrational, nor between anything else at all; rather he shared out sight equally and universally. ... Furthermore all plants after their kind are sown equally in the earth. Common nourishment grows for all beasts which feed on the earth's produce; to all it is alike. It is regulated by no law, but rather is harmoniously available to all through the gift of him who gave it and commanded it to grow."

"It was given to all alike by a single command. ... The ideas of Mine and Thine crept in through the laws which cause the earth, money, and even marriage no longer to bring forth fruit of common use. For God made vines for all to use in common, since they do not refuse the sparrow or the thief; and similarly wheat and other fruits. . For man God made all things to be common property. He brought the female to be with the male in common and in the same way united all the animals. He thus showed

righteousness to be a universal sharing along with equality.”

Gnostic Bibliography:

- Cohn, Norman 1957 *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Paladin, Granada, London.
- Crossan, John Dominic 1991 *The Historical Jesus, The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh.
- Lerner, Robert 1972 *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Pagels, Elaine 1979 *The Gnostic Gospels*, Random House, N.Y.
- Robinson, James ed. 1990 *The Nag Hammadi Library*, Harper, S.F.
- Walker, Benjamin 1983 *Gnosticism: Its History and Influence*, The Aquarian Press, Wellingsborough UK.
- Zweig, Paul 1968 *The Heresy of Self-Love: A Study of Subversive Individualism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.