

## Chapter Eight

# CHRISTIANITY

Christianity, no more than Islam or Buddhism, can be reduced to a single meaning. The chief ambiguities lie in conflicting traditional *orthodox* (conventional, official) and non-traditional or *heretical* interpretations. The chief heretical interpretations we shall examine are found in both the so-called *Gnostic* and *Hermetic* traditions of early Christianity and *pagan* thought of the time. Gnostic thinkers believed that the true God revealed himself directly in personal experience and enlightenment, without passing through the authority of the Church. The Hermetic tradition, in the form it took in the work of *Jakob Böhme* in the eighteenth century, held that the Creator became estranged from himself in contemplating the created world, and return to himself only with the help of human creatures. The Creator becomes self-aware in the human creature's awareness of the Creator. The human being becomes an agent of God's self-consciousness. Within their Christian versions, both traditions rank the Holy Spirit over the Father in interpreting the *Trinity*.

*Gnosticism*, an esoteric religious movement that flourished during the 2nd and 3rd centuries ad and presented a major challenge to orthodox Christianity. Most Gnostic sects professed Christianity, but their beliefs sharply diverged from those of the majority of Christians in the early church. The term Gnosticism is derived from the Greek word *gnosis* ("revealed knowledge"). To its adherents, Gnosticism promised a secret knowledge of the divine realm. Sparks or seeds of the Divine Being fell from this transcendent realm into the material universe, which is wholly evil, and were imprisoned in human bodies. Reawakened by knowledge, the divine element in humanity can return to its proper home in the transcendent spiritual realm. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. ©

*Hermetism*, beliefs based on a collection of mystical texts from the 2nd and 3rd centuries ad, supposed to have been the work of *Hermes Trismegistus*. The texts drew on Jewish, Egyptian, and Roman myths and beliefs to present a mystical way of life. They influenced Renaissance Europe, where it was believed that an Egyptian philosopher contemporary with Moses was their author. The Jewish elements of the works led people to believe that the texts foretold the coming of Jesus; this provided justification for Christian writers to make use of the mysticism and magic in the texts. This use strongly influenced the growth of Christian mysticism. It also fueled a fascination with Egypt as a land of esoteric knowledge. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002.

*Jakob Boehme* [1575-1624] held that everything exists and is intelligible only through its opposite. Thus, he believed, evil is a necessary element in goodness, for without evil the will would become inert and progress would be impossible. God himself, according to Boehme, contains conflicting elements in his nature. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002.

There was a strong Gnostic tendency, seen clearly in the *Marcion* in the second century A.D., to equate what Christians call God the Father, Creator of the universe, most shockingly with the *devil*, who is worshipped as God by those who do not know the true God. The diabolic creator God existed in the spirit world, but at its lowest level. The spirit world at its highest level—divine intelligence, the divine word, enlightenment, *gnosis*—is God's highest self-revelation. On the other hand, the material world is lower than even the lowest spirit, which is why a devil spirit can create that world.

The Father enjoys preeminence in the Trinity, according to most ancient Gnostic Christians, only if

*Marcion* [ca. 100-161 AD] rejected the Old Testament and almost all of the New Testament, including the accounts of the incarnation and the resurrection, basing his teachings on ten of the Epistles of St. Paul and on an altered version of the Gospel of Luke. His tenets included a belief in the eternity of matter, which was later developed by the Greek teacher Hermogenes, and a dualistic interpretation of God, whereby God is divided into the just God of Law, who was the Creator of the Old Testament, and the good God, the infinitely superior deity revealed by Jesus Christ. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002.

fatherhood is interpreted in the *biological* sense of being the ultimate One, seed or source from which everything comes. God the Father understood in the *sociological* sense of fatherhood loses the preeminence he has in orthodoxy. A few ancient Gnostics declared that God was Spirit. Some called God, from whom the devil fell, the celestial Mother (*Nicholas*, Palestine, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD). It was common to claim that God was an unstatable first principle (the One) from which the spirit world derived in a series of eons or cosmic ages.

The idea of an *emanation* of the spirit world from a single divine principle brings the ancient Gnostics close to the Neo-Platonic movement of the time, especially the great third-century Neo-Platonic philosopher *Plotinus*. Plotinus considered intelligence and the spirit world to be the first great emanation from the One. Intelligence required a distinction between the knower and what is known, and thus it fell in the realm of twoness rather than oneness. Yet, the Judeo-Christian idea of the devil as a fallen angel or spirit, which is found in Gnosticism, implies *free will* revolt against the One, not the smooth flowing of a river away from its mountain source.

*Plotinus* [205-270 AD] accepted a doctrine of *emanation*. This doctrine supposes the constant transmission of powers from the Absolute Being, or the One, to the creation through several agencies, the first of which is nous, or pure *intelligence*, whence flows the *soul of the world*; from this, in turn, flow the souls of humans and animals, and finally matter. Human beings thus belong to two worlds, that of the senses and that of pure intelligence. Inasmuch as matter is the cause of all evil, the object of life should be to escape the material world of the senses, and hence people should abandon all earthly interests for those of intellectual meditation; by purification and by the exercise of thought people can gradually lift themselves to an intuition of the nous, and ultimately to a complete and ecstatic union with the One—that is, God. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

The ancient form *Gnostic Christianity* follows *Plato* in asserting a disembodied soul trapped in an evil and even illusory body. In its modern form, Gnostic Christianity affirms the reality of the sensory world in which history unfolds. The Trinity unlocks the meaning of history. The *age of the Father* (of God the Law-Giver above history) proceeds through the *age of the Son* (Christ in history, Jesus) to the *age of the Spirit* (universal enlightenment). *Joachim de Fiore* initiated the modern Gnostic tradition in the thirteenth

*Joachim of Fiore* (1132?–1202), the Italian mystic interpreted history as a sequence of three ages, that of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The last of these ages, the age of perfect spirituality, was to begin in 1260. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. ©

century.

*Hermetic Christianity* is close to what I call modern Gnosticism. It was founded in the second century by the Thrice Great Hermes, the Egyptian god Thot, who was identified with Hermes, the Greek messenger god. The name “hermetic Christianity” suggests that Christianity may be hermetically sealed until a new Hermes arrives to reveal it. No Christianity in need of a messenger to interpret it can have a meaning that is self-evident. For centuries, the hermetic tradition existed underground in European Christian theology.

Modern Gnosticism, beginning in the twelfth century is “modern” because, unlike ancient Gnosticism, it rejects Plato’s relegation of the material world to a lower status than the world of the Spirit or of the One.

Material bodies are not just illusory appearances of universal forms and the spirit. They are perfectly real, and that is why the world history that takes place among such bodies can be real.

If we start with the Gnostic *philosophy of history* based on *Joachim de Fiore's* interpretation of the Trinity, Hermetic Christianity adds the idea that we human beings are as essential to God as God is to us, because God attains knowledge of himself only through the human knowledge that we have of him. God attains consciousness of himself only through our consciousness of him.

The age of the spirit appears as an age in which this divine self-knowledge is realized in human beings on earth. Gnostic Christianity implied a universal right to speak out, to freedom of speech, as a basis for everyone's possible enlightenment. Since the truth was not the monopoly of authorities in the orthodox church hierarchy, one could never be sure where it could be found.

Non-traditional, non-orthodox Christianity is less familiar, but perhaps for that reason is more thought provoking for many of us than the orthodoxy that is more familiar. Historically, the rise of orthodox as we know it, beginning in the second century A.D., is understood only as a reaction to early Gnostic heresy. Modern Gnosticism continues to be attacked by orthodoxy. A major twentieth century Thomist philosopher, *Jacques Maritain*, who followed the thirteenth century orthodox philosopher *Saint Thomas*, has attacked by heretical Catholic philosopher *Teilhard de Chardin* as a modern Gnostic.

*Maritain, Jacques* (1882-1973), French philosopher, known for his application of the teachings of the medieval Scholastic philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas to the problems of modern life. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Greco-Roman and Judaic sources merge in the emergence of Christianity. Greek philosophical influences predominate in heretical Gnostic versions of Christianity. Hebrew influences predominate in the orthodox story of the world from Creation to the kingdom of God, a literal kingdom under God's law. Traditional orthodoxy commands obedience to divine authority—whether it be the authority of God above or the new authority of the humble and the meek. Gnostic Christianity, a continuing historical target of orthodoxy, would free the individual from external authority through rebirth in the spirit of enlightenment.

### 1. *Judaism and the Greek-Roman World*

Greco-Roman and Hebrew perspectives are components in the identity of any Christian, and Christianity in its secularized forms helps form the character of even non-Christians inhabiting what once was known as Christendom. The theology and practice of Christianity are of course far more than a cultural influence, but this does not prevent consideration of Christianity in the *history of ideas*.

Roman and Judaic cultures did not remain isolated, despite the Near Eastern origins of Judaism and the Western character of the Roman world. After the political collapse of ancient nations of the Middle East that came with the Roman conquests, Middle East was home to religions *without a living native political tradition*. Concepts of citizenship and natural law as the basis of human law were adopted by the Near East from the Western political tradition, although the latter at once accommodated itself in eastern regions of the empire to the Oriental idea of divine emperorship. After the decline of the Olympian and Roman mythological religions, Greco-Roman civilization was a political world with a tradition of philosophy, but *without a vital native religion*.

Greco-Roman civilization experienced the attraction of Judaism. Throughout the Mediterranean world, God-fearing pagans appeared to more or less embrace the Judaic concept of God. Some, like the *proselytes*, were circumcised.

Judaism was not the only religion from the East to enter the vacuum created by the decline of the Greek-Roman *polytheism*. Mystery cults of *Adonis*, *Osiris*, and *Mithra* from Syria and Egypt were also present. But Judaism enjoyed a special place in the Roman Empire. It was not included in Rome's conglomerate worship of gods from all over the Empire in the *Pantheon*. Jews, like native Roman citizens, were exempted from Rome's *emperor worship*.



The Pantheon, Rome

Hebrew culture and Greco-Roman civilization remained superficially opposed. Greco-Roman civilization evolved a humanistic system of justice that softened the uncontested rule of patrician families and family heads in the state as well as in the family. The Roman emperor, despite emperor worship in eastern provinces, was not a divine king with an arbitrary power of life and death over infantile subjects without rights. To worship the emperor was to celebrate an emperor and empire on which protection of one's prosperity and rights depended. The protection of property rights was taken with a seriousness verging on the religious. As rights were extended to broader groups of individuals—wives, sons of living fathers, foreigners, even slaves who were allowed to accumulate savings (*peculum*) and buy their freedom—the domestic authority of the family father was reduced.

The Hebrews had abolished the uncontested rule of divine monarchs and the uncontested authority of family fathers precisely by asserting, like *Gideon*, the final authority of an all-powerful divine king in heaven.

Acting on a divine exhortation, Gideon summoned the Israelites and, with a small band of followers, attacked the Midianites at Mount Gilboa, pursuing them to the Jordan River. Following the victory, the Israelites offered Gideon a crown as a reward for his leadership, but he refused the symbol of power because of his belief that God was the king of Israel (see Judges 6-8). Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. ©

But they did not develop a secular system of individual property human rights, as we saw in the previous chapter, was solemnized as in Rome by religiously pursuing procedures of justice. They equalized human beings as children without independent rights before divinely enlightened Father. The human right to life was a special case of God's right to property, to living human beings as the product of his labor. The human right to property was a human copy of the divine right to the created world in which God invested his labor. "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh. Blessed is the name of the Lord" (Job). However, the Hebraic idea of God and Greco-Roman idea of natural and human rights independent of monotheism did

not remain mutually external. In the medieval Christian synthesis of *Saint Thomas* and the Catholic Church they came together.



During the 13th century, **Saint Thomas Aquinas** sought to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with Augustinian theology. Aquinas employed both reason and faith in the study of metaphysics, moral philosophy, and religion. While Aquinas accepted the existence of God on faith, he offered five proofs of God's existence to support such a belief.

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## 2. Christianity and Its Judaic Heritage

*Saint Augustine* in the fifth century, A.D., legitimated special rights of those who hold authority on the model of God's patriarchal property right to the world that he created. An intelligent laborer has a natural right to the product of his labor. In much the same way, kings had rights under God to their realms, husbands had rights under God over their wives and children, and the individual in the image of God had rights over the products of his or her labor limited by the raw materials made available by God. Yet the things in which we invest labor, the products of our labor, and even our own bodies belong to God, since they are part of his creation to which he has a prior right.

What we say we "own" we really only borrow from God with his permission. We are *created* first and are *creative* only secondarily. Our creativity is itself created, and we actually do nothing on our own. All that we say we accomplish is due to the spirit of God picking us up and moving through us. Creationism does not undermine the idea of natural law and natural rights because it denies a right to the product of labor, but because it denies that creatures in the natural world truly perform creative labor. God, the Creator, has a monopoly on creation. The right to the product of labor is a supernatural right belonging to God, not a natural right of natural human beings, and it is arrogance for human beings to think otherwise.

However, in the thirteenth century *Saint Thomas* asserted compatibility between Hebraic enlightened divine lordship and Greco-Roman natural law tradition illustrated by the Stoic philosophers. God is as much Christ as he is the Father. Yet, Christ is love, selfless service, ministry to others. But to love and help others it is necessary to know them, to know their needs. The Hebrew patriarchal God survives as the first member of the orthodox Christian trinity, God the Father, but God is also God suffering in the service of others. In our knowledge of others, we realize, according to Saint Thomas, that they have a natural capacity for reason, both theoretical and practical, and a capacity for accomplishing the works of human intelligence, including the creation of real human property. Human reason is not, as it was for Saint Augustine, the reception of a gift from God allowing us to see through the eyes of God. Greco-Roman humanism found expression in Saint Thomas' idea of the essential equality between human beings in the eyes of God. They are all made from the same cookie cutter. Lords and peasants are all on the same plane, serving in different ways. Kings lead to serve. For God to create a human being is to bring a human being into existence. In doing so, according to Saint Thomas, God shares something of his own divine existence, with the general human essence (being a rational animal) realized in a particular portion of matter.

Saint Thomas used the *New Testament* to reinforce the *Genesis* belief that every human being, no matter how depraved, bears by nature the divine image and is worthy of love and salvation *in the eyes of God*. By the *Old Testament*, man is in the image of God the Lord. He is a created creator. The *New Testament* holds that human beings are called upon to exist in the image of Christ, of self-giving love. In the Old Testament, inequality on earth was made legitimate in the fact that some of us, e.g., kings, realize the image of lordship more fully than others. As long as a king avoids being a tyrant and rules under divine law, his superior lordship over the peasants is justified. Inequality *in the eyes of man*, in the customary law of nations and in domestic civil law, thus became, for Saint Thomas, a fact without ultimate theological legitimacy. Those who legitimately lead and rule us, he held, do so rightfully only if they serve us in the imitation of Christ. They are essentially our equals, but with an appointed way of serving that is different from that of the rest of us.

This above concept of the mission of rulers is derived from revealed divine law, the law of love. But rulers who do not heed this divine law are still under the natural law by which a ruler should seek the well being of his people, and should not wantonly attack other peoples. Should they trespass on this natural law and try to enslave fellow rational beings, they become *tyrants* and in the end justify revolt if there is not alternative means of resistance.

Let us look more closely, now, at essential Christian orthodoxy. Hebrew and Greco-Roman ingredients contributed to what is perhaps the most stupendous theological super-drama ever conceived. The German philosopher *Friedrich Nietzsche* at the end of the nineteenth century believed that we carried the dead corpse of *Christendom* around with us in a dogmatic belief in human equality that was contradicted by universal observations of unequal human ability. We also carried this corpse around with us in our attachment to giving a portion of our wealth to charity, and to the modern *welfare state* as the dispenser of social security. The modern corpse of Christendom, of the secularized Christian civilization attacked by the Danish Lutheran theologian *Sören Kierkegaard* in the nineteenth century for its idolatrous worship of finite institutions, is also seen in democratic and socialistic ideologies that stress 1. natural equality between human beings and 2. a human duty to practice the self-sacrificial ethics of Jesus. We carry the corpse of Christendom around with us even if we do not profess Christianity, and even if we are unaware that Western civilization is this corpse.

We easily become insensitive to the original thought that was responsible for Christendom as long as it was still a living civilization. The orthodox Christian theological tragic-comedy in which God, its author, stars in three roles—Father, Son, and Spirit—is quite extraordinary. The Greek theatre served, we saw, as a model for the Roman court of law, and now we see that it also provides a way of modeling the dynamics of the Christian Trinity. Orthodoxy is best brought to life by placing it alongside the heretical Christianity that it contradicted, and which contradicted it. Orthodoxy, like any belief system, is meaningful to us only if it is polemical, only if we know what it is against. But then, contrary to the wishes of orthodox teachers to make one teaching universal, orthodoxy must share the spotlight with non-orthodox views.

The tragic-comedy of orthodox Christian theology begins with Creation. The *Father* acting through the eternal Christ or *Word* created the world, including us in his image. Yet, human beings violated the divine will and law by rebelling against their creaturely status, claiming divine status for themselves. They sought to become “one of us,” as God says in *Genesis*. Because they tried to live up to the divine image too well, pretending to a creative power of their own, human beings lost God’s favor. There is only one God, and human power is either nothing at all or it is, as Saint Augustine believed, an expression of the power of God moving through the human individual. Human beings accomplish nothing on their own except

first their errors, and secondly their subsequent consent to receive God into their minds and hearts. But because they arrogantly believed otherwise, because they assumed that they could save themselves by their own works, they were cast from the Garden of Eden, and were condemned to live by labor, by the sweat of the brow.

Yet, God did not abandon human beings. He opened a way of redemption by revealing his law to Israel, his chosen people. Through Israel, a priestly nation, all nations would be blessed. God entered into a contract or covenant with his people. He promised prosperity in a land of milk and honey if they would write his law in their hearts. But Israel repeatedly disobeyed his law by pursuing *idols*, bearing witness to false gods. “Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I am the Lord your God” (*Lev.* 4). God’s prophets, sent as a warning, went unheeded, and foreign nations were raised up by God to punish Israel.

All this, orthodox Christianity takes over from the Hebrew record of God’s acts in history. But Christianity concludes that we cannot save ourselves by heeding divine law any more than we could save ourselves in the Garden of Eden before receiving the law of Moses. The second divine person of the trinity now enters, Christ. God’s justice is unbending, but it is also impossible to restrict his love or mercy. If the Father appears in the image of law and justice, the Son appears in that of love and mercy. To us the two divine attributes, justice and love may seem mutually exclusive. To be just is to give what is deserved, whereas to be merciful is to award an individual the privilege of escaping just punishment. Out of infinite love or mercy, the Father sent his Son, Christ, to redeem us from just punishment for our sins. The historical Jesus, as Christ, incarnates the Father.

Yet Christ did not come to abolish the law. “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but rather to fulfill them” (*Matthew* 5: 17). To fulfill the law, however, is to transform it into an intelligible internal authority for man’s life: “And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (*Mark*, 2:22). Jesus radicalized the Mosaic law into a law of love—a love so boundless as to embrace even your enemies. The revelation of such non-exclusive love by itself could not redeem us. The unprecedented demand made by the law revealed by Jesus could only throw us into deeper despair over our self-salvation.

[17] Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

[18] For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

[19] Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

[20] For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

[21] Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment... (*Matthew* 5. King James Translation)

Christ could not redeem us if he had merely revealed the law of love. This law by itself would have thrown human beings into a deeper guilt than the Mosaic law, since selfless love is much harder to practice. Redemption in orthodox Christianity comes only by the crucifixion. In an ultimate demonstration of the law of love in action, Christ sacrificed himself on the cross to pay for our sins. All who accept this sacrifice and

abandon themselves to Christ's redemptive activity are exempted from further punishment. They are reborn in Christ, and they will inherit with Christ the Kingdom of God.

After the agony of the Cross, Christ rose from the dead, was glorified as the risen Lord in heaven along side the Father, and attained eternal life in his Church. Here the third eternal member of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, enters the stage of history. The spirit descended to one individual, Jesus, at his baptism. Now it prepares a descent to humanity in general. The Holy Spirit is the communion of the Son and the Father in the kingdom of heaven. According to the orthodox interpretation, precedence is assigned in this communion to the Father from whom divinity proceeds to Christ, and then (according to the Western orthodox interpretation) from the Father and Christ to the Holy Spirit. As the Church grows and as increasing numbers are reborn in Christ, the Holy Spirit descends to earth, incorporating it into the heavenly kingdom on earth.

The Eastern Orthodox Church holds that divinity proceeded from the Father to Christ and from Father to the Holy Spirit, thus stressing, more than the West, the priority of the Father. Divinity proceeds from the Father alone, not from both the Father and Christ as in the West. But even in the West the ultimate source of divine procession is the Father: divinity proceeds to the Spirit from Christ as well as from the Father, but it proceeds to Christ from the Father.

### 3. *Christianity: Orthodox and Heretical*

This is the basic orthodox Christian faith. Traditional philosophy since the early Middle Ages has left it as a matter of faith. In the nineteenth century, *G.W.F. Hegel* claimed to raise this faith to knowledge: "...the young eagle [philosophy in its youth] flies off to the sun of truth, still a predator turned against religion which it combats. Only at the end does philosophy permit justice to be done to the content of religion..." (G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke* 17, 111). Hegel offered a rational vindication, not of the Father, but of the Spirit.

St. Thomas Aquinas claimed that we could prove the existence of the Creator, the first member of the Trinity, but could not prove the divinity of the Son made flesh or of the Holy Spirit. The Father, the final source of all authority over a human being, could be proven to exist without any appeal to authority, to any free mind. This is not strange, since if the proofs of the Creator God assumed the authority of that God they would be circular. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit who sets the individual free and leads him or her into all truth (according to the Gospel of *John*) had to be accepted on faith on authority. This is not so much strange as it is merely a consequence of the precedence of the Father over the Son and Spirit. The highest divine authority could be proven without any appeal to authority, but the news of emancipation from such authority had to be accepted on the authority of the Father.

The first passage below from *John*, like the *New Testament* in general, is paradoxical, since it warrants both literalism ("...in my name") and spiritual interpretation ("he shall teach you all things"), both the spirit and the letter, the spirit and the law, the flesh and the spirit. (See the second passage by Saint Paul.) *John* licenses both orthodoxy and Gnostic heterodoxy. More concretely, the two are inseparable, since the letter invites understanding in the spirit.

[16] And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;  
 [17] Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.  
 [18] I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.  
 [19] Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.  
 [20] At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.  
 [21] He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.  
 [22] Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?  
 [23] Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.  
 [24] He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.  
 [25] These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.  
 [26] But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. *Matthew 17*. King James Translation

3] Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.  
 [4] And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward:  
 [5] Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;  
 [6] Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. II *Corinthians 3:2-3:6*

[29] But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. *Romans 2: 29*

[6] But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. *Romans 7:6*

[14] For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. *Romans 7:14*

[1] There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

[2] For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. *Romans 8:1-2*

[4] That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. *Romans 8:1-2*

The *Gospel of John* is a primary textual source for philosophical Christianity because it identifies Christ with the Word. In the ancient Greek translation, “the Word” is “the logos,” which is logic or reason. The *Gospel of John* holds that the Creator created by the Word or Christ, hence by reason and wisdom. This implies that the Creator’s will is not arbitrary. Closely related to “logos” is the Greek term “Sophia”, which means theoretical wisdom in the knowledge of first principles, or in the logos of the universe. “Sophia” is one root meaning of “philosophy”, the love of wisdom. This brings to mind a close connection between Christ and philosophy, which is precisely the intent of philosophical Christianity. Philosophy is the literally love of Christ. Let us listen to John in the box below.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made by him [the Word]... In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not... He [the Word] was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (*John* 1:1-5, 10, 14)

...the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my [the Word’s] name, he will teach you all things. ...it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away the Counselor will not come to you... I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (*John* 15:18-16:13)

But listen also to Saint Paul: “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” (*Col* 2:8). Hegel held that such philosophy is the philosophy of the understanding rather than the true philosophy of reason. The understanding abstracts, absolutizes the things abstracted, separates, and divides. Reason reunites what has been separated, it brings things and people together. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. (*Isa* 1:18)

However, free intelligence is used in the theistic proofs for the existence of the Creator or Father to place limits on free intelligence under the external authority of the Creator. Once these limits are in place, the doctrine of freedom under the baptism of the spirit is admitted only under the authority of the Father, as that existence and authority are proven in those freely embraced theistic arguments. Christian theism has used reason to prove the existence of the Lord, an external authority who thereafter authenticates himself by miracles serving to put rational inquiry of reason to rest. Reason proves God as the unsurpassable mystery of the Father, surpassing anything the human mind can understand, and the mystery of the Father alone confirms God as Christ and the Holy Spirit.

A modern Gnostic critique of Saint Thomas’s proofs was given by Hegel: we cannot prove the existence of the Father or divine Creator because such a proof would presuppose a finally false concept of God, but we can prove the Holy Spirit to be a true concept of God. To be a Father, Creator, or Lord is to be limited by children, creatures, or bondsmen, which is impossible for God if God is truly infinite. The orthodox Holy Spirit, as a communion of the Father and Christ (according to Saint Augustine) and as descended to earth in the church at history’s end when all are either converted or damned, is not infinite, since it excludes the damned. Yet if, as Hegel believed—along with *Alighieri Dante* (1265-1321) in the *Divine Comedy*--there are no damned who are consigned for all eternity to hell after Judgment Day. For

all are redeemed at the end of history in being remembered by the historians of Spirit's comprehensive triumph over various the various hells that people create for themselves, the Spirit might be infinite.



Dante facing life's choices Scala/Art

Resource, NY/(p)

*Dante Alighieri* One of the greatest poets in the history of world literature, Italian writer Dante Alighieri composed poetry influenced by classical and Christian tradition. Dante's greatest work was the epic poem *La divina commedia*... includes three sections: the *Inferno* (Hell), in which the great classical poet Virgil leads Dante on a trip through hell; the *Purgatorio* (Purgatory), in which Virgil leads Dante up the mountain of purification; and the *Paradiso* (Paradise), in which Dante travels through heaven... In each of these three realms the poet meets with mythological, historical, and contemporary personages. Each character is symbolic of a particular fault or virtue, either religious or political; and the punishment or rewards meted out to the characters further illustrate the larger meaning of their actions in the universal scheme... Virgil... is... the symbol of reason. The woman Dante loved, Beatrice, whom he regards as both a manifestation and an instrument of the divine will, is his guide through paradise... In the opening of the poem, Dante finds himself lost in a dark wood, which symbolizes his deviation from righteous living. While attempting to get his bearings, Dante spots a shining hill, which he calls the Mount of Joy. He begins to climb, but beasts, such as the she-wolf of unrestraint and the lion of ambition, block his way. Disheartened, Dante meets his guide Virgil, the 1st-century-bc Roman poet, who explains that to regain his way, Dante must travel with Virgil through hell and purgatory, and, with another guide, visit paradise... Dante's imaginary voyage can be understood as an allegory of the purification of one's soul and of the achievement of inner peace through the guidance of reason and love. The Divine Comedy... was given the title "comedy" because the poem ends happily. Nearing the end of his journey... The [above] illustration shows Dante standing in front of the mountain of Purgatory, with hell on his right and heaven on his left. Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2002. ©

Yet most Christians remain attached today to orthodox Christianity. Interview a sampling of Christians about the images of God that first occur to them. If you have the same experience as I, you will discover that the majority makes no reference to anything specifically Christian, to Christ or the Holy Spirit, but refers only to the Father, hence only to the concept of God which Christianity shares with Judaism and Islam. Perhaps this is because the Father or Creator is the easiest way for us to refer to God. *Saint Paul* in Athens was less successful in preaching Christ, but more so in arguing for the Creator.

16: Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. 17: Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. 18: Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. 19: And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? 20: For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. 21: (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.) 22: Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. 23: For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. 24: God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25: Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 26: And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; 27: That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: 28: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. 29: Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. 30: And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. 32: And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. 33: So Paul departed from among them. (*Acts*)

Divinity is commonly conceived as infinite lordship. Even Christ is divine, not as the suffering servant entering Jerusalem in tattered clothes on a donkey, but only as the risen Lord on the right hand side of the Father. Christ is divine to the extent that lordship rubs off on him. Orthodox Christianity recalls the *Mark Twain's* story of the Prince and the Pauper. The Prince, to escape the isolation of his palace, trades places with a pauper for a day. God is that Prince. Jesus is the same Prince in the pauper's tattered clothes. Yet a Prince in pauper's clothes is still a Prince, and a pauper who exchanges places with a Prince for a day is still a pauper. Lordship and bondage remain the basic human relationship between them, and

[Prince:] "Oh, prithee, say no more, 'tis glorious! If that I could but clothe me in raiment like to thine, and strip my feet, and revel in the mud once, just once, with none to rebuke me or forbid, meseemeth I could forego the crown!" [Pauper:] "And if that I could clothe me once, sweet sir, as thou art clad-- just once—[Prince:] "Oho, would'st like it? Then so shall it be. Duff thy nose, and don these calanderns, lad! It is a brief happiness, but will be not less keen for that. We will have

this seems true even within God as conceived in the orthodox way. The precedence of the Father means that the divinity of the Son and of the Spirit are subject to that of the Father. The Father is the lord of the Son and of the Spirit, but since he is the Son and the Spirit he is lord of himself.

Orthodox Christianity reconciles the pauper—the poor and meek—to what the despotism of all human history wills: obedience to external princely authority. The pauper is filled with gratitude toward a Prince with a common touch. Here is a royalist interpretation of the orthodox preeminence of the Father. In a

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (*Matthew* 5:3). The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. (*Luke*, 4:18)

different version, Orthodox Christianity assigns a democratic will-to-power to the masses. This interpretation was given by nineteenth-century German philosopher *Friedrich Nietzsche* (1844-1900). Nietzsche agrees that orthodox Christianity teaches what despotism wills, and that despotism wills obedience. Yet the *Sermon on the Mount* would universalize to even to princes the *slave morality* of turning the other cheek.

Christianity expresses the *will to power* of the masses who are individually weak, but who collectively bring down even the most creative individual. It overturns the natural table of values, setting the lord in bondage to bondsmen, his natural inferiors. Nietzsche concludes that orthodox Christianity seeks to replace the despotism of superior individuals with despotism by the masses. Christianity in its orthodox public form has, according to Nietzsche, deified power and legitimized lordship—whether it be the power of the masses

All that which has been done on earth against the noble, the powerful, the masters, the rulers, fades into nothing compared with what the *Jews* [through Jesus] have done against them; the Jews, that priestly people, who in opposing their enemies and conquerors were ultimately satisfied with nothing less than a radical reevaluation of their enemies' values, that is to say an act of the *most spiritual revenge*... It was the Jews who... dare to invert the [legitimate] aristocratic value-equation (good = noble = powerful = happy = beloved of god) and to hang to this inversion with their teeth, the teeth of the most abysmal hatred (the hatred of impotence), saying the wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly are only pious, alone blessed by God... with the Jews begins the *slave revolt in morality*; that revolt which has a history of two thousand years behind and which we no longer see because it has been victorious. (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 1)

or an elite.

The twelfth-century philosopher of history Joachim de Fiore, G.E. Lessing and Jakob Boehme in the eighteenth century, G.W.F. Hegel and Edmund Blake in the nineteenth century, and Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Altizer in the last century illustrate non-orthodox Christian philosophy. Hegel's philosophy rationally grounds the content of Christian faith, but not of the form of faith as usually understood. Knowledge is destined to replace faith, except for the still necessary faith in the future progress of Spirit in the world, and especially in the rate of such progress. This type of faith is not cognitive. It is not faith understood as mere belief in the truth of any statement without the evidence that knowledge would require. Rather, it is trust in God, in the future workings of God in history, in the further realization of universal rights and the kingdom of the spirit. The trust is not groundless, since it is based on God's track record thus far, on world-historical progress from a world in which one is free, then some, and finally all.

*Teilhard de Chardin*, a twentieth century Jesuit, maintained obedience to Rome, but developed a panentheistic theology that Rome could not approve. Prohibited from teaching philosophy, he was sent to

My starting point is the fundamental initial fact that each one of us is perforce linked by all the material organic and psychic strands of his being to all that surrounds him.... If we look far enough back in the depths of time, the disordered anthill of living beings suddenly, for an informed observer, arranges itself in long files that make their way by various paths towards greater consciousness (24) ....there is an absolute direction of growth, to which both our duty and our happiness demand that we should conform. It is his [the human] function to complete cosmic evolution." (31-33).... Christ is realized in evolution (63).... Today... research students are numbered in the hundreds of thousands-soon to be millions-and they are no longer distributed superficially and at random over the globe, but are functionally linked together in a vast organic system that will remain in the future indispensable to the life of the community (106).... Life is less certain than death (117).... the power acquired by a consciousness to turn it upon itself, to take possession of itself as of an object endowed with its own particular consistence and value [transcends the apes]: no longer merely to know, but to know oneself; no longer merely to know but to know that one knows (165).... In truth, a neo-humanity has been germinating round the Mediterranean for the last six thousand years (212).... Is evolution a theory, a system or a hypothesis? It is much more: it is a general condition to which all theories, all hypotheses, as systems must bow and which they must satisfy henceforth if they are to be thinkable and true. Evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow (219).... Man discovers that he is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself. The consciousness of each of us is evolution looking at itself and reflecting upon itself (221).... Man is not the center of the universe as once we thought in our simplicity, but something much more wonderful-the arrow pointing the way to the final unification of the world (224).... I can now add that what disconcerts the modern world at its very roots is not being sure, and not seeing how it ever could be sure, that there is an outcome-a suitable outcome-to that evolution (229).... Between these two alternatives of absolute optimism or absolute pessimism, there is no middle way because by its very nature progress is all or nothing (232).... We are faced with a harmonized collectivity of consciousnesses to a sort of super-consciousness. The earth not only becoming covered by myriads of grains of thought, but becoming enclosed in a single thinking envelope, a single unanimous reflection (251-252).... Because it contains and engenders consciousness, space-time is necessarily of a convergent nature [and] must somewhere in the future become involuted to a point which we might call Omega, which fuses and consumes them integrally in itself (259).... In one manner or the other it still remains true that, even in the view of a mere biologist, the human epic resembles nothing so much as a way of the Cross (313). [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*]

China as a paleontologist by the Church for a quarter of a century before his death in 1955. He viewed God as an evolutionary process aimed at an infinite Incarnation of love incorporating everything, at the cosmic Christ understood as an end in itself not merely for salvation from sin. Orthodox Christianity had always stressed that the purpose of the Incarnation of Christ in the world was the crucifixion by which human beings were saved from sin, from a guilt stemming from violations of God's law that were so great that they could do nothing to overcome it by themselves. Since views God as love, Teilhard defines God chiefly in terms of the second and third members of the trinity, not chiefly as the Father. The spirit is the cosmic Christ, and we feel its attraction on us. It is our destination. God does not push us from behind to obey the ancient law of the Father that we have disobeyed in sin. The aspiration to God pulls us forward toward integration in a higher universal super-consciousness.

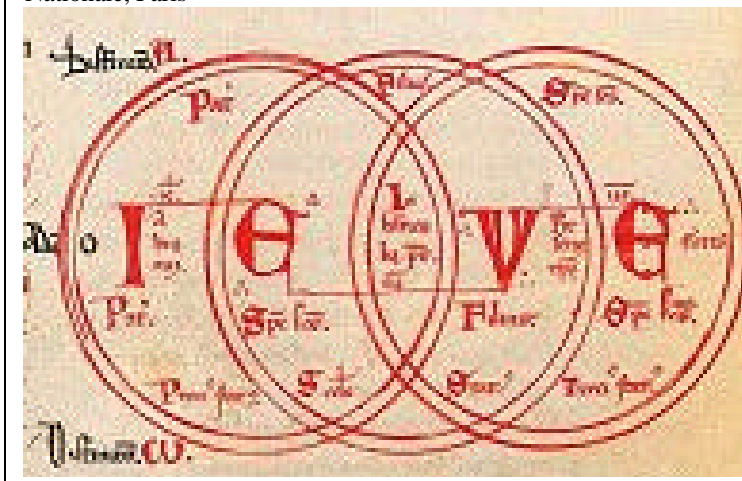
Heady stuff, paradoxically so sure and yet so uncertain. All based on the principle that what is a collection or aggregate at an early stage of evolution nucleates or fuses into an organic whole of internally related moments or aspects. From the *merger* of the disparate members of the aggregate comes the *emergence* of the undivided cosmic whole that thinks itself in you and me. Evolutionary emergence has clearly reached the individual human field of consciousness, rather clearly not yet a cosmic field of

"Microcosm" and "Macrocosm" [are] two philosophical terms, opposite in meaning, used to explain the relationship between man and the universe. The term microcosm denotes the conception of man as a complete world, universe, or cosmos, in miniature, within himself. Macrocosm refers to the idea of the whole gigantic universe outside man's nature. The microcosm concept was utilized by a number of great thinkers ranging from the 5th-century bc Greek philosopher [Pythagoras along with] Democritus to the 17th-century German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

consciousness. But is such a cosmic field of consciousness even the end result of evolution? Others may prefer the view that evolution is the result is a *macrocosm* that becomes self-aware in the private consciousness of each of its *microcosmic* members, which all still form an aggregate and not an organic whole, each internalizing the others and thus first bringing them into essential interrelation.

*Joachim de Fiore* founded a religious order in the twelfth century with the support of Popes. This monk understood world history, we have noted, as progressing through three the ages, the ages of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But Joachim was not saying that the trinity was intrinsically historical. The trinity as a process of error correction and learning in which it is first necessary to view God under the false description of being the Father in order to progress to a true description of him as Spirit. God was eternally Father as well as Son and Spirit because to learn that he is Spirit is eternally to correct the view that he is Father. Thus to think God truly as the Spirit is inseparable from having thought him falsely as the Father, while to think him as the Father is, potentially and by implication if not in fact, to view him as the Spirit.

"There are thus three states of the world... as attested by the mysteries of Holy Scripture: the first was when we were under the law. The second was when we are under grace; the third, whose intervention we await shortly and during which we will enjoy a more perfect grace... The first age was placed under the regime of servile dependence; the second under the regimes of filial [childlike] dependence [on the parent]; and the third under the regimes of freedom. First the whip, then action, and thirdly contempla-tion. Successively, the state of slaves, of free men, and of friends. Winter, the break of Spring, and summer. Thorns, roses, and lilies. Herbs HERBES, spices EPIS, and wheat... In effect, the first state relates to the Father who is the author of all, ...the second relates to the Son who is worthy of assuming our suffering LIOMON, fasting and suffering in the heart of that suffering so as to reform the statute of the first man who had fallen in eating of the fruit of the tree; while the third state relates to the Holy Spirit of whom the Apostle said: "There where the spirit of the Lord abides is freedom." *Joachim de Flore, propos rapportés en 1208 par Ralph de Goggeshall, cité dans H. Mottu, La Manifestation de l'Esprit selon Joachim de Flore, herméneutique et théologie de l'histoire d'après le "Traité sur les quatre Évangiles", Neuchâtel/Paris, Delachaux et Niestlé, 1977, p. 233. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris*




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“[Joachim] retired to the Cistercian Abbey of Sambucina, probably in 1159, and for some years devoted himself

to lay preaching, without taking the religious habit or receiving any orders. The ecclesiastical authorities raising objections to his mode of life, he took the Cistercian habit in the Abbey of Corazzo, and was ordained priest, apparently in 1168. He now applied himself entirely to Biblical study, with a special view to the interpretation of the hidden meaning of the Scriptures. A few years later, much against his will, he was elected abbot. Finding the duties of his office an intolerable hindrance to what he deemed his higher calling, he appealed, in 1182, to Pope Lucius III, who relieved him of the temporal care of his abbey, and warmly approved of his work... The papal approbation was confirmed by Urban III, in 1185, and again, more conditionally, by Clement III, in 1187... Joachim now retired to the hermitage of Pietralata, and finally founded the Abbey of Fiore (or Flora) among the Calabrian mountains, which became the center of a new and stricter branch of the Cistercian Order approved by Celestine III in 1198... Dante voiced the general opinion of his age in declaring Joachim one "endowed with prophetic spirit." But he himself always disclaimed the title of prophet. The interpretation of Scriptural prophecy, with reference to the history and the future of the Church, is the main theme of his... chief works...

The mystical basis of his teaching is the doctrine of the "Eternal Gospel," founded on a strained interpretation of the text in the Apocalypse (xiv, 6). There are three states of the world, corresponding to the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. In the first age the Father ruled, representing power and inspiring fear, to which the Old Testament dispensation corresponds; then the wisdom hidden through the ages was revealed in the Son, and we have the Catholic Church of the New Testament; a third period will come, the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit, a new dispensation of universal love, which will proceed from the Gospel of Christ, but transcend the letter of it, and in which there will be no need for disciplinary institutions. Joachim held that the second period was drawing to a close, and that the third epoch (already in part anticipated by St. Benedict) would actually begin after some great cataclysm which he tentatively calculated would befall in 1260. After this Latins and Greeks would be united in the new spiritual kingdom, freed alike from the fetters of the letter; the Jews would be converted, and the "Eternal Gospel" abide until the end of the world. ...it is clear that the Joachists went far beyond what the abbot himself had taught. They held that, about the year 1200, the spirit of life had gone out of the two Testaments and that Joachim's three books themselves constituted this "Eternal Gospel," which was not simply to transcend but to supersede, the Gospel of Christ. The Catholic priesthood and the whole teaching of the New Testament was to be rendered void in a few years. This work was solemnly condemned by Alexander IV, in 1256, and the condemnation involved the teaching of Joachim himself. His central doctrine was confuted by St. Thomas in the *Summa Theologica* (I-II, Q. cvi, a. 4)." (*Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 8)

[And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, ... Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him... (*Revelations*, 6-7)]

"Joachim of Fiore is the most important apocalyptic thinker of the whole medieval period, and maybe after the prophet John, the most important apocalyptic thinker [in the tradition of the New Testament Book of *Revelation*] in the history of Christianity." Bernard McGinn, "Who Was Joachim of Fiore, Professor of the History of Theology and History of Christianity, University of Chicago, [pbs online](#) and [wgbh/frontline](#)

[The Book of] *Revelation* [also called *Apocalypse*] was written to prepare the church for the last intervention of God in human affairs. The Christians of the 1st century believed this event to be close at hand. When it occurred, a new age of the world would begin, in which Christ and the church would be triumphant. Meanwhile, however, the evils and terrors of the existing world order would increase and intensify. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. ©

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In history God reveals himself. God reveals himself first by the law and power of the Father. Then God corrects this first self-revelation by revealing himself as Jesus's love for every human being who sins against the law. Finally he finally reveals himself in a different kind of love, in the love of the infinite Christ who no longer stands outside us as Jesus, a single individual, stood outside us, but which is the universal love in which all are reborn. Jesus' love was love for others. The love of the infinite Christ was whose body is the church at the end of history is for his individual members and of his individual members for one another in Christ. Because everything lives, moves, and has its being only in the infinite Christ, the Spirit,

Christ's love, and our love in Christ, is no longer for anything *other*. The *part* is not other than the *whole*, and one part is the part it is only in and through other inseparable parts. The parts form one body.

Implicitly this is to privilege the Spirit as the true revelation of God's nature over that of the Father. The age of the Son was the New Testament age in which God was chiefly revealed in Jesus. In the age of the Father God is primarily God above. In the age of the Son God is primarily long, long ago and far, far away. Redemption means having a personal relationship with Jesus, but our historical remoteness from Jesus's time and place makes this a constant challenge. Christians in the age of the Son have tried to meet this challenge by New Testament scholarship bringing us closer to the historical Jesus, but also by the Crusades to the holy land.

The *Crusades* of Joachim's time still expressed the age of the Son. In the age of the Spirit God is neither above nor long, long ago. Joachim had a prolonged stay in the holy land prior to receiving his *apocalyptic* revelation of the age of the Spirit. It is reasonable hypothesis to suppose in the holy land he that was personally wrestling with the problem of surmounting God's status as external to us in the age of the Son. A kind of media figure of his day, he was sought out by Richard *the Lionhearted* on Richard's way to the *Third Crusade*. Joachim did not rebuff Richard, perhaps because it would be useless to try to force individuals in the age of the Son to pass on to the age of the Spirit if they were not ready.



Corbis, **Siege of Jerusalem**. Christian armies of the First Crusade surrounded the city of Jerusalem in June 1099. In mid-July, after a long siege, the Crusaders took the city by storm and massacred many of its inhabitants. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

In the age of the Spirit, God was no longer externally revealed, whether from above or out of the past. Rather, God revealed himself within, within himself and within us. The Spirit set us free of an external law or source of salvation. A friend of Hegel's once wrote to Hegel that his *Phenomenology of Spirit* was that long-awaited third testament. Every Christian is in either the age of the Father, that of the Son, or that of the Spirit. Collectively Christendom may have passed from the age of the Father to that of the Son without arriving at that of the Spirit. Yet individual Christians linger back in the age of the Father or anticipate that of the Spirit. Joachim, a monk, believed that the age of the Spirit would be an age of contemplating God. This age would depend on separating oneself from the powers of the *world*, especially from wealth. Monastic vows take vows of poverty seriously. Joachim was an advisor to popes, but these vows contained an implicit critique of the Church, and potentially of its risky alliance with wealth and with princely

political power. He was apparently not opposed to his own financing by the Church, but how to use wealth without being corrupted by it was a problem.

*G.W.F. Hegel* in the nineteenth century would view the age of the spirit somewhat differently. For him this age would depend, not on everyone becoming a monk, but on universal human rights made possible only by the wealth being created by the industrial revolution. He certainly did not exclude the contemplation of the divine Spirit from the age of the Spirit. But such contemplation is viewed as Spirit's reflection on its own career in history, a reflection which tops off this career and brings to completion. However, the difference between Joachim and Hegel should not be exaggerated. It is apparent that for Joachim, too, the contemplation of the God could only be a contemplation of the holy spirit together with its history in the divine tragic-comedy. Furthermore, if the monkish life is generalized in the age of the Spirit, monks will no longer live apart from the world as they did in the Middle Ages and continue to do today. Our image of a monk must be vastly transformed as we pass from the age of the Father to the age of the Spirit in which there is no longer any institutionalized worldly economic or political power allied with the Father from which to detach oneself.

Hegel believed the age of the spirit was institutionalized in the world-wide human rights revolution, in liberation from feudal bondage. But this revolution did not make the church unnecessary. The church was no longer an alliance of altar and throne, an alliance in which the church teaches what despotism wills, namely, obedience. Nor could it be a modern alliance of altar and flag, an alliance in which the church teaches the perceived national interest. The church is no longer the worship of a higher will upholding the state or nation. The church becomes a celebration of the presence of the spirit.

Hegel once said that our universities are our churches, but his more considered view is that universities exist for academic knowledge, but that the church exists for the transmission of the truth from the academe and intellect to our whole being. In the church, there is neither Gentile nor Jew, but neither are there A or F students. In the church the truth is felt, not just known. Yet, we must qualify this view of the church by allowing that celebration of the spirit may at times revert to an orthodox worship of the Father. In certain crisis situations, a need for a father may reappear.

The eventual condemnation by the Church of "misuse" of Joachim's writings came after his death when his movement cause social unrest up and down the Italian peninsula was caused by his followers' expectation of the end of the ages of the Father and, and of the structures of law and order associated with those ages. The age of the Son preserves that of the Father, since as redemption by the Son presupposes the confession of sin against the law of the Father. The age of the Spirit suspends this legalism. However, individuals who still resent the law of the Father have not passed fully through and beyond it, so that their attempt to pass into the age of the Spirit will consist in negative rebellion.

Confusion over the interpretation of Christianity is encouraged by the fact that both Christians and their critics consider Christianity Atheistic@ according to the concept of creationist theism, based on creation out of nothing. Thus, when philosophers such as Hegel or de Chardin profess to be Christian, it is assumed they must be creationists.

Non-orthodox Christian philosophers often hold a theological position that remained undefined until the nineteenth century: pantheism. For pantheists everything is God in disguise. For theists God is purely beyond this created world. Pantheists holds that God is not only beyond like creationists but also in things. Unlike pantheists, they hold that nothing is God. Yet, unlike theists, they assert that everything (*pan*) is in (*en*) God (*theos*). God includes every thing and person while being more than any of them or

any collection of them. Panentheism seems better able to capture the idea of the incarnation, the presence of the infinite in the finite individual, than theism's assertion that God is purely beyond the finite, and since the incarnation sets Christianity apart from the purely theistic Creator God, panentheism's version of monotheism seems best suited to state Christianity. Still very few Christian theologians, apart from so-called *process theologians* like *Charles Hartshorne*, have laid claim to panentheism. Most claim to be theists.

Until Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832), one of Hegel's students, coined the term "panentheism" in the nineteenth century this was because the only alternative in theology to theism seemed to be pantheism. But the pantheism of the great seventeenth century Dutch Jewish philosopher *Spinoza*, since it was not theistic, was denounced as non-theistic and therefore atheistic. It is true that Spinoza never denied the existence of God, and it is that which is what atheism means he was not an atheist. Yet he did deny the theistic God and in that sense he was an a-theist. His reputation probably suffered from this ambiguity of the term "atheism". But because the only clearly conceptualized alternative to theism was pantheism and hence "atheism", the great majority of Christian thinkers have considered themselves theists.

In principle, Krause's idea changed this situation, but most philosophers and most Christians have so far failed to take notice. One reason is that theism does not deny the possibility of the Christian incarnation as long as being incarnated is seen as a contingent, non-necessary attribute of God. God is essentially beyond the world but is contingently or an accidentally incarnated in the world. Thus, God might not have incarnated himself in Jesus, but chose to do so out of his own free will. It is implied that God is essentially a person who can either act or not act in a certain way, who could have done otherwise. The infinity of God on this view requires that we no place limits on what he might or might not do. A result of theism is that it favors orthodox Christianity over Gnostic or Hermetic heterodoxy because the Father in orthodoxy initiates an eternal procession in which Christ and the Spirit proceed ultimately from the Father, while Jesus Christ and the holy spirit take no free will initiative in this procession.

The spirit in Western theology proceeds from Christ as well as from the Father, but its procession from Christ is due to Christ's procession from the Father and thus is indirectly to the Father's free-will initiative. Theism is favorable to Father-centered Christianity not only because it makes creation of the world a free will act, but also because it makes the two members of trinity other than the Father a result of an eternal free act in commencing the procession. (The Father also initiates a parallel historical procession of Jesus and the descent of Spirit to all.)

Panentheism, however, views God's presence in the world to be a necessary divine attribute, not a result of a contingent free-will act. Panentheist theology is thus more suited to a Christ- or Spirit-centered Christianity which asserts that the divinity of the infinite Christ or infinite Spirit is not due to an option taken by the Father that could be left untaken, but is due to the necessary essence of God. God under a higher, more adequate description cannot proceed from God under false description except by correcting the preceding description. In this type of procession what proceeds is higher in dignity than that from which it proceeds, which is the opposite of what was expressed in orthodox theology.

Panentheistic Christianity rejects traditional, often dogmatic, often literal Christianity based on faith and authority alone. It intends to base itself on reason. Yet, it remains attached to traditional forms of Christian ritual and speech. Universities chiefly address the mind, while the *church* address the whole person. Few heterodox Christians would welcome the church's disappearance as an institution. They comprehend a truth that by ritual and myth is already at least symbolically grasped in the *visible church*. If the churches

disappeared, philosophical Christianity would lose contact with the world, and the world would lose a point of access to truth. Philosophical Christianity would no longer enjoy a widely circulating form of Christianity to interpret. It could not publicize a theology of the Spirit already present in the upside-down father-centered orthodoxy in the world. Its truth would become the preserve of an isolated elite.

The main concern of heterodox Christianity is to preserve Christianity from skepticism by translating its dogmas into a language showing them to be rational in inner content. In content if not in name, Christianity is unsurpassable to the theology of the Spirit. Any religion which would claim to surpass it, such as *Islam* which came afterwards, either matches it or falls beneath its understanding. In its basic concept of God Islam produces nothing new but only repeats the Hebrew view of God as Creator. If God is essentially Spirit, and not just, there cannot never be a new theology. In theological principle there can never be a new religion.

There can be no new definition of God beyond Spirit, but only further development and institutionalization of this definition. The Lord is contradictorily limited by the world under his power. Spirit, limited only by itself, is thought falling into and overcoming error. The Spirit according to the Gospel of *John* leads us into truth, even truth that we cannot yet bear. No truth is beyond the grasp and teaching of the Spirit. If there were, the Spirit itself would expand, encompass it, and lead us into it. John's orthodoxy lies only in the fact that this counselor, this guide—in secular form, the voice of one's better self in dialogue—is "sent" by the Father. Heterodox Christianity would suggest that it is sent by the Spirit to its own members.

I have been using the heterodox theology developed by Fiore, Hegel, and others as a philosophy of reference in questioning the meaning of Christianity. It represents one of two long-standing interpretations of Christianity. Of the two, it is far less well known. Far better known is the tradition of orthodox Christianity upheld by most churches. I have referred to the heterodox tradition broadly as Gnostic. Hegel, Teilhard de Chardin, and the contemporary American Thomas Altizer, are modern Gnostic Christians. A study of their interpretation of Christianity illuminates Christianity even if it is not a true interpretation of Christianity.

Gnostic Christianity makes one assumption that we must question, namely, that human beings are potentially enlightened enough to live together rationally by purely self-imposed law. The orthodox hold that human beings lack such maturity, and that to suppose that they have it is to invite chaos rather than viable community. Whether or not orthodox theology is true, orthodox Christians question whether human beings will be ever mature enough to live peaceably in Joachim's age of the Spirit. They will always need a father, ultimately a perfect one in heaven. Joachim's spiritual Christianity seems more for gods than for us. However, this is an objection only to optimistic Gnosticism, not to Gnosticism itself. It suggests only that human beings will never be able to bear the Gnostic truth about God, not that it is not the truth.

A pessimistic Gnosticism can admit that the few of us who go into the age of the Spirit remain subject to a renewed need for a father in a time of crisis, and that most of us will never make that passage in the first place. That some *age of enlightenment* should generalize such a passage seems wildly optimistic. Yet, once again, this is more an objection to the modern Gnostic philosophy of world history than to Gnostic theology as such. Spirit may be a true definition of God even if most people will never understand it. In that case, the ancient versions of Gnosticism, which were more elitist and therefore less Christian, would be closer to the truth. Christianity has been a missionary religion that seeks to convert the whole outside world.

Still, Gnostic theology, whether optimistic or pessimistic, can help us understand the orthodox theology that many take for granted to the point of boredom. The repetition of orthodox creeds becomes meaningless without awareness of Gnostic alternatives that they are meant to deny. There have been many heresies, but Gnosticism denial of any final definition of God as the Lord has formed the most important and most recurrent challenge to orthodoxy over the centuries. The Gnostic tradition may serve to enliven as well as put at risk contemporary orthodox belief.

Gnostic Christianity is philosophical in ambition. Gnosis is knowledge in the sense of enlightenment. Ancient Christian Gnostics claimed divine enlightenment arising from within them, so that they could write new Christian gospels on the basis of a dream, without relying any eye-witness account of the life of Jesus.

The second-century Gnostic *Marcion*, an Egyptian who was active in Rome, asserted a radical break was asserted between the *Old Testament* and *New Testament*. The *Old Testament* Creator God, the devil in disguise, enslaved us to the Law. The true God, the One from which the divine spirit world is descended, sent Christ as a messenger to free us from the Law and reveal to us our divine nature. The neatest trick of the devil has been for him to persuade us that he is not devil at all and that he is really God. He created an hallucinatory material world. Since he was not really God he could create nothing real.

However, as long as we believe that this hallucinatory world is real, the devil will retain his power over us. A *hallucination*, perceiving something that is not there, persists only so long as we do not know that it is a hallucination. If we knew we were hallucinating we would no longer be hallucinating. We would no longer be fooled, and the hallucination of the world's existence would go away. We hallucinate our bodies, which are pseudo-creations of the devil. Your body serves as a cage by which the devil detaches your soul or spirit from its true home with the divine spirit.

But Christ, the Messenger, pierces through the defenses of the devil, reveals to us the hallucinatory nature of the human body, and frees the human spirit from its bondage to the body and to the devil. Christ does all this without becoming incarnated in any body in this world, since the hallucinatory nature of all bodies means that any bodily incarnation of Christ would also be hallucinatory. Further, since there is no real Incarnation, there is no real Resurrection of Christ in the flesh, either. The Incarnation and the Resurrection are orthodox doctrines that, if taken seriously, would imply Christ's own bondage to the devil. Marcion's Gnosticism (unlike Joachim's modern Gnosticism), follows *Plato's* denigration of the body in favor of the soul, and denies the Hebrew *Old Testamant* belief that it is impossible to have a soul without a

“And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old garment; otherwise both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old wineskins; else the new wine will burst the skins, and itself will be spilled, and the skins will perish. But new wine must be put into new wine-skins; and both are preserved.” Marcion, *The Gospel of Marcion*, translated by J.H. Hill (1891) and D. Mahar, 5: 36-38

body.

By Christ's revelation to us of our true identity as detached sparks off the divine Spirit we finally rebel against devil power and return to divine spirit from which we came. Only the Spirit and the unstatable One (not the Father) that it expresses exist. The *Old Testament* is the book of the devil, of the pseudo-Creator, while the *New Testament* is the book of truth and liberation from the body. Christianity will never be understood as long as its message is understood as a continuation of the message of the *Old Testament*

under the sign of the Lord, as long as Christ and the Spirit are viewed as having been sent by the Father. Therefore Christians must repudiate renounce the *Old Testament*. It is not surprising that Marcion's beliefs have been associated by some with *Anti-Semitism*, though it would not logically follow from the fact that the ancient Hebrews worshipped God under a false description, and hallucinated the existence of creation, that their race was somehow damned. What would follow is that they, most of all, needed to be liberated, and that their liberation would help bring the liberation of others.

Another second-century Gnostic, Valentinus, was less radical. God the Father was God as the common people know him. Deeper knowledge of God as Spirit is possible only to a minority of enlightened individuals in the Church who have passed through the waiting room of orthodox belief in the Father into the Gnostic inner sanctum. Human beings cannot pass directly from a life of ungoverned impulse to one of enlightenment. For most of us, the government of impulse is first learned by being governed by the Father. Those who are enlightened should not disturb the orthodox faith, who need a structure for their lives. The orthodox should be given time to prepare themselves for gnosis in their own way. Rebirth in the divine spirit passes through worship of the Lord. The Father is not the devil as Marcion thought, but is the external teacher with whom one must begin.

Just as there lies hidden in a will, before it is opened, the fortune of the deceased master of the house, so (it is) with the totality, which lay hidden while the Father of the totality was invisible, being something which is from him, from whom every space comes forth. For this reason Jesus appeared; he put on that book; he was nailed to a tree; he published the edict of the Father on the cross. O such great teaching! He draws himself down to death, though life eternal clothes him. Having stripped himself of the perishable rags, he put on imperishability, which no one can possibly take away from him. Having entered the empty spaces of terrors, he passed through those who were stripped naked by oblivion, being knowledge and perfection, proclaiming the things that are in the heart, [...] teach those who will receive teaching. But those who are to receive teaching are the living [those enjoying gnosis], who are inscribed in the book of the living.... But the Father is perfect, knowing every space within him. If he wishes, he manifests whomever he wishes, by giving him form and giving him a name, and he gives a name to him, and brings it about that those come into existence who, before they come into existence, are ignorant of him who fashioned them. I do not say, then, that they [ordinary Christians in the visible church] are nothing (at all) who have not yet come into existence, but they are in him who will wish that they come into existence when he wishes, like the time that is to come. Before all things appear, he knows what he will produce. But the fruit which is not yet manifest does not know anything, nor does it do anything.... For he who has no root has no fruit either, but though he thinks to himself, "I have come into being," yet he will perish by himself. For this reason, he who did not exist at all will never come into existence. Attributed to Valentinus, *The Gospel of Truth*, translated by H.W. Attridge and G. W. MacRae, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, revised edition. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1990.

Interesting ideas, but too bad he was a heretic, the orthodox will say. Yet from the standpoint of philosophy and gnosticism, ideas need to be judged for themselves, apart from any visible church authority. Yet there is a textual basis in Saint Paul's distinction between the word of wisdom and the word of miracles within the same church:

Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues. (I Cor 12:3-10)

There are many varieties of Gnosticism, and this was a major basis of orthodox complaint against Gnosticism. It was feared in the early Church that Gnosticism was too individualistic in its emphasis on the divine illumination of select individuals. Under Gnostic influence Christianity might splinter, even disappear. However, Buddhism has had an even more ancient history that has not disappeared despite the fact that it never enjoyed institutional unity. Thus, the fear may seem exaggerated. That imperial organization and hierarchy were necessary to the survival of Christianity may have been an illusion spawned by interpreting it as a spiritual version of the Roman Empire. But certain general statements can be made about early Gnosticism despite its variety, and certain general contrasts to orthodoxy follow.

1. The first contrast had to do with the relative precedence of the Father or Spirit, and it has been discussed. As a symptom of this difference, Gnosticism was less patriarchal than orthodoxy, more inclined to grant equal rights to women, because God was not viewed as a man. Some Gnostics, we noted, even viewed God as a heavenly Mother. Most of the other contrasts between Gnosticism and orthodoxy are simply consequences of this first contrast.

2. The second contrast, concerning the hierarchical organization of the church, is related to the first. Relations of external authority in the orthodox church (and in society generally) reflect similar relations between God and the world. We have noted that the most illustrious orthodox Church philosopher, *Saint Augustine*, held that all legitimate authority is divine in its origin and should be respected wherever found, in the church, family, or state. The non-institutionalized hierarchy that Gnosticism recognized was between individuals, between the enlightened and the ignorant. It was based on the *charismatic authority* of inspired personalities, and it differs radically from the orthodox hierarchy based on the *institutional authority* of offices in the Church.

3. The third contrast is also based on the first. In orthodoxy, *physical miracles*, where they are not an extraordinary answer to prayer, are evidence of divine authority behind acts and laws that we may not otherwise understand and accept. The divinity of Jesus's actions or words is not internally evident, and Jesus' multiplication of loaves may make help make it evident. Their effect is to suspend the ordinary critical faculties of the individual who beholds the miracles and to subject the individual to external divine authority. Ancient Gnosticism denied miracles in part because it denied the real existence of a created world ruled laws of nature. If there are no real such laws, there are no real exceptions to them, either. Yet the very idea of *gnosis* or enlightenment implied *autonomy* as a person and precluded being spooked by a miracle into believing something based on external signs rather than one's own understanding. Jesus

recognized that the common people expected miraculous signs, and on some occasions he offered miraculous signs. But he also disdained them: “And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth.” (*John 46:50*)

4. The fourth contrast, having to do with immortality, is also related to the first. The covenant between human beings and the Father-Creator presupposes their desire for security, and individual immortality is a condition of total security. Individual immortality, however, is not a Hebrew idea. It has its origin in Greek philosophy, especially *Plato*. This Platonic idea became part of Christian orthodoxy, apparently as a compensation for a growing lack of confidence in the early second coming of Christ and in the imminent coming of the kingdom of God on earth. Redemption was not a collective redemption of all Christians, but an eternal heavenly reward for one soul at a time.

But early Gnostic Christianity, which was close to Plato in believing the body to be a cage, did not make Platonic claims regarding the immortality of the individual soul. Marcion, for example; believed that the independence of individual soul was an illusion arising from the detachment of a spark of the divine spirit by imprisonment in an hallucinated body. The substantial reality is the single divine Spirit, not the different sparks. Moreover, the Gnostic becomes free of the fear of individual death or worse by learning of his or her substantial identity with the eternal divine spirit. Therefore, our common cosmic immortality replaces individual immortality.

5. The fifth contrast, dealing with sin, again comes from the first. The consciousness of *sin* is consciousness of having violated a law that one accepts as the law of God. The awareness of sin increased as Christians became aware of the difficulty and perhaps even impossibility of overcoming it through their own powers unaided by Christ. Guilt is different from sin because the law that is violated need not be divine law, and because of the possibility of escaping that law (e.g., by moving to another city) is greater than the possibility of eluding the divine law of the Creator of the whole world. Orthodox Christianity is a religion of salvation from sin. Gnosticism is a religious philosophy of salvation from ignorance as to one's true identity. The Gnostic, heeding the Socratic commandment *Know Thyself!*, discovers his true identity in the Spirit, and breaks the chains of illusion about who he or she is.

6. The sixth contrast concerns the contrast between the *visible church* and the *invisible church*, but it is also a consequence of the first contrast. Orthodox did not exclude the idea of an invisible spiritual dimension of the Church, but it was hardly sufficient to define the Church since it contradicted the idea of church hierarchy. The visible church is a visibly established hierarchy of institutionalized patriarchal authority. Since the patriarchal papal authority in the church is delegated by the Father through Christ the Risen Lord, emphasis on the visible church hierarchy expresses orthodox Christian theology. The visible church made very visible distinctions in dress, ritual function, rights, and authority between the laity, the priesthood, the bishops, and the cardinals.

An exclusively invisible church could not tell by outward signs who has authority, by whom truth is likely to be spoken. Stress on the invisible church thus leads to a readiness to receive enlightenment from the most unexpected sources, without any official authorization. In this sense, Gnosticism favored freedom of speech and freedom of thought. It flourished in second century Alexandria because of the city's cosmopolitan atmosphere. Gnostics could not be sure who was enlightened and who was not, and thus

they were ready to listening to all in the market place of gospels and ideas. Gnostics clearly give priority to the invisible spiritual church. The letter killeth and the spirit giveth life. The result was that some full Christians in the spiritual sense might not be Christians at all by the letter, by membership in the visible church. Even Muslims can be members of the invisible church.

Furthermore, some very visible and important Christians in the visible Church really turn out not be members at all of the invisible spiritual church. They might have secret vices that exclude them from such membership. How do you know that the priest who performs the sacrament of Communion is really a member of invisible church? And if he is merely a visible priest, how do you know that his dispensation of the sacraments is effective? One can understand the orthodox Church insistence that visible priest perform the functions of the priesthood regardless of the spiritual state of their souls. It was a question of institutional survival. Gnostics, however, adopt for an underground role in the history of Christianity that largely dispense with institutional support.

The debate concerning the visible and invisible churches is probably the most profound debate in all history about the nature of the Christian church. Each side makes telling points. True Christians are not necessarily those who loudly “Lord, Lord.” But neither are they necessarily those who, reaching a philosophical or spiritual consensus with a Buddhist dialogue partner, tell him or her that what makes or her a Buddhist is what makes them Christians. The eighteenth century German Enlightenment philosopher *G.E. Lessing* was probably mistaken in his convictions. (He hid his profound doubts, apparently believing that it could be proved. But Hegel would claim the inner truth, or speech. f externally.)



**G.E. Lessing (1729-1781)**

**NATHAN.** . . . the Christians murdered every Jew in Gath,  
Woman and child; that among these, my wife  
With seven hopeful sons were found, who all  
Beneath my brother's roof which they had fled to,  
Were burnt alive.

**FRIAR.** Just God!

**NATHAN.** And when you came,  
Three nights had I in dust and ashes lain  
Before my God and wept—aye, and at times  
Arraigned my maker, raged, and cursed myself  
And the whole world, and to Christianity  
Swore unrelenting hate.

**FRIAR.** Ah, I believe you.

**NATHAN.** But by degrees returning reason came,  
She spake with gentle voice—And yet God is,  
And this was his decree—now exercise  
What thou hast long imagined, and what surely  
Is not more difficult to exercise  
Than to imagine—if thou will it once.

I rose and called out—God, I will—I will,  
So thou but aid my purpose—And behold  
You was just then dismounted, and presented  
To me the child wrapt in your mantle. What  
You said, or I, occurs not to me now -  
Thus much I recollect—I took the child,  
I bore it to my couch, I kissed it, flung  
Myself upon my knees and sobbed—my God,  
Now have I one out of the seven again!

**FRIAR.** Nathan, you are a Christian! Yes, by God  
You are a Christian—never was a better.

**NATHAN.** Heaven bless us! What makes me to you a Christian  
Makes you to me a Jew. But let us cease  
To melt each other—time is nigh to act,  
And though a sevenfold love had bound me soon

Lessing's main point here recalls Saint Paul: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (I *Cor* 12:13). Yet Lessing expands Saint Paul's claim to include the Muslims. The extreme opposites of a purely visible church of glass and stone and Lessing's purely invisible church uniting him as a Jew with the Christian friar seem indefensible. A church without spirit is dead. In what form spirit without organization will survive is unpredictable. Yet in situations in which something has to be sacrificed, which shall it be? Spirit, which is normally invisible but which can suddenly become visible in a disorganizing work of genius? Or visible organization that may survive as a hollow shell waiting to enlivened by Spirit?

7. The seventh contrast between orthodoxy and Gnostic heterodoxy concerns nature of revelations, internal revelation by one's own inner light denies orthodox revelation from an external source. For those reborn in Christ, this inner light is that of the Holy Spirit. Revelation from an external source is ultimately illustrated by revelation by the Father. Thus the contrast between internal and external revelation is a further illustration of the difference between Gnostic theology of the Spirit and orthodox theology of the Father.

8. Finally and eighthly, the orthodox image of the *kingdom of God* is that of a kingdom under the Father's law in which Christ rules on a throne. This image perpetuates, beyond the projected end of history, relations of lordship with which history began in human history after the *fall*. The Gnostic kingdom of God is not a literal kingdom at all. Human beings inherit it by the gift of the spirit, it is not imposed on them. One possible interpretation is that they inherit it due to the death of the Father. The law of the Father, which was commanded to human beings as long as God appeared as the Father, ceases to be externally commanded and becomes the internal law of human existence as human beings live in divine *grace*. The kingdom of God is humanity's inheritance of divine enlightenment in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descends on the Apostles (at the *Pentecost*), on the Church, and ultimately on all human beings according to *Saint Paul*. The law is not suspended, but we come to want to do what the law of God in any case requires us to do.

Human beings inherit the kingdom by realizing the divine image. This Gnostic image of the Kingdom makes it invisible. It is the kingdom of God within, and it does not reveal itself in the outward trappings of power. The orthodox image of the kingdom is an image of the law of God imposed on those who have not yet been converted to it to (e.g., *Revelations*). In the Gnostic image of the kingdom the external Law-Giver dies because he has nothing more to do, since everyone's will is converted to the law of love. Thus, they can be seen as two stages in a deepening kingdom of God. The visible orthodox kingdom prepares the way for the Gnostic invisible kingdom in which the Father's commandments become an invisible presence.

As a rule, scholars limit Christian Gnosticism to the first Christian centuries. Here we use the term in a broader sense. The early Christian Gnostics followed Plato in their separation of the body and the soul. They combined Old Testament creationism with Plato's body-soul dualism. Contrary to modern Gnostics like Teilhard de Chardin or Hegel, they even asserted that the body is evil, the work of an evil creator God.

It was a cage by which the devil entrapped the individual soul and its spark of the divine spirit. This Platonism meant that the early Gnostics denied the Incarnation. A good God cannot be incarnate in evil matter. The Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection were all phantom-like for the early Gnostics. For some this is enough to doubt whether early Gnostics were really Christian.

What we have called *Modern Gnosticism* shares all eight points above with early Gnosticism. That is the justification for calling it *Modern Gnosticism*. It differs from early Gnosticism by eliminating the Platonic dualism of body and soul. It can thus take seriously the incarnation of God in matter. We have taken Joachim de Fiore to be the first modern Gnostic (1132-1202). Joachim revised Spirit-centered Gnostic theology by viewing the trinity as historical as well as eternal. De Fiore's subterranean influence extends through Lessing to Hegel, Marx, and beyond. The main theme of Hegel's philosophy is history as the story of freedom, of emancipation from various forms of external despotic law.

Hegel's philosophy of the meaning of world history, unlike Joachim's world history that begins with Old Testament times, includes prehistory, China, and India in the story. Hegel gives little attention to the age of the Son, which seems to mask a continuing age of the Father, since the Son is sent by the Father. Orthodoxy also believes that the Spirit is sent by the Father, but Hegel believes that this is an misunderstanding of the Spirit. By the very meaning of the terms involved, the Son cannot be the Son except by being the Son of the Father. By contrast, the meaning of "Spirit" does not require it to be the spirit of a Father. In fact, since the Father represents external authority, a spirit of the Father would seem to be a shackled spirit, not the free spirit conveyed by the meaning of "spirit". Hegel's most unusually contribution to modern Gnostic theology was to have assigned a date to the arriving of the age of the Spirit. Joachim and all other modern Gnostics looked toward the age of the Spirit at some time in the future. Hegel held that the ascent (not the orthodox "descent") had already taken place. It coincided with the American and French Revolutions (1776, 1789), and with institutionalization of a modern theory of universal human rights: "events speak loudly enough for themselves. It can only be a question of becoming acquainted with them in their full extent; their cry is heard around the world... The rate of taxation, which the English Parliament set on the tea to be imported by America, was extremely slight. Yet the feeling of the Americans that with the sum, in itself wholly insignificant, they would have lost their most precious rights caused the American Revolution" (Hegel, *CLIO* 8, 3, 409-410). That was the beginning of the end of history. But this greatest of modern revolutions did not understand its Christian meaning. The revolutionaries, men of action, were largely unaware that they were even Christians. They were at best invisible Christians. The age of the Spirit had come unheralded, but Hegel's would now to illuminate it and make it visible for all to see.

Hegel is the best suited modern Gnostic to enliven a clear awareness of orthodox Christianity for modern orthodox Christians. *Consciousness* is a result of contrast. One cannot become conscious of orthodoxy except by contrast heterodoxy. Any interpretation of Christianity is more controversial in a Christian culture than the philosophical interpretation of, say, Buddhism is in Western culture. A profound and convincing philosophical interpretation of Christianity that makes Christianity rational and true would enhance its prestige, but it would undermine an important function in orthodox Christianity of the external institutional authority of churches: *church authority* would now become dispensable as a source of truth. Still, churches in an age of philosophical or Gnostic Christianity would still have an important function. The church would remain as a community for the celebration of truth. However, it would not have the traditional orthodox function in the authoritative determination of truth.

The major orthodox revolt against modern Gnostic heterodoxy, initiated by *Søren Kierkegaard* in the nineteenth century, did not call for a return to the determination of truth by church authority. That is one reason this revolt is called *neo-orthodox* instead of simply *orthodox*. But modern Gnosticism has had a parallel effect to that of early Christian Gnosticism in stimulating types of orthodoxy. Neo-orthodoxy was a new orthodoxy preserving Christianity as purely subjective faith from *both* philosophical criticism *and* external church authority. No Gnostic philosophy can touch a private religious faith that repudiates all rational standards of evaluation. Kierkegaard writes in his attack on Hegel:

Hulton Deutsch **Søren Kierkegaard** [1813-1855] wrote of the paradoxes of Christianity and the faith required to reconcile them.

Now, while the existing individual undoubtedly comes after the preceding six thousand years of [of world history], if we assume that he spends his life at a systematic understanding of these [years], the strangely ironical consequence would follow, that he could have no understanding of himself in his [present] existence.... [Modern Gnostic philosophy Ce.g., Hegel] has a comical presupposition occasioned by its having forgotten, in a world-historical absent-mindedness, what it means to be a human being. Not indeed what it means to be a human being in general [as grasped in a general concept], but what it means that you and I [as unique individuals] are human beings... It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and it is only in subjectivity [only in faith, not objective knowledge including gnosis] that its truth exists... The objective tendency, which proposes to make everybody into an observer, and in its maximum to transform him into so objective an observer that he becomes almost a ghost, scarcely to be distinguished from the tremendous spirit of the historical past. This tendency naturally refuses to know or listen to anything except what stands in relation to itself. . . (Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Scientific Postscript*)



Further, no church authority can survive this *neo-orthodox Christianity* that makes the distinction between the *divine* from the *profane* into a distinction between an *infinite* totally beyond this world and everything *finite* in this world, including the church. The worship of God is radically different from an idolatrous worship of a church. The church is a fallible human institution, as was seen in the twentieth century when some churches actively or passively collaborated with ultra-nationalist, racist, and totalitarian societies and states.

Will the modern Gnostic philosophy of history prevail? Will churches become places of *celebration* more than *worship*, of the sharing of experience more than the preservation of a fixed hierarchy? Perhaps. Yet, modern Gnosticism will more likely remain a minority option within Christianity. Modern Gnosticism is heterodox, heretical. Still, in order to be heretical one must first be a Christian. It makes no sense to talk of a heretical Buddhist or Muslim. Neither Buddhism nor Islam has been organized in a single church-like institution like the catholic church (lower case) that once embraced Eastern Orthodox and Western Christianity, and which in the West tried to compensate for the decline and fall of the Roman Empire by its own spiritual imperial hierarchy.

Heretical Christianity is as old as Christianity itself. Early *Church Fathers* created orthodoxy in reaction to Gnosticism, and Gnostic Christians since then have defined their identity by protesting orthodox belief. The history of the church contains a long struggle between official orthodox belief and the

underground Christianity of Gnostics and later mystics. To understand orthodox Christianity today solely on the basis of orthodox sermons or creeds is like trying to understand an iceberg merely by its visible tip. For early orthodox Christians, to understand the ancient Church Fathers meant to understand the ancient Gnostics they attacked. For orthodox Christians today to understand their orthodoxy means above all to understand the modern Gnosticism of Hegel.



G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831)

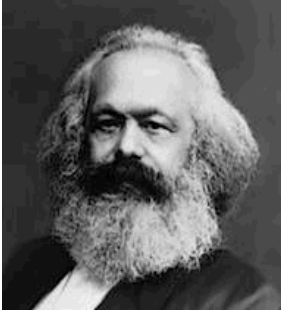
Hegel is recognized as the most recent of the great systematic thinkers of Western philosophy. His translation of Christianity into philosophy did not remain underground like that sketched unsystematically by previous Gnostic and Hermetic thinkers. He taught it openly to a wide following in the greatest German universities of his time. Never in the previous history of philosophy since Aristotle did it seem so clearly that that entire previous history culminated in the work of one man. By general consensus, Hegel's philosophy became the new *target theory*, and whether or not the whole history of philosopher was over would now depend on finding a way beyond Hegel. Various schools of philosophy since Hegel have sought, one way or another, to go beyond Hegel: *existentialism* (Kierkegaard, J-P Sartre), *historical materialism* (Marx), *pragmatism* (Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey), *analytic philosophy* (G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell).

1. Existentialists like Kierkegaard and Sartre held that Hegel reduced reality to a philosophical system of concepts, ignoring the irreducible unique individual.



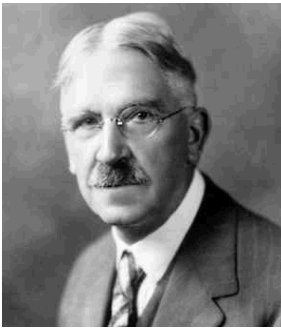
Archive Photos **Jean-Paul Sartre** [1905-1980] Sartre's work focuses on the dilemma of choice faced by free individuals and on the challenge of creating meaning by acting responsibly in an indifferent world. In stating that "man is condemned to be free," Sartre reminds us of the responsibility that accompanies human decisions. Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2002. ©

2. Marxists claimed that Hegel's kingdom of the Spirit, which touched earth with the American and French Revolutions, solved the problems of the past but ignored the problems of the present (especially of the working class poverty) and failed to study the economic conditions underlying oppression and possible future emancipation.



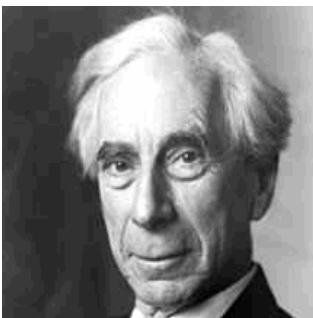
Corbis **Karl Marx** [1818-1883]... argued that the working class should rebel and build a Communist society. Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2002. ©

3. American Pragmatists like John Dewey held that Hegel succeeded in getting beyond the usual rigid either/or patterns of thought (mind or body, individual or community, good or bad, etc) in favor of a more concrete kind of thinking (both body and mind, the individual and the community, both good and bad), but his philosophy had to be reformulated as a form of *naturalism* without getting lost in theology and metaphysics.



Archive Photos **John Dewey** [1859-1852] Dewey emphasized practical ideas in both his philosophical and educational theories, always striving to show how abstract concepts could work in everyday life. He emphasized "hands-on" learning, and opposed authoritarian methods in teaching. His ideas prompted a drastic change in United States... Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2002. ©

4. Analytic philosophers like Bertrand Russell all through the twentieth century complained that Hegel was too ambitious in trying to integrate all reality in a single system of thought, which turned out to be pseudo-science. They held that the advancement of the natural sciences showed that progress in thought could only be made in a piecemeal approach in which a tiny corner of reality or language was analytically abstracted from the rest and made a topic of truly specialized mastery.

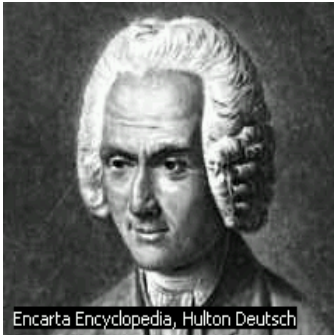


THE BETTMANN ARCHIVE/Corbis **Bertrand Russell** [1872-1970] attempted to demonstrate that mathematics and numbers can be understood as groups of concepts, or classes. Russell and Whitehead tried to show that mathematics is closely related to logic and, in turn, that ordinary sentences can be logically analyzed using mathematical symbols for words and phrases. This idea resulted in a new symbolic language, used by Russell in a field he termed philosophical logic, in which philosophical propositions were reformulated and examined according to his symbolic logic. With G.E.Moore is a co-founder of the analytic movement in philosophy. Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2002. ©

Defenders of Hegel have replied that: 1. Hegel never reduced reality to concepts. He may have given the impression that he did when he attacked the *Romantics* of his time (e.g., Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, 1743-1819; Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, 1768-1834; Jakob Friedrich Fries, 1773-1843 ). These Romantics, inspired by Jean Jacques's Rousseau's emotionalism more than by his simultaneous rationalism, denied the possibility of any true conceptual grasp of reality. We cannot only conceive what is finite, what is limited by something else. For example, the concept of something being a cause is finite because the cause is an effect of a prior cause that limits it. We have concepts of causes and effects, but

reality, which is infinite, cannot be grasped by these concepts. The Romantics wanted to replace an impossible conceptual grasp of reality with emotion and sentiment, with a *feeling* of reality.

During most of Hegel's adult life these Romantics were the most influential philosophers in Germany. Since Hegel thought they were horribly superficial, he became unrelenting in championing the power of thought to know reality. To say that we cannot know everything about reality completely is not to say that we cannot know reality. We know reality as long as we know something about it. And what we know about it becomes increasingly complex, concrete, and many-sided as history of thought advances. There is always some nuance of feeling or individual expression that is not conceptually known, but we should not make a religion of not thinking and wallowing in what is unutterable as the Romantics did.



Rousseau defended the rights of feeling in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but he went on to base the state on an abstract general will.

2. Hegel never denied that the story of human oppression and liberation is conditioned by economics. Hegel is not standing on his head as Marx thought, but was always squarely on his feet. However, he was mainly interested in comprehending the present time through scientific knowledge of its historical self-construction. Unlike Marx, Hegel believed that there is no *science of the future*. And because the past cannot be changed, there was no point for a philosopher to study closely its economic conditions. (Hegel might admit that there are more or less intelligent non-scientific *guesses* about the future. He might grant that Marxist studies of trends altering established *proportions between variables*—such as investment and the return on investment, economic growth and pollution—make our guesses more intelligent. But the study of these trends and proportionalities belongs to *social science*, not philosophy.)

3. Hegel rightly recognized that theology and *metaphysics* are inescapable. If you say that *the supernatural* does not exist, you make *nature* into your God, since nature comes to be unlimited by anything outside it. Yet that is a bad theology or metaphysics, since it does not recognize the fact that art, religion and philosophy are not just human activities. Since human beings are a part of nature, what they achieve nature achieves through their agency. The *whole* acts in and through the act of the *part*. When your hand picks up a ball, you pick up the ball through your hand. So when in religion you think the *infinite*, the infinite succeeds in thinking itself in and through the *finite*, and through your own finite thinking. *Art, religion, and philosophy* are the self-awareness not just human beings, but also of nature, of God.

4. If reality (or even any microcosmic grasp of reality) is an integrated *organic whole* of essentially related parts, analyzing one part in abstraction from this rest only falsifies it. The fact that it is difficult to take all reality in a single system of thought does not justify not trying. We may never get a perfect all-embracing system, but we will get closer to it by trying. The system we do get will be closer to the truth: it will have a higher *degree of truth*, and ultimately it will even participate in complete systematic knowledge of the whole. The part partakes of the whole. This is so even if the whole is an uncompleted process. Martin Luther King, Jr., participated in a civil rights movement that is not over even today.

Philosophers even today have not reached agreement as to how to go beyond Hegel, and that is the best reason today for us to return to Hegel, to go over his moves more slowly, and to see if there is way beyond him and beyond his unprecedented attempt to sell Christianity as philosophy. No matter how the attempt fares, it teaches much about both Christianity and its relation to philosophy.

#### 4. *Christianity's Divine-Human Superdrama*

The essential stages of the divine-human superdrama of world history according to the orthodox account are: *Creation* (including paradise), the *Fall* (including sin, the Law and the prophets), the *Incarnation*, and the coming of the *Holy Spirit*. According to orthodoxy, the Creator is eternal, but Creation commences history. Christ is eternal, but the Incarnation of Christ is in history. And the Holy Spirit is eternal, but its descent upon human beings is in history. History ends with the descent of the Holy Spirit on all human beings, or at least all redeemed human beings, in the Kingdom of God at the end of history. History from beginning to end results from interaction between human and divine action, and cannot be understood as simply due to human action. The Fall is a human response to God's creation, including paradise and God's offer of it to human beings. The Incarnation is God's response to human action in the Fall after the failure of redemption through the Law of Moses. The descent of the Holy Spirit fulfills Christ's promise to human beings in the Gospel of John.

World history is a divine-human superdrama in which God plays three roles according to the trinity, but which is not completely written by God, since human beings have *free will* in their response to divine initiatives. Human free will means that human beings could have acted differently. Every human choice might have been different. No choice is completely determined by the past. Orthodox Christianity concludes from this that each human being is responsible for his or her choices and thus deserves or does not deserve redemption, though through Christ human beings are redeemed even if they do not deserve it. If they were not responsible for their actions, they would not merit divine punishment or reward, and Christ would not be needed to suffer in their place for any merited punishment. It therefore appears that orthodox Christianity is inextricably wedded to the philosophical assumption that free will exists and that it makes for moral responsibility.

If an act of willing were not completely determined, it would not be completely determined by the person's environment or by the person's genes. Nor would it be completely determined by the person him- or herself prior to the act. Therefore, that person would not be fully responsible for the act of willing. The act would descend on the person so to speak out of the blue. The act would not be an act *by* that person. If any act of willing were fully determined by a personal agent as an act *by* that person, that person would be responsible for it, but by the same token the act would not be a free will act. The willing would be a fully determined willing. Yet, though the person would be responsible for the act, what would be responsible for the person and thus, more ultimately, for the act? The person is not responsible for his or her own existence, since that person would then have to exist before he or she exists in order to cause that existence.

The conclusion, as we already saw in the last chapter, is that either free will exists or does not exist, but in either case moral responsibility does not fully exist. In the last chapter we concluded that through your intentions you are responsible in part but not wholly, in general but not in particular, for your individual actions. We concluded that free will, uncaused acts of choice, are a hindrance rather than a help to moral responsibility—contrary to widespread belief. Some moral responsibility remains only because no free will

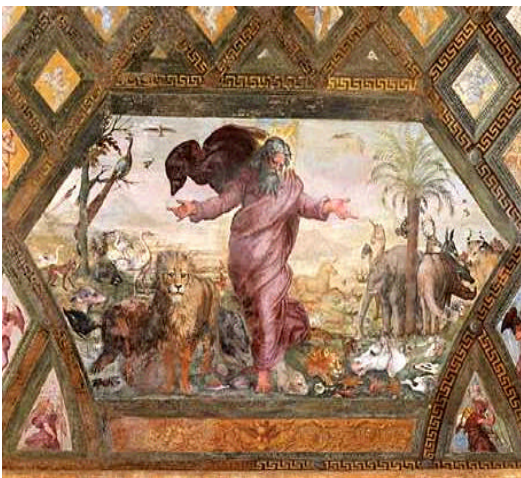
act is completely undetermined. It is caused in part by the agent even while in detail it is not completely caused.

Gnostic Christianity is not a religion of redemption from moral responsibility for sin. It is a religion of divine illumination that dissipates ignorance about who one is, an ignorance for which one is not morally responsible. It assumes that we want knowledge, and we would never chose ignorance of our divine affiliation. Psychoanalysis has habituated us to the idea that we sometimes do prefer ignorance if it is less painful than knowledge. But knowledge as *gnosis*, knowledge of one’s divine heritage, is the opposite of pain, and so only some evil force beyond ourselves can be responsible for the ignorance about ourselves that *gnosis* corrects.

### 5. Orthodox and Gnostic Interpretations of Creation

The divine-human superdrama begins in the orthodox view with Creation, which is an act or series of acts by God the Father. The doctrine is mythically presented in Genesis. Theologians have interpreted the text to mean that God created the natural world out of nothing, though the text itself could also be interpreted as asserting creation out of chaotic pre-existing matter by organizing it: “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (*Gen* 1: 2, 3). This passage illustrates the idea of creation by the word, by saying “Let it be...”

This is creation by the *logos*. This is creation by reason, by Christ, but on the surface it is not creation out of nothingness. The darkness on the deep is not nothingness, but is closer to unorganized matter. Modern Gnostic Christianity is closer to the text of Genesis that the usual theistic interpretation of God’s creation of the world out of nothing. Still, God created the world out of nothing apart from himself. We might say that he created the world by an activity of structuring his own preexisting material base.



Scala/Art Resource, NY *Creation of the Animals*

Italian painter Raphael depicted God creating animals in this early 16th-century fresco in the Vatican museum in Vatican City, Italy. Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001.

The Hebrew view of God was formed in response to conditions of natural insecurity illustrated by the Biblical flood. God was conceived as a king of kings, as the all-powerful monarch which human monarchs only dream of being. The idea of the creator was formed by reflecting on and critiquing the pretensions of human kings who pretended to be all-powerful, often by posing as gods. In an age of history before such human kings, the Hebrews could not have formed the idea of the creator God. *Noah* responded to the flood by forming the concept of an all-powerful protector God in whose hands—unlike those of a deified human king like Pharaoh—he could safely place himself. “And the Lord said unto Noah,

Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation. And Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him” (*Gen 7:1, 5*).

Implicit here is the belief, not that we created God, but that we created the Hebrew image of God as an all-powerful creator and ultimate protector. For God to be the ultimate protector in all situations, he must be all-powerful. If he were not all-powerful, there would be a conceivable situation which might affect us, but which God is powerless to control. To be powerful is to express or manifest one’s power externally. To be all-powerful is for one’s power to be manifested in everything in the external world, and in every state of everything in the world. But this is possible only if God creates everything in the world out of nothing. If there were something or some state of something that God did not create out of nothing, that thing or state would not manifest divine power throughout, and God would not be all-powerful.

However, once the idea of an all-powerful creator God was formed, creation had to be projected back in time long before human kings on whom the Hebrews reflected in forming the idea of creator. God the creator had to be contemporary with nature past and future, not just present. For the idea of an all-powerful creator of nature is inconsistent with the supposition that nature ever existed prior to the existence of this creator. On this supposition some past state of nature would be uncreated by the creator. So creationism imagines God as all-powerful king of the universe. Though this is an idea of God that could have only arisen in an era of territorially limited kings, it is not for that reason incoherent. Maybe only certain eras in history lead us to a correct idea of God.

Yet, by some Gnostic accounts, there was a time prior to God’s so-called creation of the world, a time in which another nature, nature as it originally was, already existed. Gnostic Christians deny both an all-powerful creator and creation out of nothing. To speak of such a creation is to magnify God as creator into the primary image of God. In fact, the *creation* of the world was the *fall of nature* from its original form through God’s own self-limitation, through his exclusion of nature from his own divinity that originally included it. It was at once the *fall of God*: God fell outside himself. The creation of the world is not the first existence of the world, but is the creation of the world as different from mind, self, soul, spirit. The fall of God was the fall of God from oneness of the divine spirit with an uncreated nature. We might interpret this Gnostic concept anthropologically by saying that this uncreated nature was nature as animated by soul life in the experience of a pre-historical humanity of hunter-gatherers.

Myth and historical fact need not be mutually exclusive. Myth can refer to fact while doing so poetically rather than in straightforward prose language. It may successfully refer to fact but under a false description, not under the true description sought by philosophy. The uncreated original nature appears to be the spiritualized nature experienced by what anthropologists call primitive animists. Animists express in ritual and myth the belief that all nature is animated, alive with soul life like the animals. In the Garden of Eden, before the invention of labor, humanity attributed spiritual autonomy and self-creativity to presences in its natural environment.

This spiritualized nature is not the nature whose creation is in question in the *Old Testament*. This second nature is empty of spirit life—despiritualized. The oneness of the human soul with its natural environment may be thought in Gnostic world-views to embody implicit truth and wisdom. Yet it is a wisdom of innocence, a truth unconscious of itself. For the truth of this oneness to be known, the disunion of humanity and nature must be set up and then consciously corrected as error. The divorce between humanity and nature is the disappearance of primitive animism. According to Gnostic accounts, this divorce is the reality to which we refer, under a false description, as the *creation* of the world.

The created nature of the Hebrews is external to the divine spirit. Strange as it may seem, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, before labor and before the fall, at once lived before the creation of nature as fallen. This follows from the Gnostic view that God's creation of the world was executed through the human agency of patriarchal labor. Creation of the created, not self-creative natural world which we know appears as a consequence or, rather than a condition of, the fall from Paradise.

The Hebrew doctrine of creation becomes, on this reading, the theological symbol of a momentous socio-economic revolution in the career of humanity and, indeed, of the universe itself. Ultimately it is a revolution within the process of God's own development. The patriarchal revolution established what Johann Jakob Bachhofen (1815-1887) called *father power* to the exclusion of mother power in human society. Economically, that revolution was marked by the domestication of animals and the introduction of agriculture, all made possible by the invention of labor and the disciplined use of intelligence.

Sociologically, the revolution placed the fathers who controlled the new means of production in positions of domination over wives, children, servants, and slaves within the patriarchal family. This revolution was, of course, not peculiar to the Hebrews. Unique among the Hebrews was rather the entry of the patriarchal image into the very heart of theology. They used it to define God. God is a patriarch.

The whole acts through the action of its parts so long as the behavior of the parts is functional with respect to the goals of the whole. You yourself act through the action of your hand. The Gnostics believed that the universe as a whole strives for knowledge, enlightenment. The entire universe acts through its human members as they fall into ignorance and subsequently achieve enlightenment. When human beings, through the invention of disciplined labor, come to stand over against nature viewed as an obstacle course, the universe itself, acting through humanity, undergoes a self-division of *mind* against *matter*.

The universe falls apart in two opposed parts of itself: a human self over against nature as an illusory obstacle created by the devil creator God (e.g., *Marcion*). The self held in bondage to the devil-creator God gives the natural object the appearance of being opposed to itself. Yet, correcting this false appearance, it then discovers the underlying identity between itself and the natural world. The universe embraces all, and acts through its parts. It acts through both the self and the external world that apparently opposed to the self. The limitation of the self by the world is an act of self-limitation by the universe acting in and through the self.

In Hebrew creationism, human beings do not achieve self-consciousness in consciousness of the created objects over against them. In the orthodox Christian concept of the Incarnation, which was rejected by early Gnostic Christians who believed that creation was evil, God comes to achieve self-awareness in awareness of creation, since he is now incarnate in creation. Even before God's incarnation in the world, God was conscious of himself in being conscious of the world. For the world expressed merely the Creator's will, while it does not express merely your will or my will.

Hebrew creationism, according to orthodoxy, is a precondition to the revelation of the true nature of God. The Incarnation is the identity of God with nature, leading to God's self-realization in his own creation. Self-recognition in the world is self-realization in it, since the world is now the outer realization of one's inner self. The Incarnation presupposes the Hebrew Creation, i.e., the divorce of God and nature viewed as an obstacle to God's self-realization. The Creation of an external, merely physical created nature is God's act of *disincarnation* or disembodiment. The result is God as a disembodied spirit, as pure thought, and nature as despiritualized matter. Spirit had to disincarnate itself, to abstract itself as pure

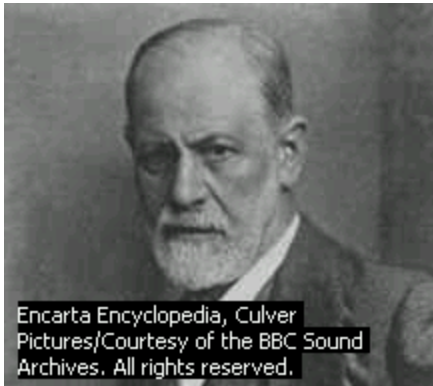
thought from nature. Only then could it enter or rather reenter nature by the Incarnation and discover the error of separating body and soul, and the truth of the identity of spirit and nature.

We have distinguished orthodox Christian and early Christian Gnostic interpretations of creation. According to the orthodox view, creation makes the world first exist. The Gnostic view of creation depends on the orthodox view because it is an interpretation of the secret meaning of the orthodox creation story as presented in *Genesis*. The orthodox interpretation is the exoteric (public) interpretation, while Gnostic interpretations are esoteric. The esoteric Gnostic meaning is frequently an exact reversal of the exoteric meaning. The exoteric meaning is that the God who created this world is good, while the angel who tempted Eve with forbidden knowledge is evil. It is the devil. Early Gnostics completely reverse this. The God who created the world is the devil in disguise, and the messenger angel who tempted Eve with knowledge or *gnosis* is a forerunner of Christ who attempted to free her from the devil and enlighten her true affinity with the divine spirit, the true God above the creator. Because she listened to this messenger she was expelled from Eden and subjected her progeny to much harsher oppression under the law of Moses than she ever experienced in Eden.

On the early Gnostic interpretation, creation is not really the creation of the world from nothing, but is a transformation of how a pre-existing world appears. *Genesis* does not reveal a world that actually comes from nothing. Rather, it is the revelation of a new concept of both God and the world. The world did not really exist before creation. But God now comes to be conceived as so unlimited in power that we can no longer suppose that the world existed prior to creation.

Gnosticism asserts a *non-theistic* concept of God, and in this sense it is *atheistic*, non-theistic. Yet it is not atheistic in the sense of a denial of God. It does not hold that we invented God. God is not merely a psychologically, socially, and economically conditioned idea. God as the One beyond the Creator, as spirit, really exists. It was rather the Hebraic representation of God as an all-powerful Creator and patriarch that was invented. God really exists as infinite, unrestricted from without. According to ancient and modern forms of Gnosticism, the Hebraic Lord is God as manifested under a false description in Orthodox patriarchal religion. The Hebrew representation of God is modeled on the agrarian-pastoral patriarch.

In the actual world, there are many patriarchs, while for the Hebrew there was but one God. Yet, if we follow up basic concepts of *psychoanalysis*, it is a secret wish of every patriarch to be omnipotent and subjugate all others. Noah's God is Noah's own ideal self. The Lord is what Noah himself would be if he were not limited by an external environment which he could not completely control. Even if theology is not mere wish fulfillment, it can successfully refer to God under a description inspired by wishful thinking. The wish of every adult patriarch is, if Freud is right, to be as his father is imagined to be by the adult as a child. The child lives on in the adult's unconscious. In the Hebraic world-view, the cosmos is modeled on the human family.



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**Sigmund Freud** explored the relation between theism and patriarchy in the *Future of an Illusion*.

In the traditional family, there is one patriarch, who is imagined by the young child to be all-powerful. The Hebraic God inherits the all-powerful status that the earthly father loses for the child as the child grows into an adult. Since it is formed in the image of the earthly patriarch, the Hebraic representation of God is of a God who realizes himself in labor. The natural patriarch wins his relatively dominant position through finite labor. The Hebrew Lord wins an absolutely dominant position by the labor of unlimited creation out of nothingness.

The historical idea of the world's dependence on the God who created it comes from reflection on the pastoral-agrarian dependence of property on the patriarchal owner, the ancestor of kings. Ownership implies control. Only dead matter obeying all-determining laws of nature can be fully owned, because it alone could be completely controlled by an all-knowing mind. Patriarchal theology leads to a despiritualization and death of a natural world now entirely created by God. Only human beings with free will escape total divine control, and thus escape the status of being merely property of God. All the materials in so-called human property are really the property of God. Human labor does not create out of nothing, but creates out of the property of God. Human beings borrow God's property. Products of human labor are products of the divine labor of creation with *value added* by the exercise of human free will.

For creationists, the worship of natural objects is *idolatry* because it implies the autonomy or spiritual dignity of nature. It thus asserts nature's status as the mere property of God. To appropriate, making something one's property, is to reduce it to being a mere thing. If ownership derives from labor as *John Locke* thought, God's labor in creating the world entitles him to proprietorship. The *Old Testament* would be completely foreign to a society of food gatherers or hunters before the invention of labor in the agricultural and pastoral revolutions. The earliest food gatherers had no sense of what we understand by "labor" and "property".

Since the source of creative labor is the applied intelligence of the patriarch, the patriarchal God of the Hebrews is, above all, characterized by the power of thought. It is ultimately thinking that is all-powerful. For a minority of philosophers, the thinking of an all-powerful being may only be a commonly accessible image of God, so that God is not literally patriarchal or male. But the majority takes the image quite literally.

## 6. *The Fall*

The crowning works of God's creation were human beings, made in his image. From the Hebrew perspective, our likeness to God was our ruin, not our glory. It was the source of the Fall. The Fall of a human being is its revolt against its creaturely status. It was the human being's rise against God, against the

divine will. It was his or her pretension to the status of being an independent Creator like God. In the Garden of Eden, the divine will was not commanded to human beings merely in the form of an edict. The divine will is revealed in natural law, in the laws of nature, not in any legislated or legislated law. The divine will was thus embodied in creation itself, since the way the world reflects in every way the will of the creator. It is possible to disobey legislated law without abolishing its status as law, but it is not possible to disobey natural law if it is truly natural law. Therefore, a human being's rise against divine law in the Garden of Eden might attempt to disobey natural law, but it cannot actually disobey it.

Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Since she succeeded in doing this, doing it did not violate any divinely willed natural law. She exercised free will, which is part of the natural law of human nature. One common interpretation is that she gained sexual knowledge that God commanded her not to have by commanding her not to eat of that tree. Another common interpretation is that sexual knowledge was permissible, but that the Fall lay in developing guilt because of such knowledge. Yet, how does guilt enter the picture? The patriarchal social revolution, which accompanied the agricultural and pastoral economic revolutions, severely restricted the expression of sexuality. *Primitive promiscuity* was no longer permitted. Sexuality is allowed only in marriages in which dominant patriarchal figures, who restrict the sexual expression of all other members of the family—of daughters and sons tempted by marriage into the wrong families, but especially of wives.



THE BETTMANN ARCHIVE *Adam and Eve* According to the second account of creation in the biblical book of Genesis, Adam was created from the dust of the earth and placed in the Garden of Eden; Eve, the first woman, was created from one of Adam's ribs. Tempted by Eve, Adam ate the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the two were expelled from Paradise for their disobedience. Here, in the engraving *Adam and Eve* (1504), by German artist Albrecht Dürer, the Serpent prompts Eve to share the fruit with her mate.

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Wives may even be kept in tents or under veils, as some Middle Eastern societies today, in order to enforce the restrictions. The function of the restrictions on wives is to permit the patriarch to be sure who his legitimate children are, the children to whose labor he has a right. Yet suppose that the restrictions are not successful, that there are violations of the patriarchal commandment, and that those who live by the law are made to repent and judge their own licentious conduct that they failed to control from patriarch's point of view. They will identify with the patriarchal aggressor and incriminate themselves as the best way to protect themselves from harsh punishment. On this reading, it is not sexual knowledge generally that is prohibited. Rather, illicit sex, forbidden sex is a special kind of sex, it is any kind that threatens to curtail patriarchal power.

Nature was reduced to a collection of mere things. Yet the *Genesis* claim that nature is mere matter devoid of spirit is the greatest error conceivable about the world. Nature and spirit are one. Early animistic human communities in the Garden of Eden believed this. And twentieth century arguments for

panpsychism argue for the same today. On this view, the Fall is the rise of the irrepressible spirit of nature against a God who would reduce nature to being merely created and thus non-creative.

All human creativity, in the Hebraic view, is ultimately borrowed from God, the result of God's creative power working through us, although by free will human beings can deflect this power one way or another. The Hebraic response to a human being's self-assertion as an autonomous creator is like that of a father who experiences his child's growth toward adulthood as a painful *Fall* of his own offspring. The Fall may have been due to the fact that human beings display the divine image all too well. Human beings in the image of God are *created creators*. The Fall occurs when they act like uncreated creators, when they try to create without giving proper credit to the uncreated divine creator.

The Fall led to a bad conscience, embarrassment over one's nakedness. The voice of conscience is the internalized voice of patriarchal authority. At its deepest level, it is the voice of the patriarchal creator God. Banishment from the Garden of Eden, which supplied all one's needs without the need of labor, obliged one to earn one's living by labor. Interpreted as an actual event in prehistory, expulsion from the Garden of Eden seems to have coincided with the abandonment of the life of a food gatherer and hunter. Yet human labor is the imitation of God as creator. Human beings strangely resemble God the creator more closely after the Fall than before. In *Genesis*, it is suggested that God was jealous of human beings who wanted to be like him. The Fall viewed as the Rise of the irrepressible creative human spirit may not seem to be a bad thing. But if God as the creator is the fall of God into alienation from the created world, human imitation of this fallen God will result in the same alienation, the same separation from the world as is experienced by this God.

The hunter-gatherer performs life-sustaining activity. Yet unlike the disciplined labor of historical civilizations, and unlike God's labor in creating the world, it is not repeatedly scheduled on a day-by-day basis. God worked six days and rested on the seventh. The very idea of scheduling a day of rest, for human beings or for God, implies that work days impose an arduous schedule. Before the invention of labor, a day's work is a day's play. After the invention of labor, disciplined labor, work is abstracted from life activity and absolutized in the negation of play. The labor, which in *Genesis* is punishment for the Fall, life by the *sweat of the brow*, marks our existence in the image of God as creator.

Of course, there remained a difference between human and divine labor. The human laborer is finite, the divine laborer is omnipotent. But the similarity is also striking. God as creator did not inhabit the Garden of Eden. The creation of the world, according to the modern Gnostic conception illustrated by *Jakob Böhme*, was the *fall of God*. Any labor requiring a rest day is punishment for God as well as for human beings. Labor, whether divine or human, alienates the laborer from the product of labor. Rest from labor in transformation of the world allows the laborer to contemplate the world as it is in itself. It allows the laborer to surrender his or her will to power in sympathy with the world's own will.

In labor one seeks to transform the world in the light of one's own narrow self-will. This narrow self-will is at the root of sin and the Fall. The standpoint of the laborer divorces one from any possibility of communion with nature. The world becomes an *object*, an *obstacle*: it *objects* to the worker's project, and the worker must wrestle it into subjection. The worker seeks to subject the world to his or her will, to master it. Adoption of the standpoint of worker is an act of self-disincarnation. It establishes oneself as a *thinking subject* over against a world to be conquered, and this world includes one's own tired *body*. The worker is not his or her body, since the body, too, must be mastered and subjected to discipline.

The creation of the world in *Genesis* is at least the creation of a new conception of the world—the conception that underlies labor. According to this conception, the world is a field of *raw materials*, *obstacles*, *instruments*, and *products*, all relative to the project of labor. Among the ancient Hebrews the world first came to be in terms of what it must be from the standpoint of labor. But if the world is the product of labor, the laborer can have no sense of oneness with it. One can have no sense of the spiritual dignity of the hammer, wood, or nail while hammering the nail into the wood. As you dominate the material with which you work, you cannot fully recognize yourself in the product of your labor. For as an agent of production, you are productive, not produced.

### 7. *The Incarnation*

As we pass to the Incarnation in Christianity's divine-human cosmic superdrama, we must remember God's alienation as creator from the world. Before the Incarnation God's need to identify with the world and achieve self-realization through self-recognition in the world is frustrated. The Incarnation achieves reconciliation between God and nature, specifically, between God and human beings. In orthodox Christianity, this reconciliation responds to human need. In Gnostic Christianity, it responds at once to a divine need. The very idea that God could have an unsatisfied need is foreign to Christian orthodoxy. Since God is perfect and all-powerful, whatever he needs he would want to get and would be able to get. Gnostic Christians, however, have insisted that there are certain logical laws of self-actualization that even God must follow, that he is not actually perfect from the start. God is not free to make a square circle, and he is equally not free to actualize himself in the world directly and immediately. *Self-actualization* is based on conscious knowledge that the world is the outer actualization of one's inner self. It can only be attained indirectly, through prior alienation from the world. Self-actualization is the overcoming of *alienation*. In the Incarnation, a discarnate and alienated God ceases to be disincarnate. God ceases to relate to the world merely as a creator and owner to things created and owned. He does so by assuming the standpoint of the natural creature and acknowledging its needs.

In what follows, we first consider the Incarnation as it is more usually considered by orthodox Christians, namely, from the human side of the relationship between God and human beings. The Incarnation responded to the Hebrews' increasing sense of helpless sin in the ancient world. The increasing sense of sin reflects the human being's increasing identification with the judgment passed upon him or her by God. In psychological terms, the *pre-Christian state of mind* reflected an increasingly severe judgment of one's own conduct within the context of a *religious ethics* in which the voice of conscience is the internalized voice of God, and in which guilt takes the form of sin. An all-knowing God, unlike human judges, condemn one's apparently honorable conduct by scrutiny of its inner motives.

*Freud* believed that the increasingly complexity of civilization leads to increasing repression of impulse, and hence to increasing guilt before the internalized authority of society. Can the voice of social authority be equated with the voice of God, since both seem increasingly severe in their judgment? Some sociologists, such as *Emile Durkheim*, suggest this. If we combine the Gnostic interpretation with this sociological view, we get the result that social authority is the devil, a false god, and that the true god is the

universal self that is a law unto itself, and that lies beneath the different finite selves that are dominated by internalized external authority.

The Roman world in which Christianity arose with its gladiators and frequent wars often seems hard and brutal. A victorious Christianity did little to correct this prejudice. Yet, if Freud is right, the pre-Christian need for salvation from sin bears witness rather to the progress of civilization in the Roman world than to a decline into brutality. The ethic of Jesus and its reception in the Roman Empire testify to heightened moral sensitivity.

We need not suppose that people sought salvation and immortality in another world because the Roman world was barbarian. The so-called God of Wrath of the *Old Testament*, who threatens material misfortune, presupposes an absence of pangs of conscience. Jesus' contempt for merely external conformity to moral law testifies to a new inwardness, a heightened emphasis on purity of motive and heart. Since God knows one's most secret thoughts, no matter how impeccable one's outward conduct, there can be no freedom from sin unless one's thoughts and inner impulses are equally impeccable. But that is a high standard. Orthodox Christianity thus emerged as a religion of salvation. It presupposed that the individual stood in need of a moral salvation that could not be effected by his own meager efforts.

Psychologically, in its origins, orthodox Christianity presupposed an intensification of guilt. Christ is needed to atone for human sin through the Crucifixion. Yet the *law of love*, whose ultimate demonstration was Christ's acceptance of the Crucifixion for the sake of all humanity, is complex. On first judgment, such a law appears to be a contradiction in terms. Law can only command *external behavior*. Love contains an inner dimension of feeling and compassion over which human beings cannot command, or at least over which they cannot command in the immediate present. We do not say that selfless love is nothing but inner feeling. That would be sentimentalism. The inner feeling of love for others must result in some outer actions in order for such love to be authentic. More than that, these actions have to be intelligently planned to actually help others.

Christian love is *helping*, and helping requires real knowledge of the *needs* of others as contrasted to their idle *desires*. Needs are discovered not by asking people what they want, but by observing the psychological or physical suffering that results from deprivation. Someone may suffer from being deprived of something that he or she does not need, but in such cases we speak of *addictions*. The difference between needs and addictions is that the suffering that results from lack of what one is addicted to is temporary. It is a withdrawal symptom. But the suffering that results from lacking what one needs, such as food or security, does not go away. Here the deprivations results in real *illness*.

Yet we must allow the possibility that some addictions, such as knives and forks and many other slow acquisitions of *civilization*, become needs. Knives and forks may have started as an addiction, but many of us today would not want to recover from their withdrawal, and perhaps could not even do so. A difference between Jesus and John the Baptist is that Jesus did not attempt ascetic withdrawal from the amenities of civilization. That is why Nietzsche once called him a Greek among Jews. As Leonardo's *Last Supper* suggests, he enjoyed something of the Mediterranean art of living.



“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him” (*Mark 3:16*)

THE BETTMANN ARCHIVE **Saint John the Baptist** emerged from many years of self-teaching in the desert to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah, as prophesied in the Old Testament. He led an ascetic life like the Old Testament prophets and spent years preaching the importance of penitence and baptizing the faithful in the Jordan River. John's work culminated in his baptism of Jesus. Microsoft © Encarta © Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001



*The Last Supper*

Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (about 1495-1497) decorates a wall at Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy. This mural depicts the moment immediately following Christ's dramatic announcement to his disciples that "One of you shall betray me." Microsoft © Encarta © Encyclopedia 2002. ©

There is such a thing as stupid selfless love, all feeling and no intelligent action, and that is not what Christian ethics is about. Nonetheless, the feeling of compassion for the suffering of others remains essential to Christian love. Such love could not be displayed by a mindless computer, no matter how efficiently it calculated what others need and how to get to for them.

A non-loving person cannot make him- or herself a loving person from one moment to the next by a simple act of will. Yet, it might be possible for a human being to choose to be a selflessly loving person over a period of time by the controllable external behavior of reading the appropriate inspirational literature or by attaching oneself to a particular church that helps one's inner growth. In other words, one may command one's future feelings. But the impossibility of commanding one's present feelings means that no one sins by having hateful current feelings so long one makes all possible progress toward having future loving feelings. To sin is only not trying to make such progress. Yet this account may suggest that human beings can redeem themselves by working on their future selves. However, the two examples just given making one's future self into a project indicate a role for inspirational literature and an appropriate church. If Christ and the Holy Spirit are present in that literature and in that church, one is after all not saving oneself merely by one's own efforts, though one has participated in one's own salvation to the extent of opening oneself by free will to the influence of Christ and of the spirit.

The law of love, then, must command future feelings of selfless love. But the commandment would be meaningless if the love it commanded were relegated to an indefinite future. A genuine command must be accompanied by a way of testing whether the command is obeyed. To follow the law of love means to set deadlines, e.g., to promise oneself to be a loving person by ten years from now, or perhaps by the time one dies. When understood in this way, the fact that present feelings cannot be commanded does not after all make the law of love a contradiction in terms. Yet when the future time arrives at which one is a loving person, selfless love will no longer be commanded. Rather, the individual will spontaneously live in love,

without any effort of obedience. The commandment of present selfless love is a contradiction whether one achieves such love in the present or does not. The law of love as a law is coherent only as a law of future love.

A second conceptual problem in the law of love concerns not what is commanded but the motive for obeying the command. The motive behind obedience to law generally is narrow *self-interest*, specifically one's selfish interest in the avoidance of punishment. Yet the motivation behind Christian love is self-giving, the opposite of selfish calculation. However, this conceptual problem is again solved if we remember that the commanded selfless love must be in the future. In the present, it is possible to pursue, out of selfish motives, future selflessness. If one is pursuing future selflessness in the present, it is possible to act out of selfishness. One can calculate, for example, that if one ever attained selflessness one would no longer sin, and thus would no longer punish oneself or be punished for sin. To sin is to violate the law of selfless love, and thus is to be selfish. The selfish practice of present selflessness is incoherent, but the selfish pursuit of future selflessness is not.

The *law* of love seems to be out of place in the actual practice of selfless love. It seems to introduce a legalism that has no place in the life of Christian love. Could it be that Jesus used the language of legalism and the *law of love*, despite the fact that it has no function in the *ethics of love*, merely because he was a Jew, and because the Jews were the people of the Law? Perhaps his rhetorical situation in addressing his people required him to use the language of the law. Otherwise, he would not have had an audience. Even in subverting legalism, he was obliged to present his message as *new wine* placed in the *old bottles* of the law, passing over the fact the wine shattered the bottles. Yet we have argued that the legalism did have a function in Christian ethics. Its function was to direct human beings to convert to a future freedom from the law, from sin, from selfish calculation, and from satisfaction with external action behavior without concerning oneself with the inner spirit of action.

## 8. *The Crucifixion*

The two conceptual problems concerning commanding selfless love and the motive behind such love stand apart from a third problem, the difficulty in knowing whether we are capable of living up to a law commanding limitless love. In his earthly teaching, centered on the law of love, Jesus worked against the assumption by which he founded Christianity through the Crucifixion. The suggestion in this teaching is that human beings can respond positively to the message of his teaching. The Crucifixion, the last chapter of the Incarnation, presupposes that a divine initiative is necessary for human beings to be redeemed. The law of a love so great as to embrace one's enemies places a far greater demand on us than *Old Testament* law. It heightens the awareness of sin. Yet the same law of love, which commands us to detach ourselves from self-interest and to live for others as Christ lived for us, can, if we but inwardly follow it, release us from the guilt of sin. Christian love would have us dissociate from the private self-interest and selfishness which are responsible for sin, and that is how salvation comes to us from Christ, who is love. By welcoming Christ into his or her life, the old selfish self dies and gives way to a new self in Christ. When one acts in a loving manner, the old selfish self is no longer present and hence cannot take credit. It is Christ in the human being who acts.



[Grunewald  
Crucifixion,  
Isenheim  
Altarpiece  
c1510-15](#)

The law of love only intensifies guilt if we accept it without living up to it, but it releases us from guilt if they can live up to it. Orthodox Christianity is based on the inability of humans to live up to the law, and it thus appears to be premised on the failure of Jesus's earthly teaching. The Crucifixion was necessary to jolt human beings into surrendering themselves not merely to the love that appears in the historical Jesus, but to its more developed form Christ after the Crucifixion. Through this surrender of their original selves, Christians collectively constitute the resurrected Christ, the Church as the spiritual body of Christ.

To orthodox Christians, however, the meaning of the Crucifixion is not immediately evident as boundless divine love. It becomes clear only in the light of the physical Resurrection in an individual human body. The physical wonder of the Resurrection revealed the Crucifixion to be nothing less than the death of God. Jesus was Christ. God had sacrificed Himself to atone for human sin so human beings would no longer have to do so.

The living example of boundless love in death was a stimulus for the participation of others in a similar love. Jesus said before the Crucifixion that he had to depart so that the Holy Spirit could descend on his disciples, so that they could be reborn in his Spirit. This more Gnostic explanation of the Crucifixion is different from the explanation that orthodox Christians usually give. They usually say that the Crucifixion was necessary to redeem human beings from their sins. But we have seen that Gnostic Christians did not dwell on sin. They dwell on the problem of ignorance about oneself and about gnosis.



*Baptism of Christ*  
Piero della Francesca, ca. 1445. Jesus's baptism in the Gather's spirit pointed to the baptism of his disciples in his spirit after his death. With that they would cease to be disciples and become members of his spiritual body or church.

The second explanation of the necessity of Christ's death, which is given in the *Gospel of John*, is far more Gnostic. Jesus had to go because his physical present to the disciples as *rabbi* prevented the Spirit of enlightenment from truly entering the lives of the disciples. Most human beings even today find it impossible to fly by their own wings while they are still students at a university, and the more gifted their teachers are the more difficult this is. As long as one is still a student, the truth one receives from teachers is scrupulously attributed to those teachers. It would be an act of disrespect for a student to claim that he or she holds that truth independently.

There were of course other ways for Jesus to go away than to be crucified on a cross, but the crucifixion was demanded by a party of Jews to which *Pontius Pilate* yielded. Thus, the Crucifixion may be explained historically without supposing it to be the redemption from sin that orthodox Christians take it to be. To the orthodox, Christ's payment for past human sin made it no longer necessary for us to pay. But it also made it possible for us, through resurrection in Christ, to overcome future sin. To Gnostics, Christ's death by whatever means makes the enlightenment of his disciples possible. No longer finding Christ before them and outside them as their teacher, they could find his spirit within them. We may wonder how Gnostics were able to live without sin. Most Gnostics believed that they, too, had once lived in bondage to God the Father, the devil god. They then knew sin, the violation of the Father's law. Their fellow orthodox Christians were still in such bondage. Orthodox Christians interpreted the life and death of Jesus within the logic of sin and redemption from sin. Gnostic Christians interpreted the same events in Jesus' life within the new logic of autonomy, enlightenment, and the Holy Spirit

### 9. *The Holy Spirit*

The Crucifixion, following upon the Incarnation, is a further act of *Disincarnation* and *Disembodiment*. The original disincarnation marked the first emergence of the concept of God as a supernatural Creator. This concept of God coincided with the death of polytheistic nature gods and human-like Olympian gods that were incarnate in nature. The idea of the incarnation of God in nature is certainly not original with Christianity. It was novel and shocking only to the Hebrews. Practically all other religions identified God or the gods either with nature or with elements, things or persons in space and time.

The Hebrews gave the Christians a view of the relation of God and the world without which the news of the Incarnation would have been quite boring. Divinity, according of this new concept, abandoned this world. Because the Creator is creative and nature is created but is fundamentally non-creative, creation was a denial of an original incarnation. According to the wisdom of most peoples, creationists make the greatest possible mistake about world, but the Christians believe that the truth can be self-conscious only through the emergence and correction of error. Reason does not consist in knowing the truth. It is being conscious of the truth in contrast to untruth.

The dis-incarnation following from the Crucifixion, the second dis-incarnation, is not a denial of the incarnation of God in the world in general. It is only a denial that God's Incarnation in a particular individual, the historical Jesus, completes the work of the Incarnation. The Crucifixion is a dis-incarnation that prepares the way for a new and expanded Incarnation. For it announces the Resurrection, a re-incarnation of God in the world, a second coming. In the original Christian Incarnation by the orthodox interpretation, God incarnated himself out of infinite compassion for all in but one individual, Jesus. Incarnating himself in an individual of such lowly station, he demonstrated his love for even the most lowly of human beings. Yet the Incarnation in Jesus was finite, exclusive, and incomplete. Jesus had to die for the work begun in this first Incarnation to be completed, for the rest of the world to be included in an infinite Incarnation. The

Crucifixion was followed, for the orthodox, by a first, individual Resurrection. This was a second Incarnation of Christ in the world as he appeared to the Apostles, confirming his victory over the grave. Then followed the Ascension of Christ to heaven. This was a new, third disincarnation, announcing the Second Coming, the final infinite Incarnation of God in the world through the Holy Spirit.

This third and final Incarnation is recognized to be historical by modern Gnosticism as well as by orthodoxy. The second Incarnation that preceded the Ascension (of which Gnostics are often skeptical because it requires a physical wonder) was still, like the first Incarnation, that of an exclusive individual who appeared to the Apostles. Yet in the third Incarnation of the Second Coming Christ is no longer a single individual. He rather merges with the kingdom of God. Through Christ, the Father's only son, humanity inherits the kingdom of heaven, which becomes the kingdom of God on earth. This is a Gnostic interpretation, since it presupposes the idea of the death of the Father. By rebirth in Christ, human beings share in Christ's inheritance. Our glorification in the kingdom through Christ is our rightful assumption of the divine image the creator, but also of rest from creation.



Scala/Art Resource, NY  
*The Ascension*

Italian painter Andrea Mantegna painted Jesus Christ ascending to heaven. Completed around 1464, the painting is in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy.

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### 9. *The Alternation of Creation and Incarnation in Human Life*

In the Old Testament, assumption of the divine image signified the Fall. Through Christ and the Incarnation, existence in the divine image is no longer a Fall from paradise into the alienation of labor and opposition to the world. On the orthodox account, God as Father or Creator incarnates himself in his own creation because of his substantial identity with the Christ, who is incarnate in Jesus. So human beings, inheriting the divine kingdom, imitating the divine image, come to realize the divine image of the incarnation. Just as the Creator found himself through his Son in the world he had created, human beings find themselves in the world they have create. They do so by resting from the labors of their creative labor. God rested from his labor of creation, according to *Genesis*, on the seventh day.

Hegel understood human participation in the incarnation to take the form of empathy (i.e. self-transposition (*Versetzung*) into experience of others). God the Father transposed himself into the experience of human beings. In other words, he took our point of view, he suffered our suffering. We do

the same with respect to other human beings. Resting from our own labors, we come to know, interpret, and then understand their actions and creations.

Consider now this proposition: rest from one's own labor implies self-incarnation in the product of even that labor, not merely in the product of the labor of others. If this is true, the Creator was, without knowing it, incarnate in creation long before Christ's incarnation in Jesus, indeed, immediately following creation of the world. Yet what "incarnation" in the world means here seems to be a kind of sympathetic identification with it. In retirement and rest, human beings realize themselves in products of their labor through non-creative, receptive, sensitive participation in the self-creativity of those products. They take delight in the spectacle of their own creations developing autonomously with a life of their own, in unforeseen ways. The work of divine self-incarnation in the world is complete only when the mind-matter dualism that we know from *Genesis* and again from the modern world (and from the modern philosophy of *René Descartes*, 1596-1649) is laid to rest. Through the divine image human beings take part in God's self-separation from the world.

The above paragraph interprets an "incarnation" to mean giving up the role of a controlling creator to identify with one's children even as they grow up and produce their own creations. Yet that is not what, according to orthodoxy, the Father did in incarnating himself in the world through Jesus Christ. Christ, who proceeds from the Father, has no autonomy to surprise the Father. The Father knows the script from beginning to end. When orthodox Christians refer to the death of God, they mean the Crucifixion, but when Gnostics refer to it they mean the death of the Father. The Father on a Gnostic interpretation rests, but rest is the opposite of the essence of Father and Creator in the imposition of his will. The resting, retiring, dying Father incarnates himself in the Son on earth by yielding a free initiative to the Son to carry on in the Son's own particular way. The Father dies and yet in the Son still lives. The incarnation has healed the father's alienation from the child. For orthodoxy, the incarnation takes place for the sake of the redemption of the creature from sin. In Gnostic interpretations, it takes place for the sake of the creator. It redeems the dying creator. Christ exists for the self-realization of the Creator who must die as a Creator, but who is reborn in eternal life in unison with the natural world.

To heal the patriarchal divorce between human beings and nature is to recover paradise lost on a higher, reflective level. The original paradise was founded on the primitive animism of the food gatherer and hunter. The new, recovered paradise does not mean that labor ceases to be the economic basis of life. It does not mean that the pastoral, agricultural, commercial, and industrial revolutions are reversed. Rest has meaning only if its contrast with labor is maintained. The self-conscious recovery of paradise means that mind-matter dualism, perpetually re-established on workdays, is perpetually overcome on the day of rest through the self-incarnation of human beings in the world we have made. Yet Sundays of the spirit may not be calendar Sundays.

### 11. *Christian Love: Medieval and Modern*

The historical Jesus, with whom according to orthodox Christianity God's incarnation in the world began, rejected what he called the *world*. The world as understood in the *New Testament*, englobes the principal ethical institutions of life. These institutions according to Hegel were the *family*, *economic society*, and the territorially limited *state*. Economic society, which Hegel called civil society or bourgeois society, consisted in the market place for the exchange of goods and services. But it also included more recent political and private or charitable corrections to perceived injustices of the market place. It includes basic public works, public services, and welfare programs. Civil society is also called bourgeois society

because the rise of the free market coincided in the rise of the bourgeois or middle class and the decline of the Middle Ages. Medieval society was dominated by aristocratic families who held whole states in their domain.

Hegel believed that the future belonged to states that could organize public services and welfare more fairly than private organizations. Most of all, contemporary rational state protects equal rights. With it the state comes into its own, escaping dominion by one of the other two institutions of the world. There were states in the Middle Ages, but they were under family control, while states that govern least and that mainly protect property are under the control of civil society.

The family, market place, and state also existed in Jesus's time, though in somewhat different form in the Roman Empire. The Roman state did not belong to a royal family, so it was different from the medieval state. It attempted some welfare, distributing corn and land to the poorer classes, and it took pride in the rule of law that it sought to extend throughout the empire. But there was no sense of Roman nationality shared by all. Individual families, with little sense of political participation, withdrew into their private economic pursuits. The result was the domination of ethical life by civil society and the market.

Jesus' rejection of the nuclear family motivated by profit is apparent in a number of Biblical incidents. He repudiated on occasion his own mother and family members, and he bid his disciples to renounce their fathers and mothers. Some *New Testament* scholars who interpret Jesus without supposing any articles of Christian faith to be true, such as David Flusser, have suggested that he did so due to the opposition of his family to his mission: his family was dismayed as any family would have been when he abandoned his workbench to announce the kingdom of God. By Flusser's account, the stories of Mary's early understanding of Jesus' earthly mission are fabrications of the early Church. Members of Jesus's family were converted only after the Crucifixion.

The expressions of animosity towards his family and those of his disciples at first seem exaggerated and hardly justified in their severity. It is possible to see in this rejection even a violation of Jesus' own law of love, which commands one to resist opponents with love rather than hate. Christian love as championed by Jesus, because of its opposition to the ethical institutions like the family, threatens to turn into its opposite, into hate and fanaticism:

Do not think I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (*Matthew*: 10:34-36).

Yet Jesus's so-called *sinister sayings* regarding the family can be made consistent with the law of love. To love selflessly is essentially to help in heart and action. But to help is on occasion to raise one's voice to loved ones. We need not interpret Jesus' words as hate for persons. But they do reflect hate for selfish institutions and precepts of the world. Such hate is consistent with a self-less love of persons caught up in these institutions. Jesus was trying to help them by freeing them from the institutions of the world. The preoccupation of families with assuring their sons of a trade and living stood in the way of the incredible notion of the kingdom of God coming through the ministry of Joseph's son.

Jesus's rejection of the other two major ethical institutions of life is equally apparent. His opposition to the values of economic society is evident in several places.

He bids the rich youth to throw away all his wealth, for what does it profit one to gain everything in this world and to lose all in the next? (*Matthew* 19: 16-24). He says that it is more difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. And he tells his disciples to build their treasure in heaven, and urges them not to worry about their own economic welfare: "For consider the lilies of the field..."

Finally, regarding the state, he advocates no more than passive obedience. We should give unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and not refuse to pay taxes (*Matthew* 22:17-21). The way to avoid transforming the Christian love practiced by Jesus into hate of worldly institutions is to endure stoically the rejected institutions as unavoidable burdens, as crosses to be borne in silence. This appears to be his attitude towards the state.

Jesus's detachment from the world meant that he was innocent of the guilt of world. Christian selfless love escapes guilt by rejecting the worldly standpoint of private self-interest as seen in the egoism of the family and in the pursuit of economic gain. This is what is meant by saying that he was *in* the world

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. [8] He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (*John* 4:3-8)

but not *of* it.

But it is less clear that escape from the world would avoid guilt for us as it seems to have done for Jesus. He offered an alternative to a world without love. Modern Christians often prefer a love that remains *in and of the world*. Jesus' distance from the world today risks the guilt of inaction and irresponsibility before the real demands of love.

## 12. *Jesus versus Christendom*

Christianity is not the historical Jesus. It is not the religion of Jesus, who was a Jew. Nor is it even the religion of the early Church after Jesus' death--though Protestants have romantically attempt to return to it. It is rather the religion of the Christian Church as developed throughout its history to the present time. *Hegel* believed that Christianity in the end comes to be expressed in Christendom, in Christian civilization as a whole. *Sören Kierkegaard* objected to this definition of Christianity because he believed that the behaviour of Christians was often unfaithful to the Christian faith. But Hegel has two answers to this. First, he maintains that Christianity can be fully equated with Christendom only at the end of the history of Christianity. Christianity is revealed by its development, and fully revealed only by its full development. Today Christendom may still not fully reveal Christendom.

Secondly, Christendom cannot reveal Christianity if it is inhabited by purely nominal Christians. It must be a true development of the original potential. But Christianity, it may be said, could have developed

in different directions, so that the actual development is no more a full revelation of its starting-point than an adult is a full revelation of a child. Growing up means making choices and sacrificing potentials. The child thus has real career potentials that the adult no longer has, and the same is true of original Christianity in relation to the Christendom of today.

Christendom can reveal the meaning of Christianity only if it can be shown that there is only one essential line of development. This would imply that the different versions of Christianity that might have developed are only accidentally different versions of the essence of Christianity. The history of Christianity would then reveal the essential potentiality of Christianity. A potentiality is revealed only by the process of its actualization. We do not know what a child's essential potential is until we know what that potential is for. Only the actualization of the potential concretely reveals that for which the potential is a potential.

The essential potentiality of Christianity is for the realization of the kingdom of God on earth. The concept of such a kingdom was already present in Jesus's earthly teaching. But Hegel believes that modern world history has revealed more clearly what this potential is by beginning to realize it. It is a potentiality for universal human rights in which each individual exercises two rights: 1. a right to creative labor along with ownership of its product and 2. a right to rest from labor with enjoyment of the sight of one's labor continued in the life of the product, which awakens and becomes a producer its own right. The right to creative labor is, more generally, the right to freedom of choice and freedom of thought. The right to rest in contemplation of the labor of the world on which one has temporarily or permanently ceased to labor is, broadly speaking, the right to welfare. It is, in other words, the right to rest even if one's past labor is sufficient to pay for it.

A universal community in which these two rights are realized is the kingdom of God because, as we have seen, Creation and the Incarnation are the two most significant acts of God in Christian theology, and because in the kingdom of God, as promised, human beings live in Christ. To live in Christ is to imitate the Incarnation by resting from individual labor and taking part imaginatively in the labor of the world. But resting from labor presupposes that one has labored, and to labor is to imitate Creation. To live in Christ is to have lived in the Creator.

Yet original Christianity lacked the notion of universal human rights. Human rights are guaranteed by a state, an institution of the world. The necessity of such rights for the kingdom of God arose only in the historical development of Christianity, in Christendom. Thus only history has revealed that Christianity has an essential potentiality for expressing itself in state-sponsored human rights law. The imitation of God in creating and self-incarnation in creation can be found in original Christianity, at least in its Gnostic forms, but it can become universal only if all individuals, especially the less powerful, are protected by the law.

For Jesus, the law of Caesar was something alien, even though we know it conveyed a natural law tradition. Orthodox Christian philosophers from Saint Augustine on advocated a holy alliance of Church and state, which others (e.g., Thomas Munzer) condemned. But no Christian philosopher before Hegel conceived the state, the rational state, as an essential agent of Christianity in realizing the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Returning to the question as to whether Christendom can be the meaning of Christianity, for Hegel the answer is clear. If Christendom is the civilization that has developed the idea of a state that guarantees rights to labor and the product of labor, to welfare and access to cultural life, then it reveals the meaning of Christianity in a way which the life and teachings of Jesus could not. But His interpretation depends on

conceiving the kingdom of God in a Gnostic fashion. If orthodox Christians prefer not to define the kingdom of God by human rights, Christendom as expressed in the modern welfare state cannot define the essence of Christianity.

Protestants have sought to return the early Church. Their attempt implied important differences between Christendom and original Christianity. But Hegel suggests that these differences can be turned against Jesus and the early Church rather than against modern Christendom. Kierkegaard viewed Christianity as a *conservative movement* as measured by fidelity to a past commitment. Yet Christianity, as *Thomas Altizer* has argued, is a forward-looking religion. Christians take themselves to be vehicles of a divine will whose ways they do not always claim to understand. The meaning of Christianity as a revolutionary movement is not to be found by interrogating further the historical Jesus. It is to be found by grasping the development of Christianity through the modern secular world into the future. To be a Christian is not to be faithful to a creed fixed at some point in the past. It is to surrender oneself to the continuing work of God in the world. Jesus was the seed. Modern Christendom is the fuller fruit. We are tempted to interpret the fruit in terms of the seed. It may make more sense to use the fruit to illuminate the seed.

A chief characteristic of modern Christendom found in *Luther*, *Calvin*, and the Puritan tradition (close to America's colonial origins) is that it has overcome the anti-institutional, anti-worldly bias of Jesus himself. Christian love in the modern world has made peace with the family (Martin Luther), with the market (John Calvin), and with the state (Puritains). It has come to realize itself the secular world. And the secular institutions have thereby been sanctified. In Protestant Christianity, marriage, gainful economic activity and political participation are capable of being fully holy.

This is in contrast to medieval Catholicism. The otherworldliness of Catholicism is closer to the Jesus of history. The monastic vows of *chastity*, *poverty* and *passive obedience* imply a state holier than marriage, earned prosperity, and good citizenship.

It remains to be seen whether, in the Protestant embrace of the secular world, it is the secular or the holy that wins out. Protestantism does not repudiate of domestic, economic, or state selfishness so long as the selfishness is turned by God to a higher purpose. A need for salvation from divinely prohibited selfishness as such presupposes a bondage to external authority which is absent from the mature adult who has achieved the *ego autonomy* of being self-determined as a law unto one's self. A mature individual does not always behave morally. But when he or she does behave morally, the behavior is based on his or her own insight and self-imposed obligation, not on compulsive obedience to external authority.

### 13. *The Philosophical Rise of Man to Divinity*

When missionaries knock offering salvation from sins, some stare blankly. They either do not know what sin is or cannot recognize it in them. An eroded experience of sin, however, threatens the very existence of orthodox Christianity as a religion of salvation. What future can there be for such Christianity in a world in which fewer experience a need to be saved? Orthodox Christianity appears as a religion for humanity in its infancy, not its adulthood. A mature individual unable to love his enemies can escape a need for salvation through Christ by choosing to live by another law than that of selfless love, since the choice of the law of Christian ethics was not compulsive.

The Incarnation responds to God's own need, not just of human beings. God the Father is not

haunted by sin, was not the slave of a superego. He is not compulsively trying to please an anonymous peer group. Rather, exemplifying full adulthood, the Father has identified with the rational voice conscience. He feels responsible only to the freely self-imposed obligations of his own autonomous ego. Yet, though God as Creator is free of sin, he is still alienated from creation. The *Creator* desires reconciliation with the world he has created. Gnostic Christianity since Joachim de Fiore asserts that human beings in the age of the spirit achieve ego autonomy and free creativity like the Father but without subjection to the Father. And they need reconciliation with the world through the Incarnation without guilty subjection to the superego, the internalized voice of the Father.

Gnosticism require the human being to overcome the standpoint of the sinner and to rise to the standpoint of God the Father himself, just as the Father in dying lowers himself to the level of the human being. Such Christianity is comprehended from the Infinite divine member of the divine-human relationship. Human beings overcome their separation from God, and inherit his kingdom. The human being does not become God, but discovers in God. Participating in the infinite Incarnation of God in the world, the individual becomes a microcosm of the macrocosm. The individual finds the whole divine cosmos in him- or herself: "A true assertion about God is an assertion of [by] God" (Sextus the Pythagorean).

Any philosophy that claims to be true and that wishes to interpret a particular religion charitably will claim to be philosophy behind that religion. It will give a rational interpretation of it, and assign a spiritual meaning to whatever it is inclined to reject on a literal interpretation. Modern Gnostic Christianity strives to comprehend rationally what, in orthodox Christianity, was at first only represented pictorially, mythically, and symbolically. The effect of the *picture thinking* of orthodox Christianity has been to distort the meaning of Christianity. Picture thinking consists in thinking by concrete images. Are images crutches used by thinking to avoid the strain of *pure imageless thought*? Physicists recognize the familiar image of the atom as a little solar system as a crutch that distorts the true nature of the atom. Mathematicians say the same thing of images that attempt to picture infinity. The same is no doubt true regarding visual images of God.

Pictorial representation is like *anatomy*, which juxtaposes in space inseparable parts of an organism as if they were mutually exclusive and could exist apart from one another. Anatomy can be seen or imagined, but the total physiological process by which the organs are inseparable from one another can only be thought. Pictorial representation imposes artificial separations between essentially related terms in the God-humanity relationship. It falsifies the relationship by making God essentially other than, transcendent to, human beings.

An example of this artificial separation exists in the orthodox understanding of the Incarnation. Orthodox Christianity speaks of the Incarnation as God's totally selfless love for what the other, for human beings. Out of infinite love for us, God sacrificed himself on the cross. This picture thinking expresses *abstract thinking*. God is thought in abstraction from that to which it is essentially related. Non-abstract thinking (what Hegel called *concrete thinking*), however, cancels the separation which the imagination and abstract thinking establish between God and humanity. Concrete thinking grasps God as the *true infinite*. This is the infinite that is truly infinite because it includes the finite, the human, within it. The true infinite refuses to exclude the finite like the *false infinite* does: it refuses to become a finite infinite that is contradictorily limited by something finite lying outside it. What abstract thinking understands to be God's selfless *agape* love for humanity, concrete thinking holds to be infinite divine narcissistic self-love. Friendship (*philia*), desire (*eros*), and self-sacrifice (agape love) are three kinds of love. Narcissism is a fourth kind. Contemplative self-love is a kind of narcissistic self-love, but it is non-exclusive. Narcissism

marks God's love for himself, and our love of God within God, who alone is all-inclusive and infinite. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (*John 17:3*).

The "narcissism" of a finite person who falls in love with his own image is a comical self-delusion. One is infatuated with one's mirror image, to the point of being oblivious to one's limitations, and to the hazards of one's environment. But there could be no self-delusion in the narcissism of a truly infinite being such as God. God's love for humanity, if God is truly infinite and all-embracing, turns out not to be love for anything external to himself. Creation and the Incarnation are the drama of God's own self-alienation from nature (Creation) and self-realization through reunion with nature. God is not outside human beings but rather includes them. God reunites himself with nature through human beings who rest from their labors by identifying with nature. They identify with nature as creative (productive), and not just created (produced).

In humanity's divorce from nature, following upon the patriarchal revolution, the universe comes to be internally divided. Humanity belongs to the universe. By the Incarnation of God in creation and—what is connected with it—of human beings (realizing the divine image) in nature, God achieves self-realization through human beings. What orthodox Christianity conceives as selfless divine love for humanity appears from a Gnostic perspective to be God's narcissistic self-love, God's self-realization in a world that is not alien.

When philosophy recognizes that God does not live for what is other, human beings in the imitation of God are no longer required to do so. The way is open for reconciliation between Christianity and a human ethics of individual self-realization in the world. The other cannot be an enemy, for one must find something of oneself in the other in order to realize oneself in the other.

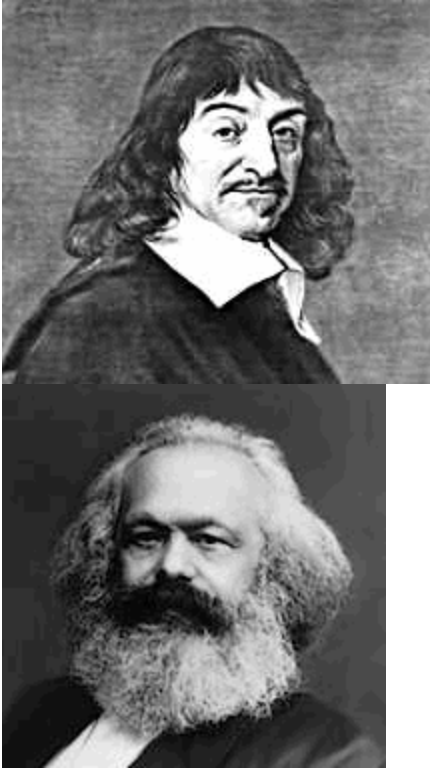
#### 14. *The Necessary Recurrence of Alienation*

The reconciliation of divine self-love perpetually corrects the error of self-abstraction or self-detachment from what is other. This error reflects maintenance of labor as the economic basis of life. A patriarchal orientation to the world remains even if it is no longer the possession of a patriarchal class and is generalized, for example, to women. One concept of women's liberation is the achievement by women of what was originally patriarchal male power. The spirit could not be realized if human society were to lapse into a totally pre-patriarchal relationship to the world. Quiet communion with nature enjoyed by the food gatherer contains no awareness that God transcends alienation from nature.

Creative human laborer suffers alienation from nature. Without this alienation and its self-correction, reconciliation with nature cannot be conscious of itself as the truth about the relationship of human beings to the world. Reconciliation, oneness with nature, comes, we have seen, through infinite self-incarnation in nature by a worker who rests from the labor of surmounting nature as an obstacle course. This self-incarnation is a communion and identification with nature, and at once a communion with fellow human beings who also belong to nature. According to a romantic interpretation, it is a participation in the self-creativity or self-will that exists throughout nature. No individual in nature is a mere means to the satisfaction of human aims. Each has its own aims and agenda. Empathy with their goal pursuits of others leads to a realization that one's own pursuits are only a particular case of universal goal pursuits throughout nature. Through identification with nature, one overcomes the laborer's sense of being limited by nature.

Yet this self-aware empathetic self-incarnation in nature is reserved for Sundays of the spirit. The

René Descartes' dualism of mind and matter is reasserted on workdays to be cancelled on Sundays. As the "father of modern philosophy" Descartes' has contributed to defining modern commonsense. *Karl Marx* held that human labor alone, viewed as an end in itself and not just a means to survival, realizes one's humanity. The truth, from a Gnostic perspective, is rather that all labor alienates human beings from nature, even so-called *creative labor*. Further, this alienation prevents one from recognizing nature as it is in itself, and for itself



Hulton Deutsch **René Descartes**. The first modern philosopher, Descartes held that science and mathematics could explain and predict events in the physical world [, but not the mental world]. Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft

Corbis **Karl Marx**. [Marx, falling heir to Descartes' dualism, held that labor, opposing the human mind to nature as an obstacle course was non-alienating because the specific potential or species essence of human beings is actualized.] Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2002.

The *panpsychist* philosophy of nature attempts to establish by logical argument the view of nature that would make participatory identification with nature possible. The apparently purely physical world is, in fact, pervaded with mind or spirit, and so has a fundamental likeness to us. It holds that even inanimate matter contains sentience, though not biological life. Only in and through intelligent life does the cosmic spirit think itself. (These arguments have been discussed in an earlier chapter.)

Panpsychism is not likely to become the practical, commonsense view of the world. For, despite any theoretical arguments on its behalf, the mind-matter dualism denied by panpsychism is reasserted on workdays. The problem of realizing communism as Karl Marx posed it was one of deciding whether the contrast of leisure days to workdays might someday be overcome by the uncontested triumph of leisure over the constraints of working on nature to survive. Meanwhile, panpsychism, a theory that would help make the Incarnation of spirit in the entire cosmos comprehensible, has practical import only on the Sundays of the human spirit.

### 15. *Immortality*

Modern Gnostics deny the orthodox belief in individual immortality. For orthodoxy eternal life is a personal, *individual immortality*, an endless extension into the future of one's individual stream of sensory

consciousness. Even if this stream is interrupted by a dreamless sleep, it always returns. The chief reward for the individual, according to orthodox Christianity, is blissful individual immortality in heaven. Yet, paradoxically, fixation on such individual immortality may be a last stronghold of the very *exclusive egoism* from which the ethics of selfless love was supposed to deliver one. It appears that individuals are supposed to practice selfless love in order to attain the final goal of exclusive self-love, the total happiness of the *beatitude*, seeing God face to face forever. The exclusive egoism of the world must be distinguished from the inclusive egoism that Jesus himself advocated. “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (*Matthew* 10:1). He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (*John* 12:1).

The conflict between narrow egoism and Christian love exists whether one is talking about the orthodox concept of self-sacrificial love or about Gnostic divine self-love. Narrow egoism, most admit, has its essential place in modern economic and family life. Christian love as practiced by Jesus, through repudiating the exclusive egoism of *economic competition* and *power struggles* in the world, risks reinforcing narrow egoism by freeing it of any religious regulation or control.

Selfless Christian love is elastic enough to embrace the world. It is capable of seeing itself even in its apparent opposite. It can see itself even in a narrow or exclusive egoism but also in expressions of *hate* viewed as possible tools of love itself in the course of *divine providence*. Yet, though the assertion of exclusive private self-interest has its place in the world and may even be an instrument of divine providence, such providence turns the evil of the world to good. But it does not make evil out to be immediately good.

Economic, political, and domestic life make up the sphere of *external action* in the world. Such action requires fixation on narrow goals and interests. Religion, for modern Gnostic thinkers, rests on *inner contemplation* by the individual of its oneness with nature incarnating the divine spirit. It requires abandonment of the *exclusive egoism* appropriate to the competitive institutions of the world. God engages in self-love, not in a selfless love of anything else. Yet divine self-love is *inclusive egoism*, it is inclusive narcissistic self-love. God finds himself by losing himself in creation, and so may we. God embraces all nature in an infinite incarnation of himself. In religion we share in this infinite self-love. Human beings are among its agents. The doctrine of individual immortality is not misguided for asserting an exclusive egoism. Yet it may be misguided for promoting exclusive egoism at the wrong place, in religion.

The principle heterodox concept of immortality interprets it as participation in the institutional life of humanity and, more broadly, as participation in all nature as the incarnation of the Christ, as recreated in the spirit. A Romantic *experience of the individual's release into the vastness of nature* extinguishes the desire for individual immortality. However, in philosophy no *experience* is self-validating. Panpsychism is a part of a *philosophical validation* of any Romantic experience of participation in nature.

A non-individual immortality of losing oneself in eternal life can be tasted in the course of an individual life, as well as at its conclusion. *Eternal life* presents itself as Sunday abandonment of the workaday standpoint of labor. *Labor* is placed in *time*. Labor situates the worker between the obstacle of the present and the unrealized project in the future. Eternal life in one sense consists in finding oneself in the world as it is (under whatever manifestation), outside the pursuit of realized objectives in time. One ceases to try to transform the situation given by the *past* into some *future* by *present* external action.

The desire for immortality merely as one particular individual reflects fixation on the stream of sensory experience. From this perspective, *death* for the individual is the *cessation of sensation*. The

person who does not want to die is an individual who identifies with the stream of this sensation. Yet one who disidentifies with this purely sensory stream of consciousness may instead identify with a community, or possibly with the cosmic life of nature in which he or she temporarily participates. Such a person no longer desires the infinite extension of his or her individual stream of sensory consciousness. The part will never be the whole, but already now it partakes of the whole. What he or she desires may rather be the extension of this public life, or even of the natural life of the universe. Versions of Christianity that promise individual immortality presuppose, from the modern Gnostic perspective, a decline of the sense of community. They presuppose individuals with a reduced ability to identify with any larger whole to which they belong.