

The Gnostic Jesus I

Institute of Advanced Theology
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The discovery of an ancient library of manuscripts at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, together with associated finds, has transformed the study of Christian origins. The diversity of Gnostic beliefs, their complex relationship with other philosophies and religions, the passion of divergent commitments among Gnostic groups, have all become plain in ways that they were not before. Strangely, however, scholarship has not yet explored the connection between these texts and Jesus himself. But if the sources of Gnosticism are read as what they present themselves to be (see *The Testimony of Truth* 1), reflections of religious experience rather than literal history, they illuminate a world of visionary practice that helped shape Christianity and the religious environment of Late Antiquity.

The Gospel according to Thomas

Saying 22

Jesus saw some babies nursing. He said to his disciples, “These nursing babies are like those who enter the kingdom.” They said to him, “Then shall we enter the kingdom as babies?” Jesus said to them, “When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female, when you make eyes in place of an eye, a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then you will enter.”

Internal links: sayings 1, 3, 19, 53, 114

External links: Luke 18:15-17/Mark 10:13-16/Matthew 19:13-15

Mark 9:42-50/Matthew 18:6-9 (cf. Matthew 5:29-30)

Matthew 18:10; Luke 12:8-9/Matthew 10:32-33

Genesis 1:27

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The Gospel according to Philip speaks of salvation as a matter of uniting with one's heavenly image. *The Gospel according to Thomas* (saying 22) also specifies the union of what is above with what is below, the interior with the exterior, as the aim of the Gnostic quest, but *Philip* is more practical. It provides a detailed commentary on this process of union, specifying by means of symbolic language how and where this marriage with a divine image can occur (II.3.67.29-34):

The Lord did everything in a mystery, a baptism and a chrism and a Eucharist and a redemption and a bridal chamber. The Lord said, "I came to make the things below like the things above, and the things outside like those inside, I came to unite them in that place."

The "bridal chamber," the apex in the sequence of mystery, is the "place" where above and below and outside and inside are reconciled, where a person merges with one's heavenly counterpart.

Internal links:

The Gospel according to Philip II.3.74.13-23:

Anointing is superior to baptism, for it is from the word "anointing" that we have been called "Christians," certainly not because of the word 'baptism.'

The Gospel according to Philip II,3.63.34-64.5:

And the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. But Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on the mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed their disapproval. They said to him, Why do you love her more than all of us? The Savior answered and said to them, Why do I not love you like her?

The Gospel according to Philip II.3.59.2-5:

For it is by a kiss that the perfect conceive and give birth. For this reason we also kiss one another. We receive conception from the grace that is in each other.

External links: Mark 6:13; 14:3-9; 15:40-47; John 20:22-23

The Gnostic Jesus III

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Treatise on Resurrection (also known as *The Epistle to Rheginos*) I.4.48.6-49.8:

Now if you recall having read in the Gospel that Elijah appeared – and Moses – in his company, do not suppose that resurrection is an illusion. It is not an illusion; rather, it is something real. Instead, one ought to maintain the world is an illusion, rather than resurrection, which became possible through our lord, the savior, Jesus the kind. And what am I telling you? Suddenly the living are dying – surely they are not alive at all in the world of illusion! -- the rich have become poor, rulers overthrown: all changes, the world is an illusion. But let me not deprecate the circumstances of this world at too great length. Simply: resurrection is not of this sort, for it is real. It is what stands at rest, and the revealing of what truly exists. And it is what one receives in exchange for the circumstances of this world, and a migration into newness. For incorruptibility is streaming down upon corruption, and light is streaming down upon darkness, swallowing it. And the fullness is filling up its lack – these are the symbols of the likenesses of resurrection. This is what brings about goodness.

Internal links:

Treatise on Resurrection I.4.44.21-39; I.4.45.23-46.2; I.4.49.9-23

External links:

The Gospel according to Mary (10.6-20):

I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to him, Lord I saw you today in a vision. He answered and said to me, You are privileged, because you did not waver at the sight of me. For where the mind is, there is the treasure. I said to him, Lord now does he who sees the vision see it through the soul or through the spirit? The Savior answered and said, He sees neither through the soul nor through the spirit, but the mind which is between the two – that is what sees the vision and is –

1 Corinthians 15:35-44:

But someone will say, How are the dead raised, and with what sort of body do they come? Fool, what you yourself sow does not become alive unless it dies! And what do you sow? You sow not the body that shall be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of another grain. But God gives to it a body just as he wills, and to each of the germs its own body. Not all flesh is the same flesh, but there is one of men, another flesh of animals, another flesh of birds, another of fish. And there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but one is the glory of the heavenly and another of the earthly. One glory is the sun's and another the moon's, and another glory of stars, because star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. Sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; sown in weakness, it is raised in power; sown a psychic body, it is raised a spiritual body.

Mark 12:18-27:

And there come to him Zadokites, who say there is not resurrection, and they interrogated him, saying, Teacher, Moses wrote us that if someone's brother dies and leaves a woman behind, but does not leave a child, that his brother should take the woman and raise up seed for his brother. There were seven brothers, and the first took a wife, and dying did not leave seed. The second took her and died not leave seed behind; and the third similarly. And the seven did not leave seed. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection, of which of them will she be wife. For the seven had her as wife? Jesus told them, For this are you not deceived, knowing neither the writings nor the miracle of God?! Because when the dead arise they neither marry nor give in marriage, but are like angels in the heavens. Yet concerning the dead – that they are raised – have you not read in the book of Moses about the thorn-bush? – how God talked to him saying, I am Abraham's God and Isaac's God and Jacob's God? He is not God of dead – but of living --people. You are much deceived!

The Gnostic Jesus IV

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In its release of *The Gospel according to Judas*, the National Geographic Society repeatedly stated that it had "authenticated" the document. Several news agencies simply repeated those claims. But "authentic" turns out to be a slippery term as used by the National Geographic Society. No scholar associated with the find argues this is a first-century document, or that it derives from Judas. The release says the document was "copied down in Coptic probably around A.D. 300," although later that is changed to "let's say around the year 400." So what this amounts to saying is that "The Gospel of Judas" is an authentic fabrication produced by a group of Gnostics. Gnostics believed that their direct knowledge of heaven permitted them to understand what no one else knew, or could know by historical knowledge. For ancient Gnostics to believe in their own powers of divination is characteristic of their religious and philosophical outlook; for their visions to be passed off as historical knowledge in our time is dishonest or self-deceived.

The Gospel according to Judas 35.21-36.10

Knowing that Judas was reflecting upon something exalted, Jesus said to him, "Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the kingdom. It is possible for you to reach it, but you will grieve a great deal. For someone else will replace you, in order that the twelve may again come to completion with their god." Judas said to him, "When will you tell me these things, and when will the great day of light dawn for the generation?" But when he said this, Jesus left him.

The Gospel according to Judas 52.14-24

Then Saklas said to his angels, "Let us create a human being after the likeness and after the image." They fashioned Adam and his wife Eve, who is called Zoe in the cloud. For by this name all the generations seek the man, and each of them calls the woman by this names.

Internal links:

The Gospel according to Judas 33.19-34.26; 38.1-40.26; 44.15-45.2

External links:

Matthew 13:11; 24:3; John 13:25-27; Revelation 12:9.