

Dialog with da Vinci: The Gnostic Gospels by Ken Wilson June 2-3 2006

What are Gnostic gospels? What do they say about the world, God, Jesus, the fix we're in, and how to fix the fix we're in?

Several, including Gospel of Philip, of Mary, of Thomas, of Truth, of Judas. Full blown Gnostics believed a few things, generally:

1. The physical world is evil, not created by God, but by some other spiritual beings who were many steps removed from God.
2. What's wrong with the world is the world itself, which we need to escape.
3. Some have a divine spark, can discover an eternal divine self within; this secret knowledge (gnosis) is key to liberation from source of evil, material world.

History of Gnostic interaction with NT Christianity

- + Paul responds in 1 cor. 8: 1-4
- + 2nd Century Gnosticism in full bloom (Valentinus, 143 A.D.)
- + 4th Cent. Constantine represses Gnosticism
- + 13th Cent. Pope Innocent III oversees an atrocity

Early opponents of Gnosticism were not powerful and privileged, but many died for their faith.

Gnostic gospels unavailable until a major find 1947 at Nag Hammadi

But differences between Gnostic Gospel Jesus and NT Gospel Jesus go much deeper than whether or not he kissed Mary...

Prime difference: Gnostics believe material world is

Jesus of NT gospel is more divine and more human than Gnostic gospels.

Jesus in Gnostics is in the secret knowledge business.

What can we learn from the Gnostics?
(God uses heresy to reveal by contrast)

1. Gnosticism reminds us: we humans crave experience and we're going to go where we can to get it.

+ Gnosticism feeds the hunger for subjective experience

- + When we deny the importance of subjective we open door to Gnosticism
- + How Gnostic inner experience differs from meeting the Jesus of NT Gospels inwardly

2. Gnosticism reminds us: we humans need something from our religion in the present and not just promises for the future.

- + Gnostics redefined resurrection mean a spiritual state (something it never meant in Jewish thought); which allowed them to teach the kingdom has already come "in fullness"
- + Jesus in NT gospels taught the kingdom is "already" and "not yet"
- + When we emphasize the "not yet" we open the door to Gnosticism

3. Gnosticism reminds us: something's profoundly wrong that we need liberating from.

- + Gnostics said "What's wrong with the world is the world itself and we need to escape it through secret knowledge of the spirit realm, rising above our physical nature." At least they had the courage to admit something's deeply wrong. (More than a good education can fix.)

- + Christianity says is, "What's wrong with world is broken relationships."

- + Ephesians 4: 17-19:

Compare: Ignorance, Hardness of Heart, Immoral Behavior in Gnostic and NT view. Gnosticism says Ignorance is problem; NT says Hardness of Heart Goes deeper. (Distorted Christianity says immoral behavior is heart of the problem--not biblical Christianity, though, which sees heart of sin as relational breakdown.)

NT Jesus reveals a relational God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit; God is Love, in irreducible relationship. Hardness of heart is a violation of God's being.

Application to Pentecost.....