Modern Gnosticism - Does it exist? - posted by roadsign (), on: 2006/1/15 20:14

Has Gnosticism returned?
I am reading about first century Gnosticism, and see some similar parallels in our modern churches - esp the ultra-Charismatic ones:

Special knowledge (enlightenment) is sought- not intellectual, but something higher which the ordinary Christian is incapable of attaining. These special experiences indicate "salvation".

Gnostics diminished the authority of Scripture - esp OT which they allegorized.

Also, Gnostics weren't concerned about sin. That is what I see in our modern movements - very little said about repentance. Often love is lacking in their lives.

On the other hand, whatever is experienced "in the spirit" is perfect, it is God's glory, and also an indication of special enlightenment. (characteristic of Gnosticism)

Am I on track or way off? Is there any info around?
Diane

Re: Modern Gnosticism - Does it exist? - posted by Sir_Edward (), on: 2006/1/15 21:07

Yes, you are correct except gnostics also denied that Jesus came in the flesh so that would probably differentiate them.

Gnosticism and its errors have survived but usually not as a complete system. Jesus being only spiritual and not physical is rare but the special knowledge thing, the allegorical interpretation of the OT with diminished authority of Scripture, the antinomianism (very prevalent to day in all systems) is very much alive and well. In a sense it seems that whenever worldly philosophy is coupled with Christianity you get some form of Gnosticism but not full blown like it was in the early church. It is an old heresy.

Blessings.

Re: Modern Gnosticism - Does it exist? - posted by tacklebox (), on: 2006/1/15 21:16

rodsign wrote:
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Diane,
The Apostle John was so sickened by Gnosticism that it is reliably reported that he wouldn't even stay at the same house that a "Christian" gnostic was residing.

1 John launches specific attacks against gnosticism. John claims in 2:1 that it was written so they would not sin, and that included the sin of heresy.

I started preaching out of 1 John 2 weeks ago, and my study of Gnosticism that was involved with that lead me to a similar conclusion as you: that Gnosticism is alive and well today. It's not as organized as it was in the first three centuries, nor does it many of its forms go by that old title, but its doctrine still finds its way into the church.

This webpage below gives a thorough perspective into Gnosticism, which is growing in popularity in America and abroad. This passage tells why:

"In an age when the attitudes of self-awakening and self-knowledge are very much in the consciousnesses of people it is no wonder Gnostic teachings are being reexamined. Large groups of people feel alienated from the Christian God. They feel even more alienated from the Christian Church. Many have turned to the pre-Christian deities and nature for sources of their spiritual and religious experiences. Gnosticism can be one of these sources because it makes man feel worthy of himself and his Diety." (emphasis added)

Here's the link: http://www.themystica.com/mystica/articles/g/gnosticism.html

One person noticed that many Gnostic doctrines can be attached to the Matrix movies.

I can see where the Matrix does have some Gnostic elements to it. Gnostism basically teaches the following:

* There is a supreme god who is good and perfect, but can only be known through special, unnatural knowledge of Him.

* This supreme being made other beings that were divine and powerful, but he didn't create matter, just spirits. (only those Gnostics that subscribe to doceticism believe this teaching. Docetism is the belief that all matter is evil and only spiritual things are good. The docetic Gnostics say that Jesus had a phantom body and only appeared to be physical.)

* One of the lesser beings gave birth to a child, but she was ashamed and hid him away, which led him to believe he was the supreme god. This being is referred to as the "demiurge." The demiurge created all matter - the universe, and he made many mistakes in his creation because he wasn't the supreme being. Some Gnostics teach that the demiurge is evil, while others have sympathy on him because he tried to be good but he is the victim of not having full knowledge that he isn't god.

* Humans were part of the creation, and because we were created by the demiurge we lack a natural knowledge of spiritual things and of the supreme being.

* The supreme being has sent messengers, men of enlightenment who have special knowledge of what god is really like. Jesus was among these men, and many Gnostics taught that he was indeed the son of god, the most enlightened one ever.

* Jesus supposedly revealed his Gnostic teachings (sharing his "special knowledge" with them) to his disciples, many of which were women (there are Gnostic gospels that claim to have been authored by the apostle Thomas and Mary Magd elene.)

Gnosticism was the first heresy in the church (Judaizers weren't really heretics but misguided Jews who thought Gentiles had to become Jews by at least circumcision before they could inherit salvation.)
The apostle John fought Gnosticism with all five of his New Testament works. In fact, there is a second-century document by a disciple of John that tells of an incident while John was staying at a house in Ephesus. Apparently this Gnostic came to stay at the same house and John refused to even go in the same house as him!

Why John was so vehemently opposed to Gnosticism is obvious. It perverts not only the New Testament, but the Old as well. Gnosticism has its roots in Gentile (Greek) philosophy, not in Judaism. One of its central bases was Alexandria (Egypt), and that's why the Alexandrian texts that so many modern translations depend upon should be held questionable as to their authenticity. While many of these texts do predates others, there seems to be little concern that these text were altered or influenced by the Gnostics.

I am currently going through I John with my congregation on Sunday mornings and have been studying a lot about this. I John battles some of the Gnostic-influenced teaching that was making its way through Asia Minor.

It's really amazing how much modern Christianity resembles Gnosticism. We've reduced the Gospel to a creed, a list of statements that if one learns ("special knowledge"), then we welcome them into the fold.

True Christianity isn't about "special knowledge." It's about a supernatural transformation. It's about being born again - being a new creation.

While knowledge can transform a person intellectually, it cannot change a person spiritually. They will continue to be dead in their sins unless a Redeemer ransoms them. Jesus didn't suffer and die to make bad men good but to make dead men live!

That's why the cross is so offensive to us. It means dying to self and giving God full control. Gnosticism exalts the person because it is through that self-knowledge that they attaining salvation. Christianity refuses the exalted self any inheritance to salvation.

"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." -Luke 18:14

Christians should understand that we can never be reborn unless the old self first dies. That's where the fullness of Christ can be grasped.

Gnosticism allows a person to mix their old self with new knowledge, and this is not Christianity. No amount of knowledge, no matter how divine, can give spiritual life. Christ alone can do that. He alone has the words of eternal life (John 6:68), and they are not words that give special knowledge, for He is the Word (John 1:1), and therefore in Him alone is salvation (John 14:6.) Notice how much John fights Gnosticism in his Gospel?

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Quote:

Sir_Edward wrote:

Yes, you are correct except gnostics also denied that Jesus came in the flesh so that would probably differentiate them.

Actually, there were some sects of Gnosticism that didn't teach such. The teaching that all matter is evil and only spirit thins are good is called docetism (doe-SEE-tism), and it primarily is an influence of Greek philosophy. Not all gnostics believed in this, but the fact of the matter (no pun intended) is that the gnostics denied the principle doctrine of the virgin birth, even those gnostics who didn't perscribe to docetism.

-Chris

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Re: - posted by roadsigh (), on: 2006/1/16 7:58

Quote:
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What people say, and what their heart really believes can be two different things.
I believe that these people today, who have left the "sound doctrine" and followed after false teachings, merely hold to the doctrine of Christ in word. Because their roots in the traditional church are so recent, they are not yet going to openly admit their denial of Christ.

However, by their practices, I'd say that they do DENY his deity, incarnation, and his atonement. They don't do as he said, and they don't live like him. Just wait a while, and you'll see the denial of Christ openly taught.

What is disturbing is their lack of love, empathy. They are in such heavy denial, and their "worship" is a mood alterer - transporting them into extatic experiences - like drugs.

As you say - there is no transformation.

I think the movement is fueled by unconfessed sin, unresolved guilt, and perhaps the church's miserable failure to teach and live Scripture - and above all, to LOVE.

A lady, who moved into my town last year, is heavily involved in this charismatic type of movement. She started up a Bible Study, which I began attending. However she never opened her Bible, and never spoke its truths. She is an obsessive liar, and puffed up about herself. And she won't admit it, or ever apologiste. She regards herself as above sin, and since she has received special "knowledge", she believes that it is her duty to place herself as the authority over us lesser mortals.

When I (and others) discovered her bluff, and broke connection with her, she told me that God is calling her to leave town and "move forward". She is going to be the youth pastor of a church. (probably a lie)

I see the subtle influx of this movement as a common problem among many of my former church associates. It strains our fellowship.

Tacklebox - I don't suppose your messages are on line? I too am doing an indepth study of 1 John. I will be keeping your posts.
Diane

Re: - posted by Onesimus4God (), on: 2006/1/16 18:07

Quote:
-------------------------Gnosticism can be one of these sources because is makes man feel worthy of himself and his Deity."
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Just today, I was worshipping God online with another saint. I asked the Lord about how it is that He would be mindful of a wretch like me. "How could I be worthy of your love, oh Lord". "Show me how I may be worthy, Lord".

Instantly, I saw Jesus on the cross, beaten beyond recognition, body torn to shreds. I wept.

Onesimus4God