GNOSTIC CHRISTIANITY and the GNOSIS OF LIGHT* (Draft 2009)

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The Mystical Teaching of Judaism and Christianity: The Omitted Bible

A great misfortune befell Christianity.
-Eliphus Levi

Clearly, the Christian Bible, with its absence of sacred texts from the entire intertestamental period, the *Old Testament Pseudepigraphas* (excluded Jewish texts), the *New Testament* Christian *Apocrapha* (excluded *Gospels, Acts, Letters, Apocalypses*) including all Gnostic and *Essene* texts, has given us an extremely censored and limited view of the actual teaching of Jesus and indeed, of the entire Judeo-Christian religious tradition. The deleted Christian *Apocrypha* gives us a clear picture of the life and belief of early Christendom. The magnificent nondual mystical *Zohar* from the *Kabbalah*, *Hermes Trismagistus*, *Plotinus*, *Enoch*, *The Infancy Gospels*, *The Gnostic Gospels*, *The Essene Scriptures*, *The Apochraphal Acts*, *The Apocalypses*, all were omitted for arbitrary and political reasons by the Orthodox Christian Church during the first four centuries after Jesus. Nearly all of the interior, feminine, mystical/spiritual participatory/ experiential literature is omitted, sacrificed to the political ambitions and fears of the early Church bishops, and later, to the prevailing anti-spiritual, anti-metaphysical rationalism of the 17th century Enlightenment. This early psychological attitude still characterizes mainstream Christianity to this day. What are the causes of this Christian catastrophe?

The Gnostic Challenge to the Early Church

Although the essential pith teachings of Kabbalistic Valentinian Gnostic Christianity and Thomas Christianity (*Gospel of Thomas*, *Book of Thomas* and *Acts of Thomas*) are essentially monistic and nondual (p.218), most Gnostic speculative systems of the first three centuries after Jesus were ontologically dualistic regarding the separation of matter and Spirit, humanity and God. Indeed, this holds true of the outer exoteric views of all religions. The conventional, traditional view is materialistic and dualistic while the esoteric teaching is more subtle.

In much of the Gnostic literature the phenomenal world of matter and humankind ("The Darkness") is but a shadowy Platonic reflection of the perfection of God ("The Light"). Humanity and God are essentially separated by spacetime material reality, and are destined to remain so until reunited with God at death. In this outer dualistic view, liberation in life is precluded. God is eternally transcendent, physically and spiritually, abiding in a separate cosmic realm (*pleroma*). God is "other" and "alien" to humanity (Marcion, the Mandaeans, Basilides). God is unknown and unknowable. Positive qualities appear - light, life, mind

(psyche), spirit (pneuma), but outer exoteric Gnostic theology, including outer exoteric Gnostic Christianity, is negative.

Christian Gnosticism borrowed heavily from Hellenistic philosophy, particularly Platonic dualism, Orphism and Pythagoreanism, deriving its cosmogony (its origin) and cosmology (its nature) from Plato's *Timaeus*, as well as from the Hebrew *Genesis*. Dualism arises with the creation of matter by an evil Platonic demiurge (separate creator god). Humankind is redeemed only by faith (*Pistis*: exoterically belief; esoterically, ego-self-surrender) in the savior (for the Gnostic Christians it was Jesus Christ) who descends into spacetime to transmit to humankind the true Gnosis of Light (nondual primordial awareness wisdom, *gnosis*, *jnana*, *yeshe*) that is our actual identity as spiritual beings. The essential difference between the Gnostics and the Orthodox Church is this: The Church insisted that the way to salvation was faith (*pistis* as belief), whereas the Gnostics insisted upon *Gnosis*, the indwelling Primordial Wisdom. Those who follow the way of the "Gnosis of Light" will be saved from a hell of continuous reincarnation and death. Reincarnation, the "pre-existence of the soul" and its transmigration through many lifetimes, was an important doctrine of Jewish and Christian faith and belief until the second Christian Council of Constantinople in 553 C.E.

The origins of Gnosticism then, are highly syncretistic, the authors freely using the ideas of not only the Greeks, the Egyptians and Plotinus and the Hebrews, but Persian-Iranian-Babylonian speculative religious philosophy as well. Indeed, these two groups form the mainstreams of Gnostic theological speculation, the Egypto-Greek culminating in Christian Gnosticism, and the Persian-Iranian culminating in Mani and Manichaeism. It was the Babylonian Mani (215-276) who introduced dualistic Vedic, Buddhist and Zoroastrian elements into Gnostic Christianity.

The Christian Gnostics provided the challenge to the Christian Orthodoxy of the early Church that led to the defining of the dualistic, materialist, rationalist, anti-mystical view of the Church that characterizes contemporary Christianity today (Pagels 1978, 2003, Meyer 1992). The Christian Roman Emperors and early Church Bishops responded to the Gnostic challenge by declaring the teaching heretical, and fixing the *New Testament* canon (Council of Carthage, 397) to the exclusion of the Gnostic *Gospels, Acts* and *Letters*, except the *Gospel of John*, which was, in part, a Gnostic text (p.237), and the Letters of Paul, which, although used as polemic by early Church heresiologists, was, in its esoteric aspect, profound Gnostic teaching (pp. 231 ff.).

Foremost among the Gnostic sages were the producers of the heretical, mystical, nondual Valentinian doctrine, the great poet/scholar/mystic Valentinus (100-165), and his disciples Ptolemy, Heracleon, Theodotus, and Marcus (2nd century CE)p.218. Also of importance were the dualistic Gnostics Marcion of Sinope (85-165), and the Babylonian, Mani, founder of pagan Manichaeism which so profoundly influenced St. Augustine.

Valentinus was Egyptian, educated in Alexandria by Theodus, the great disciple of Paul, and taught his nondual monistic Gnostic mysticism in Rome in 135 to 160 C.E., to the particular consternation of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon (in Gaul). The good Bishop's treatise

against heresy (*Against Heresies*, 180C.E.) is a polemic against the exegesis of Ptolemy, the great Gnostic synthesizer of the nondual Valentinian doctrine. The Gnostic's rejection of the outer exoteric, vindictive creator God (demiurge) of the Greeks and Hebrews ("Men make gods and worship their creation" - *Gospel of Philip*, Gnostic), their refusal to accept the authority of the bishops, and their insistence that spiritual (*pneuma*) evolution and redemption in human beings is an internal, individual, mystical transformation, not exoteric conventional belief, led to the casting out of Valentinus and his followers from the Church (143C.E.).

By the time of the conversion to Christianity of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 313 C.E. and the first Council of Bishops in Nicaea in 325 C.E., the great monistic nondual teaching of the "Gnosis of Light" had been officially excluded from the Orthodox Catholic Church and thereby lost to Christians until the recent discovery in 1945 of the *Nag Hammadi Scriptures*. Ultimately the Gnostic teaching of the first three centuries was assimilated into non-Christian Persian-Iranian Manichaeism which became the dominant religion in Central Asia by the ninth century, before finally succumbing to Islam. It survives today with the Mandaeans in Iran and Iraq.

Esoterically, however, the promethean nondual Gnostic teaching of the Thomas and Valentinian Christians continues as the radical nondual teaching of the Primordial Awareness Wisdom (*Gnosis, jnana*), the great Wisdom Tradition of humanity. There it may be rediscovered in the esoteric "inner," "innermost secret" and nondual teachings, albeit through slightly different metaphors, in the Buddhist tradition through *Dzogchen*, *Mahamudra and Saijojo* Zen; in the Taoist tradition of the yoga of the *Returning of the Light*; and in the Vedic/Hindu tradition of *Advaita Vedanta* (*jnana and rahja* yoga).

Heresiology and the Survival of the Christian Church

In the first century, Christians were remarkably diverse in their faith and belief, but by 200 CE Christianity had become an institution, headed (in Rome) by a three rank hierarchy of bishops, priests and deacons, the guardians of the "one true faith". All else was heresy. Bishop Irenaeus, himself martyred by the Romans in 202, persecuted and suppressed the Gnostics and others, which led eventually to the concealing of the *Nag Hammadi* texts, sometime after the Creed of Nicaea (Council of Nicaea, 325). Outside of the "one true church there can be no salvation" (Irenaeus). When this Orthodoxy gained military and political support after Roman Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity (313), the penalty for heresy was death. The Orthodox teaching on the resurrection led by Irenaeus and Tertullian legitimized a hierarchy of the Church through which all others must approach God. Gnostic teaching however, offered direct access to God through one's individual spiritual practice and realization under the guidance of a realized master in the context of the spiritual community. For the Gnostics the Church hierarchy was unnecessary for salvation. Clearly, such heresy threatened the Orthodox bishops, and the authority of the early Church.

According to Elaine Pagels¹ had Christianity remained multiform it may not have survived. Its survival may well be due to the organization and authoritarian theological structure of the early church. This process of establishing Orthodoxy ruled out Gnostic/Kabbalistic mysticism and all other options. The gnostic inner esoteric view, based on direct spiritual experience, would not again surface until Meister Eckhart (d. 1329) and Paracelsus (d. 1541), and in the Protestant Reformation through mystics like Jacob Boehme (d. 1624). The outer exoteric Protestant movements however, remained within the framework of basic Catholic Orthodoxy established by 200 CE and continued the suppression of the esoteric and non-dual Gnostic mysticism.

One cannot help but speculate: had the non-dual mystic Valentinus won election to Pope (Bishop of Rome) certainly the New Testament canon developed at the Council of Nicaea in 325 and fixed at the Council of Carthage in 397 would have been very different indeed. And one wonders what would have been the collaboration of Valentinus and of the former Manichaeian Gnostic St. Augustine whose conversion to Orthodoxy so profoundly influenced the fixing of the canon to the exclusion of the esoteric mystical texts?

Hidden Treasure at Nag Hammadi

In 1945, at *Nag Hammadi* in Egypt—in one of the most important discoveries of the 20th century—Coptic translations of original Greek Gnostic texts were found in a cave by the shepherd Mohammed Ali. In 1947 the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* at Qumran revealed original *Essene* texts. These two great discoveries together give us an accurate and penetrating view of the life and belief of early Christianity, and of the actual teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. The *Nag Hammadi* texts include authentic Gospels, Acts and Letters. Unfortunately, none of these texts were included in any contemporary Christian Bible. They are readily available in contemporary translations of the *Nag Hammadi* library and the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, and in Barnstone and Meyer's *The Gnostic Bible* (2006)(p.242). Why were these vital texts excluded?

Orthodoxy: The Anti-Mystical Dualism of the Early Church

The Gospel of Mary (Gnostic) illustrates the Orthodox vs. the Gnostic viewpoints: Mary represents the Gnostic, mystical, visionary; Peter represents the Orthodoxy, suspicious of seeing Jesus in mystical visions. Each Provincial, General and Ecumenical Council omitted more and more of the esoteric interior, mystical texts. The esoteric content of the Essenes (Dead Sea Scrolls, 1947) and the Gnostics (Nag Hammadi, 1945) represents the early inner, secret and in certain texts, the "innermost secret" nondual direct experiential teaching of Jesus. These texts were suppressed in their time and were permanently omitted from the New Testament when it was "fixed" at the Council of Carthage in 397 CE.

¹ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (1989) and *Beyond Belief, The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (2003). There is no more authoritative and readable account of the drama of the emergence of Christianity than these concise books.

As we have seen, it is generally agreed by historians and Bible scholars that the conventional, Orthodox compilers, editors and revisers of what has become the *New Testament* were ideologically and politically opposed to the esoteric, mystical teachings of the nondual Gnostics, and indeed, of all Gnostic teachings and texts, dualistic and nondual, except *John*, and as we shall see, *Paul* (Cameron 1982, Mack 1995, Koestler 1996, Pagels 1989, Seely 1994, Layton 1987, et al.). The conventional, exoteric, anti-Gnostic, anti-mystical, anti-pagan orientation of the Christian Church today reflects Orthodoxy's victory over the esoteric, inward view of the *Gospel of Thomas* and Valentinian Kabbalastic Gnostic Christianity. Exoteric material bodily salvation (blessedness) prevailed over esoteric spiritual liberation/salvation, which is realization (*apolytrosis*) of the nondual "Gnosis of Light" of the primordial Father of All, the very light of the perfect wisdom that shines at the spiritual heart of each human being. What then, did Jesus actually teach?

The Nondual Teaching of Jesus

Initiation (*teleosis*) into the Gnosis of Light (secret wisdom mysteries) was reserved for the spiritually advanced (the "elect") *pneumatic* Christians. To the uninitiated (the "called" *psychic or pistic* Christians) Jesus taught only in parables (*Matthew, Thomas, Peter, James*). The letter of Peter to Phillip (*Nag Hammadi*) speaks of Jesus after his death appearing as light on the Mount of Olives to teach the "mysteries of the universe". He appears as a bright, luminous presence, in contrast to Orthodox views where he appears in bodily form.

Bishop Irenaeus claimed the legitimacy of the gospels was due to their authorship by Jesus' own disciples. Scholars now do not know who wrote the gospels, but it is universally agreed by Bible scholars that it was not the disciples (p.227ff).

The Apocalypse of Peter (Apocrypha) and The Secret Book of James (Gnostic) reveal how Jesus selected the more prepared disciples for special revelations leading to their spiritual liberation/enlightenment, attesting to the fact that Gnostic teachings emphasized realization by direct mystical, meditative or contemplative experience. Lesser prepared priests and bishops were offered only "common" tradition. This "method of the siddhas" that is the essence of the master/disciple relationship further threatened the dualistic exoteric Orthodoxy of Bishop Irenaeus and Tertullian ultimately leading to the declaration by the Orthodox apologists that all Gnostic teachings were heretical. The Church bishops argued that since no one had access to Jesus as the apostles did, later generations must look to the authority of the Church and its priesthood. The essential esoteric, and more subtle innermost secret and nondual mystical teaching of Jesus—that "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you"— was thereby lost to billions of Christians over the next nineteen centuries.

By the latter part of the 2nd Century, Orthodoxy insisted on "One God and One Bishop." Clement's (Clement I, Bishop of Rome) letter to Christians in Corinth (c. 90-100 CE) makes the first argument for dividing "the clergy" (priesthood) from the "laity." Whoever

refuses to "bow the neck" to the clergy is guilty of insubordination "against the divine master himself." Bishop Ignatius of Antioch defended the same principle.

Valentinus, the great poet master of Gnosticism, received secret initiation from Theodus (a disciple of Paul) into the "Secret Doctrine of God." This advanced nondual spiritual discipline teaches that the God of Israel—the God of Orthodoxy—is not the highest God but a dualistic Platonic demiurge or exoteric separate Creator God, the false "I am God and there is no other" of Orthodoxy and of Israel.

According to the Valentinians and the Thomas literature (p.218), true Gnosis (primordial nondual wisdom, *jnana*, *yeshe*), the essential Gnosis of Light, lies in recognizing and experiencing through meditative contemplative practice (not conceptual belief)—under the guidance of a living master—the realization of the indwelling presence (Christos, logos, vidya, rigpa) of the nondual monistic ultimate source of all spacetime phenomenal reality. This true Gnosis knows "The Depth" (Bathos) or multi-dimensionality (many mansions) of the perfectly subjective transcendental God, the Supreme Source, the "All-in-All," the "I Am That I Am," that is pure, primordial nondual ultimate Spirit. Through this primordial wisdom the initiate is thereby "released" or liberated (apolytrosis), redeemed from the lesser Platonic creator demiurge and the separate creator god of Israel (*Yahweh-Elohim*). Here the initiate is embraced by the transcendent truth of actual nondual Godhead, beyond relative, conditional existence, beyond the discursive thinking of concept and belief (dianoia, doxa), and indeed, ultimately, beyond all distinctions and dualism, including the dualism of the dual and the nondual, the exoteric and the esoteric responses, existence and non-existence, indeed beyond the mind altogether. Such is the absolute nondual monism of Jesus teaching on the Gnosis of Light as we discover it in the Valentinian and Thomas literature. As we have seen, it is essentially the same radical nondual Primordial Awareness Wisdom teaching that is the heart of Buddhism (Mahamudra, Dzogchen, Saijojo Zen), the Sanatana Dharma (Advaita Vedanta) and Taoism. It is this great primordial wisdom teaching that all of the masters of all the times have taught to their prepared disciples.

The Gnostic Trinity: Father, Mother and Son

The nondual Gnostic texts describe God as a dyad embracing masculine and feminine aspects. God is androgynous. The Son of God that descends as "The Mind" (awareness) is also androgynous. God is not a dualistic creator god. God is the nondual supreme source of everything, the Depth (*Bathos*), ineffable, unspeakable, the "Primal Father," "The Womb and Mother of All" (Valentinus). Christ speaks to John (*Apocryphon of John* - Gnostic): "I am the One who is with you always. I am the Father. I am the Mother. I am the Son" (an esoteric trinity). In the *Gospel to the Hebrews* (Gnostic) Jesus speaks of "My Mother, the Spirit."

In the *Gospel of Thomas* (Gnostic) Jesus speaks of "the Divine Father, the Father of Truth, and the Divine Mother, the Holy Spirit." In the *Gospel of Philip* (Gnostic) Spirit is both Mother

and virgin, the counterpart and consort of the Heavenly Father. "The Father of everything united with the virgin who came down." Here, the untainted, primordially pure Holy Spirit (feminine) descends from the formless realm into the physical world of form. Because the process is allegorical and symbolic, not literal, it is spirit that is virgin. Christ therefore, born of virgin spirit (esoterically) became interpreted exoterically as "born of a virgin." The Gnostic author of the *Gospel of Philip* however, ridicules the literal-minded Christians who mistake this process for a magical virgin birth through Mary, Jesus' biological mother, as though she conceived her child apart from Joseph.

Adam (humanity), being one, is the androgyne who "contains the female within him." (*Thunder* - Gnostic) "I am androgynous, Mother and Father, I procreate myself, I am the womb to the All, I am the glory of the Mother."

The conventional exoteric view of the trinity is of the identity of essence (homoousia) of Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Esoterically the view is the identity of the divine Primordial Father, (Abba in Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke), the nondual primordial source of all relative spacetime phenomena with the divine Cosmic Mother, pure, unconditioned virgin Holy Spirit who descends into conditional, created, relative spacetime, the creative Divine Mother of mind (thought, awareness) and all mental and physical form, and The Son—"The Mind"—the divine *Christos*, the Christ Nature seed that is the unrealized spiritual potential of each human being. Each human incarnation descends from the Father/Mother/Creator aspect of the nondual primordial source into the world, "the logos made flesh" whose divine potential is to realize then actualize or demonstrate through compassionate conduct the great nondual truth that "the Kingdom of God is within you", that "Christ livith in you." This is what Jesus realized. It is told by our Great Wisdom Tradition that this primordial presence is "always already" present in all beings, and that human beings have the potential to actualize or realize that outcome through committed practice of the "spiritual" path in this very lifetime. This great truth, according to the Valentinian and Thomas literature is what Jesus taught.

The monotheistic incarnation theology of both the outer exoteric and inner esoteric views of the foregoing Trinity christologies agrees as to the identity of the essential nature (hypostasis) of the three aspects or three natures of the one transcendent yet immanent God. Such an understanding is expressed in the Johannine logos chistology derived from the monistic Neoplatonic metaphysics of Plotinus and of the Stoics, and is a nondual monistic transcendental theology. This triune essential nature of God is monistic for it is of one substance (homoousia): Primordial Father, Mother Holy Spirit, Christos/logos Son. The three are an inseparable prior unity. Trinitarian Monotheism. Onotological monism (p.218).

The difference in view is in the emphasis. The exoteric orientation emphasizes the separate, material, bodily aspect of the incarnation (descent of spirit), resurrection and return (ascent of spirit) of the *logos* as Jesus, the Son of God. Here, Jesus is God. Jesus the *Christos* and humanity are viewed as separate. Thus the dualism. **The esoteric and the nondual emphasis of the Gnostic Thomas and Valentinian teaching is the indwelling spiritual presence**

(Christos, I Am) of the logos that is the essential nature, not just of Jesus, but of each and every human being. It is this divine presence that the incarnation of Jesus—the Son of Man, the mortal human avatar—reveals and mirrors to us as our actual identity is awakened and resurrected through the gradual, then sudden process of spiritual (pneumatic) transformation.

The Gnostics Openness to Women

Gnostics showed a remarkable openness to women. Jesus violated Jewish law by speaking openly with women and including them among his companions. Though Paul acknowledges women as his equal "in Christ", he could not advocate their equality socially and politically. By the end of the 2nd Century women's participation in Orthodox worship was explicitly condemned as heretical. Meanwhile, the *Dialog of the Savior* (Gnostic) praises Mary the Magdalene above Thomas and Matthew. Her Gnosis surpassed even Peter's, yet she was never recognized as an apostle by the Orthodox Church. In the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*, Mary Magdalene represents the gnosis, whereas Peter, Matthew and "the disciples" cannot comprehend this nondual esoteric teaching. Although Clement of Alexandria affirmed women's active participation in the Church, the Orthodox majority adopted Tertullian's uncompromising position that women were not allowed active participation. This bias against women persists even now, and not just in the Catholic Churches.

The Valentinian Gnostics view of sexual intercourse is unique in the history of Judaism and Christianity. Sex between husband and wife promotes spiritual development! The Hermetic/Gnostic idea of androgyny, the male/female polarity within each human being was further developed by this Christian Gnostic group, and by the Gnostic communities of Thomas and John (p.234). Theodus and his disciple Valentinus may have had access to Tibetan *Bön* and/or Vedic tantric teaching regarding the use of sexual energy in spiritual practice. The Babylonion Mani (215-276) was certainly familiar with Vedic and Indian Buddhist tantric tradition and practice.

Martyrdom and the Passion of Jesus

The exponents of heresy in the 2nd Century, those Orthodox Christian apologists—Ignatius, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Justinian—all affirmed martyrdom at the hands of the Romans and considered those who opposed it heretics. Even those Gnostics who were martyred were denied its value — they were merely "a sort of retinue for the true Orthodox martyrs" (Pagels). However, most Gnostic heretics opposed martyrdom on religious grounds. They did not believe that martyrdom alone offers redemption, and was a foolish waste of life, an easy way out - as if "through suffering for one hour they purchase for themselves eternal life" (*The Testimony of Truth*, Gnostic). As if God desires human sacrifice. As if salvation/enlightenment were not about living, but merely dying.

The Apocalypse of Peter (Gnostic) describes how Peter finally becomes enlightened and discovers the true meaning of the Passion of Jesus. The seduction and coercion of followers and children to be slaughtered, and expressions of joy at this is repulsive to Peter according to the Gnostic author of this text.

The Orthodox view of The Passion is of Christ's death as a sacrifice, an expiation which redeems humanity from guilt and sin. The Gnostic view is quite different. Here, Jesus' death is a promethean paradigm that recognizes the divine *Christos* seed and its potential for liberation and Christ/buddhahood within all human beings. Christ's suffering at his crucifixion is assumed by all Gnostic texts. Most are however, concerned to show how his incarnation as human was an injunction, an exemplar by a great avatar who incarnated from God, the Primordial Father to demonstrate the way to transcend and prevail over suffering and death by virtue of divine light, the Gnosis of Light that lives immortal at the heart of each human form. He demonstrated the way to transcend this mortal coil and to "overcome the world." He taught that to "confess Christ" means not outer confession to being a Christian before a judge, or to friends and associates, but to confess and demonstrate Christ Consciousness, the Christos in compassionate, everyday acts and conduct. "The greatest commandment is love," and love is the daily activity and action of compassionate, loving service, giving wisely to others (charis/ grace/ charity, tonglen, loving-kindness, mercy, ahimsa, karuna/compassion). "Therefore, love one another as I have loved you." This is precisely the Primordial Wisdom view (Gnosis, *jnana*, yeshe) of our Great Wisdom Tradition, whether Vedic/Vedanta, Taoist, Buddhist, Islam or Judaic.

The exoteric, Orthodox view of martyrdom prevailed. Roman persecution gave solidity to the Church organization. It encouraged communication (consider Ignatius letter on his way to death in the arena) increasing doctrinal, ritual, canonical, and political uniformity and unity "even to the ends of the earth" (Irenaeus). Gnostics however, who resisted this conformity were scattered and lost (Pagels, 1989). The esoteric truth is however, that Jesus' sacrifice redeems humanity from "this ocean of incarnation and death" (Paul) only when an individual realizes, then demonstrates the "Great Love" of the Father through moment to moment kindness, generosity and compassionate service to other beings. And such a result begins for each one this very moment, now.

Physical Experience or Spiritual Experience?

Orthodox tradition insists on a material, bodily interpretation of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Exoterically, bodily, not spiritual experience, is the central fact of human life. What one does physically (or abstinence from it): eat, drink, sex, work, death is what marks spiritual life and development. The esoteric and nondual oriented Gnostics however, viewed the physical dimension as immaterial or illusory (not non-existent) and emphasized the "inner spirit" and the direct contemplative or mystical experience of the divine for each individual. For these gnostics it is the mortal human Jesus that descended into spacetime to

demonstrate this inner spirit of the *Christos* or Christ nature within each human being. Unfortunately, this is not the Jesus that Christians have idealized and worshiped for 2000 years. It is Jesus as God that Christians have worshipped. **During his life Jesus cautioned against such an outer exoteric idealization or deification of any individual human—including himself— at the expense of the personal realization of the divine** *Christos* **seed within each one of us. "Seek the Kingdom of heaven within." "Become a disciple of your own mind who is father of truth." "I am not your master. . . Light the light within you." Jesus' teaching always directs us to turn to the "light within." Indeed, this is the esoteric teaching of all of the spiritual masters and adepts of the great Primordial Wisdom Tradition of humankind.**

The Gospel of John was a Gnostic primary source (p.237). Yet it was included, after much debate, in the Orthodox New Testament. John speaks: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." Here one finds God only through Christ, and one finds Christ only through the Church. Thus Orthodoxy was strengthened. Conversely, the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas (p.234) avoids this connection of agency through the Church. "There is light within a being of light, and it lights the whole world. If he does not shine, he is darkness." Here, one is directed to the inner Gnosis of Light that is the "disciple of your own mind..." The esoteric Gnostic Gospels of Thomas, Philip, Mary and others were of course, all omitted from the Orthodox New Testament.

Christian Orthodoxy defined God oppositely from the nondual Gnostics, who considered theology anthropology. The perennial truth "Know thyself" (Socrates) is the imperative to know one's own *psyche*, one's essential mind nature. This mind essence is the religious quest par excellence, for ultimately and in spirit we are all enfolded and arise in nondual perfectly subjective godhead. Beyond ethnicity, creed or belief we all share the same God. Indeed, according to our Great Tradition, this godhead is the "supreme identity" of each of us, without a single exception. To "know thyself" deeply and truly is to realize that nondual *logos/Christos* presence of that that is the very source and nature of awareness/consciousness, the very essence and nature of mind, always already present within each human being. Such was the esoteric Hebrew, Hellenistic, Hermetic/Orphic/ Vedic mysticism which Moses and the Jews and Jesus, and the Gnostics inherited from the Ancients.

The nondual Gnostic view of the human condition then, was very different from Christian Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy followed the dualistic Hebrew tradition of the Old Testament that sin separates humanity from God. Sin (hamartia), "missing the mark," is redeemable only through the agency of Jesus Christ. Gnostics however, viewed hamartia as ignorance (avidya of the Hermetic, Vedic-Hindu and Buddhist traditions). Hamartia or ignorance creates the suffering (pathos), that is forgetfulness or amnesis, unconsciousness or unawareness of the divine. The Gospel of Thomas warns that transcendental self- discovery involves much inner turmoil. Here Jesus criticized the magical view of "The Kingdom of Heaven" as a literal physical place. "The Kingdom is within you and it is outside you,. . . it is

spread upon the face of the earth, and you do not see it." The Kingdom of Heaven then, is a state of contemplative mystical- transcendental enlightened Christ Consciousness. Human salvation and redemption, or liberation (apolytrosis) comes not through a future physical historical event—a paracletic Second Coming—but through the practice of the spiritual path that is the free will and choice of ego-transcending internal spiritual transformation within individuals. "Who is it that seeks, and who is it that reveals?" It is not an external teacher said Jesus. Nor is it Jesus himself. "I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become drunk from the luminous spring that I have tended" (Thomas 13). The master/ teacher only guides and mirrors the divine logos/Christos that is already present in the devotee/disciple. "The one who reveals" is the inner presence of the Christ Nature, the guru/teacher/knower within each human heartmind. The external master however, is necessary to guide the disciple to this realization. The master helps the student to "become a disciple of your own mind which is the father of truth" (*Testimony of Truth Gnostic*). "Each human being is a dwelling place and therein—at the spiritual heart—dwells an infinite reality, the source of the kosmos - yet it exists in a latent condition" (Simon Magus). How does one attain Gnosis? Zostrianos (Nag Hammadi) tells us that we must transcend physical desires, reduce the chaos of conceptual mind by meditation and mantra, receive the vision from the "messenger of light," and do not be discouraged along the way. (Compare with the Three Statements of Garab Dorje, Ch.IIX). Such a difficult interior contemplative path was not for the uninitiated masses. One who receives, then realizes through practice the true Gnosis of Light is "no longer a Christian, but a Christ" (Gospel of Philip, [Gnostic]). Such a one realizes, then demonstrates through compassionate conduct the inner "Gnosis of Light," the Christ Consciousness that is the indwelling Christ Nature present in all human beings.

"Orthodoxy on the other hand required only a confession of the simplest essentials of faith and celebrated simple rituals demanding a minimum of spiritual commitment. It is difficult to see how the Christian religion could have survived without this basic, simple framework. Powerful ideas do not make a religion powerful."

- Elaine Pagels (1989)

The Price Paid

What was the result for future generations of Christians due to the omissions and distortions by the Orthodox Church of Jesus ecstatic nondual mystical vision and teaching? Today, at the beginning of the 21st Century, the vast majority of the world's Christians have not been introduced to the great nondual mystical Gnosis of Light that we now know was the heart essence of Jesus actual teaching. Nor were the millions of Christians of the past twenty centuries. The profound nondual practice (yoga) of transcendence of egoic ignorance (hamartia, avidya) that Jesus transmitted is available (at least in written form) in the mystical

nondual Gnostic texts of the Valentinians and Thomas, and other Christian texts referred to at the beginning of this chapter. *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* and *The Gnostic Bible* are excellent sources in new translation for this vital material (Meyer 2007, Barnstone 2006). However, without the physical presence of a living qualified master to mirror the inner gnosis and guide the teaching these, and all esoteric texts remain largely exoteric.

Now, 2000 years after the death of Jesus these scared texts remain taboo for many Christians. An exoteric, anti-mystical conventional Christian religion has prevailed in this postmodern world of scientific and spiritual materialism. And our essential Primordial Wisdom Tradition teaching of the esoteric transmission of the nondual lovewisdom from qualified master to prepared disciple has been lost to Christianity.

Thus, the popularization and "universalization" of Christianity by the early Church offered salvation through exoteric faith, ritual and law, rather than through ego self-transcending contemplative meditation on and realization of the Gnosis of Light. This popularization allowed the later bishops of the Orthodox Church and their Roman converts to suppress the great monistic, nondual primordial wisdom teaching of Jesus that is his transmission to us of "The Word" of the *Logos* of the Gnosis of Light. Indeed, most scholars agree, the *Gospel of Thomas* and the esoteric nondual Valentinian Gnostic record of the teaching of Jesus is far closer to his actual teaching than the anti-mystical, exoteric Church doctrine represented in the canonical New Testament of contemporary versions of the Bible (Cameron 1982; Koester 1990; Layton 1987; Meyer 1992; Barnstone 1984; Kingsland 1970, Pagels 1989, Duling 1979, Funk 1995, Grant 1966, Mack 1993, 1995, Schoedel 1972, 1980, Williams (1988), Wallace 1992)).

The Transcendence of Ego: Faith, Belief and Gnosis

"Faith" translates the Greek "pistis." Exoterically "pistis" is belief, esoterically it is surrender of self or ego that is an opening to receive the inner wisdom Gnosis. This was the nondual Gnostic understanding. But by 189 CE, with the elevation to pope of Demetrius, Bishop of Alexandria, "faith" had become for Orthodox pistic (psychic) Christians essentially conceptual belief (dianoia, doxa) which was demonstrated in legalistic, ritual and moral terms. Faith as ego deconstruction and surrender is experiential (epinoia/penetrating insight) and emotional (bhakti, devotion) and is conducive to esoteric contemplative practice of mystical ascent into the indwelling Gnosis of Light, or Christ Consciousness. Faith as concept and belief and ritual without surrender of egoic motives emphasizes objective, third person egoserving conventional conceptual belief and self-serving morality. Faith as ego self-surrender opens to that beyond the objective dimension and necessarily enters the realm of first person subjective, contemplative or mystical experience (ego-transcending prayer/meditation). As the heartmind opens to receive, the ego and its concepts and beliefs recede (step-by-step) into deep subjective background that is the divine sourceground, the supreme source of all that arises in time and space. That the experience of spirit is essentially a subjective

emotional and experientially receptive opening (*yin*), and is prior to the objective mental operations of concept and belief (*yang*) is an urgent psychological truth of all of the traditions of our great Primordial Wisdom Tradition.

Second century Orthodox theologians Clement of Alexandria (150-215) and his disciple Origen (185-225) attempted to mediate between the dualistic conceptual, ritualized, legalistic Mosaic tradition of the Hebrews and Orthodox Christians, and the nondual heretical Gnosticism of emerging Christianity. Although both men were leaders of the Orthodoxy and engaged in polemics against heretical Gnostic teaching, both were almost certainly initiates of the nondual Gnosis of Light, and were censured by Bishop Demetrius for introducing Gnostic teaching into their theologies. For Clement, faith had two aspects. With the *pistic* Christians, Clement believed that faith as belief, law, ritual and moral correctness was necessary for salvation. But he also understood and argued that the direct, mystical, non-rational, *pneumatic*/emotive Gnosis was a necessary aspect, perhaps even the very basis of faith. "From the beginning you are immortal god-children of eternal life" (*Stromateis* IV, 89 2-3).

For early Christianity then, there were two types of Christian, the exoterically oriented pistic or psychic (mind) Christian, and the more spiritually mature, esoterically or mystically oriented *pneumatic* (spirit) Christian who grew in his/her faith under the guidance of an initiated spiritual master. As we have seen, the nondual Gnosis of Light—the primordial awareness wisdom, jnana/yeshe, vidya/rig pa—whatever the tradition, has always been transmitted via this "method of the siddhas," that is, by a qualified, or even enlightened/liberated master to a prepared disciple or devotee. Due to the subtlety of the nondual, non-egoic nature of the inner Gnosis, and the prodigious defenses of the dualistic, selfish "spiritualized ego" in resisting its own deconstruction, intervention by a qualified master is absolutely necessary to development stage success, and to the ultimate completion of the process (present company excluded, of course). The Socratic dictum "Know thyself" is the intention. Yet, "It is impossible to study ourselves by ourselves" (Suzuki Roshi). In the process of the deconstruction and transcendence of the destructive self sense or ego, it is the master who guides the student through the maze of samsara, "this ocean of incarnation and death" (Paul), all the way to the end of it. This then, was the esoteric, mystical teaching of the Gnosis of Light that was omitted from the New Testament of the Christian Bible. What is this Gnosis of Light that dwells within each human form? And what is its relationship to human happiness?

> For no small matter is at stake. The question concerns the very way in which human life is to be lived.

> > - Plato

The Gnosis of Light

Behold the light! . . . the true light which lighteth every one that cometh into the world. - Gospel of John

The Presence

Jesus taught the truth (alétheia) and the goodness/beauty (agathos/charis/kalos) of the ancient mysteries, the Primordial Wisdom Tradition of our species that was the radical nondual monistic teaching taught by all of the masters of antiquity, and by the great masters who founded the historical religions (p.218). This "innermost secret" great tradition of humankind belongs equally to them all. Esoterically, there is a prior or transcendent unity at the heart of all of the traditions of our Great Wisdom Tradition. This unity is subtler or deeper than the exoteric moral, theological, epistemological and ontological similarities revealed by philosophy and religious studies. This unity is the pinnacle where the exoteric traditions merge. This unity is the base or sourceground in whom they all arise. Here lies the implicate, nondual primordial unity that transcends yet embraces the explicate realities of all our traditions. It is this unity of ultimate being itself (Interbeing) that is our heart's desire through the relative becoming process of the interdependent continuum of the outer, inner, innermost secret and nondual religious and philosophical views and practices, albeit expressed through different metaphors, and differing levels of subtlety of understanding. This Base (gzhi) or "supreme source" (Bathos, shunyata/emptiness, the Trikaya of the Base, Absolute Bodhicitta) in whom everything arises is the nondual intrinsic "Primordial Awareness Wisdom," the very Gnosis of Light (jnana/yeshe, p.221.²

The nondual view of the Gnosis of Light—Christ Consciousness—is the essence of our Great Tradition. This view is perhaps, best stated in the one Gnostic gospel that was included in the New Testament Canon, the *Gospel of John:* "Behold the light! ... the true light which lighteth every one that cometh into the world." It is this light, this potential for enlightenment that is the bright, unrealized "presence that lives sleepwaiting within each human form" (Schofield 1973). It is this light that is the subject of the profound primordial mystery, the subject of the esoteric transcendental aspect of our descent from the primordial sourceground, and our ascending path of return. This luminous presence (*Christos/vidya/rigpa*) is the very primordial light of *Genesis*, arising from the Depth (*Bathos*, emptiness) and dwelling at the spiritual heart of every human being. This true Gnosis is more profound than the dualistic doctrines of the Gnostic Christian heretics. It is more profound than the transcendental theology of the great theologians Clement of Alexandria and his disciple Origen; more profound even than the nondual Valentinian and Thomas teaching. Indeed, the true Gnosis of Light is utterly beyond the grasp of human concept

² Our Great Wisdom Tradition assumes that this greatest or subtlest Primordial Awareness Wisdom dimension is hidden from egoic, conceptual mind to varying degrees—from slightly hidden to deeply hidden. It is revealed, step-by-step as the spiritual aspirant ascends through the practice of the path of gnosis. And paradoxically, it is given immediately, in this very moment now to the prepared aspirant who will open to receive it. This seeming paradox of the hidden gnosis *vis-a-vis* its immediate presence at the spiritual heart is the "paradox of the path." It defines the "problem of gradualism." The paradox of seeking happiness, whether relative or ultimate, is this: "We cannot *become* happy. We can only *be* happy" (Adi Da Samraj).

and belief, transcending the mind altogether for it is the eternal mystery of the clearlight nature of mind. It is this Gnosis of Light that arises from and opens into the very primordial ground of being. Therefore, this unity of love and wisdom (philosophy as philos/sophia) is the essence or nature of mind itself (the Primordial Father, Tao, Brahman, Shunyata, Cittata/Sem nyid). This Gnosis of Light is the primal creative utterance (Logos, the Word), remembrance, recognition and ultimate realization of our inherent primordial "supreme source." It is this Gnosis of Light that, according to our Great Tradition, is the actual preconscious motive for all our seeking strategies for happiness. The great adepts and masters of the past and the present have taught and demonstrated this great truth. And, astonishingly, "It is already accomplished". "For those with ears to hear, let them hear." For those who will, surrender and receive this "always already present" presence of the Gnosis of Light. Why then is this great wisdom teaching absent from exoteric contemporary Islamic, Jewish and Christian spiritual practice?

The Betrayal of the Gnosis of Light

Our conventional religious institutions do not desire to transcend the egoity that obstructs realization of the gnosis love/wisdom, but to serve it. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche has termed this egoic motive "spiritual materialism." Our prevailing global massmind ideology is scientific materialism whose legacy emotionally conditions us to accept and cling to belief in a complex of separative conceptual and belief systems ("hang ups," cathexes, samskaras) that deny this supreme identity, this primordial light that we actually are. We are reduced by this radical objectivist materialism to "ghosts in a machine" (Koestler), and the deep subjective realities of God and spirit become no more than "artifacts of neurochemical brain activity." We feel guilty and unworthy of the love and the wisdom that is our birthright as "god-children" participants being/becoming the Gnosis of Light. Here, "the sins of the parents are visited upon the children" (Jesus of Nazareth), generation to generation.

A great misfortune befell Christianity. The betrayal of the Mysteries by the false Gnostics - for the Gnostics, that is, those who know, were the Initiates of primitive Christianity - caused the Gnosis to be rejected and alienated the Church from the supreme truths of the Kaballa, which contain all the secrets of transcendental theology. (*Eliphas Levi, The Mysteries*, A.E. Waite, in Kingsland, 1970)

As we have seen, the esoteric understanding of the indwelling, intrinsic primordial wisdom gnosis became hardened into exoteric, conventional dogmas and the "True Gnosis of Light" became heresy. The power of the Church became gradually vested in an ambitious, material priestly hierarchy who, from the earliest apostolic period, established a powerful Orthodoxy fanatically opposed to the esoteric mystery teaching descended from the prehistoric Christ/Buddhas to Hermes and Moses, to Jesus, to Paul, to Theodus and his

disciple, the master Valentinus. This was the fanatical "Christ Cult" of the Christian Orthodox Church of the first and second centuries (p.229ff). This Orthodoxy included certain Gnostic initiates—Clement, Origen, and Augustine. It was the sworn goal of this group to destroy every trace of the Gnosis wisdom texts throughout all Christendom (Mack 1995). The result was that the Gnosis of Light love-wisdom unity teaching of Jesus was lost to the world until the discovery of the *Nag Hammadi* scriptures in 1945, and the Essene scriptures at Qumran in 1947.

Christos, The Cosmic Christ: The Heartseed of the Gnosis of Light

The primordial wisdom mystery teaching of the "Gnosis of Light" is this: that humankind has an inherent, indwelling divine nature or "heart essence." "The Nature of Mind is primordially pure from the very beginning." It is told that such a realized humanity separated and descended into the material world of flesh and ego, yet desires to be released, realize and return to the actual spiritual perfection or wholeness that is paradoxically, our actual design and identity from the very beginning. This return to, or realization of our original, inherently divine nature is the great esoteric truth of the perennial mythical archetype of "the eternal return" (p.224 ff). This truth of our apparent descent into material spacetime and the realization-return to essential, nondual spirit is present in the inner esoteric and greater esoteric nondual wisdom teachings in virtually all religious traditions. This truth is descended to Christianity through the esoteric and innermost secret tradition of the Hebrews and the Greeks (Pathagoras, Plotinus, Moses, Jesus and Paul). This teaching was present in the Hellenistic mysteries which were descended from the Hermetic/Orphic and Vedic mystery traditions and their prehistoric antecedents.

That which is called the Christian religion existed among the ancients, and never did not exist, from the beginning of the human race until Christ came in the flesh, at which time the true religion which already existed began to be called Christianity. - St. Augustine (Epis. Retrac., I, xiii, 3)

Thus it is the nature and destiny of humanity, according to the teaching of our great Primordial Wisdom Tradition as it is embodied in esoteric Christianity, that "in the beginning" humankind was spiritually divine and whole, unseparate from the nondual Father-Mother-Creator-God. Humanity descended from this Eden consciousness into matter, became clothed in "coats of skin," polarized into two sexes, and became egoically separated and forgetful (amnesis) of our divine source. This theme is constant in the various creation mythologies of our species. This is the hell of samsara: the sin (ignorance, hamartia, avidya, marigpa), suffering (pathos, duhkah) and death (thanatos) that is the story of the Old Testament, and the ancient Vedas. It is the indwelling presence of this divinity, realized through the sadhana of the yoga of the practice of the spiritual path (marga, lam) that develops our "paracletic faculty." The ripening of this seed of divine potential facilitates the reunion and

return to our primordial sourceground that is the esoteric teaching of the New Testament, and of nondual Buddhism (Essence *Mahamudra*, *Dzogchen*), Hinduism (*Advaita Vedanta*) and Taoism (the yoga of the *Returning of the Light*). This inherent, primordial spiritual nature (Christ Nature, Buddha Nature), that "I Am" presence that is the heartseed always already present at the heart of each human being, is esoterically, the old news and the good news of the teaching inherited and transmitted by Jesus the Christ and Gautama the Buddha. This is the ancient Gnosis of Light revealed and demonstrated through the historical person of Jesus as the Christ Principle, the divine seed *Christos (Logos)*, and of Buddha Gautama Shakumuni as the *Tathagatagarbha* (the seed of Buddahood). This Christ-Buddha Nature is our actual "supreme identity." Who am I? "I Am That I Am." "Tat Tvam Ami/That I Am," without a single exception.

Thus it is the *Christos*, not the person or personality of Jesus, and not Jesus as God that is to be realized by each human being through the teaching and the yoga or spiritual practice of the Gnosis of Light. It is the *Christos* that is the Cosmic Christ presence, "the living Jesus", "the living Buddha" that dwells within the heartmind of each human being and shall, in due course and by grace, be resurrected and realized by each one of us as individuals. And thereby the collective whole of humanity shall be released, liberated and returned in spirit to the Eden consciousness of the nondual divine "That I Am" that is our supreme source. This is the great Primordial Wisdom mindstream of the Cosmic Christ that has been realized and actualized in the world by Jesus the Christ and by each of the Buddhas and great *mahasiddhas* of the past, and of the present, and will be realized by the avataric Christ/Buddhas yet to come. Thus it is, according to the innermost secret teaching of our Great Tradition.

The initiatory levels or degrees of depth of realization of this esoteric perennial mystery teaching remain of course, merely exoteric conceptual understanding until actually realized and demonstrated—gradually step-by-step, then suddenly—by the disciple/devotee in the everyday lifeworld—from initiation and baptism, to enlightenment, to the realization of the *Christos* and its actualization in the world through compassionate activity, and beyond (p.244, *Kosmos: The Seven Stages of Life*, Appendix B). Such a one, according to the *Gospel of Philip* (Gnostic), "is no longer a Christian, but a Christ."

The Resurrection of the Cosmic Christ

It is the Cosmic Christ then, that is to be realized through the radical Gnosis of Light, the promethean "clear light" teaching of our Primordial Wisdom Tradition. The realization of the unseparate Cosmic Christ is the realization of Christ Consciousness, the Christ Nature, the Buddha Nature, Krishna Consciousness, that primordial presence that is, by whatever name, the divine original face of each human being, of all sentient beings, and indeed, of all relatively manifested spacetime conditional reality. Thus there is the implicate order of perfectly subjective "Big Mind," (Susuki Roshi), the mindstream of the *Christos*, the Buddha mind that transcends and embraces everything. And there is included within this the relative, conditional world of spacetime reality—"Small Mind"—the explicate order of the

objective world of related things. Again, it is this Christ-Buddha mindstream that is, according to our Great Tradition, the luminous presence (*Christos, vidya, rigpa*) of the Primordial Awareness Wisdom of our supreme source—*Bathos*, the Depth in whom this all arises.

The realization of the Cosmic Christ, according to Paul, must be "found and brought to birth" as the "Christ in you" in order to be lifted up from "this ocean of incarnation and death." Jesus' resurrection is for Paul, not a temporal "judgment day," but a transcendent gnostic/mystical awakening or enlightening: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee" (Ephesians).

Throughout the canonical New Testament and the noncanonical Gnostic Scriptures, Christ Consciousness—*Christos/logos*— as the potential realization of the Gnosis of Light is presented continuously in outer exoteric symbol and allegory as the fall and resurrection of each individual, and thereby of humanity collectively. Humanity has been crucified upon the cross of material form. Today we see this in scientific and spiritual materialism. Once again, our spiritual ascent—resurrection, liberation and return—is accomplished through the practice of the spiritual path, the yoga of the path to realization of Christ Consciousness, the indwelling *Christos* or Cosmic Christ that is and always shall be our original divine self nature. From the Fifth Gospel, the *Gospel of Thomas* (Gnostic) Jesus speaks:

If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.... There is light within a being of light, and it lights the whole world. If he does not shine, he is darkness.

"Christ is Risen"

The great truth "Christ is Risen" is, esoterically, the personal realization that the conditional ego-I of every human being has already been resurrected into the Gnosis of Light that is the "I Am" presence, the *Christos (vidya, rig pa)* that is not other than, or in any way separate form our source, *Abba* or God the Father, primordial spirit-being itself. "Christ is risen" is the truth that "it is already accomplished" (Garab Dorje); that each one is already resurrected into the light, here, now, at the heart, when we listen, open and recognize, then realize *That (tat)* that we always actually are, this primordial Gnosis of Light. This recognition, this remembrance can occur at any moment now. The realization and actualization of it through kind, compassionate acts takes a little longer. "The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step" (Lao Tzu).

The Gnostic Christian Nondual View: Kabbalah, Valentinus and Thomas

We have seen that some contemporary scholars (Jonas, Rudolph, Churton) view the Christian Gnostic record of the first two centuries as theologically and ontologically dualistic

regarding the separation of matter and Spirit, humanity and God. But it is not so. Well developed nondual monistic (all of reality is one substance) teaching arises in the Valentinian, literature of the second century C.E. (Schoedel, Dawson, Layton). Of God the Prmordial Father: "He possessed the All dwelling within him" (Valentinian Exposition). "In the Unbegotten One, all things exist at once" (Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies). According to Bentley Layton, this teaching assumes a nondual monistic cosmology characteristic of "Stoic pantheistic monism [where] all is enclosed by God and ultimately all is God" (Layton 1987). William Schoedel: "Such theology presupposes a non-dualistic cosmology. For it does not allow that the God who contains all things is limited by any other reality" (Schoedel, 1972). The Valentinian first principle, the supreme source of the All is this Primordial Father, the Depth (Bythos or Bathos). From this masculine aspect of godhead emanates The Son that is "The Mind," intrinsic primordial awareness itself descended into mental and physical form. Thus, from the nondual One arises plurality, The Many. This feminine aspect of godhead is called "The Silence," the direct experience of the Primordial Awareness Wisdom that is utter equanimity or peace. Thus this androgenous male/female dyad that is The Son descends as The Mind into spacetime as the dimensions (Aeons) of mental and material form. All together these entities, these "members of the All" constitute the pleroma or "fullness" of the Father that is nondual godhead (Layton 1980, Schoedel 1972, Thomassen in Meyer, 2007). Jesus is the physical embodiment of the Son (Mind), the *Christos* who incarnates into spacetime in order to teach to suffering, separated human beings the redeeming Gnosis of Light.

Two of the great Nag Hammadi texts, Valentinus' Gospel of Truth (Gnostic) and the Tripartite Tractate (Gnostic) explicate this profound, if fantasque, gnostic ontology. These pivotal texts represent a transition in Christian history from the outer exoteric Hellenistic-Platonic dualism of earlier Egypto-Greek and Gnostic teaching, and from the dualism—the essential separation of humanity and God, matter and spirit—of the Hebrew Tanakh (The Old Testament) and the developing Christian Orthodoxy, to the inner esoteric and then radical nondual experiential mysticism of the Kabbalistic Valentinian and the Thomas teaching. Exemplars of this transition process include, as we have seen, the great Gnostic turned Orthodox theologians, Clement of Alexandria (Stromata, Book IV) and his disciple, Origen, and later, Saint Augustine (before his conversion to Orthodoxy).

Both the *Gospel of Truth* and the *Tripartite Tractate* emphasize inward mystical *epinoia* (*bhavana*, *dhyana*). *Epinoia* is the penetrating insight of immediate contemplative or meditative, non-conceptual knowing (*gnosis*) *vis-a-vis* exoteric, conventional conceptual belief (*dianoia*, *doxa*) in the separate Platonic creator demiurge and the exoteric dualistic creator-god of the Hebrews and Orthodox Christians. Both of these texts utilize the nondual Kabbalistic mysticism of the ancient *Raza Rabba* (The Great Mystery), and the 2nd century mysticism of the *Zohar* of Simeon ber Yohai. (*Zohar* was probably completed in the 12th century by Moses de Leon.) These secret teachings are antedated by a thousand years in the Hebrew *hekalat*, and through the *logos/Christos* incarnation of Enoch. The *Gospel of Truth*

speaks of redemption (apolytrosis, release or liberation) as "revealed to be perfect through the mercies of the Father" as the hidden mystery, Jesus the Christ. Through him he enlightened those who were in darkness because of forgetfulness." (Grant, 1961). This forgetfulness (amnesis) begets the ignorance (hamartia/sin) that perceives the phenomenal world of matter as objectively real and separate from the *pleroma*, the fullness of spirit, the All embraced by perfectly subjective Bathos, the Depth that is godhead, the Primordial Father. Valentinus laments this condition in which we arise and dwell within God yet we do not know it. Through this fundamental ignorance of the nature of reality and our place and participation in it we see, not the luminous primordial unbounded wholeness, the Bathos of the pleroma, but merely its illusory platonic shadows that constitute the apparently separate material world. But for the Valentinians God is the one reality. There is only God. Gnosis is the light that dispels the separative darkness of ignorance that brings suffering and death, so that we may know there is no ultimate separation between humanity and God. The world of form arises, dwells and decays within the Depth of the Primordial Father God, who transcends yet embraces every participating fragment of that unbounded whole. Such a view is the antithesis of Gnostic dualism. Again, this Valentinian narrative partakes in the very innermost secret nondual core of our Primordial Wisdom Tradition, whether Buddhist Dzogchen, Advaita Vedanta, or Kabbalah.3

For the esoteric oriented Christian *pneumatic* Gnostic, Jesus demonstrated the *logos-Christos* that is present as the divine "Gnosis of Light" *within* each human being, an inherent, already present, divine spiritual potential awaiting recognition, then realization. For these Christians neither the human Jesus, the great exemplar and master teacher of the Gnosis of Light, nor Jesus as the Son of God was the object of worship. For the nondual *Gnostics* it is the *logos-Christos*, the Christ Nature, the very presence of God that abides at the human heart that Jesus' realization exemplified.

Thus, in the Valentinian Gospel of Truth and the Tripartite Tractate we see a fully developed nondual, monistic transcendence of the persistent dualism of matter and spirit, humanity and God, body and soul, soul and the divine of exoteric Hellenism, Orthodox Judaism and Orthodox Christianity. Through the Valentinian texts, and also in the Thomas literature we discover the "Gnosis of Light" that is nothing less than the nondual wisdom teaching found at the esoteric and nondual heart of all of the traditions of our Great Tradition, as we have seen. This is the great innermost secret spiritual teaching that was descended to Jesus from Moses, Enoch and the hekalot, to the mystical Zohar and Kabbalah, and from the ancient Orphic/Hermetic mystery religions, and passed forward through the

³ When speculating about the "highest" or most subtle nondual "innermost secret" teaching of any tradition it may be useful to note that there are levels of depth of understanding of this greatest teaching, from the subtlest conceptual understanding, through the penetrating insight of the union of shamatha/vapashyana (ennoia/epinoia), to the omniscient understanding of a Christ/Buddha. Such levels or dimensions of understanding are functions of the psychospiritual lifestage development of the individual. Moreover, with the exception of a Christ/Buddha, the speaker/interpreter introduces a personal subjectivity into the objective unpacking of the teaching. There seems to be a profound impulse, even a *prima facie* moral imperative to share our innate Primordial Wisdom with one another. Yet there exists an apparent protean abyss between our view and our conduct. We will not be taken seriously until we practice our praxis. Thus do we proceed.

esoteric mystical Gnostic teaching of the Apostle Paul, and on to Paracelsus, Meister Eckhart, Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila. Some of these initiates realized, then actualized through the Gnosis of Light the actual *Christos*, (logos), the Cosmic Christ that abides, according to the *Gospel of Thomas*, in each human being.

Clearly, the authors of the Valentinian texts, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and other incipient nondual Gnostic texts (e.g. the non-Christian Hermetic *Nag Hammadi texts: Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth, Asklepios* and the *Prayer of Thanksgiving*) perceived and perhaps even realized in the lifeworld the esoteric "innermost secret" nature of mind that is nondual God the Primordial Father, the ultimate sourceground of all arising spacetime phenomena. Clement of Alexandria speaks of the "Monadic Gnosis," and the metaphysical unity of all relative spacetime being in God. Valentinus tells of the "source of the All, the Ineffable One liveth in the Monad ... alone, in the silence ... and none was before him (*A Valentinian Exposition-Nag Hammadi*)." "Your Father in Heaven is One" (*Interpretation of Knowledge - Nag Hammadi*). The view of the Valentinians and the Thomas Christian Gnostics then, was that God—*Abba*, the Primordial Father—was the nondual supreme source of all phenomenal being, and that Jesus the *Christos* was a mortal avatar who, during his human life "overcame the world," that is he realized, then demonstrated the truth of our inherent indwelling Christ-Nature, our divine human potential and prior actual identity as "Children of the Light."

The Three Aspects of Knowledge: Gnosis, Sophia, Dianoia

Gnosis (*jnanalyeshe*) is the "primordially pure" clearlight of mind that opens into the very ground or source of being. Gnosis is our innate, indwelling nondual noetic (mind/spirit) primordial wisdom accessed through immediate subjective knowing experience. Gnosis is not merely belief or conceptual or empirical knowledge (*dianoia*, *episteme*). Nor is it the discriminating penetrating wisdom (*sophia*, *prajna*, *sherab*) that consumes the *kleshas* (obstructive negative emotions) and prepares the mind to open and receive Gnosis. Gnosis is direct, penetrating nondual meditative or contemplative spiritual insight/intuition (*epinoia*, *vapashyana*) of the naked Primordial Awareness Wisdom (*jnanalvidya*, *yeshelrig pa*) of our Supreme Source (Tao, *Nirguna Brahman*, *Mahashunyata*, *Dharmakaya*, *Samantabhadra*) in whom arises all spacetime phenomena.⁴ Again, this ultimate sourceground—"Big Mind" (*paramartha*)—transcends yet embraces "Small Mind" (*samvriti*), relative, perceptual and conceptual knowledge and discursive thinking about arising spacetime phenomena.⁵ Gnosis is the knowing aspect (*buddhi*, *jnalshepa*,

⁴ "Awareness" translates *ennoia*, "mindfulness" translates *aponoia*, concept/belief translates *dianoia*, "empirical experience" translates "*episteme*" "relative discriminating wisdom" translates *sophia*, "nondual primordial awareness wisdom" (*jnana/yeshe*) translates *gnosis*, "*primordial presence*" translates vidya/rigpa, "Supreme Source"/"Depth" translates *Bathos*.

⁵ Our perennial wisdom Great Tradition teaches of the dialectic of the "Two Truths": Relative Truth (*samvriti*), the finite objective relative-conventional empirical reality with its physical and mental phenomena, and Ultimate or Absolute Truth (*paramartha*), the infinite, nondual perfectly subjective unbounded whole, the Ultimate Reality that transcends yet embraces the phenomenal world of Relative Truth. This world of Relative Truth includes the dyad of outer exoteric and inner esoteric reality dimensions. This esoteric dimension then includes yet deeper or subtler strata of hidden dimensions,

vidya) of the nondual essence of mind, beyond the duality of subject and object, prior to the discursive and emotive function of mind (manas, namshe, vijnana). Thus Gnoisis is primordial (yenas) wisdom in that it transcends, yet includes, temporal relative knowledge (samvriti) of spacetime phenomena. "To know oneself at the deepest level is to know God" (Monoimus). Here, knower (gnostikos) and known (gnosis), subject and object, spirit and matter are not separate but participate together as the unbounded whole in a relationship of identity. Exoterically oriented Jews and Christians have assumed a dualistic separation of humanity and God for centuries. Again, such a view represents the ignorance (avidya) that is hamartia (sin), literally "missing the mark." The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas speaks not of sin and repentance but of ignorance (hamartia/sin, avidya, alogos, marigpa) and enlightenment (vidya, rigpa, logos, liberation, bodhi, moksha, apolytrosis). It is this liberation/enlightenment that is, according to the pith teaching of our Great Wisdom Tradition, the end of all our seeking, ultimate "Happiness Itself."

Jesus and Paul: The Outer, Inner and Nondual Teaching

The obscurity and contradictions of the canonical New Testament *Gospels, Acts* and *Epistles* clearly show that they have been over-written, re-written, interpolated and revised with the anti-mystical Orthodox intent to de-mystify, de-spiritualize and conceptualize the teaching of Jesus (Pagels, Koester, Robinson, Mack, Funk, Meyer). To further complicate matters, Jesus (and Paul), like all great spiritual adepts, transmitted the ancient nondual Gnosis mystery teaching both exoterically, to those less well prepared to receive, and esoterically, to those whose *karma* and spiritual practice had prepared them for the "mysteries of the Kingdom."

"I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.... These things have I spoken unto you in parables: the time cometh when I shall ... tell you plainly of the Father" (*John* xvi 12, 25).

To the spiritually uninitiated and unprepared the mystery of the Gnosis of Light can be given only through allegory, metaphor and symbol. Whether layperson, priest or scholar, the true Gnosis of Light can only be transmitted directly, through the mindstream of an the "innermost secret," and finally the nondual which is ultimate Reality Itself. Again, the realization of these ascending levels of knowledge is a function of the psychospiritual lifestage development of the spiritual aspirant. As to the experience of these hidden dimensions, whether conceptual dianoia or direct contemplative epinoia/gnosis, it is most important to maintain the understanding awareness that these dimensional reality realms—these "many mansions of the Father's house"—arise in a relationship of interdependence with one another and with the whole, and therefore possess no inherent, independent existence in themselves; not even the nondual Ultimate Reality itself. I have elsewhere referred to the great prior unity of these none too tidy epistemological dualities as the "Principle of Ontological Interdependence." Indeed, our Great Tradition views all objective and subjective entities as ultimately empty of inherent existence (shunyata, pratity a samutpada). This does not however, deny them their reality status as objectively real objects in the realm of Relative Truth that is empirical, relative-conventional spacetime reality. This principle of the Two Truths is the key to understanding the emerging paradigm shift that is the resolution of the "explanatory gap" between mind and matter (the "mind-body problem"), and between science and spirituality that is the "hard problem" of consciousness with its urgent need of an integrative principle between the third person methodologies of Western science and the first person modes of inquiry of Vedic/Buddhist contemplative science (Ch.VIII).

adept master to the prepared mind of the disciple/devotee. The ego-I cannot transcend itself without intervention. The mind cannot come to know itself alone. This is a vital truth of the metanarrative of our great Primordial Wisdom Tradition, whatever the individual tradition narrative.

As to the great Gnosis of Light teaching as it arises in the metaphors and allegories of the canonical and non-canonical Gospels, Acts and Epistles, it is urgent to distinguish the outer, materialistic exoteric from the inner esoteric (secret and innermost secret) connotations of the Christos, the Logos or Christ principle. While the exoteric view of Jesus is as God incarnate, for the esoteric understanding Jesus is the historical human who "overcame the world" to become Jesus the liberated Christ (the Christos, the initiate adept and anointed one), a fully realized human avatar who, like Moses, Shankara, Buddha Gautama, Longchenpa, Padmasambhava, incarnated to fully realize the indwelling primordial wisdom, the Gnosis of Light that is the *Christos (Logos)*, Buddhahood, and further, to demonstrate this great truth that the Cosmic Christ or Christ Nature (or Buddha Nature) is the actual design of humanity. Each human being is a kosmic⁶ being, a potential Kosmic Christ or Buddha, and may, in due course, realize the potential of that primordial Christ/Buddha nature within. "The only difference between a Buddha and an ordinary person is that one realizes it, the other does not" (Zen patriarch Hui-neng). Although the wisdom gnosis is fully awake and present at every moment, we do not see it, so the master reveals it through the stages of the spiritual path as the disciple grows, step-by-step into the Gnosis of light. This ostensible paradox I have elsewhere termed "the paradox of the path." For Paul, the great initiate of the Gnosis of light,

I came unto you not with the excellence of wisdom (*Gnosis, Sophia*) proclaiming to you the mystery of God... howbeit we speak wisdom among the full-grown.... I fed you milk, not with meat; for ye were not yet able to bear it *The psychic* does not discern *pneumatic* things.

-Paul, I Crointhians

The Gnosis of Light (nondual wisdom, *jnana*, *yeshe*) received by faith/*pistis* (surrender of the ego) is then, the great mystery of the ages. The Gnosis of Light is the Tao that cannot be named. It is the unity of luminous emptiness, awareness and appearance of Buddhist *shunyata*. This Gnosis of Light is the direct nondual experience of the divine inner wisdom presence (*Christos*, *vidya*, *rig pa*) of the Cosmic Christ, unseparate from the Primordial Father, the very base, or ground or source in whom energy (*spiritus*, *pneuma*, *ch'i*, *lung*, *prana*) arises in space and time as light, mind, matter, breath, voice and all the manifested things of relative, conditional existence. This great mystery cannot be told. It cannot be grasped by the mind. It is profound. It utterly transcends the conceptual

⁶Kosmic here denotes the unbounded whole of the Pythagorean Kosmos (physical, mental, causal, nondual spirit) that transcends yet embraces the merely physical cosmos.

understanding. Yet, from such a ground, through the mind, upon the breath, the Gnosis of Light arises, shines at the heart of all beings.

This is the "Gospel that has been given in all creation under heaven" (*Colossians*). This is the teaching that has "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." (2 *Timothy*). This is the truth that "existed among the ancients, and never did not exist, from the beginning of the human race until Christ came in the flesh...(St. Augustine)

Again, such a teaching refers not to the historical human person of Jesus, nor to Jesus as God, but to the *Christos*, the Gnosis of Light that he realized and demonstrated, not by his death but by his life. For Paul, as for the Gnostic authors of *John* and *Thomas*, the teaching is the esoteric "Gnosis of Light that passeth all understanding." It is indeed, the *Christos*, the Christ Nature that is that very "light which lighteth every one that cometh into the world." "The lamp of the body is the mind" (*Gnostic Dialog of the Savior*). "Enlighten your mind . . . light the lamp within you" (*Gnostic Teaching of Silvanus*). Alas, even though this *Christos* dwells now, awake, at the heart within each human form, yet we know it not. "It is spread upon the face of the earth, but you do not see it." Thus it abides in "The Silence" awaiting the surrender of opening (*pistis*/faith) that is the *sadhana* of the spiritual path.

On the road to Damascus, "when it was the good pleasure of God ... to reveal his son in me" (not *to* me), Paul was initiated (*teleosis*, anointed) by the *Christos*, the "Christ that liveth in me," "the mind of Christ," not by the God Jesus, and not by the man Jesus (Paul never met Jesus in the flesh). "For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ" (*Galatians*). *In Ephesians* Paul states, "How that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery of the Christ."

Clearly, Paul understood the distinction between the great manifestation of the *Christos-Logos* in Jesus the great human teacher, and Jesus as a unique singular god. Paul loved the great man Jesus for his demonstration of the realization of the Gnosis of Light. But Paul praised and attempted to realize in himself the nondual divine *Logos*, the *Christos* realized by the mortal human Jesus in order to reveal to each one of us our own divine potential or capacity for this ultimate happiness that is liberation/enlightenment.

Exoterically then, the great man Jesus of Nazareth has been molded by humans to be worshipped as the one and "only begotten Son of God," a separate, (though immanent) transcendent god, a unique spiritual singularity in the history of the world. In a less parochial, esoteric view, Jesus was one of many historical and pre-historical avatars and Christ-Buddhas, the indwelling, unseparate *logos* incarnated from the very source of All-That-Is, the "I Am," to teach and to demonstrate to self-conscious beings that greatest truth: that "No longer I, but Christ liveth in me", and "Wonder of wonders, all beings are Buddhas... Everything is Buddha from the beginning." It is through this great realization that "Christ shall shine upon thee."

The Solar Logos: The Descent and Ascent of All-Embracing Spirit

Who is it? As far into antiquity as we may go, it is told of "that One that dwelleth in the sun." The various mythic sun gods are the logoic expressions for us of that bright One who

is the very source or base of everything that is, whose luminous body is of pure clear light, and in whom an avataric "son" is incarnated into spacetime physical form. ("Logos" is a Greek translation of the Hebrew *dabar*, "that which lies behind, or prior to.") The *Christos* or Cosmic Christ in whom the great avatars descend is the Solar Logos aspect or expression of this Primordial Father (Abba in Jesus' Aramaic tongue), our very sourcegorund, primordial Spirit Itself. For the Vedic tradition this nondual primordial source of That-That-Is is *Kham* Brahm, "The Bright" that is Nirguna Brahman, in whom Krishna and Shankara incarnate. For Taoists it is the ineffable stillness of the *Tao* that cannot be told; in Egypt it was *Osiris* in whom appears the divine son Horus; in Greece it was *Apollo*; for Kabbalists it is the unspeakable En Sof (One Point); in Persia it was Ahura-Mazda (Ormazd); for Buddhist tradition it is mahashunyata, the union of phenomenal appearance and primordially pure luminous emptiness in whom everything arises and participates, embodied as Samantabhadra (Tib. Kuntuzangpo, Jap. Fugen) the primordial Adi Buddha. For the Hebrews it is the unspeakable nondual God of Abraham and Moses, *El'elyôn*, the "I Am That I Am," in whom Jesus incarnates. (Yahweh-Elohim is its outer, exoteric, creator aspect just as Ishvara and Suguna Brahman are the relative, creator aspects of Nirguna Brahman, the nondual unqualified Absolute.) "And God said unto Moses, I Am That I Am ('eh yeh aser 'eh yeh): and he said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you" (*Exodus*). That "I Am" is eternally present as the Solar Logos, the *Christos* presence that lives as potential to be realized at the spiritual heart of each human being. Thus Jesus spoke to the Pharisees: "Before Abraham was, I Am." From *El*, the perfectly subjective, utterly ineffable, primordial Absolute source has come Yahweh-Elohim, mother-father creator God in whom arises all of phenomenal reality, and the sentient beings to experience and grow through it, and in whom incarnates all of the Christ-Buddhas and great avatars and mahasiddhas of the past, and of the present, and of the future.

According to our Great Tradition, the liberation of humanity from our seeming descent into the suffering of this material world requires nothing less than the periodic manifestation and intervention of the Solar Logos into an avataric incarnation, as a human being, who then "overcomes the world" and realizes, then demonstrates the wisdom and compassion of the way and the path to return. "The Word (*logos/Christos*) was made flesh and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth" (The *Gospel of John*, a Gnostic Gospel).

According to our Great Tradition then, the Solar Logos has manifested through many incarnations throughout human history: Jesus the Christ, Gautama Shakyamuni the Buddha (and all the Buddhas of prehistory), Garab Dorje, Padmasambhava, Longchen Rabjam, Tsongkapa, Bodhidharma, Dogen, Ramakrishna, Shankara, Ramana Maharshi, Lao Tzu, and many others, all incarnated manifestations of nondual timeless Spirit descended as divine avataric archetype into the spacetime material dimension of existence. From its primordial source the *Logos* incarnates again and again into human form to realize, then teach the true Gnosis of Light, our indwelling Christ/Buddha Nature in order to enlighten and liberate all who will listen, surrender (*pistis*-faith) and follow The Way. This "true Gnosis of light" is the peace and equanimity of *samadhi*, *moksha*, *satori/kensho*, *apolytrosis*, the realization of that

luminous interior immediate presence of the *logos-Christos* (*vidya*, *rig pa*) that is our actual "supreme identity" and that is not other than, or separate from the all embracing great expanse of the supreme source itself: *Tao, Brahman, Shunyata, Dharmakaya, Abba* the Primordial Father that is That "I Am That I Am," of Moses and Jesus. Esoterically, the teaching is about the same. Exoterically it appears a little different. Buddha emphasized wisdom and compassion. Jesus emphasized love and compassion. Esoterically understood, the truth of the Gnosis has its wisdom aspect; it has its love aspect. Wisdom is manifested as Love—kindness and compassionate service to others. Love and Wisdom are a prior unity. The dialectic of the nondual primordial wisdom teaching appears differently in different times, for different peoples, through different metaphors, but the nondual heart essence of the teaching is always the same. At the apex, where exoteric and esoteric differences merge into greater esoteric or innermost secret identity, all differences are transcended in their nondual primordial source, a prior metaphysical unity. Who is it?

Something lives within you that lives longer than the suns. It resides at the place in the heart. . . What that subtle Being is, from which all that is arises, that is the Real, that is Spirit, that thou art (*Tat tvam Asi*). . ."

- Chandogya Upanishad (Samaveda)

A billion stars spin through the night blazing high above your head. Deep within you is the presence that will be, when all the stars are dead.

-Rilke

It is "That I Am" (*Tat tvam Ami*) that is the great "I Am" of Israel, of Moses and of Jesus, and of all the buddhas and *mahasiddhas* of the past, and of the present, and of those yet to come. It is That I Am that is the presence of the Gnosis of Light abiding at the heart of each human form.

New Testament Mythmaking

That which is called the Christian religion existed among the Ancients, and never did not exist . . . -St. Augustine

The *New Testament* is an extremely limited selection of texts produced from a large body of teaching that evolved among various Christian/Jewish communities during the first two hundred years following the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

The discovery of authentic Gospels, Acts and Letters at Nag Hammadi in 1945, the Essene Scriptures at Qumran in 1948, and the deconstruction of the canonical *New Testament* by postmodern Bible and religious historical scholarship reveals a picture of the formation, evolution and content of the teaching of Jesus that is quite different from the current Christian view.

According to the conventional view of Christianity, the authors of the *New Testament* were all present, and directly witnessed the divine intervention of Jesus the Christ, the "only begotten son of God" into the world. Further, these writings were all for the sole purpose of implementing Jesus intention to establish the Orthodox Christian Church. The conventional idea that the *New Testament* is "a singular collection of apostolic documents, all of which bear 'witness' to a single set of inaugural events, is misleading" (Mack 1995).

Scholars and religious historians know that the canonical *New Testament* record is the evolutionary product of two centuries of Christian myth-making, brilliantly constructed by the Orthodox Church leadership to establish its singular view of God's plan for his earthly kingdom and the church's absolute authority over it. Over the centuries the image of Jesus has been molded to fit some earthly view or another. For example, there is near universal scholarly agreement that the gospels and other texts of the *New Testament*, with the exception of most of Paul's letters (*Colossians* and *Ephesians* are of questionable authenticity), were actually written anonymously or pseudonymously during the first century by the leaders of what was to become the Orthodox Catholic Church (Duling 1979; Mack 1995; Butts 1987; Koester 1996; et. al.).

Various Jesus communities began to develop in the 30's and 40's of the first century (p.233). Many scholars now believe that the earliest was the community that produced the *Gospel of Thomas*, followed by the *Sayings Gospel* of "Q" (30 to 70 C.E.). The *Gospel of Thomas* may well have been the source for "Q" and the synoptic gospels. The *Letters of Paul* are dated from the 50's, the *Gospel of Mark* from the 70's, the *Gospel of Matthew* from the 80's, the *Gospel of John* in the 90's, the *Gospel of Luke* at the end of the First Century, and the acts, letters and other texts during the first half of the Second Century (Mack 1995; Butts 1987; Koester 1982, Pagels, 1989.), Each of the Jesus communities that produced the gospels and other texts of the *New Testament* had a different view of Jesus' teaching. All believed their disciple and his view to be the correct view. Several of these Jesus groups had their own gospels (Cameron 1982). Some of the early

Jesus groups viewed Jesus as a great esoteric teacher or sage (early Q, *Gospel of Thomas, Gospels* of *Mark* and *Matthew*). Others viewed him exoterically and dualistically, as a singularly divine and separate god (late Q, *John*, cf. pp. 232, 233).

These various texts then came to be collected by a radical Christian community (the "Christ Cult") that evolved gradually during the second through the fourth centuries to become the Orthodox Christian Church, (Mack 1995,1993; Koester 1996; Butts 1987). This particular view of Jesus and his teaching, along with its revision of Judaism, became the *de facto* religion of Empire following the conversion of Constantine (313) who became sole emperor of the Roman Empire in 325. In 381 Emperor Theodosius declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. The Church edited the large body of Christian literature in accordance with its view (the "Christ Myth"), suppressed Gnostic dissent, (the penalty for heresy was death), revised and appropriated the Hebrew epic in support of its view, created or revised the *Gospel of John* and added it to the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke to complete the "four formed gospel," attached this "*New Testament*" to selected and edited exoteric Jewish scriptures (the "*Old Testament*") at the Council of Nicaea (325), "fixed" this New Testament cannon so that no other version of the Jesus teaching could be added or deleted (Council of Carthage 397 and again at the Council of Trent 1545-1563), and thereby created the contemporary Christian Bible, the official word of God for all Christians.

The scholarly contention that the exoteric and esoteric history of Christianity is a process of myth making should not be construed negatively. Nor is it news. All cultures create a narrative, a complex of myths to explain and understand their particular place in the history of the *kosmos*. Historians call these "myths of origin" and they constitute both the preconscious and superconscious deep cultural background of a culture. Religion, whether the exoteric metaphysical assumptions of scientific materialism (Ch.II) to the "highest" nondual teaching of our great Primordial Wisdom Tradition always arises in a social-cultural context. These myths are experienced exoterically and esoterically depending upon spiritual maturity. The popular scientific materialist notion that "history" is true, and "myth" is false is misleading, as if "history" is somehow written completely objectively, and "myth" is merely its trivial subjective corollary. Indeed, the reverse has been argued by our Great Tradition: that objective reality is an illusion of reified concepts, beliefs and appearances created by the separated, egoic observer (e.g. Buddhist and Hindu metaphysics; Eastern and Western philosophical and religious idealism, and the quantum theory, itself an incipient epistemological idealism, p.42 ff, 47 ff).

Postmodernism (the psychology of the unconscious, relativity and quantum theory) has taught us the relativity of explanation (p.47). The quest of modernism, the quest for a single, certain, absolute system of explanation—a "theory of everything"—has given way to a postmodern "conceptual relativity," an understanding that there are multiple useful (pragmatically true) explanations for any given phenomena or event (the "principle of non-reductionist causality"). The conventional view of history and myth then, is that history occurs in "real time" objective "reality," and myth occurs in some sort of diaphanous "mythtime," or unreal subjective reality. A synthetic, synchronic view is that these apparently

different realities are both present in the metaphysical unity that is the flux or stream of the tantric continuum (quantum discontinuum) of our preconscious, conscious and superconscious experience of being here in spacetime reality. Now one view may be manifest in individual or collective experience; now another view. Our attachment to, or identification with a particular view will polarize or separate us from other related or opposing views (wu *li).* The antidote is *shoshin*—zen mind— the openness of the beginners mind, understanding all views (including synthetic views and sublimely elegant mathematic and physical theories) contain truth as facets of a larger whole; not attaching to any particular view. ("I hold no opinions." Gautama, the Buddha). This is more than dialectical thinking. This is liberation thinking. The relativity of all views—"conceptual relativity"—is contained within the inclusive ultimate nondual view which transcends yet includes even our views about it. (This is not to say that "everything is relative." Ch.VII, Quantum Emptiness and the Relativity of Absolutes). That is, the nondual Ultimate or Absolute (Tao, shunyata, Brahman), the very essence and nature of mind ("Big Mind") utterly transcends yet includes relative mind ("Small Mind") and all of the conditional, relative phenomena arising therein, including our conceptual theoretical speculations and our closely held beliefs about it.

Mythmaking then, is a necessary and inevitable socio-psychological behavior complex in the evolution of the historical identity of any culture. Metamythmaking occurs as the various narratives, the icons and epics of a self-conscious species begin to merge and transcend their apparently separate and different iconographies into the more inclusive truth of the prior metaphysical unity that is their perfectly subjective source. According to our Great Wisdom Tradition, ultimately, every apparent difference is drawn up into its primordial source, only to re-emerge again and again, moment to moment, eon to eon, cosmos to cosmos, as if such differences were ever actually separated at all. Indeed, the realization of this truth is the perennial wisdom teaching that Jesus, and the Buddhas and other masters have transmitted exoterically to the people, and esoterically to their prepared disciples from the very beginning. The Primordial Wisdom teaching then, is the goodness, beauty and truth of reality carried forth through relative time and space within the deep background cultural storage vehicle of myths, metamyths, archetypes and metanarratives.

Therefore, no culture stands cognitively in an objective relation to its own myths. This includes the individual students, scholars, apologists and critics of the culture. Even those scholars of the religious myths of the culture remain attached to, or live in subjective relation to certain of these myths, as evidenced by the astonishing cognitive gymnastics (cognitive dissonance: both belief and denial) of religious historians, philosophers and theologians throughout the history of humankind. (Present company excluded, of course.)

The "Christ Myth" and the "Christ Cult"

If we are to begin to understand the profound Primordial Wisdom teaching that is the esoteric "innermost secret" nondual teaching of Jesus, we must understand the nature and

historical evolution of both the outer exoteric and inner esoteric aspects of Christian mythology and ideology. This, in turn, will aid our understanding of the universal, transcultural truth of the descent of primordial "divine" Being, the *Logos* itself, our very source, into an avataric, logoic human incarnation—e.g. Jesus the Christ, Gautama the Buddha— who "overcomes the world" by realizing, then demonstrating—through perfect compassionate activity—the perennial truth of the ascent, the way of return to this "supreme source." It is this primordial nondual teaching that is the inner truth of the outer appearance of the Christ Myth, and indeed, of all exoteric religious myths and traditions.

Gradually, over a quarter of a century of early Christian social experimentation, probably in Syria, one of the several Jesus communities began to shift its focus from the view of Jesus as a great teacher-sage, as it appears in the Synoptic Gospels of the New Testament, the *Sayings* (*logia*) *Gospel* of *Q* (early *Q*), and in the *Gospel* of *Thomas*, to a new focus on Jesus' identity, the meaning of his death and related ideas of his death, resurrection and martyrdom. Jesus the human teacher, sage and spiritual master who realized the *logos/Christos* became transformed into Jesus, the separate one and only begotten son of God, a unique spiritual singularity in the history of humankind. Emphasis on the esoteric teaching ("the Kingdom of God is within you") shifted to the exoteric worship of Jesus as a god, or Jesus as God. Moreover, belief in this story, the "Christ Myth" which became the Nicene Creed, was the only way to salvation for all human beings, now and forever. (Today, in the 21st century, this parochial view is still held by most Christians.) The evidence for such a group comes from Paul's letters of the middle of the first century. Indeed, this is probably the group to which Paul converted (Cameron, Duling, Mack).

As this "Christ Cult" spread, its christology became anchored in the mythology of martyrdom, the ancient transcultural archetype of the honorable death. The conventional, exoteric "Christ Myth" that emerged is expressed in Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15: 3-5), known as the *kerygma* (proclamation): Jesus the Christ died for the sins of humankind; he was buried, and on the third day was resurrected from death whereupon he appeared to Peter, then later to the other disciples. This "kerygmatic formula" that is the root of the "Christ Myth" is exoterically, the death and resurrection of the actual physical material body of Jesus the Christ, the one and only son of God. An exoteric reading of Paul's letter to the Romans clarifies (7:21-26) the formula: God regards Jesus' death as expiation for the sins of the gentiles, and to justify and encourage human beings to commit to the true faith (pistis) that was exemplified by Jesus himself.

The Christ Myth therefore provided the emerging "Christ Cult" (the very early Orthodox Church) a very material solution to two pressing problems: the forgiveness and inclusion of gentiles into the Christian Jewish community, and a miraculous sign from God (the resurrection) that justified the group's claim to be the children (chosen people) of the God of Israel, and the inheritors of God's kingdom on earth (Mack 1993, 1995; Koester 1996; Funk 1995).

The Apostle Paul: Orthodox or Gnostic?

It is important to note that during the period of Paul's letters (the 50's), and indeed until the Gospel of Mark in the 70's, Christians regarded themselves as a part of the Jewish temple state in Jerusalem. The Christ Myth was an ancient mythological solution for a Christian Jewish community who was struggling to assimilate gentiles into its congregation (*ekklesia*) while maintaining its relationship with the law and the prophets of Israel (*synagogue*).

Paul understood that the Christ Myth had its exoteric and its esoteric dimensions, and as all great masters, he taught through both modalities. Paul's gospel proclamation of the *kerygma* in his letters to the Corinthians and Romans proclaiming Jesus to be the *Christos* (*messiah*, *logos*) was the bedrock upon which the later Orthodox Church built its dualistic **exoteric** theology. This same proclamation is the very base of the **esoteric** nondual transcendental theology of the great tradition of our monistic nondual Primordial Wisdom teaching, of which Gnostic Thomas Christianity and Gnostic Valentinian Christianity is an example, and which we see in the *Gospels* of *Thomas* and *John*.(p.234,237). The difference lies in the emphasis on Jesus as the one and only Christ or God, or Jesus as the teacher and shower of the way to realization of the *logos/Christos* that dwells within each human heart.

The Valentinians revered Paul and viewed his letters, along with the *Gospel of Thomas*, as Gnostic primary sources for their nondual transcendental theology. Indeed, they considered Paul a Gnostic initiate (Pagels 1975). As noted, Valentinus received initiation into the Gnosis of Light by Theodus, the great disciple of Paul. It must also be noted that some of the theology attributed to the Valentinian school was standard Gnostic dualism. However, a close esoteric reading of the *Nag Hammadi* Valentinian Gnostic teaching in *The Gospel of Truth*, *The Tripartite Tractate*, *The Treatise on the Resurrection* (Codex I), *The Interpretation of Knowledge* and *A Valentinian Exposition* (Codex XI) reveals the nondual heart essence—the pith— of the teaching.

Yet Bishop Irenaeus, Tertullian, Justinian, and even Origen use Paul's theology in their Orthodox polemic against Gnostic, and particularly Valentinian Gnostic heresy. (Valentinus was expelled from the Church for heresy in 143.) Was Paul a Gnostic or an antignostic? The Gnostics claimed him. Orthodox heresiologists clamed him. Conventional scholarship views Paul as an antignostic. Yet clearly, there is Gnostic terminology and nondual exegesis in the Pauline letters. Elaine Pagels suggests that this Gnostic terminology in Paul's letters "may be more plausibly explained as Pauline terminology in the Gnostic writings" (Pagels 1975).

The nascent nondual teaching in both the Pauline and the Valentinian *corpus* are derived from the ancient pre-Christian, pre-Greek Orphic/Hermetic and even Vedic mystery teaching: from the "religion that existed among the ancients, and never did not exist, from the beginning of the human race..." (St. Augustine, *Epis. Retrac.*). Paul, and the Valentinian Gnostics understood this ancient "Gnosis of Light" as the essence of Jesus' teaching and derived their esoteric and even nondual transcendental theology from it. For the Orthodox heresiologists this esoteric mystical Gnostic aspect of Paul's teaching was in direct

opposition to their own dualistic exoteric view of the Christ Myth which understood Jesus as the separate one and only god-man. Their solution: Orthodoxy suppressed and denied both the dualistic and the nondual gnostic, esoteric aspect of Paul's (and thus Jesus') teaching. They utilized only the exoteric materialist/ physicalist aspect in their exegesis, and claimed that Paul was thereby antignostic.

That Paul (and Jesus) taught "in two ways at once", is clear not only from an esoteric reading of the Pauline *corpus*, but from his express statements in the authentic letters: "The *psychic* does not discern *pneumatic* things" (1 Cor. 2:14). As we have seen, the *psychic* (mind) *or pistic* Christian is unprepared to receive the true Gnosis of Light directly, and is given only the exoteric teaching which emphasizes religious law, ritual and morality. The *pneumatic* (spirit) Christian ("the elect") is prepared through advanced spiritual practice and insight for the direct, esoteric and even nondual transmission of the Gnosis of Light. In our Primordial Wisdom tradition every great master or *mahasiddha* has transmitted the great nondual teaching in this "two ways at once."

The exoteric/esoteric dialectic is useful because without it the teacher and his/her unique transmission of the primordial nondual teaching will usually be interpreted from the exoteric pole only, thereby continuing the dualistic, polarized view at the expense of a more subtle, higher (deeper), more inclusive and comprehensive nondual understanding that is the precursor to liberation—the ultimate happiness—through the Gnosis of Light. Unfortunately, this is precisely the present situation regarding most contemporary historical interpretation of the teaching of Paul, and of Jesus (and of much Buddhist, *Vedanta* and Taoist teaching as well). Postmodern biblical exegesis remains rooted in second century exoteric Orthodox heresiology and its contemporary *apologia*. "From the modernism you choose, comes the postmodernism you deserve" (David Antin).

From Nazareth to Nicaea: The Packaging of Jesus

We have seen how the Orthodox Church of the first two centuries gradually displaced the historical Jesus of Nazareth with the "Christ Myth," the "Christ of Faith," ultimately codified in the *Creed of Nicaea* (325), and declared the official religion of the Roman Empire in 381. Again, the penalty for heresy was death.

The primordial nondual teaching of Jesus the sage-become-*Christos* that emerges from an esoteric understanding of *The Gospel of Thomas*, early *Q*, the nondual Valentinian teaching and other Gnostic and Hermetic teaching including the esoteric aspect of *John* (p.237), was transformed into the dualistic, materialist exoteric dogma of the *kerygma* formula and the later Orthodoxy of the synoptic gospels. Step-by-step, the Jesus of Thomas and Valentinus and his mystical gospel of the Gnosis of Light that dwells within us all was reduced to the mythic, separate Jesus-as-God that we get from an exoteric reading of the *Gospel of John*.

Contemporary Christianity therefore, did not originate with the historical Jesus and his actual teaching of the Gnosis of Light, but with the "creedal Christ" (Funk 1995), the "Christ Myth"

created, packaged and sold by the apologists of the early Church, those "false Gnostics ... who caused the Gnosis to be rejected and alienated the Church from the supreme truths of transcendental theology. [This was] the great misfortune which befell Christianity (Eliphas Levi p.201). This was indeed, the Christian Catastrophe.

The contemporary Neo-Orthodox Protestant theology of Bultmann, Barth, Tillich and Niebuhr, along with contemporary Christian fundamentalism and the Roman Catholic Church continue the dualism of the materialist, exoteric Orthodox legacy. Myths of origin evolve predictably. Their inevitable deconstruction and the excavation of more subtle truths waiting in their historical sources is painful due to our inherited belief and identity in, and emotional attachment to the comfort zones provided by the myth. The antidote? *Shoshin*/zen mind, the beginners mind, prior to the uncomfortable comfort zones of our attachment to our current conceptual and belief systems. Alas, easier said than done.

The challenge and the task of postmodern, postcritical, post metaphysical Christianity therefore, is to rediscover, then re-cognize the subjective, emotional, experiential-participatory transcendental theology of our Great Wisdom Tradition; to free the ancient, primordial nondual gospel teaching of Jesus from the *kerygmatic* grip of modernist, rational, "natural theology" exegesis of the canonical Gospels. "Men make gods and worship their creation" (*Gospel of Philip*-Gnostic). The task then, is to restore the great esoteric and the innermost secret nondual teaching of Jesus to Christianity, and to situate it and understand it in the context of the nondual teaching of humanity's Primordial Wisdom Tradition.

The Early Jesus Communities and the Early Gospels

When examining events of the past it is urgent to remember the subjective, cultural, conceptual relativity of any explanation (p.47). History is interpretation. Hermeneutics and textual exegesis yield , at best, a temporary and relative view. Historical facts, truths and meaning abide in a continuum of pre-conscious deep background cultural/historical flux, as we have seen.

Bible and religious historical scholarship has identified, through documentary evidence, at least six distinct Jesus communities that arose during the first fifty years after the death of Jesus (Mack 1995, Duling 1979, Koester 1990). We have seen that one of them developed into the Catholic Orthodox Christian Church that emerged from what some scholars have termed the "Christ Cult" (Mack 1995, Funk 1995). It was this Jesus group that created and enforced, during the first three centuries, a body of carefully selected and edited literature that was to become the epic myth of origin of Christianity as it appears in contemporary versions of the Christian Bible.

At least five other Jesus communities produced their own Christian texts. The earliest was probably the Gnostic Thomas community that produced the *Sayings Gospel of Thomas* which was similar to the *Gospel of Q*, also a sayings gospel. "Q" means *quelle* or "source" in German. Either *Thomas* or the mysterious *Q* was the primary source of the three synoptic gospels, Mark,

Matthew and Luke (Pagels, Mack 1993; Duling 1979; Koester 1996). Some scholars now believe that Thomas was the earliest (30-60 CE) and therefore the source of "Q" and the synoptic gospels (Pagels, Koestler, Meyer).

Another early Jesus community was the "Jerusalem Pillars" (Peter, James and John) mentioned by Paul in his letter to the Galatians. There was also the "Congregation of Israel" who created the pre-Markan miracle stories (stilling the storm, feeding the multitudes, walking on water, the blind man, the deaf mute, etc.) that were incorporated into the earliest canonical gospel, the *Gospel of Mark*. Finally there was the Jesus community that produced the pre-Markan "pronouncement stories." These were instructive anecdotal stories in the Greek *metis* (*chreiai*) tradition wherein the master dramatically demonstrates the *metis* aspect of his wisdom (exoteric discursive knowing, *i.e. sophia/prajna/sherab*) *vis-a-vis* his nondual wisdom (*gnosis/jnana/yeshe*) in a pithy rejoinder to a challenge. For example: "Can the rich enter the kingdom of heaven?" "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, give to God what is God's." When asked why he shared the table with the unclean tax collectors, Jesus said in this pronouncement story, "Those who are well, do not need a physician."

The primordial stream of the Gnosis of Light that entered the Christian religion through the incarnation and esoteric nondual teaching of Jesus, continued through some of the early Jesus communities to Paul, and to the communities that produced the Gnostic Gospels of Thomas and John, and the Gnostic Valentinus and the later Christian mystics. Along the way the nondual Gnosis of Light teaching clashed with the dualistic exoteric apocalyptic trend of the emerging Orthodox Church (the Christ Cult), thereby contributing to the refining of the Orthodox view (the Christ Myth), and the eventual fixing of the New Testament canon, to the exclusion of all Gnostic texts (except John) at the Council of Carthage in 397.

Most of the early Jesus people, including the people of the synoptic Gospels, the *Gospel of Thomas* and the people of *Q*, viewed Jesus as a master teacher, prophet and sage. The Christ Cult made him a god, divine but separate from humankind. The esoteric and nondual Gnostic view is of Jesus as the great exemplar (*mimesis*, to become the pattern) of liberation into the Gnosis of Light that is already present within us, the implicate, hidden or cloaked (*maya*) ultimate destiny of all human beings. This mystical view was evident in the first century Gnostic communities that produced the *Gospels of Thomas* and *Q*, and was developed further in the nondual teaching of the Valentinian and Hermetic literature of the second century.

The Gospel of Thomas

The Gospel of Thomas is a Coptic (Egyptian) translation of an authentic Greek text discovered in 1945 with the Nag Hammadi library (Codex II, 2). Scholars date the original text from the 30's to the 70's of the first century and consider it a source for the Matthew and

Luke Gospels, and possibly "Q" as well. It is considered by most scholars to be the "Fifth Gospel." It is a wisdom sayings gospel (logos/sophon) transmitting 114 koan-like instructions on awakening and expressing the inner Gnosis of Light. It is of tremendous importance for it is the only extant text authentically documenting that early Jesus communities produced sayings gospels based solely upon the actual teaching of an historical Jesus. Because it is early, and very much like the hypothesized but undocumented Sayings Gospel of Q, the possible "source" of the three *synoptic gospels*, it reveals much about the historical development of Jesus' teaching from its early formulation in Q, through the mythmaking process of later Q, and the synoptic Gospels, Acts and Letters. Unlike the other Gospels— Gnostic or synoptic—Thomas contains no Christos, no Jesus narrative, no dualism, no nihilism, no ontological speculation and no fantastical mythology or cosmogony. It is the voice of Jesus transmitting the wisdom of the ages in its earliest, purest Christian formulation. Thomas is a zen-like testament in that it is interpretive and perfomative. It does not preach. It does not condescend. It demands first person, present tense lifeworld response from the hearer, right now. It is radical in that, unlike the synoptic Gospels, Acts and Letters, its teaching is nondual, that is, no separation between God and humanity. The presence of God (*Christos*) is already present in everyone.

The *Gospel of Thomas* then, reveals authentic historical documentation of Jesus' actual radical esoteric teaching of the Gnosis of Light, the primordial nondual wisdom mindstream that flowed from Jewish Kabbalistic mysticism through the Gnostic teaching of Paul and the *Gospel of John*, the Valentinian School and some of the Sethian literature, all the way to the Catholic and Protestant mystics of the Reformation. This is the inner, esoteric teaching that would begin a polemical battle between the Christian Gnostics and the Orthodox Church that would rage for three centuries. This is the great inner nondual teaching that would ultimately be lost to Christianity with the victory of the dualistic, exoteric creator god theology of the Orthodox Church.

The inherent nondual view of the *Gospel of Thomas* transcends yet includes the Q people's early view of Jesus as a prophet and sage who teaches law and morality (Q¹). It transcends and includes the exoteric martyrology of late Q (Q²), and of the later "Christ Cult" that transforms Jesus into the separate transcendent god of the "Christ Myth," the Christ who died and whose physical body was magically resurrected from the dead in *kerygmatic* expiation for the alleged original sin of humankind. This later view served the Christ Myth of the developing Orthodoxy by transferring the emphasis from Jesus' heretical mystical esoteric teaching to the exoteric, fabulous event of his physical, bodily resurrection and ascension. As if by demonstration of miracles and magic his divinity were proven. The esoteric and even nondual view of both the Valentinian School and the *Gospel of Thomas* avoids such dualistic exoteric materialist proof strategies. (See also the *Greek Gospel of Thomas* [Nag Hammadi Codex II] and the Book of Thomas [NHC, II], a question/answer dialogue [erotapokriseis] in which Jesus nondual teaching is expressed in terms of platonic ontology and ethics.)

The Jesus people of the Gnostic Thomas and Valentinian communities, steeped in Jewish mysticism, could not believe, did not need to believe the outer exoteric *kerygma* martyrology of the Orthodox Christ Myth. With the conviction of their inner esoteric direct contemplative experience of Jesus' teaching with its emphasis on the personal enlightenment and transcendence of each human being, the notion of the necessity of Jesus' death as atonement for our inherent original sin, and of a magical, supernatural physical body resurrection was absurd. Indeed, even in the canonical *New Testament*, Paul, Matthew, Luke and even John made it clear that Jesus first appeared after the resurrection as a blinding luminous spiritual presence, not in physical, bodily form (Pagels 1989; Funk 1995; Robinson 1988).

As to Jesus' death as *kerygmatic* expiation of the original sin of humankind, these early Gnostics viewed the act of forgiveness as beginning with the individual. Forgiveness is seen as an act of love. We are forgiven our sins to the degree that we forgive ourselves, and others. This is the reciprocal nature of love. Forgiveness is accomplished—by grace—within the individual. No external agent or belief is necessary. What we give is what we get. What we sow is what we reap. Our Primordial Wisdom Tradition understands this truth as the Law of Cause and Effect—the Law of Karma.

However, the framers of the Orthodox view—codified in John—needed the doctrines of the exoteric physical resurrection and the vicarious atonement in their materialist polemic against the deeper, subtler esoteric view of the Gnostics. For the esoteric and the nondual Christian Gnostics the emphasis was on our original goodness—the inherent Gnosis of Light—not our original sin, our separation from God. What was important was our spiritual life, not death. Jesus was "the living one," the "living Jesus" who mirrors "the light that is over all things," the living presence of the *Christos*, the "I Am" that dwells within each human form, and indeed in all phenomena. "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you..." "The Kingdom of God is within you, and it is outside you." "Become a disciple of your own mind." "Light the light within you." "There is light within a being of light, and it lights the whole world..." "Look to the (inner) living one as long as you live" and not only in death (the Orthodox view), but in this very life you may return to the primordial kingdom of the Gnosis of Light that is the very ground of the world and all its beings. Jesus transmits this primordial wisdom in *Thomas* definitively in saying 108: "Whoever drinks from my mouth will become as I am, and I myself will become that person, and the mysteries shall be revealed to him." Thomas traces this primordially present wisdom seed of the Gnosis of Light to Genesis where humanity (Adam) descends in the image of the first primordial light. Jesus speaks: "We came from the light, the place where the light came into being by itself... We are its children, the chosen of the living Father" (*Thomas* 50).

As the "true disciple" initiate realizes, then demonstrates in the lifeworld his/her actual identity as a spiritual being of light—as the true Gnosis of Light—enlightenment (salvation, *apolytrosis*) arises and eventually, through this new Christ consciousness one may become as Jesus, a living Christ. One who receives (*paralambano*), then demonstrates in the lifeworld

this Gnosis of Light "is no longer a Christian, but a Christ" (*Gospel of Philip*, Gnostic). With such an inward view the Gnostic Christians of the Thomas community did not need the external magic and miracles that we see in the *Gospel of John* to establish objective credibility of their personal subjective experience of the Gnosis of Light.

The Gospel of John

The Gnostic Jesus community that produced the *Gospel of John*, probably in the 90's of the first century, seems to have developed its view of Jesus and his teaching independently of the other Jesus communities, and probably as polemic against gnostic heresy (Pagels, Koester, Mack). The Gospel of John became the locus of controversy between Irenaeus, the architect of the emerging Orthodox view of Jesus as God, and the Gnostic view of Valentinus and his disciples of Jesus as humanity's great teacher of the Gnosis of Light, that "luminous *epinoia*" that outshines from a "being of light and lights the whole world." Irenaeus, and later, Athanasius warn Christians to avoid the direct penetrating insight (in Buddhism it's called *vipashyana*) of *epinoia* and to experience God only through *dianoia*, or concept and belief. Thus was Christianity gutted of its essential esoteric mystical core. This bias persists in Catholic and protestant Christianity today (Pagels, Meyer, Layton, Koester).

The Johannine community developed, over time, both an exoteric and an esoteric view of the Jesus teaching that shows little resemblance to the three synoptic gospels. For the esoteric faction, the story of Jesus is the Hermetic/Hellenistic, Jewish Kabbalistic Gnostic story of the descent and ascent of the Christos, the unfathomable mystery of the divine presence of our transcendent supreme source, the "Primordial Father" incarnated into human form to realize and demonstrate the great perennial truth that this same result is the potential destiny of each human being. There seems to be little interest for either the exoteric or the esoteric factions of this community in producing the historical narrative of Jesus' life that we see in the synoptic gospels. The concern of the synoptic gospels is the story of the appearance (descent) of the divine presence as it develops (ascends) and becomes manifest in Jesus the human spiritual teacher. There is no attempt to identify Jesus with God, or to portray him as a God. But in an exoteric reading of John, Jesus bursts forth into spacetime reality not as human, but as the fully formed Christ, the incarnate *logos* itself, the Son of God. Here, Jesus is not only God's divine messenger, but God himself in a human form. Although the synoptic gospels refer to Jesus as the "Son of God" and "Messiah," these epithets referred to human functions and Jesus would have been considered a man, and not, as in John, "Lord and God" (Pagels, Koester). Again, "Men make Gods and worship their creation" (Gospel of Philip - Gnostic).

The exoteric oriented members of the John community emphasized the miracle stories (the "signs source") as proofs of the miracle of the singular divinity of the Christ, the one and "Only begotten Son of God." The members with esoteric understanding must have understood these stories as exoteric mythical signs outpicturing the deeper esoteric and

nondual truth of the divine *logos* working through Jesus in the world, and in the limited mind of humankind toward the evolutionary purpose of revealing the true Gnosis of Light, that indwelling presence abiding within each human being that is the divine potential awaiting its recognition and realization.

The exoteric aspect of the *Gospel of John* clearly intends the seven miracles as signs "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." (Some scholars believe this exoteric material was added much later.) The magical exoteric martyrology of the resurrection is to the same purpose. However, at the esoteric, gnostic core of the *Gospel of John* is the archetypal, nondual primordial wisdom teaching of the descent and ascent of the Primordial Father—our supreme source—as the incarnate *logos/Christos*, the divine presence at the heart of each one of us. Esoterically, as with the *Gospel of Thomas*, magical signs and martyrdom are not required. "I lay down my life to receive it back again. I lay it down of my own free will." On this view, Jesus did not intend to die in keregmatic atonement for our sins. It is not his death, but the perfect demonstration of his life that is the essential core of the teaching.

The Gospel of John contradicts the synoptic gospels on several points. Why then did Ireneaus and the Christian Othodoxy select the Gospel of John to complete the "four formed gospel" that became, in 397 CE (Council of Cartage), through the agency of Constantine and Athanasius, the Four Gospel Canon of the New Testament? An outer, exoteric reading of the Gospel of John holds that only Jesus embodies the divine Gnosis of Light and that therefore, humanity can know God only through the agency of Jesus (and therefore the agency of the Church). However, the Thomas and Valentinian gnostic Christians, drawing from the well of esoteric and nondual teaching of Jewish Kabbalah (and much earlier hekalat) and Greek Hermetic mysticism, came to see Jesus intervention in the world in a much different way. Here we recognize that each human being carries the inherent imprint of the "image of God" as the presence of the Gnosis of Light, the divine seed of liberation hidden within the human heartmind. Clearly, the christology written into the Gospel of John suited the purposes of Irenaeus, Tertullian and the later Bishops of the Orthodox Church in their ideological war against such radical nondual primordial wisdom teaching.

As the Johannine community evolved, the exoteric view and the esoteric view began, more and more, to differentiate. According to some scholars (Mack 1995, Duling 1979), about the beginning of the second century the exoteric faction of the community split off to join with the emerging Christ Cult that was the incipient Orthodox Church. The esoterically oriented faction continued to develop in the Christian Gnostic tradition.

That there is a protean exoteric/esoteric amalgam to the canonical *Gospel of John* is clear. How and when this came to be, what was added or deleted, and by whom will perhaps, never be known. What is also clear is that in *John* there is a fully developed eschatology. The descent, resurrection and ascension of the Christ (whether in bodily or spiritual form) is fulfilled. Jesus final words are, "It is finished." The *eschaton* (end time) is already present in the presence of Jesus, the realized *Christos*, and in a latent form in every human being. This is the "good news" of the Primordial Wisdom teaching that is made manifest through the nondual teaching of

Jesus as it is given through an inner esoteric reading of the *Gospel of John*. In the synoptic gospels we are waiting for the *eschaton* and the final fulfillment of the *parousia*. In both esoteric and exoteric John the mystery is revealed. The end time is now, and always was. And always will be. However, for the esoteric Christian understanding *Christos*, the luminous spiritual presence of nondual God—the primordial base or source, beyond a dualistic creator god—bestows the Gnosis of Light that is the nondual unity of love and wisdom. The fulfillment of this promise occurs, not vicariously through mere belief in, or through the death of a singular, eternally transcendent son of God; not through a future paracletic second coming, but here, now through each one's opening to receive—faith/*pistis* as ego surrender—this ever present presence of the Gnosis of Light that abides within the spiritual heartmind of all beings, without a single exception. It is this liberation/enlightenment that is, according to our Great Wisdom Tradition, the end of all our seeking—the happiness that cannot be lost—ultimate Happiness Itself.

Colophon

Being Is Love

In the beginning is primordial spirit Itself. It always is, in the deep silent night. It is the source and the ground of everything that is. Now spirit arises as its own luminosity, the primordial light that becomes energy, enters into time, becomes the light, mind, life, breath, voice of all being. Thus does the *logos* of light descend as form. Now the light shines at the heart of the darkness. Yet in darkness, the form perceives it not.

Thus it is, from time to time primordial spirit incarnates, awake, into its human form to light the way home. Such a one outshines as the primordial light itself, becomes our way to the very source in whom this all arises. As this light fills the world, there is love. Spirit becoming form is love. And into love this all returns. Great gravity of love. As if we ever separated at all. Therefore, "Love one another as I have loved you." "And Christ shall shine upon thee." "Wonder of wonders, all beings are Buddhas." "It is already accomplished." Great Joy.

Being Primordial Awareness Wisdom*

The Non-Meditation That is Happiness Itself

Now is the moment we abide in primordial essence luminous nature of mind empty awake awareness itself

Whatever experience arises pleasant neutral unpleasant no need to change it

Whatever arises let it be

without judgement positive or negative without past or future without attachment or aversion without affirmation or denial without closeness or distance

Whatever arises is pure clear light of mind that opens into the very ground of being Thus whatever arises is liberated

Now let it be exactly as it is Perfect openness Perfect space As it is already accomplished Simply relax into it

^{*} Excerpted from *Stromata*, Fragments of the Whole: Selected Essays of David Paul Boaz (Dechen Wangdu), ©2009 David Paul Boaz. All rights reserved. www.davidpaulboaz.org, Copper Mountain Institute, info@coppermount.org, www.coppermount.org 505-898-9592

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Appendix A: Part II Kosmos: Descent and Ascent of Spirit in Advaita Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism

Life Stage/Mind State (evolutionary, developmental)

> 1, 2, 3 Egocentric

Physical, Emotional, Mental Stage; Individuation of lower mind. Dualistic material seeking strategies dominate the view and behavior. Sleepwaiting denial of spirit-presence. Exoteric, relativeconventional response. Gross ignorance of the essencelessness and impermanence of the five skandhas of existence and the five sense consciousnesses.

Om Gate...

4

Ethnocentric

Spiritual development ground and path stage; dualistic conventional religious and beginning mystical seeking; finding the master; conditional savikalpa samadhi; the lesser esoteric response. Shamatha mindfulness practice. The Mahatman or essence-self recognition; diety practice. Spiritual materialism. Path of form. Kindness. Quiescence practice.

Para Gate...

5, 6 Worldcentric

Spiritual completion fruition stage; deity, formless and kosmic mysticism; the greater esoteric response, vipashyana practice. Moksha-nirvikalpa samadhi. Karma ceases only when in turiya (vidya/rigpa); compassionate transcendent Witness practice, Dzogchen, Essence Mahamudra. Frequent "clicking" from asleep to awake states. Insight practice.

Parasamgate...

Theocentric

Spiritual perfection stage; final furition, alpha pure non-dual realization; full bodhi; Atman identity with Brahman; no more learning; muni; transcendent integration of conditional self in lifeworld (moksha-sahaj samadh), behond fear and hope. Karma ceases; Maha-rishi, Christ-Buddhahood. Realization of Kham Brahm, "The Bright," Ultimate Spirit Itself, Tao.

Bodhi Svaha

Consciousness Dimension/State-(avastha) (non-developmental, inherent in all beings.)

Waking State (Exoteric)

(vaishvanara/ jagrat)

Intentional, ego-motivated, desire-mind awareness, estranged and ignorant (avidya) of non-dual Atman that is Brahman. Empirical reality. Subject-object separation and dependence. The physical and lower mental phenomenal worlds. Physical and emotional body of desire. Lifeworld ruled by fear and hope. Prepersonal to personal. The Bardo of Living.

Nirmanakaya.

Dream State (Esoteric)

(svapna)

Prepersonal, preconscious, subtle body of desire. Non-empirical illusory (maya) subjectobject independence. Objective, relativeconventional realism. Beginning compassion. Fear and hope. Personal to transpersonal. "State effects" not yet "trait effects." The Bardo of Becoming.

Nirmanakaya

Deep Sleep State (Greater Esoteric)

(formless sushupti/prajna) Transpersonal, transrational; profound, wise compassion. A lifeworld devoted to surrender, renunciation and service. Subjective idealism. Transpersonal subtle to causal cognition. Path of the siddhas, rishis, arhats, saints and bodhisattvas. Transcendent Witness Presence awareness. Transpersonal, transrational. The Bardo of Dharmata.

Sambhogakaya

Turiya ("The Fourth")

(The innermost secret, non-dual transcendent Witness)

Realization (liberation) of personal identity with Absolute Reality, Brahman, Buddhahood, primordial, non-dual Spirit Itself in whom arises all phenomena. Great compassion. Transcends and includes the previous relative states. The timeless "fourth time," prior unity of Svabhavakakaya/ Trikaya of the Base; emptiness (shunyata) realized through yeshe/ jnana/ gnosis, vijnana). Buddha NatureUltimate Mind the non-dual Primordial Awareness Wisdom. This realization is *turiyatita* (sahaj) the fifth state.

Dharmakaya

Corresponding Energy-Body/Kosha Dimension/Viinana (Body, Mind, Soul, Spirit)

> Gross Body (sthula-sarira)

Gross physical matter-energy body (annamaya-kosha). Life, Prana or Emotional Body (pranamaya-kosha). The Quantum potential. Mental Body (manomaya-kosha), manas desiremind/sense-mind (citta or sems). Brahman as Virat. Conditional self and its identities. The five skandhas/ sense consciousnesses (panchdvara-vijnana) plus mind (manovijnana)

Om ...

Subtle Body (*sukshma-sarira*) (vijnanamaya-kosha)

Transcends & embraces previous koshas. Buddhi, higher mental, citta, reflecting and discriminating mind. The will. Intellectual and subtle dharma understanding. Beginning insight and bhakti/devotional meditation (dhyana). Path of the yogis/ saints (love wisdom). Brahman as Prajapati Hiranyagarbha. Klishta-Manovijnana, subtle body, the root of ego-I.

Mani...

Causal Body (*karana-sarira*) (anandamaya-kosha) Soul, transcendent mental, wisdomspirit-bliss; path of sages arhats, bodhisattvas 8th & 9th bhumi. Non-dual Witness practice. Causal dimension to non-dual Absolute. Saguna Brahman as prana-vayu or sutratman. Alayavijnana (store consciousness). Very subtle body. Unity of the Two Truths.

Padme...

Atman

The non-dual, untainted divine presence (vidya, rigpa, logos), Supreme Identity, the Witness (saksin) that is identical to Nirguna Brahman, the Supreme Source. Transcends and embraces previous samadhis, koshas and all conditional experience. Mouna, the great Peace in the Silence. Om Shanti Om. Tao, shyunyata/emptiness, Dharmakaya. The unobstructed Pure Alaya (amala-Nature(sems nyid/cittata, gnosis). Tao.

Hüm Hrih.

^{*} The multidimensional pie of Spirit descending as phenomenal reality and the ascending realization of its non-dual Source is sliced in slightly different ways by different Wisdom Traditions, and even within traditions. Moreover, although the *koshas* of Vedanta and the *vijnanas* and *kayas* of Buddhism generally correlate, there is at present, no agreement on the definitions and correlation of consciousness dimensions, lifestages, bodies, levels, structures, and mindstates. Excerpted from *The Nature of Mind: The New Reformation in Religion, Science and Culture*. ©2009, David Paul Boaz, Copper Mountain Institute • 505-898-9592 • www.coppermount.org, www.davidpaulboaz.org