

MYSTIC LIGHT

The Secret Book of John

CHURCH HISTORIANS have recorded a tradition that in the earliest Christian times, in the first and second centuries of our Christian era, the Western Church centered in Rome looked with disfavor upon the Gospel of John because it was considered to be Gnostic. To St. Ireneus of Gaul goes the credit for having sponsored this Gospel, so that it was accepted into the New Testament canon.

But again, in the Middle Ages, we hear that the Manicheans of the South of France possessed a “false Gospel of John,” which purported to be the revelations Saint John received while lying in the bosom of the Christ. This Gospel, the churchmen said, confused the Christ with Lucifer and even had a false genesis of the world, in which the Demiurge rebelled against God, was cast out of heaven, and implored God for a chance to redeem himself. This was granted to him, and the manner of his redemption was to create a cosmos in seven days.

The Demiurge (this is a Greek word, adopted from Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle) and his helpers could see the archetypal patterns by which the creation was meant to proceed, but were not able to copy them, and so this creation was imperfect. Inevitably, when the Demiurge created living creatures, meant to be mankind, this creation also was imperfect. The creature meant to be man was helpless and could only crawl on the ground. Taking pity on this creature, God sent His Emissary, the Christ, and Mary, both Angels from the higher heavens, to instill a living spirit, and when this was done, the creature became able to



From Martin Luther's *Biblia*, published by Hans Lufft, Wittenberg, 1534

The Lord as World-Creator

A traditional anthropomorphic, geocentric depiction of God the Father as Creator of edenic Earth, stars, and empyrean.

stand upright and to show himself human. Thus the creation was looked upon as the work of the fallen Principle of Darkness, which was redeemed—

together with its Principle—by Christ, the Principle of Light.

How does Light redeem darkness? By shining into the darkness, which is not a real, positive “thing in itself” but only the absence of Light. Darkness is what is called a “negative” fact, something which exists only by the absence of something else, having no substance. From this concept the Manicheans evidently drew their formula for the conquest of evil.

The legend is that at one time there existed two kingdoms, the kingdom of the Light Elves and the kingdom of the Night Elves. The Light Elves were purely good, and the Night Elves were wholly evil. But how could the Light Elves conquer the Night Elves, since they could not, by their nature or essence, do evil? They solved the problem by incorporating a part of the Kingdom of Light with the Kingdom of Darkness, and by continued shining overcame the dark.

Acting on this formula, the Manicheans infiltrated the ranks of their enemies, in Europe, primarily the Roman Catholic Church, though they had other enemies elsewhere. These hidden Manicheans lived outwardly the lives of devout Catholics, *except that they threw their whole influence toward promoting goodness and eliminating the evils within the Church.* They must have had mental reservations in respect of many of the Catholic teachings, but these they kept to themselves.

A case is on record of a priest whose life was so holy and beautiful that he was almost worshiped by his flock, even while he was alive; but after his death, to their great horror, they found among his properties indisputable proof that their beloved saint was, in fact, a Manichean. So they destroyed and buried his relics and poured hatred upon the memory of this “devil” in disguise, whose holiness had been an inspiration to them all and whose loving kindness had illumined their lives.

How many of the great reformers of the orthodox churches were, in fact, Manicheans or Gnostics in disguise? Some day we may know. We say “Manicheans or Gnostics” because archeological discoveries, such as those at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, show that the essential doctrines of Mani go back to earlier Christian and pre-Christian times.

Mani was a universalist Teacher who believed that all ancient religions, in their pure essence, led up to the throne of the Christ. The Roman Catholic Church, followed by its offshoot, the Lutheran, and other orthodox Protestant churches which are also forms of Catholicism, had taken the stand that only the Old Testament should be combined with the New Testament, because Jesus was a Jew, and that all other scriptures should be ignored or destroyed. They went even farther and established the rule that unless a follower of the Christ did accept the Old Testament along with the New, and eschew the other Gentile scriptures, then he was not a Christian, however much he loved the Christ and however much he endeavored to live the Christ life. This is the doctrine that led to widespread persecution and intolerance, for it held, in effect, that every man had to be a Jew before he could be a Christian.

St. Paul had already fought the battle for the Gentiles in the first century so that they could be Christians without going through the synagogue or Hebrew Temple at Jerusalem—although it is obvious that he would have been overjoyed to welcome them there as “God-fearers” in the Court of the Gentiles. He would even have torn down the barriers in the Temple enclosure and allowed Gentile converts to worship in the Court of the Israelites themselves; at least, the Jews accused him of trying to take a Gentile into the sacred inner section. He probably tried, at least.

We also see that St. Paul quoted from the Greek Mystery teachings and from Greek astronomers and philosophers, in which he had the example of some of the most devout of the Pharisees and Sadducees before him.

It is significant that among the doctrines of a sect called the Paulicians—historians do not know if the name came from their own leader or from St. Paul, but some think it comes from St. Paul—we find many of the doctrines which were characteristic also of Manicheanism.

The library found in Egypt in 1945 gave two versions of the John *Apocryphon*. The book had been discovered in the nineteenth century, but was not translated at the time. No one seemed to be interested in it, and only a few passages were

quoted in various books by authors who visited the museum at Berlin where this remarkable book was preserved.

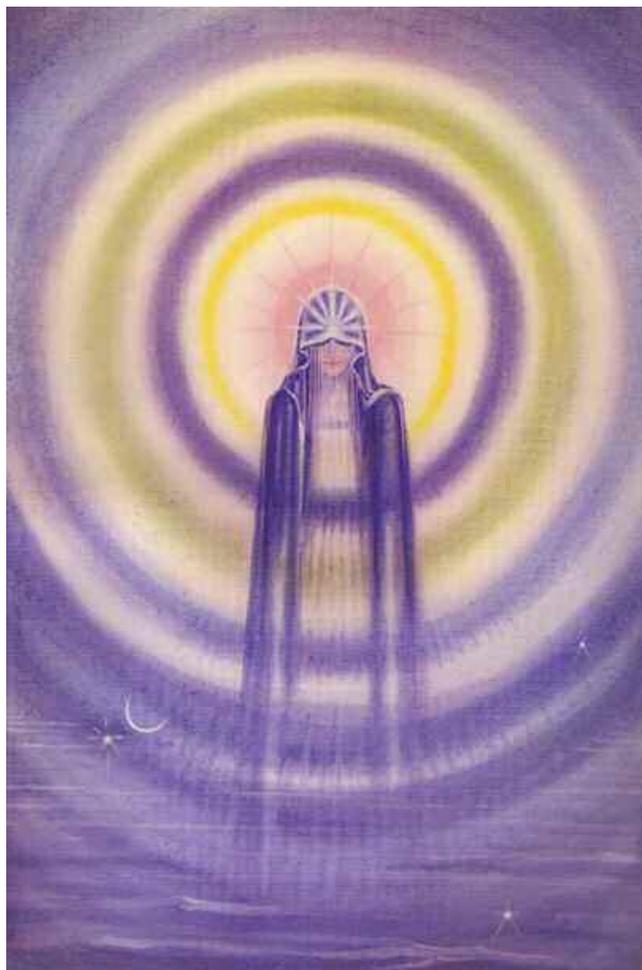
Jean Doresse speaks of the Gnostic books as being writings “disguised” as Christian, because he does not understand that the ancient peoples felt it to be no sin to retain their own ancient scriptures and to interpret them in the Christ Light. Today missionaries are still trying to force Buddhists, for example, to reject and renounce “the Light of Asia” when they become Christians; as if it were necessary to renounce one light because a stronger light had come into the world! No one would have been more deeply reverent of the Buddha than the Christ Himself! and no one would have been more reverent of the Christ than Guatama the Buddha.

One of the two documents found at Nag Hammadi is a variant of the Berlin book of John. The two chief versions Doresse terms No. 1 and No. 2, No. 2 being similar to the Berlin Codex. He mentions an “edition No. 36 of Codex X” which he says “gives a developed version of the treatise in a text that is much amplified and enriched by personal glosses.” He then gives a brief resume.

Preamble: The Apostle John, brother of James, is troubled by the question flung at him in the Temple by a Pharisee named Arimanius. “Where has your Master gone now?”

“A Pharisee named Arimanius.” The Pharisee’s name was probably not really Arimanius. Arimanius is, in all likelihood, Ahriman, the Persian Satan, or Tempter. Here the Tempter speaks to John through the lips of the Pharisee, just as he spoke to Jesus through Peter when Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Get thee behind me, Satan,” looking straight into the face of Peter when he said it. Similarly it is the Tempter, Satan, or personified Doubt and Despair, who speaks to John in the challenge of the Pharisee: “Where has your Master gone now?”

John retired into the solitude of the mountain to meditate and pray, seeking an answer to this and other questions: Why was the Christ sent into the world? Who is his Father? What is the Aeon like to which mankind is travelling? The heaven opens and a threefold Being appears—in the form of a young man, a woman, and an old man—and this



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Illustration by Ethelwynne M. Quail for Geoffrey Hodson's *Kingdom of the Gods*

The World Mother

The Celestial Virgin, as Mother (Mater) of formed matter, personifies the primarily “feminine” attributes of the Elohim.

triple Being declares that it is really a single Being, Father-Mother-Son, together in One. The Being reveals to John the secrets of the Universe, past and future, and bids him convey these teachings to the Elect. (Doresse does not mention the traditional story, as recounted in the Middle Ages, that John received his vision lying in the bosom of the Christ.

The Primordial Being existed alone in the beginning, calm and at rest in the Great Silence of the ocean of Light. He contemplated the waves of pure Light in which He rested and by His thought of Himself an Image was cast upon the waves. This First Thought is the “perfect power Barbelos,” the Image of God, who is Primordial Man and Virginal Spirit. We may note that all of these teachings are really Platonic concepts in mythological dress; not a “disguise,” but a poetic allegory.

Other “androgynous Aeons”—bisexed Principles having both masculine and feminine powers, Will-Power and Love-Wisdom, a concept grossly degraded by the Church Fathers in the early centuries—correspond to the Elohim of the Bible. The biblical Jehovah was in fact one of these dual-sexed Elohim, who was identified by the Hebrews, or interpreted by them, as being the One Absolute Supreme Being, his ancient status having been rejected and forgotten.

Barbelos—the First Being, the Divine Virgin—gazes steadfastly into the Light of God, and by thus gazing conceives a Spark, which becomes the Son of God. In these ancient visions, the comparison is, we believe, to the way in which an image is reflected in a crystal ball. Both quartz crystals and glass were made in Egypt and other places, perhaps even white glass, though this is not certain. At any rate, the ancient form of gem polishing was to “roll” the stones. They were not faceted in the same way that we have them today. Thus a piece of quartz crystal could have been found “rolled” in a

stream, or “rolled” by a craftsman; and if so, it could have served as a scryer’s crystal. The crystal has the peculiar property of seeming to take the reflected image into itself, and reversing it. It appears upside down, the crystal is full of it. Even so the vision of Light creates *within* the Barbelos—the First Angel—a Spark which is of God and which is like God.

Oriental poets also compare the mystical sympathy with God to the way in which a lover sees his own image in the pupil of the eye of a loved one. Each looks at the other, lover and beloved, and each sees in the pupil of the eye of the other an image of himself. So Man gazes at God and God’s Image is formed in his soul; and contrariwise Man’s Image is formed in the Eye of God, and this Man-Image in God’s Eye is what the mystic sees. Such is the formula of the Eye, as shown in many ancient poetic allegories of the East; and such, we believe, is the meaning of these obscure texts in the *Aprocryphon* of John. (Continued) □

—Ann Barkhurst

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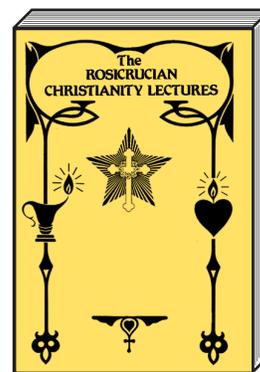
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