



Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism

Alastair H. B. Logan

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The sensational discovery of the Nag Hammadi Coptic Library in Egypt in 1945-46 has revolutionized the study of the origins and development of the ancient religious phenomenon known as Gnosticism. It has brought to light many hitherto unknown Gnostic texts and is forcing a reappraisal of the traditional picture of Gnosticism as in essence a Christian heresy.

This work focuses on several foundational Gnostic texts—the 'Sethian texts'. Earlier discoveries of Mandaean and Manichaean texts had suggested that the origins of Gnosticism might lie in an oriental religion of redemption, culturally far removed from their pre-Christian context. But the Sethian texts suggest that these Pre-Christian Gnostics were fundamentally influenced by Jewish ideas.

Alastair Logan identifies these Gnostics in their developing, essentially Christian context, isolates the earliest forms of their foundational myth in Irenaeus of Lyons (130?-200? CE) and the *Apocryphon of John*, and traces its development until it underwent a Sethian reinterpretation in the early third century CE. In exploring the fascinating interrelationship of Gnostic and Christian ideas, he relates a series of Nag Hammadi texts to the Gnostics; examines the literary and theological evolution of the two main versions of the *Apocryphon* in terms of Gnostic cosmology, anthropology, soteriology and eschatology; demonstrates how similar were the theological and soteriological concerns of Gnostics and 'orthodox'; and argues that the Gnostics were the first Christian Platonists, the first to develop a Trinity (of Father, Mother and Son), and the first to make post-baptismal chrismation central to Christian initiation.

Dr. Logan overturns many common misunderstandings about Gnosticism. The Gnostics felt themselves to be Christians, true interpreters of the message of the unknown God of love first revealed in Christ, the heavenly Son.

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