

The Heretics: Insights into Gnosticism and its effects on the Church today

Research question

- Intro to Gnosticism: what is it?
- The Nag Hammadi Discoveries
- How the 21st century church is impacted by this

Who are the Gnostics?, do they exist today?, what are their major systems of thought?, What do they believe in?, what is their worldview? Why are they considered heretics and what are the impacts of this system of belief for the 21st century church? We live in an era of increasing pluralism, new belief systems and philosophies are constantly being presented as alternatives to the orthodox view of the church. The system of belief known as Gnosticism which was considered a heresy in the earliest centuries of our era, is still relevant today, and it is mostly encompassing systems of belief familiar to the New Age movement. However Gnosticism According to Stephan Hoeller has its own worldview, and it's a full blown tradition with its scriptures, its mystery rites, its priesthoods, and its spiritual lineage.¹

The discovery of the Nag Hammadi documents have raised questions about 1st century Christianity and Gnosticism. The discovered texts even though they are considered Gnostic give us an insight into that time when the church was forming, and finding out what heresy was and what was not. What was to be considered orthodox Christianity and what was heresy. I will introduce the Gnostics, and what they believed. Further studies into Gnosticism have demonstrated that they are very hard to categorize, define and catalogue since they have a multiplicity of views

¹ Stephan A. Hoeller, Gnosticism: New Light on the Ancient Tradition of Inner Knowing, Quest Books: Wheaton IL, 2002

and a Pleroma of belief systems. But it has been argued that indeed Gnosticism is a system of religious thought with its characteristics in now modern times, what is the result of this system of belief and what impact has it created for the Christian church in the 21st century. How can better understanding of heretical systems of thought make us better equipped to address the issues of the church these days? This is the question I will be addressing in this essay.