

The Lord's Assembly and "Oppositions Of Science Falsely So Called"

Dr. Thomas M. Strouse

Introduction

The Scripture revealed that the Serpent couched his lies to the original couple (Gen. 3:5) in the verb "knowing" (יָדָע),¹ lending justification to designate his theology "Gnostic" with the Greek equivalent verb γινώσκω.² Because of the 1945 discovery of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic texts, modern Bible critics have been reluctant to refer to Gnosticism as a pre-first century phenomenon.³ However, this essay will employ the terms "Gnostic" and "Gnosticism" and refer to the original deceptive knowledge (γνώσεως) movement. The Gnostic texts such as the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Apocalypse of Adam* are merely the manifestations of the Devil's deceptive doctrines *ab origine*. Gnosticism, then, has its roots back to the Garden of Eden, and has manifested fully blossomed in the recent discoveries of Gnostic literature.

Gnosticism (γνώσεως "falsely so called") gives an alternative view to God, creation, man, and salvation, contradicting the biblical worldview at every point. Essentially, Gnosticism teaches that the divine spirit (i.e., god) is transcendent, emanating his/its essence as the substance of the material world (i.e., pantheism) while distancing himself/itself from material cosmos and creature embodiment. The emanation of his fulness (*pleroma*, πλήρωμα) mediates through Aeons or intermediate deific beings who exist in the πλήρωμα to help the spark of divinity embodied in flesh to acquire release and achieve spirit divinity. The dual nature of man's immaterial with material was the result of the false creator deity (demiurge, δημιουργός)⁴ who entrapped the divine soul/mind in flesh to keep man ignorant of his true divine nature and spiritual destiny. The low-level false creator deity and his archons desire to keep men enslaved to their authority by keeping them attached to the material cosmos in ignorance. While physical death releases the divine spirit from embodiment, it will be re-embodied (i.e., reincarnation) if sufficient advancement in the πλήρωμα has not been accomplished (this cycle is potentially perpetual). Salvation is exclusively spiritual since the material creation, including fleshly embodiment, is absolutely and eternally evil.

¹This is the etymon for the Greek verb εἶδω, the obsolete form for the perfect verb οἶδα (used as a present tense, first person, singular verb).

²This verb occurs 223x in the New Testament (NT) and receives the translation "know" (196x), "perceive" (9x), and "understand" (8x). The cognate Greek noun γνώσις occurs 29x while the intensified compound noun ἐπίγνωσις occurs 20x.

³Marvin Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts* (NY: HarperOne, 2009), 864 pp. Cf. also Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (NY: HarperOne, 1987), 432 pp.

⁴Cf. Heb. 11:10 for this *hapax legomena*.

The Lord's Assembly

The Apostle Paul gave his purpose for writing I Timothy, stating, *“These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: ¹⁵ But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”* (I Tim. 3:14-15). This behaviour centered on the defense of the central doctrine of Scripture—*“the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh”* (I Tim. 3:16). There is no question but that this mystery is great; what is the relationship of the Creator with His Creation? The incarnation doctrine demands the virgin birth, perfect life, death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. If the biblical teaching of the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ is diminished, denounced, denied, or destroyed at all, then no other doctrine matters. The Apostle initially charged Timothy with resisting the teaching of any other doctrine (I Tim. 1:4), and concluded the *Epistle* saying, *“O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and **oppositions of science falsely so called**”* (I Tim. 6:20). The word “science” is γνῶσεως (*gnoseos*) and refers to the false Garden Gnosticism. Scripture indicates that there is a true γνῶσεως or knowledge that is divine (Rom. 11:33; 15:14; I Cor. 12:8; II Cor. 2:14; 4:6; 10:5; Eph. 3:19; Phil. 3:8; and Col. 2:3). Satan has perverted true knowledge and used the word γνῶσεως for his purposes. Peter challenged believers, saying, *“But grow in grace, and in **the knowledge** of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen”* (II Pet. 3:18). The Lord's assembly, then, has this sole divine responsibility of resisting and rejecting any form of Garden γνῶσεως, in doctrine or practice, from her ministry. It behooves church members to recognize and reject Satan's ancient lies which promote his “spiritual” alternative to the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, and eventually damns all devotees with false γνῶσεως.

The Doctrine and History of Gnosticism

I. The Lies of the Garden

Shortly after the sixth day of Creation (cf. I Tim. 3:7), Satan deceived the perfect couple through the instrumentality of the serpent, giving his alternative and anti-Christian world view. He posited two subtle and effective lies which permeate all false religious systems up and through the Tribulation. *“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die”* (Gen. 3:4). First, Satan denied God's prediction and offered the opposite teaching—no death. Deathlessness to man was the promise. Second, the Scripture revealed, saying, *“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”* (Gen. 3:5). Couched in the term knowing (עָרַף, γινώσκω),⁵ Satan claimed deification for Adam and Eve. The promise to man was deification. Corollaries to this

⁵The term Gnosticism comes from γινώσκω and refers to religious or special knowledge. Satanic Gnosticism has been around since the Garden, but many want to use the term as a technical expression for the AD second century fully-blossomed Gnosticism.

include no salvation for the body or flesh—flesh is evil.⁶ Furthermore, the resurrection of the body is denied. Satan’s alternative theological system was not Theism, but Pantheistic (known also as “catholicity”) in scope, Gnostic in nature, and Antichristian in conflict. Therefore, it is predicted that his religions, cults, and philosophies would be re-packaged historically and religiously with an emphasis on deification of all, reincarnation of man, denigration of the material world, works salvation in this life, and some sort of purging advancement after physical death. The word “God” would refer exclusively to the non-material realm as “abstract existence,” “divine thought,” “ideas,” “energy,” “Over-soul,” “mind,” “the endless all,” “the ideal,” etc.

All ancient and modern religions, cults, and pagan philosophies teach more or less obliquely the following satanic tenets. 1) Deity is housed in the flesh for some reason (polytheism leads to pantheism). 2) Deity needs to escape the flesh of man through purging of “sin” and “evil” in this life, and advance in the πλήρωμα to spirituality through reincarnation. 3) “True” reality is in the spiritual universal mind, soul or intellect. 4) The fullness (πλήρωμα) of the real existence of deity, or the archetypal ideal existing in the invisible heavens, has emanations down to the imperfect phenomenal manifestations of that ideal, locked in the material world, through aeons, angels, or other intermediaries, who help the spark of divinity housed in evil flesh back to Godhood through the πλήρωμα. 5) Pseudo-Christian religions teach that Jesus Christ is spiritual but not in the flesh (Docetism), or that Jesus is a mere man in physical body but not the divine Christ (Adoptionism). 6) Since man is good (= god), man advances in this life and the afterlife and avoids any permanent judgment such as hell (hell is an illusion, it does not exist, or man is annihilated).

These lies of the Garden and their corollaries did indeed seduce the original perfect couple, have permeated all major religions, cults, and philosophies through world history, and will unite all religions during the Tribulation in the Ecumenical Church of “the great whore” (Rev. 17:1 ff.). Satan’s movement of “doctrines of devils” (I Tim. 4:1) is unchanging although occasionally repackaged, and it is the colossal “lie” of the ages (Rom. 1:25; II Thess. 2:11), deceiving and damning multitudes. Here is a summary of the history of his Garden Gnosticism and its seductive strength even in the Lord’s assemblies.

II. Historical Examples of the Lies

Ancient Religions

Babylonianism

The religion of Babylon, or Babylonianism, had its roots in the rebellion in the land of Shinar, from which Nimrod founded Babel (Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9). The nimrodian rebels built a tower to reach into the heavens as their gateway to deity (“gate of god” = Babel [בְּבֶלֶט]). Presumably the tower represented the *pleroma* (cf. Col. 2:9) and man’s advancement to godhood. This was the beginning of the movement to build, through masons and builders, towers,

⁶Lucifer, as a created spirit being, apparently was not interested in salvation of the material body (Isa. 14:12-14; Ezk. 28:12-17).

ziggurats, pyramids, and pillars, all of which represented as phallic symbols the rejection of the Seed Promise (Gen. 3:15). Their focus upon astrology, including the naming of star constellations, the geocentric zodiac, and occultic practices, fostered pantheism. The biblical revelation of the religion of Babylon denoted that it was polytheistic (and ultimately pantheistic)⁷ as the prophets declared. Isaiah revealed the polytheism of Babylonianism, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground” (Isa. 21:9), as did Jeremiah, “Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, *even* they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens” (Jer. 10:11), and likewise Daniel, “There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3:12).

Furthermore, Babylonianism was permeated with sorcery (Dan. 2:2), astrology and magic (Dan. 2:10), giving evidence of the lies of the Garden in which men strive towards deity through self-help in this life and afterwards (reincarnation). Lucifer’s pantheistic proposal through the king of Babylon that “I will be like the most High” (Isa. 14:12-14) laid as foundational the Garden Gnosticism of Babylonianism.

Egyptian Religion

As Mizraim⁸ became the father of the Egyptians (Gen. 10:6), he no doubt perpetuated the lies of the Garden among his people. The Egyptian religion was based on the divine pharaoh who helped devotees with *ka* (life force) to advance in the next life. Horus, the son of mother Isis and father Osiris, became the reincarnation of Osiris when the father was killed by Set. Scripture teaches that Pharaoh was a divine authority in his own right (Ex. 5:2), and his religion was polytheistic. The LORD showed His superiority over the Egyptian polytheistic pantheon, saying, “*For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD*” (Ex. 12:12). His plagues were upon Egyptian deities, as Moses revealed, saying, “*For the Egyptians buried all their firstborn, which the LORD had smitten among them: upon their gods also the LORD executed judgments*” (Ex. 33:4). It is obvious that Egyptian deities associated with inanimate objects (i.e., the Nile) and well as creatures and animals (i.e., swarms and cattle). Although somewhat complex, the religion of Egypt fostered the lie of reincarnation and progress toward final deified spirit in the entombment practice.

Canaanite Religion

The Bible characterized the religion of Ham’s son Canaan (Gen. 10:6) as idolatrous and immoral. Moses warned the Jews that they needed to recoil from and reject all of the religion of Canaan. Its pantheon contained El or Elohim (Dt. 7:25), Baal and Asheroth (= “groves” [Jdg. 3:7]), and Mot (death). The occultic practices of Canaanite religion were condemned, as Moses declared, saying, “When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou

⁷Polytheism (many gods) leads to the worldview of Pantheism (all is god) since there must be the ultimate authority (cf. Acts 17:23). Biblical revelation posits Theism, or the doctrine of the personal and one (albeit triune) God separated from His creation (*vide* Dt. 6:4; I Jn. 5:7; and Gen. 1:1, respectively).

⁸This is the KJV transliteration of the Hebrew מִצְרַיִם for “Egypt.”

shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. ¹⁰ There shall not be found among you *any one* that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, *or* that useth divination, *or* an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, ¹¹ Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. ¹² For all that do these things *are* an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee” (Dt. 18:9-12). These religious practices were not only idolatrous but also immoral, giving the Canaanites the sensual means by which they could participate with deities and advance in personal deification. Jehovah forbade worship of pillars, as Moses warned, saying “Thou shalt not plant thee a grove (*asheroth*) of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee. ²² Neither shalt thou set thee up *any* image; which the LORD thy God hateth” (Dt. 16:21-22; see also 12:3). He denounced the perverted concupiscence towards lewd images, as Ezekiel denounced, saying, “Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and madest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them” (Ezk. 16:17). Baal worship also involved astrology and sodomy (II Ki. 23:5-7). The Canaanite religion is another example of the variegated manifestation of the lies of the Garden with its multiple deities (polytheism/pantheism) and religious immorality (spiritual advancement through sexual perversion).

Hinduism

Although Hinduism has been called “the oldest religion of the world,” its roots go back to at least 1500 BC.⁹ Accordingly, man is locked in Samsara or the cycle of rebirth, advancing upward with Karma to reach Moksha, or final union with the spiritual essence (Brahman).¹⁰ The variations within Hinduism have reduced down to the two basic lies of the Garden, namely, deification through many reincarnations.

Platonic Philosophy

Plato (427-347 BC) was the understudy of Socrates (470-399 BC) and the teacher of Aristotle (384-322 BC). He wrote the 36 dialogues and 13 letters, including the following works: *Euthyphro*, *Apology of Socrates*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*, *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Parmenides*, *Philebus*, and *Symposium*. He ushered in Greek philosophy (and later neo-Platonism), and influenced the world of the New Testament era and the specifically the Apostolic Fathers and subsequent Patristics. Secular philosophers observed the following:

The contact between the Greek and the Hebrew worlds created a new problem, that of explaining and justifying the Hebraic religious view, and later the Christian outlook, in terms that would make sense to those who did not accept either the Old or New Testament picture of the world. As St. Paul discovered, the message of Christianity sounded like nonsense to the Greek philosophers. When he spoke to them at Athens, they ridiculed him. Jewish and Christian thinkers began to try to state their religious beliefs in terms that would be reasonable to someone schooled

⁹The king of Media reigned over India in the 5th century BC (Est. 1:1; 8:9), albeit the Persian religion was no doubt akin to the doctrines of Satan.

¹⁰In distinction, Brahma is the lower deity or creator god of the material creation.

in Greek philosophy. They attempted to show that the assertions of their religion were justified on the standards employed by the Greek philosophers. Philo Judaeus, of the first century A.D., and the early Church Fathers Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-220) and Origen (A.D. 185-254) argued that the religion of the Bible was compatible with Platonic philosophy. They contended that philosophical reasons could be given for accepting certain religious views, and that various religious contentions could be interpreted as ways of stating philosophical theses. Over the next several centuries, many theories from the writing of the Greek philosophers were employed by theologians to clarify or justify their religious convictions. Proofs of the existence of God, and theories about His Nature were set forth to provide a rational justification for the religious knowledge-claims of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and of the Mohammedan religion.¹¹

Also, philosopher Fishler noted, saying,

Plato's thoughts on God, which are among the most difficult to comprehend, found their way into both the Christian religion and Western philosophy. This could not take place however, until the *Idea of the Good* of Plato had been transformed into the *One* of the neo-Platonists and adapted to the Christian religion by St. Augustine, Origen, Dionysius the Areopagite, John the Scot, and other key figures of the Christian Church.¹²

Since he had founded the Academy of Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the western world, the philosophical thought of the Greco-Roman world into which Christianity came was platonic. The un-regenerated Patristics therefore seemly attempted to Platonize Paul.

Hatch identified Platonic philosophy as Gnostic in nature, saying,

The chief philosophical expression of Dualism was Platonism. Plato followed Anaxagoras in believing that mind is separate from matter and acts upon it: he went beyond him in founding upon this separation a universal distinction between the real and the phenomenal, and between God and the world...the creative energy of God is spoken of as the *Demiurgus*, who himself made an ideal world...¹³

Hatch elaborated, observing,

These unbodied Forces, which are here called by the Platonic name of Forms, are elsewhere spoken of in Stoical language as Reasons, sometimes in Pythagorean language as Numbers or limits, sometimes in the language of the Old Testament as Angels, and sometimes in the language of popular mythology as Daemons.¹⁴

¹¹Avrum Stroll and Richard H. Popkin, *Introduction to Philosophy*, third edition (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), p. 342.

¹²Max Fishler, *What the Great Philosophers Thought About God* (Los Angeles: University Book Publishers, 1958), p. 19.

¹³Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publ., 1995 reprint), p. 177-179.

¹⁴Hatch, pp. 185-186.

First Century Mystery Religions

The pagans of the first century were mesmerized with the current array of mystery religions, such as Mithraism, Dionysianism, and Cybele worship, all of which were various blatant forms of the Gnostic lies of the Garden, and which competed for their devotion. Louis Berkhof accurately summarized these expressions of the lies of the Garden, stating,

We cannot discuss the various Gnostic systems, such as those of Valentinus and Basilides, but can only briefly indicate the teachings of Gnosticism in general. A trait of dualism runs through the whole system and manifests itself in the position that there are two original principles or gods, which are opposed to each other as higher and lower, or even as good and bad. The supreme or good God is an unfathomable abyss. He interposes between Himself and finite creatures a long chain of aeons or middle beings, emanations from the divine, which together constitute the Pleroma or fullness of the divine essence. It is only through these intermediate beings that the highest God can enter into various relations with created beings. The world is not created by the good God, but is the result of, probably, a fall in the Pleroma, and is the work of a subordinate, possibly a hostile, deity. This subordinate god, is called the Demiurge, is identified with the God of the Old Testament, and is described as an inferior, limited, passionate, and vengeful being. He is contrasted with the supreme God, the source of goodness, virtue, and truth, who revealed Himself in the Christ...in a phantasmal body, or as an earthly being, with whom a higher power or spirit temporarily associated himself.¹⁵

Patristics

The Catholic Church fathers (patristics), had been schooled in Platonic philosophy in their pre-Catholic Church “conversions,” and carried this philosophical worldview into their understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures. Seeburg lists a series of common characteristics of the Gnostic heretics with whom the Patristics interacted.

1. “The world of spirit and that of matter stand dualistically opposed to each other, as above and below, as good and bad.”
2. “From the spirit-world...which is internally agitated by the aeons...the present world appeared by emanation or evolution.”
3. “The spirit is imprisoned in the body.”
4. “”Redemption originates in the world of spirit. The Redeemer is Jesus Christ. He is a celestial aeon.”
6. “Redemption has to do chiefly with the pneumatic.”
7. “In keeping with the whole trend of the system of Gnosticism, there is found in it no recognition of the resurrection of the dead, nor of the early Christian eschatology as a whole. The return of the spirit freed from matter to the pleroma marks the end.”¹⁶

¹⁵Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 47-48.

¹⁶Reinhold Seeburg, *The History of Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), pp. 95-98.

Selwyn observed about Greek philosophy and its impact on the patristic doctrine of God, saying, “Greek philosophical theism had always been hampered by its besetting tendency to assume a dualism between ‘the One’ and ‘the Manifold’...tending towards a concealed ditheism...This tendency can be traced...in Plato, who distinguishes between God and the ‘Idea of the Good.’”¹⁷

It should be noticed in the order of Aeons that *ekklesia* refers to “the heavenly church” which is “the archetype of the lower church.” The Patristics who repudiated the overall system of Gnosticism nevertheless subscribed to the Greek philosophical notion of a universal, invisible, ideal church of which earthly and material churches are mere inferior manifestations of the true church. Ignatius was the first patristic to use “catholic” with “church,” saying, “where Jesus may be, there is the universal (catholic) Church.”¹⁸ The *Didache* (c. AD 125) revealed the widespread and early usage of a universal or “catholic” church among the Patristics.

1. “...so may Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom.”¹⁹
2. “Remember, Lord, Thy Church to deliver it from all evil and to perfect it in Thy love; and gather it together from the four winds—even the Church which has been sanctified...”²⁰

Origen (“child of Horus”) lived from AD 185-254 and was a prolific writer (6000 volumes), including the *Hexapla*. He was declared *anathema* in 553 and consequently never canonized by the RCC because of his Gnostic teachings.

It was the age when Neoplatonism was beginning to control thought. Starting with God as the abstract Existence (*to en*), advance was made through the divine Thought (*noos*), the conceived order of things, the universal soul, to this world, in which the souls of men live imprisoned in matter. The task before them is escape from the sensuous by asceticism and ecstasy, through the medium of mystical symbolic rites.²¹

Origen claimed a three-fold approach to Scripture, namely, the somatic (literal), the psychical (moral), and the pneumatic (spiritual), arguing that the spiritual is the ideal. He posited the doctrine of a second god.

Nonetheless, we meet with subordinationistic features in Origen. The Son is the ‘second God’...He is not the absolutely Good and True, but he is good and true as an emanation and image of the Father...thus Origen’s doctrine of the Logos reflects the conception of his age. Christ is God as is the Father, like him eternal; yet he is the ‘second God’ and dependent upon the Father.²²

¹⁷E. Gordon Selwyn, *Short History of Christian Thought* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949), pp. 28-29.

¹⁸John B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 84.

¹⁹Lightfoot, p. 126.

²⁰Lightfoot, p. 127.

²¹Seeburg, p. 146.

²²Seeburg, p. 150.

Moreover, he expounded, saying,

The Son serves him [God] here as Mediator. A definite number of incorporeal spiritual beings, originally all alike, was a first created. To these belonged, however, free-will, which is inseparable from their existence. But their moral decisions were different. Man, who was intellect, by reason of his fall from God, cooled down into soul, since he lost his participation in the divine fire. The condition of all creatures is regulated by their respective merits. God has bestowed upon all creatures a material corporeity. Their bodies were framed to correspond with their merit—those of divinities, thrones, and powers were light and ethereal; those of the stars, which are also living beings (i.e., Plato and Philo), brilliant; those of Satan and the devils, as being the creatures who fell first and more deeply than others, coarse and dark...this accounts for the origination of the world, which hence had a beginning in time...the place and country, circumstances of birth, etc., are appointed to everyone in accordance with his condition in the pre-existent state.”²³

According to Origen, “After the ascension [of Jesus] the human was entirely absorbed in the divine.”²⁴ Origen taught baptismal-regeneration, saying,

Baptism...is actual purification.” He said “fire baptism of martyrdom...washes away sins.” He taught “pre-natal existence.” He stated the Cyprianic ecclesiology, saying, “Outside the church there is no salvation.” He affirmed, “The process of purification and instruction begun on earth is continued after death. The good, clothed in a refined spiritual body, enter ‘paradise’ or ‘a certain place of education, and auditorium or school of souls’...the wicked...experience the fire of judgment...not a permanent punishment, as imagined by the simple, but a process of purification...However, the wicked along with the good, ‘also attain the goal’ of entering into the sphere of Christ.”²⁵

Milton Hunnex summarized the influence of Platonic teaching on Augustine and subsequent “Christianity,”

Thought and experience attend to structure the world in terms of the opposites characteristic of dualism, such as mind and matter, good and evil, reality and appearance. This prevalent tendency is opposed by another tendency of reflective thought, to seek unity in the apparent diversity of the world. Hence when a cosmic dualism is advanced, it is often subordinated to some overarching and absolute reality such as God or the *Idea of the Good*, as in Plato. Popular thought, however, finds the dualistic distinctions of mental and material, this world and the next, easier to comprehend. In Western philosophy, Platonism established the character of most dualism until it was modified by St. Augustine into its Christian form as Augustinianism. Until challenged and largely replaced by *Aristotelianism* in the thirteenth century, Platonism (or, as it was later called, Augustinianism) was the predominant philosophy of the West. The renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the scientific revolt of early modern Europe tended to revive its influence. It has exhibited a perennial vitality either as a dualistic

²³Seeburg, p. 151.

²⁴Seeburg, p. 153.

²⁵Seeburg, pp. 156-159.

form of *idealism* or as *mysticism*. Platonism is characterized by a spiritualistic view of life and a high regard for the capacity of the human mind to discover absolute truth. It is the ancient origin of both *dualism* and *idealism* in the West, and it has permanently influenced the character and concerns of Christian theology and philosophy.²⁶

Augustine (AD 354-430) is considered the greatest Western Father who influenced the Roman Catholic Church with his Neo-Platonic philosophy until the ascendancy of Aristotelianism through Thomas Aquinas (13th century). He studied Plato's dialogues and then was attracted to Manicheism. He lived in immorality until his turn the Catholicism. He wrote *Confessions* detailing his spiritual journey. After the fall of Rome in 410 to the Goths, he wrote the *City of God* defending the Roman Catholic Church from the charge that she weakened Rome to allow for the sacking. Seeburg summarized his Neo-Platonic influence, saying,

There is innate in the soul an 'interior sense,' which apprehends the nature of things rough their intelligible forms. This *species intelligibilis* is not attained, but innate. But here Augustine launches out into the 'intelligible world' of the Platonic system—into the contemplation of the ancient fantasies of the original forms of all existing things. The contemplation of the eternal becomes for him—in genuinely Greek spirit—salvation...These are the fundamental intellectual lines within which the thought of Augustine moved. First, voluntarism (God is Will and man is will; love is blessedness). Then, the Neo-Platonic intellectualism (the contemplation of the intelligible world is blessedness). Both are, in a marvelous way, interwoven, and over all lies the enchantment of inner and personal experience...There exists for him but two great realities: God and the Soul...He did not, like Origen, develop a theological system, but he furnished to his age a wealth of fruitful religious and speculative ideas, giving back to it in a purified and profounder form what he received from it. His 'doctrine' is deficient in unity, combining the most violent contradictions (gospel and philosophy, Catholic tradition and religion, voluntarism and intellectualism, etc.); but his writings proved stimulating in an unparalleled degree.²⁷

His view on ecclesiology was platonic in nature and expression. He was forced by the anabaptistic Donatists to expand on his Cyprianic view of 'church.' When they pressed against the impurity of Augustine's visible catholic 'church' and argued for their pure church, he developed a two or third-fold meaning of church. Seeburg stated,

From a critical point of view, the Donatistic objection is not with justification, for the church of the sacraments and the church of grace can only with the greatest difficulty be intellectually harmonized...we may, accordingly, speak of a two-fold, or even a three-fold, definition of the church in Augustine...The kingdom of God is thus for Augustine essentially identical with the pious and holy; but it is also the episcopally organized church.²⁸

Further Seeburg elaborates,

²⁶Milton D. Hunnex, *Chronological and Thematic Charts of Philosophies and Philosophers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publ. House, 1986), p. 31.

²⁷Seeburg, pp. 310-312.

²⁸Seeburg, pp. 325-326.

The church as an enclosed garden, paradise, consists of the *sancti* and *justi*. Then appears as equivalent: ‘the certain predestinated number of the saints,’ and from this again: ‘the number of the just.’ Yet many of the *predestinati* are now living carnally and unworthily—are heathen and heretics. And yet these are all to be considered as included in the enclosed garden, the church, which originally consisted of the holy and righteous.²⁹

Seeburg summarized Augustine’s view of the church.

In it the best and worst elements appear side by side. It is Evangelical and Catholic; superior to the world and compromising with the world; at once, true and untrue. Theoretically contemplated, it is a malformation without parallel: practically considered, a redundancy of large conceptions and impulses—not an organism, but a vessel full of fermenting elements.³⁰

For Augustine, the true “catholic church” was the invisible realm of the elect within the visible catholic church. This position was the predicable position of Neo-Platonism, emphasizing the Idea of “church” within the spiritual realm as “true,” and any corporeal manifestations of “church” as weak, inferior, carnal, and secondary. The Donatistic appeal to the visible assembly as the pure and true church was an abomination to any thorough-going Gnostic Platonist who viewed the corporeal as evil and to be rejected and abandoned. Since the Reformation, many Baptists have been bedazzled by the Neo-Platonic, Augustinian heresy of the universal, invisible church in their doctrine and practice.

Pseudo-Christian Cults

Mormonism

Begun at least by 1830, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) was demonically inspired movement of Joseph Smith (1805-1844). The Mormon plan of eternal progression is an obvious manifestation of the lies of the Garden, as Intelligences in the past allowed God and his wife to have Spirit Children. These Spirit Children warred and one third became evil, falling to the earth with no opportunity to receive a body for advancement. The remaining two thirds needed bodies to advance on earth and become gods. This advancement was achieved by being good Mormons, which included populating the world (through polygamy) with bodies for the Spirit Children. After death and further advancement in Paradise, men will be resurrected for the Judgment, which judgment will result in everyone going to one of three kingdoms, the Celestial, the Terrestrial, or the Telestial. This cycle is eternally progressive.

Jehovah Witnesses

Through the impetus of Charles T. Russell (1852-1916) and then later with the efforts of Joseph F. Rutherford (1869-1942), the Jehovah Witnesses began (1874) and blossomed. Their teaching was Garden Gnosticism, positing that Jehovah created Jesus (= Michael) who created

²⁹Seeburg, p. 326.

³⁰Seeburg, p. 327.

man. In 1914, Jesus began ruling in heaven and Satan and his demons were subsequently cast down. Satan will oppose Jehovah Witnesses during Armageddon, and those slain will be gradually resurrected during the Millennium. The exact number of 144,000 Jehovah Witnesses will go to heaven to rule with Christ without bodies. After the resurrection there will be the final test to see who will identify with Satan's rebellion and those who do will be killed and annihilated. The righteous will live on earth with a body and under the rule of the 144,000.

Common Gnostic heresies include the denial of the Trinity, spiritual advancement after death, denial of hell but acceptance of the doctrine of annihilation, and de-emphasis on the physical body.

Christian Science

Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) espoused her version of the lies of the Garden, declaring that God is the "divine principle" or "mind," that there is no Trinity, and that sin is an illusion of the mortal mind. Man is perfect and should strive for the Divine Mind of Christ (who was not born of a virgin and did not resurrect). Through understanding the teachings of her book *Science and Health with the Key to Scripture*, man may be freed from the illusion of evil, recognize that he is spiritual, and be absorbed back into the pantheistic Infinite Mind.

The Worldwide Church of God (Armstrongism)

The businessman Herbert W. Armstrong (1900-) founded The Worldwide Church of God in 1931, having interjected Gnosticism into his Seventh Day Church background. He taught that God wanted to reproduce himself, and that those who were baptized and adhered to his teachings were begotten until Jesus returned. Then they will be resurrected as immortal Spirit "God" beings. He denied the biblical teaching concerning the Trinity doctrine and promoted the doctrine of "soul sleep."

Non-Christian Cults

Theosophy

Through the grossly corrupt and immoral drug addict, Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891), the Theosophical Society began in 1875 in New York. She combined Hinduism and Spiritism³¹ to found her society for the purpose of studying the occult and the Cabbala.³² Blavatsky taught that man is a god in the making, and through reincarnation all may become "a Christ."

Neo-Paganism

The popularization of "neo-pagan" in "The Church of all Worlds" movement of Oberon Zell-Ravenheart (1968) had its foundation in the goddess movement, Norse mythology, and the

³¹Modern Spiritism began in 1848 with the John Fox daughters who communicated with the poltergeist "Mr. Splitfoot." Spiritualistic groups posit the message that "there is no death," and mediums communicate with departed spirits for guidance in this life and afterward about endless progression. They deny the redemptive work of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, heaven and hell, and biblical revelation.

³²She seemed to have connections with Brooke Foss Westcott (of Critical Text notoriety) and the "Ghostlie Guild" society.

movements of the Neo-Druids, Neo-shamanism, and the Neo-native American religion. Neo-Paganism encompasses a great variety of religious movements which teach pantheism, reincarnation, karma, spiritual imbalance with nature, and ultimate advancement through practices such as dances, chants, trances, magic, invoking spirits, and use of intercessors such as psychics, seers, shamans, Tarot card reading mediums, and Ouija (French “yes” and German “yes”) board practitioners.

Scientology

L. Ron Hubbard founded the Church of Scientology in 1953, expressing a modern and expensive version of the lies of the Garden. Supposedly, expressions of “life force” called Thetans created the material world and became encased in flesh. In time they forgot their divine origin and nature, and developed Engrams or mental hindrances to their identity. Consequently they need the Engrams cleared through the use of the E-meter, so that they can advance in their assumptions (= reincarnation) back to spirit deity. Satan’s religion is thinly disguised in this Garden Gnosticism.

The Ecumenical Harlot Church of the Tribulation

During the Tribulation, Satan will unite all of the anti-Christian religions around their variegated and repackaged expressions of the lies of the Garden, before he destroys the Ecumenical Harlot Church at the beginning of the last three and a half years of Tribulation (Rev. 17:16-17). Repackaged in these worldwide religions, cults, Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism, sometimes deeply and sometimes superficially, will be the lies of deification and deathlessness. Each will teach the basic goodness (deity) of man and his ability to advance spiritually in this life (works salvation) and/or the next (purgatory, reincarnation).³³ Catholics will unite with Hindus, Mormons with Protestants, and Jehovah Witnesses with devotees of Neopaganism. When the Devil and his angels are cast out of heaven, he will energize the Beast to destroy the Harlot church and promote raw Satanism, unveiling the previously repackaged lies of deification and deathlessness.

The Pauline Counter to Gnosticism

The Apostle Paul gave the scriptural defense against Greek philosophy and the Gnostic heresy of the first century (Col. 2:9-11), as he refuted Plato’s Garden Gnostic teaching concerning the fulness (πλήρωμα). Understanding Paul’s exposition of truth about the πλήρωμα will help one understand how wide-spread Platonic Gnosticism was in the first century of New Testament Christianity, and how easily the un-regenerated church fathers (Patristics) “platonized” Christian doctrine. These erroneous notions appear in the textual tampering represented by the Critical Text (CT), in the promotion of a Gnostic Christ as refuted by the Apostle John (I Jn. 2:22; 4:1-3), in the perversion of the meaning, mode, and timing of biblical baptism, and in the universal, invisible church heresy. The Lies of the Garden (Gen. 3:4-5)

³³Vide Thomas M. Strouse, *To the Seven Churches: A Commentary on the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Cromwell, CT: Bible Baptist Theological Press, 2013), pp. 679 ff.

manifested in Greek philosophy and especially through Plato, which in turn influenced the unregenerate apostolic church fathers who were foundational to the errors of Catholicism, which errors the Protestants attempted to reform in modified forms. This Platonic Gnosticism rears its diabolical head in Baptist churches, as platonized and protestantized Baptists perpetuate the Gnostic-laced CT and resultant translations, and/or promote admittedly, a “Platonic,” “universal,” “invisible,” “true,” “ideal,” “mystical body of Christ” church.

The Greek word πλήρωμα occurs 17x in the NT. It refers to “that which is full” or “that which fills.” The cognate verb πληρώω occurs 90x and means “to fill.” The following are significant passages:

1. “*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth*” (Jn. 1:14). The incarnate Lord Jesus was and is the embodiment of divine grace and truth.

2. “*And of his **fulness** have all we received, and grace for grace*” (Jn. 1:16). John affirmed that the Apostles and presumably all believers have received the divine *pleroma* upon receiving the Saviour (Jn. 1:12).

3. “*Which is his body, the **fulness** of him that **filleth** all in all*” (Eph. 1:23). The incarnate and resurrected Lord Jesus Christ fills His body (i.e., local church) with His *pleroma*.

4. “*And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be **filled** with all the **fulness** of God*” (Eph. 3:19). Regenerated church members have the expectation to be filled with the divine glories and communicable attributes of God, having the Triune Godhead dwelling within.

5. “*Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the **fulness** of Christ*” (Eph. 4:13). Saved church members must grow in the divine perfections as Peter implored (II Pet. 1:4-8).

6. “*For it pleased the Father that in him should all **fulness** dwell*” (Col. 1:19). Christ was and is the complete composite of all the perfections, attributes, and characteristics of God the Father.

7. “*For in him dwelleth all the **fulness** of the Godhead bodily*” (Col. 2:9). Again, for reemphasis, Paul declared that the Lord Jesus Christ was indeed, “*God was manifest in the flesh*” (I Tim. 3:16).

a. “*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*” (Col. 2:8). Paul warned the Colossian church members about Greek philosophy and demonic doctrines.

b. “*And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power*” (Col. 2:10). He clearly testified that Christ alone is the *pleroma*, the Christian is complete in the Lord and does not need to advance up the *pleroma*, and Christ is actually and believers are positionally above all angelic (demonic) beings.

The Johannine Counter to Gnosticism

Although the Apostle Paul dealt with the Gnostic attack upon the Work of Christ, the Apostle John dealt with the Gnostic attack upon the Person of Christ. John warned about “*the spirit of Antichrist*” which is behind the attack upon the Person of Christ (I Jn. 4:3). Satan has

employed the spirit of antichrist since the Garden (cf. Gen. 3:15), promoting Gnosticism through many antichrists (I Jn. 2:18, 22; and II Jn. 1:7). For instance, the Apostle warned about the heresy of Adoptionism, that the Christ Spirit “adopted” the mere man Jesus at his baptism (Mt. 3:16), and left the mere man Jesus at his death (Mt. 3:16; Jn. 19:30). He stated, “*Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son*” (I Jn. 2:22). Furthermore, he denounced Docetism, which stated that the divine person Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh. He warned, “*And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world*” (I Jn. 4:3). Both heretical forms of Gnosticism denied the incarnation, that “*God was manifest in the flesh.*” Adoptionism denied that the man Jesus was ever deity, and Docetism denied that Jesus Christ was ever man. As Paul defended the Works of Christ, John defended the Person of Christ.

Conclusion

What has worked so effectively for Satan for the last six thousand years will continue as his agenda to the end. His alternative world view appealed to the perfect couple and led to their sin. Couched in terms of knowledge, he offered them the opposing and anti-Christian doctrines of deathlessness and deification. The deathlessness of man contradicts the truth that sinful men will die (Gen. 2:17; Ezk. 18:4), and the deification of man contradicts the truth that man is not God (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 100:3). Satan through his demons and dupes has perpetuated the lies of the Garden and re-packaged them as humanism and reincarnation. Man is good and ultimately god, and will advance to spirit deity through some form of reincarnation. All world religious movements will unite around the re-packaged variations of the Gnostic lies, until Satan will expose the raw tenets of his doctrine at the midpoint of the Tribulation. Only those who receive the biblical revelation of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ will be protected from Garden Gnosticism. Independent Baptist churches are not exempt from the temptation to embrace elements of Gnosticism such as the Critical Text and the universal invisible church heresy. As the Apostle Paul charged Timothy to resist Gnostic attacks upon the Work of Christ, and as John urged his assembly to avoid Gnostic attacks upon the Person of Christ, so the Lord’s assemblies today have the same injunctions to resist the oppositions of science falsely so called, which false science (gnosis) promotes heresies relating to the Person and Work of the precious Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.