

Gnostics Gave Evidence that Jesus a Myth

In the early Church, there were many people who believed that Jesus Christ was not a man but a vision. They believed that the Jesus who we read of in the gospels was not a man. These people were mystics and were not far from being psychologists. Their Jesus only existed in the mind like modern witches use imaginary people to lead them to spiritual awareness. They were called antichrists who denied the coming of Jesus in the flesh in John's time. In Paul's day, they denied that Jesus had risen from the dead. We know their Jesus was a mental force and not a vision of a separate entity because the New Testament just condemns them and never tries to prove to them that Jesus was real as we would expect if they were saying there was a Jesus but he was only a ghost.

The mystics called themselves Gnostics - those who know. They wrote scriptures that indicate the possible non-existence of Jesus Christ.

WERE THERE Gnostics IN THE FIRST CENTURY?

Did Gnostic Christianity denying the Jesus story exist in the days of the apostles or did it come after? It hardly matters. Either way something problematic existed with the Jesus story which gave rise to Gnosticism. There is a black hole of data so you never know if Gnosticism was there from the start or not.

Some scholarship says it was a later development.

'But it is now widely agreed that the quest for a pre-Christian Gnosticism, properly so called, has proved to be a wild goose chase.', Dunn, 'The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul', p. 9 (2003).

'Even if it could be proven that any of the previously discussed works or, for that matter, any of the NH tractates are non-Christian Gnostic documents, that would not in itself be evidence for pre-Christian Gnosticism.', Combs, 'Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and New Testament Interpretation', Grace Theological Journal (8.2.207-208), 1987.

'And even if we are on solid ground in some cases in arguing the original works represented in the library are much older than extant copies, we are still unable to postulate plausibly any pre-Christian dates.', McRae, 'Nag Hammadi and the New Testament', pp. 146-47, in Combs, 'Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and New Testament Interpretation', Grace Theological Journal (8.2.208), (1987).

'Egypt has yielded early written evidence of Jewish, Christian, and pagan religion. It has preserved works of Manichaean and other Gnostic sects, but these are all considerably later than the rise of Christianity.', Unger, 'The Role of Archaeology in the Study Of the New Testament', Bibliotheca Sacra (116.462.153), 1996.

'Some modern researchers suggest that several NT and related texts evidence contact with "Gnosticism" in various stages of its development. Texts that especially stand out are Paul's Corinthian correspondence, Colossians, Ephesians, the Pastoral Epistles, Jude, 2 Peter, and the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 115) and Polycarp of Smyrna (d. ca. 165) among others. But even here the issues discussed are diverse, demonstrating a complex assortment of competing new religious movements, but no evidence of "Gnosticism."', Freedman, 'Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible', p. 509 (2000).

'Scholarship must in all likelihood abandon the hypothesis that a cohesive Gnostic movement is reflected in Paul's letters.', Lüdemann, 'Primitive Christianity: A Survey of Recent Studies and Some New Proposals', p. 150 (2003).

'If in all likelihood, with the possible exception of the Simonians, there was no such thing as a rival Gnostic movement within or competing with Pauline Christianity, the question arises whether there ever was a specific Gnostic myth as an entity of its own.', *ibid*, p. 151.

'The full-fledged Gnosticism of later church history did not exist in the first century A.D.21 An incipient form of Gnosticism was present, but Schmithals makes the error of reading later Gnosticism into the first century documents.', Schreiner, 'Interpreting the Pauline Epistles', Southern Baptist Journal of Theology (3.3.10), Fall 1999.

THE GOSPEL OF PHILIP

This Nag Hammadi gospel says Jesus was not conceived by the Holy Spirit for the Holy Spirit is female and that nobody baked bread until he came. This is a clear indication that Jesus was considered to be a myth figure.

The Apocryphon of James which was written in the early second century says that there is a curse on the men who saw Jesus meaning the apostles. This work is proof that there were mystical Christians who denied the authority of the apostles. By implication, they were rejecting the authority of the gospels for the gospels purport to preserve the apostles teaching and take us as near to seeing Jesus as a man as possible.

The unorthodox Christian scripture the Apocryphon of James or Secret Book of James seems to have originated before 150 AD (page 30, The Nag Hammadi Library in English). This work rejects the reliability of the gospels and the New Testament for it says only Peter and James were given the knowledge. It says that those who have seen and consorted with the Son of Man or Jesus are cursed and those who have not seen him are blessed. So we are told not to believe that Peter and James consorted with Jesus. They never knew him as a man. The reason people who haven't known Jesus are blessed is because they can have visions of him and receive secret knowledge of him. (This knowledge gives salvation so it is spoken of as life while ignorance is symbolised as death or death and burial.) So we are told that anybody who claims to know a real flesh and blood Jesus or him as a man is not to be heeded. The gospels are to be dumped. It says that we must neglect reason. Probably it simply means that reason will not bring you to the truth not that reason has no value. So books like the gospels which try to make it reasonable to believe in Jesus are to be deplored. Jesus says in this treatise that the head of prophecy was stopped with John the Baptist. Then he said Peter and James need to understand what this means. So the head of prophecy is symbol. So earlier when we read that they are to scorn death and then contradictorily keep remembering the cross and death of Jesus we can only conclude that we are to scorn literal death and keep remembering the symbolic cross and death of Jesus. They stand for Jesus becoming saved and reborn through knowledge so that the old Jesus is symbolically crucified and dead and replaced by a spiritually alive Jesus.

James asks Jesus to protect him against temptation by the evil one and Jesus replies that through temptation they can be made equal to Jesus and like Jesus they will be crucified and buried by the evil one like he was. Since James the primary recipient of this answer was not crucified the crucifixion is symbolic. Here Jesus is saying he didn't really die on the cross but died and was buried by the evil one. He means that before he was saved himself he was deluded and was dead in the sense that he wasn't saved and in that sense he was buried by Satan. The Apocryphon has no need to say such things about Jesus unless it was thought to be true. It's a very intelligent work as well. These Christians believed that only the being appearing to them to give them saving knowledge mattered not stories about a historical Christ. They even denied that he was crucified. When the biggest thing that happened to Jesus was a symbol and not real then its hardly likely that Jesus was real either.

Conclusion

The Gnostics knew that Jesus was a myth and the stories about him were not true. That is why they felt free to make up tales of their own but at least they admitted they were making up tales in the hope of helping people spiritually.

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