

ROSI CRUCIAN  
DIGEST

VOLUME 89 NUMBER 2 2011

GNOSTICISM

Each issue of the *Rosicrucian Digest* provides members and all interested readers with a compendium of materials regarding the ongoing flow of the Rosicrucian Timeline. The articles, historical excerpts, art, and literature included in this *Digest* span the ages, and are not only interesting in themselves, but also seek to provide a lasting reference shelf to stimulate continuing study of all of those factors which make up Rosicrucian history and thought. Therefore, we present classical background, historical development, and modern reflections on each of our subjects, using the many forms of primary sources, reflective commentaries, the arts, creative fiction, and poetry.



This magazine is dedicated to all the women and men throughout the ages who have contributed to and perpetuated the wisdom of the Rosicrucian, Western esoteric, Tradition.



May we ever be worthy of the light with which we have been entrusted.



In this issue, we go within to experience the inner knowledge of the Gnostics and Gnosticism, an important tradition contributing to what, centuries later, would become Rosicrucianism.

# ROSICRUCIAN DIGEST

No. 2 - 2011

Vol. 89 - No. 2

## Official Magazine of the Worldwide Rosicrucian Order

Established in 1915 by the Supreme Grand Lodge of the English Language Jurisdiction, AMORC, Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, CA 95191.

Copyright 2011 by the Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC, Inc. All rights reserved. Republication of any portion of Rosicrucian Digest is prohibited without prior written permission of the publisher.

ROSICRUCIAN DIGEST (ISSN #0035-8339) is published bi-annually for \$12.00 per year, single copies \$6.00, by the Grand Lodge of the English Language Jurisdiction, AMORC, Inc., at 1342 Naglee Ave., San Jose, CA 95191. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to ROSICRUCIAN DIGEST at 1342 Naglee Ave., San Jose, CA 95191-0001.

Ἡ Γνωσις



<b>Gnosis, Gnostics, and Gnosticism: An Introduction</b>	2
<b>Ancient Doctrines Rediscovered</b> <i>Christopher McIntosh, D. Phil.</i>	4
<b>Who were the Gnostics?</b> <i>Richard Smoley</i>	11
<b>Early Christianity &amp; the Gospel of Mary</b> <i>Karen L. King, Ph.D.</i>	18
<b>Translation of the Gospel of Mary</b> <i>Karen L. King, Ph.D.</i>	22
<b>The Gospel of Judas: Introduction</b> <i>Marvin Meyer, Ph.D.</i>	25
<b>The Cathars: Trials and Tribulations in the Languedoc</b> <i>Bill Anderson, FRC</i>	30
<b>Esclarmonde de Foix</b> <i>Hélène Bernard, SRC</i>	40
<b>Pristine Church of the Rose Cross</b>	46
<b>The Universal Declaration of Human Rights</b>	49
<b>Rosicrucian Declaration of Human Duties</b>	54
<b>Being a Mystic</b> <i>Christian Bernard, FRC</i>	56

# GNOSIS, GNOSTICS, AND GNOSTICISM: AN INTRODUCTION

**T**he key to all mysteries and the source of all Illumination lies deep within the self.

*From a Rosicrucian manuscript*

This issue of the *Rosicrucian Digest* explores the topics of Gnosis (inner knowledge), the Gnostics (mystics who proclaimed gnosis as the path to salvation), and Gnosticism (the broad tradition beginning millennia ago and continuing through the Catharism of the Middle Ages to today).

The various groups that we call “Gnostics” today emphasized the individual coming to personal and interior experiential knowledge (gnosis) of the transcendent Divine One which is within the innermost being.

In antiquity there was no religion called Gnosticism. This is a term that scholars invented to categorize the variety of early Christian “groups.”<sup>1</sup>

The word “gnosis” is usually translated as “knowledge.” The Greek language distinguishes rational knowledge (“He knows mathematics”) from knowledge through observation or experience (“He knows me”), which is gnosis.<sup>2</sup>

Elaine Pagels, Ph.D., one of the foremost scholars on Gnosticism writes, “As the gnostics use the term, we could translate it as ‘insight,’ for *gnosis* involves an intuitive process of knowing nature and human destiny . . . to know oneself, at the deepest level, is simultaneously to know God [the Divine]; this is the secret of gnosis.”<sup>3</sup>

Marvin Meyer, Ph.D., another of the world’s leading Gnostic scholars, writes, “To know oneself truly allowed gnostic men and

women to know god [the Divine] directly, without any need for the mediation of rabbis, priests, bishops, imams, or other religious officials.”<sup>4</sup>

The interior center of knowledge, with no need for an intermediary, is a familiar theme that manifests in Rosicrucian studies and practice.

Gnostics viewed the role of their savior or revealer to be to awaken people, rather than to die for their salvation or to be sacrificed for their sins. Dr. Meyer writes, “The gnostic revealer discloses knowledge that frees and awakens people, and that helps them recall who they are. When enlightened, gnostics can live a life appropriate for those who know themselves and god [the Divine]. They can return back to the beginning, when they were one with god [the Divine]. Such a life transcends what is mundane and mortal in this world and experiences the bliss of oneness with the divine.”<sup>5</sup>

The roots of Gnosticism extend back to the time of the Greeks, Romans, and Second Temple Jews. “Some gnostics were Jewish, others Greco-Roman, and many were Christian. There were Mandaeans gnostics from Iraq and Iran; Manichaeans from Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and all the way to China; Islamic gnostics in the Muslim world; and Cathars in western Europe.”<sup>6</sup>

It is from the Cathars (from the Greek *katharos*, or “pure”) that the Rosicrucian

Tradition of today finds its closest link to Gnosticism. The Cathars, a sect of Christian mystics whose beliefs most likely originated from the traditions of Old Europe and Manichaeism (Persian Gnosticism), lived in the Languedoc of what is now southern France and other parts of Europe beginning in the eleventh century.

These mystics allowed equal rights for women and men, encouraged understanding and dialogue between all faiths, and provided excellent education for their citizens<sup>7</sup>—all values highly cherished by Rosicrucians. The Cathars deeply influenced what would become the Rosicrucian Tradition in the Languedoc, especially around Toulouse.

The Cathars also performed initiations, following a period of preparation including fasting and a great desire for Perfection. Some of the earlier gnostic traditions also included initiations and other mystical

rituals. Today Rosicrucians perpetuate the Western esoteric initiatic tradition.

Gnostics sought wisdom and knowledge from varied sources. Dr. Meyer notes, “In addition to Jewish sacred literature, Christian documents, and Greco-Roman religious and philosophical texts, gnostics studied religious works from the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Zoroastrians, Muslims, and Buddhists. All such sacred texts disclosed truths, and all were to be celebrated for this wisdom.”<sup>8</sup>

Throughout history, Rosicrucians have valued and studied truths from many philosophies and traditions and have strongly advocated tolerance and humanism. The Rosicrucian teachings include lessons on some of the most important religions of the world and explore the various mystical traditions that have contributed to the Rosicrucian Tradition today.

~~~~~  
*We believe that the desire to know divine laws—that is natural, universal, and spiritual laws—will eventually supplant the need just to believe in God or the Divine. We assume, therefore, that belief will one day give way to knowledge.*

—From the Rosicrucian *Positio Fraternitatis Rosae Crucis* (2001)

~~~~~

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle*, (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2003), 155.

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, (New York: Random House, 1979), xix.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

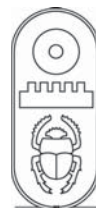
<sup>4</sup> Marvin Meyer, “Gnosticism, Gnostics, and *The Gnostic Bible*,” in *The Gnostic Bible*, ed. Willis Barnstone & Marvin Meyer (Boston: Shambhala, 2009), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Julie Scott, “Clemence Isaure: The Rosicrucian Golden Isis,” *Rosicrucian Digest* Vol. 88 No. 1 (2010): 47, [www.rosicrucian.org/publications/digest/digest1\\_2010/04\\_web/08\\_Scott/07\\_gmscott.pdf](http://www.rosicrucian.org/publications/digest/digest1_2010/04_web/08_Scott/07_gmscott.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Meyer, “Gnosticism, Gnostics, *Gnostic Bible*,” in *The Gnostic Bible*, 2.



# ANCIENT DOCTRINES REDISCOVERED

*Christopher McIntosh, D. Phil.*

From pp. 1–8 of the Third Revised Edition of *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology, and Rituals of an Esoteric Order*, by Christopher McIntosh, © 1997 by the author, reprinted by permission of Weiser Books (www.redwheelweiser.com, 1-800-423-3309).

**E** Christopher McIntosh (D. Phil., Oxon) is a course lecturer in Rosicrucianism in the Western Esotericism program at the University of Exeter (England) and is currently teaching at the University of Bremen, Germany. In this chapter from his book entitled, *The Rosicrucians*, he traces the history of the Rosicrucians, beginning with Egyptian-influenced Gnosticism to the Rosicrucian traditions of the seventeenth century.



The Rosicrucian movement is part of a way of thinking whose roots go far back into antiquity and which can be described as the Western esoteric tradition. This tradition, drawing on many sources, has run through European history exercising a strong influence, sometimes underground, at other times flourishing in the open. Although frequently in conflict with Christianity, Christian thinking was often influenced by it, and *vice versa*. This way of thinking amounts almost to a separate language and, without an understanding of it, much that is important in the history of Western thought cannot be grasped. The poetry of William Blake, for example, remained largely uncomprehended until recent research showed that he spoke the language of the esoteric tradition.

A great revival of this tradition began in Italy during the Renaissance and opened up

a new phase in the development of esoteric thought. From then on it had an assured, if still somewhat underground, place in Western thought. The Rosicrucian movement belongs to this phase of esotericism. In order to understand the esoteric tradition, we must follow it back to its origins and examine the different ingredients that went into it.

The philosophical milieu in which the tradition began is loosely known as Gnosticism, a movement beginning in the fourth century B.C., which had Egypt as its focal point of development. Egypt had been penetrated first by Persian mystical beliefs during the Persian conquest in 525 B.C. then by Greek and oriental influences following its occupation by Alexander the Great in 333–331 B.C. Out of this mixture came a religious outlook with the following main characteristics.

## **Gnostic Beliefs**

The Gnostics saw the universe as a duality between spirit and matter. They conceived of a supreme divine being who was immaterial, eternal, unreachable, and unknowable. In the Gnostic view, the spirit is a fragment of this universal being which has split off and become imprisoned in matter. The world of matter is not the creation of the supreme God but of a lower god, or demiurge, who has at his beck and call a number of minions, called archons (rulers), who have different spheres of influence in

the material world that correspond to the planetary spheres. The uppermost sphere, that of Saturn, forms the boundary between the lower and upper world governed by good spirits. Omar Khayyam expresses this in verse:

Up from Earths' Center through  
the Seventh Gate<sup>1</sup>  
I rose, and on the Throne of  
Saturn sate,  
And many Knots unravel'd by  
the Road;  
But not the Master-knot of  
Human Fate.

Human beings, according to this view, are composed of a body and a soul, both of which belong to the material world, and a divine spark, or *pneuma*, which is the godly element within. As long as humans are kept in ignorance of their true position, by the demiurge, they continue to be prisoners. But, sometimes, messages from beyond the spheres are received by certain individuals who then become aware of their imprisonment and are able to pass the knowledge onto others. Their knowledge, or *gnosis*, is the most important weapon in freeing the spirit from its bondage.

It is not enough, however, for Gnostics merely to know that they are imprisoned. They also need to know the workings of the world that surrounds them so that they can be better equipped to overcome it, or so that they can use it in a positive way—because not all Gnostic schools saw the world as absolute evil.

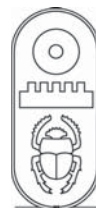
The Gnostic cosmology was taken to a large extent from the Stoic philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus, who saw the cosmos as a living organism, subject, like every other living thing, to the laws of birth and death. When the universe dies, according to Heraclitus, it leaves behind a seed from which a new cosmos grows. Everything in this cosmos derives from a single basic substance, which Heraclitus saw as a kind of fire. “For Fire all things are exchanged,” he

wrote “and Fire for all things, even as wares are exchanged for gold and gold for wares.”<sup>2</sup> Thus everything moves in a cyclical process, an idea often represented by the *ouroboros*, a snake biting its own tail. This symbol came to be very widely used and is frequently found in alchemical contexts.

The Gnostics furthermore conceived that, in order to initiate the process of growth, an act of sexual generation involving a universal male and female principle was required. The sexual analogy was also used to illustrate how a human being's “virgin” soul becomes implanted with the “seed” of God in a mystical union, or *hieros gamos*. Sexual symbolism featured prominently in Gnostic ceremonies.

The Gnostic belief in a graduation from coarse matter to pure spirit is reflected in the way their communities were organized. These were divided into three main groups. At the lowest level were those entirely preoccupied with material and mundane things. As long as they remained in this state, there was no possible redemption for them. Next came those not capable of direct perception of the godly, but who believed in a higher reality and were therefore capable of partial redemption. At the highest level came those who were possessed by the spirit of God, or *pneuma*. These were known as “pneumatics.” They acted as prophets and were capable of full redemption. Between these three groups, there were also many finer, intermediary grades. A system of ceremonies accompanied each level and, people who had been initiated to a particular grade had to remain silent about it to those of inferior grades. It will be seen from this description that most of the elements of the modern secret society were present in the Gnostic community.

Some of the early Church fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, were influenced by Gnosticism, and a number of Christian Gnostic groups were formed



in the early years of the Christian era. The main body of the Church, however, opposed Gnosticism, both inside and outside its ranks. The struggle continued into the Middle Ages, during which Gnosticism still persisted in various parts of Europe. The Bogomils of Bulgaria, for example, were a Gnostic sect who ate no flesh apart from fish. They believed that fish were the only creatures that did not generate sexually. A similar Gnostic sect was the Albigenses of southern France who, like the Bogomils, advocated sexual continence and opposed the eating of meat. They were savagely wiped out in the 13th century in a crusade inspired by Pope Innocent III. After this, Gnosticism went underground, though, even in the later Middle Ages, its influence broke through here and there. In the Renaissance, as we shall see, it came back into its own.

### Gnosticism and Hermetism

Gnosticism also produced the series of writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistos, which were to have an enormous influence on the esoteric thinking of the Renaissance and after. Hermes Trismegistos (the “Thrice-Great”) is an amalgam of the Greek messenger god and the Egyptian god of

wisdom, Thoth, though in the Renaissance he was considered by many to be an actual historical figure. He is the supposed author of a body of mystical lore composed around the beginning of the Christian era in Egypt.

The best known of the Hermetic treatises is the *Poimandres* (or *Pymander*), whose author describes how, during meditation, he conversed with the *Poimandres* or *Nous* (mind) of the supreme being, who unfolded to him a teaching that is basically Gnostic.<sup>3</sup> Human beings originate from God, but have fallen into a world of matter created by the demiurge, who is himself an offspring of the divine intellect. After death, those who have achieved *gnosis* rise up through the spheres to be reunited with the Godhead.

To say that the Hermetic writings taught a contempt for matter, however, would be misleading. Unlike the more extreme forms of Gnosticism, Hermeticism seems to see matter as a necessary part of creation which must be understood and mastered if the spirit is to rise above it. Hence, along with the Hermetic mystical doctrines go certain teachings about the workings and manipulation of matter. This part of the Hermetic writings became the



Hermes Trismegistus with Alchemical Sun and Moon.



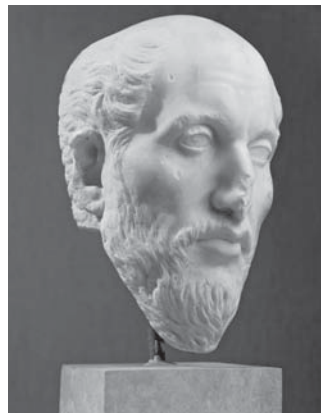
basis of alchemy, which is therefore often referred to as “the Hermetic Art.” Hermetic alchemy included theories about how to heal sickness. As this was supposedly one of the main activities of the original Rosicrucian brotherhood, it may be useful to examine some of the ingredients of Hermetic physiology and medicine.

In one of the Hermetic texts, the *Sermon of Isis to Horus*, a dialogue takes place in which Isis reveals to Horus that the human body is “a union and blend of the four elements; and from this blend and union a certain vapor arises, which is enveloped by the soul . . . its nature. And thus the differences of changes are effected both in soul and body.”<sup>4</sup>

For if there be in the corporeal make-up more of fire, thereon the soul, which is by nature hot, taking unto itself another thing that’s hot and [so] being made more fiery, makes life more energetic and passionate, and the body quick and active. . . . If [there be] more of air. . . life becomes light and springy and unsteady both in the soul and body.

Isis goes on to say that an excess of water makes the creature supple and “able easily to meet and join with others, through water’s power of union and communion with the rest of things.” If the earthly element is in excess, then “the creature’s soul is dull, for it has not its body texture loosely knit.” In this case, the body is also heavy and inert. “But there is a balanced state of all [the elements], then is the animal made hot for doing, light for moving, well-mixed for contact, and excellent for holding things together.”<sup>5</sup>

Different animals, the sermon explains, have different elements predominating—air in the case of birds, for example, and water for fish. Human beings, however, have a share of all the elements. When they are in their original state of balance, human beings are healthy. But if the equilibrium is impaired and there is a



Plotinus.

predominance of one of more of the elements, then the vapor that links body and soul is upset and the body becomes ill.<sup>6</sup>

The parts of the Hermetic corpus dealing with alchemy, astrology, and magic formed one of the main pillars of later Western occultism.

### Neoplatonism

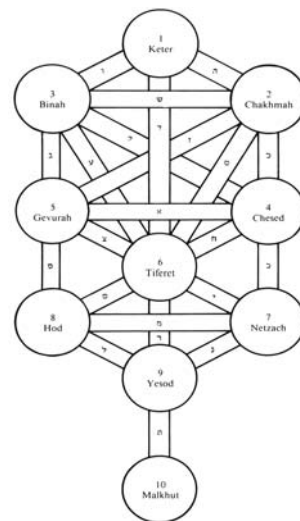
The intellectual and religious climate that produced Gnosticism and Hermeticism also produced a set of doctrines known as Neoplatonism, another movement of great importance in the esoteric tradition. This system of thought is based on Plato’s teachings of the immortality of the soul, of a transcendent principle of good, and of a dualistic state of affairs in which the world perceived by our senses is illusory and masks a real world accessible only to our minds. Neoplatonism, which emerged in Egypt between the third and sixth centuries A.D., combined Platonic philosophy with Aristotelian, Stoic, Pythagorean, and Gnostic teachings. Its founder is said to have been a somewhat shadowy figure called Saccas (c. 175–c. 242), but the best-known proponent of Neoplatonism was Plotinus (204–270). Born in Lycopolis in Egypt, Plotinus studied under Saccas at Alexandria and later taught his philosophy in Rome. His teachings were put together with a commentary by his pupil Porphyry (c. 232–304) and published under the title of the *Enneads*.<sup>7</sup>



Plotinus conceived of the world as coming into being through a process of emanation from the supreme cosmic unity inaccessible to human reason. This being gave rise to a World of Spirit which in turn generated a World Soul, which then branched out into individual souls. The soul, said Plotinus, “has given itself to each of the separate material masses. . . it makes them living beings not by merging into body but by giving forth, without any change in itself, images or likenesses of itself like one face caught by many mirrors.” In another passage, Plotinus brings in a simile reminiscent of alchemy: “Gold is degraded when it is mixed with earthly particles; if these be worked out, the gold is left and is beautiful, isolated from all that is foreign, gold with gold alone. And so the Soul; let it be but cleared of the desires that came by its too intimate converse with the body, emancipated from all the passions. . . in that moment the ugliness that came only from the alien is stripped away.”<sup>8</sup>

It is important to mention the Pythagorean strain in Neoplatonism, since this was an aspect that greatly appealed to Renaissance scholars. Pythagoras (c. 580–c. 497 B.C.) was the founder of a school in the Greek colony of Croton in southern Italy that lasted for a century or more after his death. This organization was not only a philosophical school, but also a kind of religious brotherhood believing in the transmigration of souls and, therefore, in abstinence from the eating of meat, since animals were also held to have souls.

The most important contribution of the Pythagorean school was its work in the field of numbers and proportion. It was this school that discovered the numerical relations of musical intervals. They found that, if a piece of string at a given tension is sounded on half its length, the resulting tone is an octave above the tone resonating on the full string. If the length is reduced by two-thirds, the tone is a harmonic fifth higher.



The Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

Likewise, a reduction in length of three-quarters gives an interval of a perfect fourth. This discovery of musical harmony was developed by the Greeks into a notion of the whole cosmos as an orchestra, with each of the planets surrounding a different note and producing the “music of the spheres.”

## Qabalah

There remains one strain in the Western esoteric tradition to mention, possibly the most important of all: the Jewish Qabalah. This is a highly complex collection of mystical teachings whose exact origin is unknown but which emerged in two main phases. The first phase took place among the medieval Jews of Spain, who produced the *Sepher Yetzeriah* (Book of Formation) between the third and sixth centuries A.D. and the *Zohar* (Book of Splendor) in the 13th century. The latter purports to derive from a rabbi of the second century, but was probably written down by Rabbi Moses de Leon shortly before it came into circulation. The second phase is what is known as the Lurianic Qabalah, after Isaac Luria of Safed in Galilee (1534–1572). He and his followers developed the Zoharic Qabalah and introduced a number of new concepts.

The Qabalah fulfills a number of purposes. It is, first, a system of cosmology

and theology explaining the nature of God, the origin of the world, and the character of man's destiny. It is also a means of interpreting the scriptures by the application of certain rules which yield an "inner" meaning to the language of the Bible. Finally, it embodies certain mystical techniques whereby the individual learns to commune with higher realities.

The Qabalah conceives of creation as emanating outward from God in a series of ten basic forces or principles, called *Sephiroth*, which are normally arranged in a pattern known as the Tree of Life. These ten principles are held to run right through creation, from Universal being down to humankind—another form of the conception of macrocosm and microcosm. Another part of the Qabalistic scheme is the notion of the Four Worlds descending from the Godhead: *Atziluth*, The World of Emanation; *Briah*, The World of Creation; *Yetzirah*, The World of Formation; and *Assiah*, The World of Action, the world of matter in which we live.

One important part of Qabalistic doctrine concerns the Hebrew language, which is believed to be of divine origin. According to this doctrine, each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet



Marsilio Ficino.

represents an elemental force in creation. All this was eagerly taken up by the esotericists of the Renaissance and adapted to Christianity, so that, out of the Jewish Qabalah, there developed over time a Christian Qabalah. Later I shall give a fuller account of how Qabalistic teachings affected Rosicrucianism.

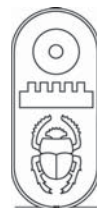
## The Renaissance

These, then, are the main esoteric traditions that were rediscovered by the Renaissance scholars. The most important center of this rediscovery was the Florentine court of Cosimo de Medici who conceived a passion for Hermetic and Neoplatonic literature after meeting a mysterious Greek scholar, Georgios Gemistos, who went by the name of Pletho (from the Greek *plethos*, meaning "the full"). Pletho gave a series of lectures in Florence in 1439 tinged with Gnostic and Neoplatonic ideas.

It is believed that these lectures inspired Cosimo de Medici to found his Platonic academy and to commission the best available scholars to gather and translate classical texts. The most prominent of these scholars was Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) who, besides works by Plato, translated the *Corpus Hermeticum* which he saw as containing a core of teachings handed down from very ancient times through Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, and Hermes himself, whom Ficino accepted as a real person. It appears to have been Ficino who introduced the vocabulary of special terms describing wisdom handed down from sage to sage. In time, the list of sages came to include Moses, Dionysius, the Areopagite, and even Saint Augustine.

Ficino's influence extended throughout Europe. This belief in an inherited core of secret wisdom captured many imaginations and reappeared prominently, as we shall see in the Rosicrucian writings.

Ficino's pupil, Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) was among these responsible for stimulating interest in the Qabalah. His





*Fama Fraternitatis*. From the archives of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC.

*Nine Hundred Conclusions* (1486), which used Qabalistic and Neoplatonic ideas in an attempt to find common ground between Christianity, Judaism and Islam, brought accusations of heresy against him. For some time Pico was plagued by Church authorities, until Pope Alexander VI absolved him of heresy in 1493.

Another advocate of Qabalism was the Franciscan Francesco di Giorgio di Venetas, whose *De Harmonia Mundi* combines Qabalism with a preoccupation with the ideas of universal harmony and the music of the spheres. Also important in the Qabalistic

revival was a Jewish refugee from Spain, Judah Arbanel, whose *Dialoghi d'Amore*, written under the name of Leone Ebreo, was brought out in 1535 and later achieved wide currency through being included in the collection of Johann Pistorius, *Artis Cabalisticæ*, published at Basel in 1587.

By the early 16th century, these different elements had been successfully amalgamated to form a new language, a language which, when transplanted to German soil in the period leading up to the Rosicrucian manifestos, played a key role in shaping the movement.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Edward Fitzgerald, *Rubâiyât of Omar Khayyâm* (New York: Miller Graphics/Crown, 1979), verse 34, pp. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Heraclitus of Ephesus. "Fragment 22" in James Adams, *The Religious Teachers of Greece* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), p. 228.

<sup>3</sup> W. Wynn Westcott edited a volume called *The Divine Pymander, or the Pymander of Hermes*, published in 1894 by the Theosophical Society in London.

<sup>4</sup> "Sermon of Isis and Horus" in the G. R. S. Mead,

*Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, Vol. 3 (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1992, reprint), p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> See "Sermon of Isis to Horus," pp. 124–125.

<sup>6</sup> "Sermon of Isis to Horus," pp. 125–126.

<sup>7</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*, Stephan Mackenna, trans. (London: Faber & Faber, 1966); reissued 1992, Burdette, NY: Larson Publications.

<sup>8</sup> See Plotinus, *The Enneads*, Ennead I, Tractate I, Section 8, and Tractate VI, Section 5, pp. 60–61.

# WHO WERE THE GNOSTICS?

*Richard Smoley*

From pp. 11–19 of the First Edition of *Forbidden Faith*, by Richard Smoley, © 2006 by the author, reprinted by permission of HarperCollins (www.harpercollins.com).

**I**n this article, Richard Smoley, one of the world's most distinguished authorities on the mystical and esoteric teachings of Western civilization, introduces us to the history and roots of Gnosticism.



Until fairly recently, if you were to ask about the origins of Christianity, you would hear much the same story no matter whom you asked. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, came down from heaven. He taught the apostles the true faith and commissioned them to preach the Gospel to all nations. He also founded a church and appointed the apostles as its leaders. Sometime in the second century A.D., this organization started to call itself the Catholic Church, from the Greek *katholikos*, or “universal.” All Christian churches today are, in one way or another, its offspring.

Human nature being what it is, however, things did not always proceed so smoothly. Groups of people sprang up who introduced their own distortions into Christ's doctrine. Some said that Christians still had to observe the Jewish Law. Others said that Christ wasn't really divine. Still others said he wasn't really human.

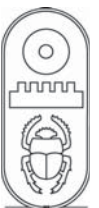
Throughout the centuries, the church, aided by the power of the Holy Spirit, managed to face down these heretics, as they came to be called (from the Greek *hairesis*, or “sect”). To this day, the Christian church has preserved Christ's teaching in its pure form, thanks to the countless Church

Fathers and theologians who fended off the assaults of error.

As I say, this was the standard picture of Christian history until comparatively recently (although, of course, certain details had to be adjusted depending on which denomination was telling the story). And this is the picture in which many sincere Christians still believe. Unfortunately, as modern scholarship has discovered, it's not entirely accurate.

If you read the Gospels carefully, you will notice that Christ does not talk much about theology. He has a lot to say about ethics, about loving your neighbor, and about going to God with inner sincerity. He argues often and heatedly with scribes and Pharisees about sacrificing the spirit of the Law to the letter. But he does not argue with them about the nature of God, nor does he even say who or what he himself is. His disciples keep asking him, but he never gives them a clear answer. If you were to summarize Christ's teaching as found in the Gospels, you might turn to a verse from the prophet Micah: “What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic. 6:8). Christ says much the same thing in the episode of the Two Great Commandments (Matt. 22:35–40; Mark 12:28–31). There's not much theology in that.

This was the heart of Christ's teaching, and he no doubt had good reasons for stressing the things he stressed. But once Christ himself was no longer on the scene, his disciples began to teach his message in their own ways, and these ways soon began





Roman Emperor Constantine, who first legalized Christianity and then began to turn it into the state religion of the Roman Empire. This statue is in York, England, which was an important Roman city called Eboracum during the time of Constantine.

to diverge. Some stayed close to the Jewish religion; others moved away from it. You can see this in the New Testament, where Paul quarrels with the church leaders over whether Gentile converts need to follow the Mosaic Law. (The dispute is described both in Acts and in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Acts makes the whole affair sound considerably more peaceful and dignified than Paul does: Acts 15:1–31; Gal. 2:1–16.) There were other differences as well. Some emphasized a more external faith; others saw Christ's teaching in a more mystical light.

By the second century A.D., if you were to take a look at the Christian community in the Roman Empire, you would undoubtedly find a number of different, often conflicting, groups who understood the master's teaching in various ways. Some would see Jesus as a great spiritual master and nothing more. Some would resemble early versions of the Catholic or Orthodox churches today, with bishops and sacraments; others would probably look more like philosophical study groups or mystical schools. And although it would be far from true to say that these different bodies lived in perfect harmony, none of them had any special privileges, and so they all had to coexist. This picture would change radically only in

the fourth century A.D., when the emperor Constantine first legalized Christianity and then began to turn it into the state religion of the Roman Empire. At this point the proto-Catholic Church—which was previously only one strain of the Christian tradition—consolidated its power by suppressing its Christian as well as its pagan rivals.

Christian history is, as a result, a sad and often heartbreaking story, where great Church Fathers (some of them later canonized as saints) heaped anathemas upon alleged heretics over points of doctrine that Christ and his disciples would in all likelihood neither have cared about nor even understood. At the same time the essential teaching of Christ—to “love thy neighbor as thyself”—was often sacrificed to this doctrinal squabbling, turning the church itself into a merciless persecutor.

The ancient Gnostics were one of those lost strains of Christianity. Who were the Gnostics, and what were they like? This isn't always easy to figure out, because much of the material we have about them comes from Church Fathers who were writing anti-Gnostic polemics. We are thus somewhat in the position of a future historian who would have to piece together a Democratic Party platform using only Republican campaign commercials as sources (or vice versa).

Fortunately, the situation has improved of late, thanks to the discovery of Gnostic texts at various archaeological sites in the Middle East over the last century. The most celebrated of these took place at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945. Two peasants, digging for fertilizer, unearthed a cache of scriptures, many of them previously unknown, that cast an entirely new light on Gnostic teachings. This discovery is so important that it in itself is one of the main reasons for the resurgent interest in Gnosticism. The Nag Hammadi texts were written by different authors at different times and represent the views of a number of sects

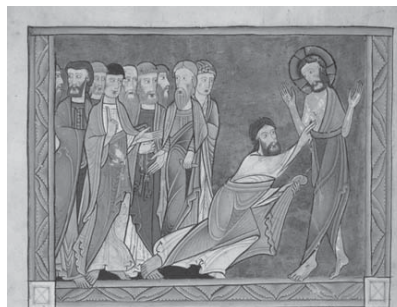
and teachers. But they still offer an extremely valuable window onto a tradition that had previously been known mainly through the words of its enemies.

### The First Gospel?

Perhaps the most interesting of the Nag Hammadi scriptures is an enigmatic work called *The Gospel of Thomas*. It is extremely short—in one standard edition, it fills only twelve pages—but it has received more attention than any of the other Gnostic scriptures.<sup>1</sup> This is partly because, although it never found a place in the New Testament, it may be older than the Gospels that did.

The age of *Thomas* is not easy to determine. Many scholars have placed it in the mid-second century A.D., on the grounds that it is a supposedly Gnostic document. But this begs the question, because it assumes that Gnosticism did not arise before the second century.<sup>2</sup> If *Thomas* is older than that, it would force scholars to push the origins of Gnosticism back to the first century. And there is reason to believe that this Gospel does date from earlier than the second century.

The most compelling argument is the form this Gospel takes. It tells no story and has no narrative beginning or ending. It is simply a collection of sayings, some of them parables, some of them proverbs, “that the living Jesus spoke,” as we read in the opening verse. Remarkably, this makes the *Gospel of Thomas* resemble early sayings collections whose existence had long been postulated by New Testament scholars based on similarities and differences among the canonical Gospels. The most famous of these hypothetical sayings collections is called Q (from the German *Quelle*, or “source”). No text of this document has been discovered yet, and one may never be. Scholars can only infer what Q was like from similarities and differences between Matthew and Luke, both of whom evidently made use of it.

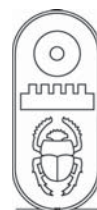


Doubting Thomas, from a page of the York Psalter, produced in the north of England, ca. 1170.

*The Gospel of Thomas* is not Q. But it bears a striking resemblance to Q in its literary form, which, as a bare collection of sayings, is more primitive than the ordered narratives of the four New Testament Gospels. Scholars generally assume that the simpler a text is, the older it's likely to be, since later versions tend to acquire embellishments and additions that were not in the first versions. To take one example, there is an apocryphal Gospel called the *Protevangelion of James*, which is about Christ's birth and infancy. (It is, by the way, the origin of the idea of Mary's Immaculate Conception.) It has a more elaborate nativity than either Matthew or Luke, and other details indicate that it's based on them. Precisely for this reason, it cannot be older than they are; it's generally dated to around 150 A.D.<sup>3</sup>

*Thomas* is not like these apocryphal works. It is not based on the canonical Gospels, it is in a more primitive form than they are, and besides, it takes exactly the form that scholars had long supposed the earliest texts about Jesus had. For this reason, some New Testament scholars go so far as to call it the “fifth Gospel.” It could have been written as early as 50 A.D. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are usually dated to between 70 and 100 A.D.

If so, this is rather troubling to those who believe that Jesus taught a version of Christianity like those of the mainstream



denominations, whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. The *Gospel of Thomas* does not present Jesus as the incarnate Son of God who takes away the sins of the world, or as the second person of the Trinity. In fact, Jesus makes no special claim to divinity or divine authority. At one point, he asks his disciples what he is like. Peter tells him he is like a righteous angel. Matthew says he is like a wise philosopher. Thomas says, “Teacher, my mouth utterly will not let me say what you resemble.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus chides him, saying, “I am not your teacher. You have become intoxicated from the bubbling wellspring that I have poured out.” So, far from asserting his own divinity, Jesus even balks at being honored with the comparatively humble title of “teacher.” Moreover, *Thomas* never speaks of Jesus as “Christ”—the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Messiah*, or “anointed one.” These facts also point toward an early date for this Gospel, since under most circumstances, the image of charismatic figures grows in status and prestige as their living memory fades. Eventually they may attain divine or semidivine status. (In our own time, this has happened with Mao Zedong in China and even with Elvis Presley in the United States.) The doctrine of Jesus’s divinity was not formulated until the Council of Nicaea, convened by the emperor Constantine in 325.

Just as important as these considerations is the kind of teaching that the Jesus of *Thomas* presents. Many of Jesus’s sayings in *Thomas* resemble those in the New Testament Gospels. Those that don’t are often extremely cryptic: “Be passers-by” (*Thomas*, 42). “I have cast fire upon the world, and see, I am watching until it blazes” (10). “When you see one not born of woman, fall upon your faces and prostrate yourself before that one: it is that one who is your father” (15). Most striking, however, is the declaration made at the very beginning

of the Gospel: “Whoever finds the meaning of these sayings will not taste death” (1).

It is this characteristic of *Thomas* that has led scholars to regard it as Gnostic. Here, in essence, is the central difference between Gnosticism and conventional Christianity. “Whoever finds the meaning of these sayings will not taste death.” What is most important in *Thomas* is not sin, repentance, and redemption, but an enigmatic mystical illumination that is somehow encoded in these verses. Jesus’s sayings in *Thomas* are like koans, those unanswerable riddles given by Zen masters to their pupils as a way of cutting through the ordinary mind. They are meant not to convey information but to awaken. The goal of Gnosticism is not salvation, but enlightenment.

This was, no doubt, the main reason conventional Christianity repudiated Gnosticism, for illumination is too hard, too uncertain of attainment, to form the basis for a popular religion. It is much easier to see things in light of sin and atonement or appeasing the wrath of an angry God, particularly in pagan antiquity, which adopted exactly this attitude toward its own deities.

What of Thomas the man? We do not know much about him. His name means “twin” in Aramaic, but that tells us little. Some argue that he was Jesus’s twin brother or resembled Jesus enough to be his twin, but most likely it simply means that he was born as a twin to someone else and had *Thomas* as his nickname. His most famous appearance in the Bible comes in John’s Gospel, where he doubts Christ has risen from the dead and only believes when he sees (John 20:24–29). But scholars have in turn doubted that this story is historical. They say it most likely does not reflect a real incident; instead it was a jab at the Gnostics, followers of Thomas, some of whom did not believe that Christ had suffered and died in the flesh.

Apart from these sketchy details, scholars believe that Thomas most likely preached in



Syria, where he was venerated for centuries by Christians (and where his Gospel may have been written). Afterward he may have gone as far afield as India, where to this day an extremely ancient Christian community traces its origins to his preaching. Thomas left his mark in the East, in areas where mystical enlightenment would find a more congenial home than among the rationalistic Greeks or the hard-headed Romans.

### The Roots of Gnosticism

But India was not to prove the central stage for the development of Christianity. The Roman Empire provided this context, and late Roman culture and thought would leave an indelible mark on Christianity in all its forms. This was a world similar to our own in many respects. It was vast, far-flung (encompassing the entire Mediterranean basin), and remarkably unified. During the first two centuries of the Christian era, wars were rare, and the empire's inhabitants "enjoyed and abused the advantages of wealth and luxury," in the words of the historian Edward Gibbon.<sup>5</sup> Trade and commerce flourished, and as usually happens, along with goods and money, there also flowed ideas, philosophies, and religions. New cults and sects burgeoned in a generally tolerant pagan culture. (The Christians were persecuted not because they believed in a different god but because they refused to honor the others—a slight that pagans believed ran the risk of bringing on divine wrath.)

This religious culture helped shape the infant Christian faith. Its first and greatest influence was, of course, Judaism, the mother faith. From Judaism, Christianity took its sacred scripture as well as its view of a single, monotheistic God. At the same time, from the outset Christianity has always had a problematic relationship with Judaism. One of the key problems has to do with the nature of God himself. The God of the Hebrews is not always good; he is capable

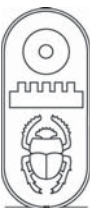
of wrath and vengeance and is unapologetic about it. "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things" (Isa. 49:7). "Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?" (Lam. 3:38). This was not always easy to reconcile with the good, loving God preached by Jesus.



God in "The Last Judgment" by Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, in the Sistine Chapel, Vatican City.

In addition to Judaism, there were also the philosophical schools, which did not occupy themselves with philosophy as we know it today, but explained the nature of the gods and the universe and taught their pupils how to live in harmony with them. Of these the most important for Christianity and Gnosticism was the school of Plato. Although Plato himself lived in the fourth century B.C., he left an institution of higher education called the Academy in Athens, where his doctrines were taught and continued to evolve in the following centuries. It would be hard to overestimate his influence. In fact, it's sometimes said that all Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato.

Plato explains reality in a way that could be described as *esoteric*. This word does not refer to the difficulty or obscurity of his thought. Originally it meant that many of his teachings were given only to relatively advanced pupils, people who were "further in" the circle (the word comes from the Greek



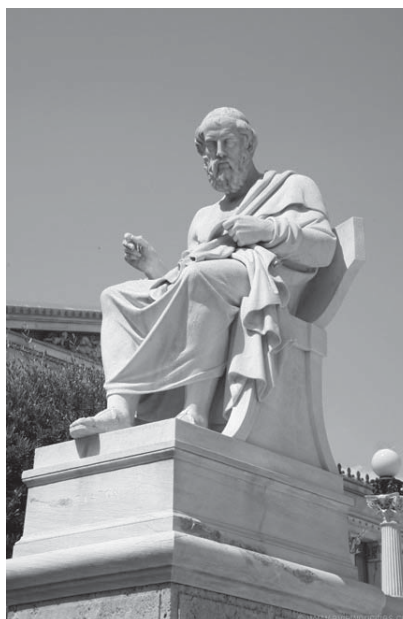
*esotero*, which means “further in”). But it points to another meaning as well: it indicates that these teachings are essentially about inner experience. Unlike modern thought, which views the invisible and internal dimensions of life and thought as purely subjective (and hence unreal), esotericism says these inner dimensions have a genuine reality and can be known and intelligently described. Plato even went so far as to flip conventional wisdom on its head and say that the world we see is itself unreal. The solid objects of ordinary reality are merely copies or imitations of ideal entities that he called “forms”—abstract images that exist in the realm of thought. The forms alone are real, Plato said, because they are eternal and unchanging, unlike the ceaselessly shifting world here below.<sup>6</sup>

Plato’s influence on Gnosticism was profound, but it’s often overlooked. The most important of Plato’s works from this point of view is a late dialogue called the *Timaeus*. It is the book that introduced the myth of the lost continent of Atlantis. (According to Plato, who said these records had been preserved in Egypt, Atlantis was destroyed around 9600 B.C.) After talking about Atlantis, the *Timaeus* goes on to paint an esoteric portrait of the creation of the universe. God is good, Plato says, and “the good can never envy anyone anything.” Consequently, “God wanted everything to be good, and nothing bad, insofar as this was possible.”<sup>7</sup> So he created a world that was as perfect—as like himself—as it could be.

As part of this project, God creates the seven planets, which (in accordance with Greek myth) are also gods. He then charges these gods with making the human race. God does not make them himself, because, he says, “If I created them and gave them life, they would be equal to the gods.”<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, God says, he himself will sow the seed of divine consciousness in them. They will be a mixture of mortal and immortal.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato sometimes refers to God—and he *does* speak of one true God, who is above all the others and who in fact created them—metaphorically as the “craftsman.” The Greek word for this is *demiourgos*, which has been anglicized into “demiurge.” The later Gnostics would adopt this name for the creator. But they changed Plato’s system by saying that this demiurge was a second-rate deity who created the visible world. They added the idea of another God—a true, good God who remained above, unmoved and aloof from this degenerate piece of cosmic handiwork. Plato’s philosophical descendants objected to these views; Plotinus, the great Neoplatonic philosopher of the third century A.D., even wrote a treatise refuting them! Despite these crucial alterations, it’s easy to see how Plato’s ideas fed into Gnostic currents.

Finally, there were the mystery cults, which introduced their followers to higher states of consciousness through secret rituals devoted to such gods as Demeter, Dionysus, and Isis, the beloved Great Mother of the Egyptians (from whom the Virgin Mary would later take many of her attributes).



Plato. Photo © aviewoncities.com.

Initiates swore to remain silent about what they had learned and done in their rites, and they kept their oaths so well that we have only a vague idea of what went on. We do know, however, that a common theme had to do with death and resurrection. Some said the chief benefit of initiation into the mysteries was that you would no longer have a fear of death.

Even this brief picture shows some of the roots out of which Gnosticism grew. We see themes of hidden knowledge, mystical experience, and the greatest mystery of all—death and rebirth. Then there is the nature of God himself. Is he good? If so, why is the world in such terrible shape? Maybe, as Plato said, the world is not real—and maybe it's

not all that good either. If this is true, what does it say about the God who created it?

The Gnostic teachers turned these questions into a system of thought that remains powerful and compelling. It's not always a cheerful picture, nor is it always easy to understand. But it has a strange allure for the modern—or rather postmodern—mind, obsessed with texts that mean the opposite of what they say on the surface, with realities that drop away from us under our feet, with forces that shape our lives and fates beyond our ken. Most importantly, it speaks to the nagging need inside many of us for awakening, for recollecting a lost truth that is central to our existence but which we have somehow mislaid.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 117–31. There are other works attributed to Thomas, but for the sake of simplicity, when I speak of *Thomas*, I will be referring to this Gospel.

<sup>2</sup> For one example of this argument, see Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 70.

<sup>3</sup> *The Protevangelion of James*. See *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McLachlan Wilson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 1:285–99.

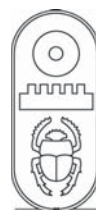
<sup>4</sup> *Gospel of Thomas*, saying 14, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 119. Hereafter references to the *Gospel of Thomas* will be to this edition and will use its verse enumeration.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Harper & Bros., n.d.), chapter 1, 1:214.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Republic* 476c–d.

<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Timaeus* 29e–30a; my translation.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Timaeus* 41c; my translation.



# EARLY CHRISTIANITY & THE GOSPEL OF MARY

*Karen L. King, Ph.D.*

Reprinted by permission of Polebridge Press from pp. 3–7 of *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, by Karen L. King, 2003.

**I**n this excerpt from her groundbreaking book, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle*, Karen King (Ph.D., Brown University), Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School, shares a startling view of Jesus and Mary of Magdala (Mary Magdalene), whom Jesus singled out for special teachings and to whom he revealed deep theological insights.



Few people today are acquainted with the *Gospel of Mary*. Written early in the second century CE, it disappeared for over fifteen hundred years until a single, fragmentary copy in Coptic translation came to light in the late nineteenth century. Although details of the discovery itself are obscure, we do know that the fifth-century manuscript in which it was inscribed was purchased in Cairo by Carl Reinhardt and brought to Berlin in 1896.<sup>1</sup> Two additional fragments in Greek have come to light in the twentieth century. Yet still no complete copy of the *Gospel of Mary* is known. Fewer than eight pages of the ancient papyrus text survive, which means that about half of the *Gospel of Mary* is lost to us, perhaps forever.

Yet these scant pages provide an intriguing glimpse into a kind of Christianity lost for almost fifteen hundred years. This astonishingly brief narrative presents a radical

interpretation of Jesus' teachings as a path to inner spiritual knowledge; it rejects his suffering and death as the path to eternal life; it exposes the erroneous view that Mary of Magdala was a prostitute for what it is—a piece of theological fiction; it presents the most straightforward and convincing argument in any early Christian writing for the legitimacy of women's leadership; it offers a sharp critique of illegitimate power and a utopian vision of spiritual perfection; it challenges our rather romantic views about the harmony and unanimity of the first Christians; and it asks us to rethink the basis for church authority. All written in the name of a woman.

The story of the *Gospel of Mary* is a simple one. Since the first six pages are lost, the gospel opens in the middle of a scene portraying a discussion between the Savior and his disciples set after the resurrection. The Savior is answering their questions about the end of the material world and the nature of sin. He teaches them that at present all things, whether material or spiritual, are interwoven with each other. In the end, that will not be so. Each nature will return to its own root, its own original state and destiny. But meanwhile, the nature of sin is tied to the nature of life in this mixed world. People sin because they do not recognize their own spiritual nature and, instead, love the lower nature that

deceives them and leads to disease and death. Salvation is achieved by discovering within oneself the true spiritual nature of humanity and overcoming the deceptive entrapments of the bodily passions and the world. The Savior concludes this teaching with a warning against those who would delude the disciples into following some heroic leader or a set of rules and laws. Instead they are to seek the child of true Humanity within themselves and gain inward peace. After commissioning them to go forth and preach the gospel, the Savior departs.

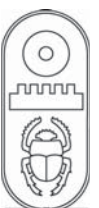
But the disciples do not go out joyfully to preach the gospel; instead controversy erupts. All the disciples except Mary have failed to comprehend the Savior's teaching. Rather than seek peace within, they are distraught, frightened that if they follow his commission to preach the gospel, they might share his agonizing fate. Mary steps in and comforts them and, at Peter's request, relates teaching unknown to them that she

had received from the Savior in a vision. The Savior had explained to her the nature of prophecy and the rise of the soul to its final rest, describing how to win the battle against the wicked, illegitimate Powers that seek to keep the soul entrapped in the world and ignorant of its true spiritual nature.

But as she finishes her account, two of the disciples quite unexpectedly challenge her. Andrew objects that her teaching is strange and he refuses to believe that it came from the Savior. Peter goes further, denying that Jesus would ever have given this kind of advanced teaching to a woman, or that Jesus could possibly have preferred her to them. Apparently when he asked her to speak, Peter had not expected such elevated teaching, and now he questions her character, implying that she has lied about having received special teaching in order to increase her stature among the disciples. Severely taken aback, Mary begins to cry at Peter's accusation. Levi comes quickly to her defense,



Mary of Magdala. Photo © St. Mary Magadlene, by Br. Robert Lentz, OFM, Courtesy of Trinity Stores, [www.trinitystores.com](http://www.trinitystores.com), 800.699.4482.



pointing out to Peter that he is a notorious hothead and now he is treating Mary as though she were the enemy. We should be ashamed of ourselves, he admonishes them all; instead of arguing among ourselves, we should go out and preach the gospel as the Savior commanded us.

The story ends here, but the controversy is far from resolved. Andrew and Peter at least, and likely the other fearful disciples as well, have not understood the Savior's teaching and are offended by Jesus' apparent preference of a woman over them. Their limited understanding and false pride make it impossible for them to comprehend the truth of the Savior's teaching. The reader must both wonder and worry what kind of gospel such proud and ignorant disciples will preach.

How are we to understand this story? It is at once reminiscent of the New Testament gospels and yet clearly different from them. The gospel's characters—the Savior, Mary, Peter, Andrew, and Levi—are familiar to those acquainted with the gospels of *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, and *John*. So, too, is the theological language of gospel and kingdom, as well as such sayings of Jesus as “Those who seek will find” or “Anyone with two ears should listen.” And the New Testament gospels and *Acts* repeatedly mention the appearance of Jesus to his disciples after the resurrection. Yet it is also clear that the story of the *Gospel of Mary* differs in significant respects. For example, after Jesus commissions the disciples they do not go out joyfully to preach the gospel, as they do in *Matthew*; instead they weep, fearing for their lives. Some of the teachings also seem shocking coming from Jesus, especially his assertion that there is no such thing as sin. Modern readers may well find themselves sympathizing with Andrew's assessment that “these teachings are strange ideas.”

The *Gospel of Mary* was written when Christianity, still in its nascent stages, was

made up of communities widely dispersed around the Eastern Mediterranean, communities which were often relatively isolated from one other and probably each small enough to meet in someone's home without attracting too much notice. Although writings appeared early—especially letters addressing the concerns of local churches, collections containing Jesus' sayings, and narratives interpreting his death and resurrection—oral practices dominated the lives of early Christians. Preaching, teaching, and rituals of table fellowship and baptism were the core of the Christian experience.<sup>2</sup> What written documents they had served at most as supplemental guides to preaching and practice. Nor can we assume that the various churches all possessed the same documents; after all, these are the people who wrote the first Christian literature. Christoph Marksches suggests that we have lost 85% of Christian literature from the first two centuries—and that includes only the literature we know about.<sup>3</sup> Surely there must be even more, for the discovery of texts like the *Gospel of Mary* came as a complete surprise. We have to be careful that we don't suppose it is possible to reconstruct the whole of early Christian history and practice out of the few surviving texts that remain. Our picture will always be partial—not only because so much is lost, but because early Christian practices were so little tied to durable writing.

Partly as a consequence of their independent development and differing situations, these churches sometimes diverged widely in their perspectives on essential elements of Christian belief and practice. Such basic issues as the content and meaning of Jesus' teachings, the nature of salvation, the value of prophetic authority, and the roles of women and slaves came under intense debate. Early Christians proposed and experimented with competing visions of ideal community.

It is important to remember, too, that these first Christians had no New Testament, no Nicene Creed or Apostles Creed, no commonly established church order or chain of authority, no church buildings, and indeed no single understanding of Jesus. All of the elements we might consider to be essential to define Christianity did not yet exist. Far from being starting points, the Nicene creed and the New Testament were the end products of these debates and disputes; they represent the distillation of experience and experimentation—and not a small amount of strife and struggle.

All early Christian literature bears traces of these controversies. The earliest surviving documents of Christianity, the letters of Paul,<sup>4</sup> show that considerable difference of opinion existed about such issues as

circumcision and the Jewish food laws<sup>5</sup> or the relative value of spiritual gifts.<sup>6</sup> These and other such contentious issues as whether the resurrection was physical or spiritual were stimulating theological conversations and causing rifts within and among Christian groups. By the time of the *Gospel of Mary*, these discussions were becoming increasingly nuanced and more polarized.

History, as we know, is written by the winners. In the case of early Christianity, this has meant that many voices in these debates were silenced through repression or neglect. The *Gospel of Mary*, along with other newly discovered works from the earliest Christian period, increases our knowledge of the enormous diversity and dynamic character of the processes by which Christianity was shaped.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See the summary in Till and Schenke, *Die Gnostischen Schriften*, 1–2.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Koester, “Writing and the Spirit”; “Written Gospels or Oral Traditions?”

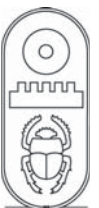
<sup>3</sup> See Marksches, “Lehrer, Schüler, Schule,” 98.

<sup>4</sup> These letters are contained in the New Testament canon, and include *Romans*, *1* and *2 Corinthians*, *Galatians*, *Philippians*, *1 Thessalonians*, and

*Philemon*. It is possible, although widely disputed, that Paul wrote *2 Thessalonians*, *Ephesians* and *Colossians* as well. The other letters attributed to him (*Hebrews*, *1* and *2 Timothy*, and *Titus*) are pseudonymous.

<sup>5</sup> See *Galatians* where this issue is a topic of considerable controversy.

<sup>6</sup> See *1 Cor* 11–14.



# TRANSLATION OF THE GOSPEL OF MARY

*Karen L. King, Ph.D.*

Reprinted by permission of Polebridge Press from pp. 13–18 of  
*The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, by Karen L. King, 2003.

Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,1

1 (Pages 1–6 are missing.)

2 *The nature of matter*

“. . . Will m[a]tter then be utterly [destr]oyed or not?”

<sup>2</sup>The Savior replied, “Every nature, every modeled form, every creature, exists in and with each other. <sup>3</sup>They will dissolve again into their own proper root. <sup>4</sup>For the nature of matter is dissolved into what belongs to its nature. <sup>5</sup>Anyone with two ears able to hear should listen!”

3 *The nature of sin and the Good*

<sup>1</sup>Then Peter said to him, “You have been explaining every topic to us; tell us one other thing. <sup>2</sup>What is the sin of the world?”

<sup>3</sup>The Savior replied, “There is no such thing as sin; <sup>4</sup>rather you yourselves are what produces sin when you act in accordance with the nature of adultery, which is called ‘sin.’ <sup>5</sup>For this reason, the Good came among you, pursuing (the good) which belongs to every nature. <sup>6</sup>It will set it within its root.”

<sup>7</sup>Then he continued. He said, “This is why you get si[c]k and die: <sup>8</sup>because [you love] what de[c]ei[ve]s [you]. <sup>9</sup>[Anyone who] thinks should consider (these matters)!”

<sup>10</sup>[Ma]tter gav[e bi]rth to a passion which has no Image because it derives from what is contrary to nature. <sup>11</sup>A disturbing confusion then occurred in the whole body.

<sup>12</sup>That is why I told you, ‘Become content at heart, <sup>13</sup>while also remaining discontent and disobedient; indeed become contented and agreeable (only) in the presence of that other Image of nature.’ <sup>14</sup>Anyone with two ears capable of hearing should listen!”

4 *The Savior’s farewell*

<sup>1</sup>When the Blessed One had said these things, he greeted them all. “Peace be with you!” he said. <sup>2</sup>“Acquire my peace within yourselves!”

<sup>3</sup>“Be on your guard <sup>4</sup>so that no one deceives you by saying, ‘Look over here!’ or ‘Look over there!’ <sup>5</sup>For the child of true Humanity exists within you. <sup>6</sup>Follow it! <sup>7</sup>Those who search for it will find it.

<sup>8</sup>“Go then, preac[h] the good news about the Realm. <sup>9</sup>[Do] not lay down any rule beyond what I determined for you, <sup>10</sup>nor promulgate law like the lawgiver, or else you might be dominated by it.”

<sup>11</sup>After he had said these things, he departed from them.

5 *Mary comforts the other disciples*

<sup>1</sup>But they were distressed and wept greatly. <sup>2</sup>“How are we going to go out to the rest of the world to announce the good news about the Realm of the child of true Humanity?” they said. <sup>3</sup>“If they did not spare him, how will they spare us?”

<sup>4</sup>Then Mary stood up. She greeted them all, addressing her brothers and sisters, <sup>5</sup>“Do not weep and be distressed nor let your hearts



be irresolute. <sup>6</sup>For his grace will be with you all and will shelter you. <sup>7</sup>Rather we should praise his greatness, <sup>8</sup>for he has prepared us and made us true Human beings.”

<sup>9</sup>When Mary had said these things, she turned their heart [to]ward the Good, <sup>10</sup>and they began to deba[t]e about the wor[d]s of [the Savior].

## 6 *Peter asks Mary to teach*

<sup>1</sup>Peter said to Mary, “Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than all other women. <sup>2</sup>Tell us the words of the Savior that you remember, the things which you know that we don’t because we haven’t heard them.”

<sup>3</sup>Mary responded, “I will teach you about what is hidden from you.” <sup>4</sup>And she began to speak these words to them.

## 7 *Vision and mind*

<sup>1</sup>She said, “I saw the Lord in a vision <sup>2</sup>and I said to him, ‘Lord, I saw you today in a vision.’

<sup>3</sup>He answered me, ‘How wonderful you are for not wavering at seeing me! <sup>4</sup>For where the mind is, there is the treasure.’

<sup>5</sup>I said to him, ‘So now, Lord, does a person who sees a vision see it <with> the soul <or> with the spirit?’

<sup>6</sup>The Savior answered, ‘A person does not see with the soul or with the spirit. <sup>7</sup>Rather the mind, which exists between these two, sees the vision an[d] that is w[hat . . .]’

## 8 *(Pages 11-14 are missing.)*

## 9 *The ascent of the soul*

<sup>1</sup>“ . . . it.’

<sup>2</sup>“And Desire said, ‘I did not see you go down, yet now I see you go up. <sup>3</sup>So why do you lie since you belong to me?’

<sup>4</sup>“The soul answered, ‘I saw you. You did not see me nor did you know me. <sup>5</sup>You (mis)took the garment (I wore) for my (true) self. <sup>6</sup>And you did not recognize me.’

<sup>7</sup>“After it had said these things, it left rejoicing greatly.

<sup>8</sup>“Again, it came to the third Power, which is called ‘Ignorance.’ <sup>9</sup>[It] examined the soul closely, saying, ‘Where are you going? <sup>10</sup>You are bound by wickedness. <sup>11</sup>Indeed you are bound! <sup>12</sup>Do not judge!’

<sup>13</sup>“And the soul said, ‘Why do you judge me, since I have not passed judgement? <sup>14</sup>I have been bound, but I have not bound (anything). <sup>15</sup>They did not recognize me, but I have recognized that the universe is to be dissolved, both the things of earth and those of heaven.’

<sup>16</sup>“When the soul had brought the third Power to naught, it went upward and saw the fourth Power. <sup>17</sup>It had seven forms. <sup>18</sup>The first form is darkness; <sup>19</sup>the second is desire; <sup>20</sup>the third is ignorance; <sup>21</sup>the fourth is zeal for death; <sup>22</sup>the fifth is the realm of the flesh; <sup>23</sup>the sixth is the foolish wisdom of the flesh; <sup>24</sup>the seventh is the wisdom of the wrathful person. <sup>25</sup>These are the seven Powers of Wrath.

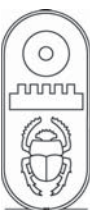
<sup>26</sup>“They interrogated the soul, ‘Where are you coming from, human-killer, and where are you going, space-conqueror?’

<sup>27</sup>“The soul replied, saying, ‘What binds me has been slain, and what surrounds me has been destroyed, and my desire has been brought to an end, and ignorance has died. <sup>28</sup>In a [wor]ld, I was set loose from a world [an]d in a type, from a type which is above, and (from) the chain of forgetfulness which exists in time. <sup>29</sup>From this hour on, for the time of the due season of the aeon, I will receive rest i[n] silence.’”

<sup>30</sup>After Mary had said these things, she was silent, <sup>31</sup>since it was up to this point that the Savior had spoken to her.

## 10 *The disciples’ dispute over Mary’s teaching*

<sup>1</sup>Andrew responded, addressing the brothers and sisters, “Say what you will about the things she has said, <sup>2</sup>but I do not believe



that the S[a]vior said these things, f[or] indeed these teachings are strange ideas.”

<sup>3</sup>Peter responded, bringing up similar concerns. He questioned them about the Savior: “Did he, then, speak with a woman in private without our knowing about it? <sup>4</sup>Are we to turn around and listen to her? Did he choose her over us?”

<sup>5</sup>Then [M]ary wept and said to Peter, “My brother Peter, what are you imagining? <sup>6</sup>Do you think that I have thought up these things by myself in my heart or that I am telling lies about the Savior?”

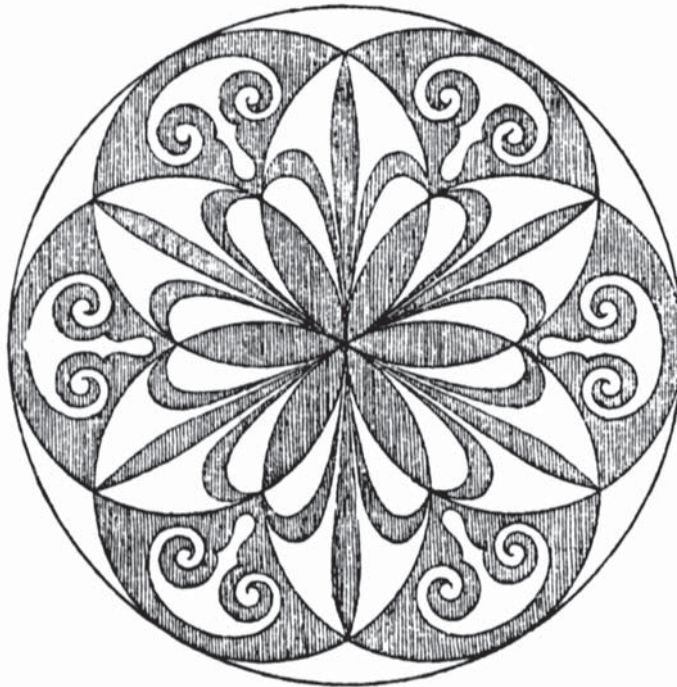
<sup>7</sup>Levi answered, speaking to Peter, “Peter, you have always been a wrathful person.

<sup>8</sup>Now I see you contending against the woman like the Adversaries. <sup>9</sup>For if the Savior made her worthy, who are you then for your part to reject her? <sup>10</sup>Assuredly the Savior’s knowledge of her is completely reliable. That is why he loved her more than us.

<sup>11</sup>“Rather we should be ashamed. We should clothe ourselves with the perfect Human, acquire it for ourselves as he commanded us, <sup>12</sup>and announce the good news, <sup>13</sup>not laying down any other rule or law that differs from what the Savior said.”

<sup>14</sup>After [he had said these] things, they started going out [to] teach and to preach.

<sup>15</sup>[The Gos]pel according to Mary



# THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS: INTRODUCTION

*Marvin Meyer, Ph.D.*

Reprinted with permission from the book *The Gospel of Judas, 2nd edition*.  
Copyright © 2006, 2008 National Geographic Society.

**M**arvin Meyer (Ph.D., Claremont University) is Grisct Professor of Bible and Christian Studies at Chapman University, Director of the Albert Schweitzer Institute, and Director of the Coptic Magical Texts Project of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity. In this article, Professor Meyer introduces us to *The Gospel of Judas* (which had been lost for 1,600 years) told from the perspective of Judas Iscariot, history's ultimate traitor. In this radical reinterpretation, Jesus asks Judas to betray him.

Judas is as ignominious as his actions. He takes blood money from the authorities for his betrayal of Jesus, and either he hangs himself (as in Matthew) or he dies in a ghastly fashion (as in Acts), falling headlong and causing his body to rip open.

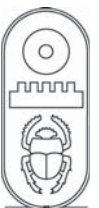
Yet, even in the New Testament, there is something captivating about Judas Iscariot. The account of Judas betraying Jesus remains a story of great power and poignancy: Jesus is handed over by one of his closest friends. Furthermore, in the New Testament gospels, there are hints of a more favorable figure of Judas Iscariot. Judas is part of the inner circle of disciples of Jesus, and according to the Gospel of John, Judas acts as the treasurer of the group and is entrusted with whatever funds Jesus and the disciples might have had. At the Last Supper, Jesus himself tells Judas to do what he has to do and to do it quickly. Judas kisses Jesus in the garden, with a form of greeting still used today between friends throughout the Middle East. Wasn't all this part of the divine plan, according to the New Testament—that Jesus should die for the sins of people and rise from the dead on the third day? Without Judas and his kiss, would the crucifixion and resurrection ever have taken place?

---

Over the years the sands of Egypt have surrendered countless treasures and archaeological wonders, and now they have yielded another spectacular find—the Gospel of Judas, recently discovered and published for the first time in 2006.

The very title of the text, the Gospel of Judas—Judas Iscariot—is shocking. In the New Testament gospels and most of the Christian tradition, Judas Iscariot is portrayed as the quintessential traitor, the betrayer of Jesus, who turns his master in to the Roman authorities. According to these accounts, there is little that is apparent in his character that could connect him with the gospel, or “good news,” of Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, it is said that Satan enters into Judas and drives him to his despicable deed, and in the Gospel of John, Jesus addresses the twelve disciples and says that one of them, Judas, is a devil. The end of

The enigma of Judas Iscariot has been explored by many who have wondered about Judas's character and motivation. Modern literature and academic scholarship are rich with discussions of Judas, including Jorge



Luis Borges's *Three Versions of Judas*, Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, Hans-Josef Klauck's *Judas: Ein Jünger des Herrn*, William Klassen's *Judas: Betrayor or Friend of Jesus?*, Hyam Maccoby's *Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil*, and Marcel Pagnol's play, *Judas*. In the rock musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Judas Iscariot nearly steals the show, and his presence and music probed a more sympathetic view of the depth of his devotion to Jesus. In the song "With God on Our Side," Bob Dylan sings of Judas:

*You'll have to decide  
Whether Judas Iscariot  
Had God on his side.*

The Judas Iscariot of the Gospel of Judas is the one who betrays Jesus, but he is simultaneously the protagonist of the gospel. He says to Jesus, "I know who you are and where you have come from. You have come from the immortal aeon of Barbelo. And I am not worthy to utter the name of the one who has sent you." In the spiritual world of the Gospel of Judas, to confess that Jesus is from "the immortal aeon of Barbelo" is to confess that he is a divine being, and to declare the ineffability of the name of the one who sent Jesus is to profess that the true God is the infinite Spirit of the universe. Unlike the other disciples, who misunderstand Jesus and cannot bear to stand before his face, Judas understands who Jesus is, takes his place before him, and learns from him. In the end, Judas hands Jesus over in the Gospel of Judas, but he does so knowingly, after being fully informed by Jesus. Jesus says to Judas, with reference to the other disciples, "You will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man who bears me." According to the Gospel of Judas, Jesus is a savior not because of the mortal flesh that he wears but because he can reveal the soul or spiritual person who is within, and the true home of Jesus is not this imperfect world below but the divine world of light and life. For Jesus in the Gospel of Judas, death is no tragedy,

nor is it an evil necessary to bring about the forgiveness of sins. As a result, the act of Judas handing Jesus over to be crucified in the Gospel of Judas loses a great deal of the negative meaning and significance ordinarily associated with it.

Unlike the New Testament gospels, the Jesus of the Gospel of Judas laughs a great deal, and part of that laughter is directed toward the foibles of the disciples and the absurdities in human life. Death, as the exit from the absurdity of physical existence, is not to be feared or dreaded. Far from being an occasion of sadness, death is the means by which Jesus is liberated from the flesh in order that he might return to his heavenly home. Jesus will be handed over by Judas, but this will provide the occasion for Jesus to discard his body and free his inner self, the divine self. No wonder Jesus laughs.

This perspective of the Gospel of Judas is different in a number of respects from that of the New Testament gospels. During the formative period of the Christian church, numerous gospels were composed in addition to the canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Among the other gospels that have survived, whole or in part, are the Gospel of Truth and the Gospels of Thomas, Peter, Philip, Mary, the Ebionites, the Nazoreans, the Hebrews, and the Egyptians, to name a few, and these gospels demonstrate the rich diversity of perspectives within early Christianity. The Gospel of Judas is yet another of the gospels written by early Christians as they attempted to articulate, in one way or another, who Jesus is and how one should follow him.

### **The Discovery**

The Gospel of Judas was discovered in the 1970s in Middle Egypt in a papyrus codex (or book), later designated Codex Tchacos. According to reports, the codex was found, with other manuscripts, in a cave that

had been used for a burial. It was apparently displayed, stolen, and later recovered and the collection of manuscripts was taken to Europe and presented to scholars with a view to a sale, though the suggested purchase price proved prohibitively high. Eventually the Gospel of Judas made its way to the United States, where it was hidden away in a safe-deposit box on Long Island for sixteen years and then was placed in a freezer by a potential buyer. By the time the codex was acquired by the Maecenas Foundation for Ancient Art and the National Geographic Society, for conservation and publication, this much-abused book consisted of a mass of fragments in a box. Beginning in 2001, Rodolphe Kasser undertook—with conservator Florence Darbre and, since 2004, Gregor Wurst—the Herculean task of assembling and arranging the papyrus fragments, large and small. In time, *mirabile dictu*, the box of fragments became an ancient collection of books once again.

As preserved, Codex Tchacos is at least sixty-six pages long and contains at least four tractates:

- a version of the Letter of Peter to Philip (pages 1–9), also known from Nag Hammadi Codex VIII
- a text entitled James (pages 10–30), which is a version of the First Revelation of James from Nag Hammadi Codex V
- the Gospel of Judas (pages 33–58)
- a text provisionally entitled the Book of Allogenes (or, the Stranger, an epithet of Seth, son of Adam and Eve, in gnostic texts), previously unknown (pages 59–66).

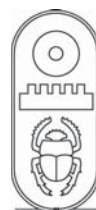
A papyrus fragment of Codex Tchacos has also been discovered that seems to contain the page number 108, and Jean-Pierre Mahé has identified among the remaining papyrus fragments what he believes are words and phrases that come from a Coptic translation of a famous Hermetic text, *Corpus Hermeticum XIII*. Thus, Codex Tchacos may once have been a larger book

than we might have imagined, and unless any remaining papyrus fragments have turned to dust, it is conceivable that there may be more fragments, and even more pages, of the ancient collection still to be discovered.

Although the Gospel of Judas and the other texts in the codex are written in Coptic, a late form of the ancient Egyptian language, the Gospel of Judas was, without a doubt, originally composed in Greek, probably around the middle of the second century. This date becomes more secure on the basis of a statement of Irenaeus of Lyon, who refers to a Gospel of Judas in his work *Against Heresies*, written around 180. As Gregor Wurst demonstrates in his essay, the Gospel of Judas in the Codex Tchacos may now be identified as a version of the Gospel of Judas mentioned by Irenaeus and others after him. The Coptic translation of the Gospel of Judas is most likely somewhat older than the copy we find in Codex Tchacos, which probably dates to the early part of the fourth century, though the carbon-14 dating would also allow for a slightly earlier date for the codex.

### The Gnostic Context

The Gospel of Judas may be classified as what is often called a gnostic gospel. Probably composed around the mid-second century, as noted, most likely on the basis of earlier ideas and sources, the Gospel of Judas represents an early form of spirituality that emphasizes *gnōsis*, or “knowledge”—mystical knowledge, knowledge of God, and the essential oneness of the self with God. This spirituality is commonly described as “gnostic,” but there was a debate in the ancient world over the use of the term, and that debate goes on to the present day among scholars. Such a direct approach to God as is to be found in gnostic spirituality requires no intermediary—after all, God is the spirit and light within. Evidence from the early church and the heresiologists (heresy hunters) within the church indicates that the priests and bishops were not pleased with these freethinking gnostics. The writings



of the heresiologists are filled with accusations that gnostics entertained evil thoughts and engaged in illicit activities. Polemics is not a pretty business, and documents with polemical intentions, such as those of the heresiologists, frequently try to discredit their opponents by raising suspicions about their thought and life. The gnostic Gospel of Judas returns the favor by accusing the leaders and members of the emerging orthodox church of all sorts of unsavory behavior. According to the Gospel of Judas, these rival Christians are simply lackeys of the God who rules this world below, and their lives reflect his disgusting ways.

The Gospel of Judas makes mention of Seth, well-known from the biblical book of Genesis, and concludes that human beings with the knowledge of God belong to the generation of Seth. This particular form of gnostic thought is often described by scholars as Sethian. In the story told in the book of Genesis, Seth, third son of Adam and Eve, was born after the tragic violence in the dysfunctional first family, which left Abel dead and Cain banished. Seth, it is suggested, represents a new beginning for humanity. To belong to the generation of Seth, then, according to the Gospel of Judas and similar Sethian books, is to be part of enlightened humanity. That is the good news of salvation in Sethian texts like the Gospel of Judas.

In the central part of this gospel, Jesus teaches Judas the mysteries of the universe. In the Gospel of Judas, as in other gnostic gospels, Jesus is primarily a teacher and revealer of wisdom and knowledge, not a savior who dies for the sins of the world. For gnostics, the fundamental problem in human life is not sin but ignorance, and the best way to address this problem is not through faith but through knowledge. In the Gospel of Judas, Jesus imparts to Judas—and to the readers of the gospel—the knowledge that can eradicate ignorance and lead to an awareness of oneself and God.



Page from Codex Tchacos.

This revelatory section of the Gospel of Judas, however, may present challenges to modern readers. The challenges arise chiefly because the point of view of the Sethian gnostic revelation differs substantially from the philosophy, theology, and cosmology that we have inherited within the Euro-American tradition. Rome and orthodox Christianity eventually won the day, and as Borges once noted concerning the gnostic accounts he was discussing, “Had Alexandria triumphed and not Rome, the extravagant and muddled stories that I have summarized here would be coherent, majestic, and perfectly ordinary.” The gnostics of Alexandria and Egypt did not triumph, nor did the Gospel of Judas, in the theological wars that raged during the second, third, and fourth centuries, and consequently texts like the Gospel of Judas, with their different perspectives, contain ideas that sound unusual today.

Nonetheless, the revelation that Jesus imparts to Judas in the Gospel of Judas

illustrates a theology and cosmology that are still quite sophisticated. The revelation itself contains few Christian elements, and, if scholars are correct in their understanding of the development of gnostic traditions, the roots of these ideas may go back to the first century or even before, within Jewish philosophical and gnostic circles that were open to Greco-Roman ideas. Jesus tells Judas that in the beginning there was an infinite, utterly transcendent deity, and through a complex series of emanations and creations, the heavens became filled with divine light and glory. This infinite deity is so exalted that no finite term can adequately describe the deity; even the word God, it is intimated, is insufficient and inappropriate for the deity. The world below, however, is the domain of a lower ruler, a creator God named Nebro (“Rebel”) or Yaldabaoth, who is malevolent and mean-spirited—hence the problems in our world and hence the need to listen to words of wisdom and become aware of the divine light within.

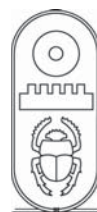
For these believers, the most profound mystery of the universe is that within some human beings is the spirit of the divine. Although we live in a flawed world that too often is the domain of darkness and death, we can transcend darkness and embrace life. We are better than this world, Jesus explains to Judas, for we belong to the world of the divine. If Jesus is the son of the divine, so also are all of us children of the divine, and we shall be enlightened.

In contrast to the New Testament gospels, Judas Iscariot is presented in an unfamiliar and rather unorthodox way in the Gospel of Judas, a way that shows what it means in this world for the wisdom and knowledge of God to be present and for a person of knowledge to be a disciple of Jesus. The Gospel of Judas describes the vicissitudes of Judas, who is opposed and persecuted but nonetheless is informed of everything by Jesus. The story of the

Gospel of Judas ends as Judas does exactly what Jesus says he will do, with the handing over of Jesus and not the crucifixion. The point of the gospel is that Jesus is a savior not because of a sacrificial death that he experiences but rather because of the wisdom and knowledge that he reveals—the very knowledge that he reveals to Judas in the Gospel of Judas.

In the biblical tradition, however, Judas—whose name has been linked to “Jew” and “Judaism”—was often portrayed chiefly as the evil Jew who turned Jesus in to be arrested and killed, and thereby the biblical figure of Judas the betrayer has fed the flames of anti-Semitism. The role of Judas in the present gospel, along with the more positive hints about the character of Judas in the New Testament gospels, may help to counteract this anti-Semitic tendency. In the Gospel of Judas, Judas Iscariot turns out to be the one disciple of Jesus who truly understands who he is, and Jesus singles him out for further discussion of the true nature of the divine, the cosmos, and salvation. Additionally, the mysteries Judas learns from Jesus are steeped in Jewish mystical lore, and the teacher of these mysteries, Jesus, is the master. The Christian Gospel of Judas is at peace with a Jewish view—an alternative Jewish view, to be sure—of gnostic thought, and Jewish gnostic thought has been baptized as Christian gnostic thought.

In this book, Jesus echoes the Platonic conviction that every person has his or her own star and that the fate of people is connected to their stars. Judas, Jesus says, also has his star. Near the conclusion of the text, just before an account of transfiguration in a luminous cloud, Jesus asks Judas to look up at the heavens and see the stars and the display of light. There are many stars in the sky, but the star of Judas is said to be special. Jesus tells Judas, “The star that leads the way is your star.”



# THE CATHARS: TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS IN THE LANGUEDOC

*Bill Anderson, FRC*

**I**n this article, Bill Anderson, FRC, editor of the Rosicrucian Beacon magazine (English Grand Lodge for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa) presents the Cathars and Catharism, from the origins of this beautiful mystical tradition to their exemplary courage during the persecution of the Inquisition.

---

*Al cap dels set cent ans, verdajara lo laurèl.*  
The laurel will flourish again in 700 years.  
(Belibaste)

In Christianity, the laurel, once sacred to Apollo, is said to symbolize the Resurrection of Christ and the triumph of Humanity.

The word Cathar derives from the Greek word *katharos* meaning “pure.” Catharism itself was a gnostic and dualist Christian religious movement that appeared in the Languedoc region of France, called Occitània at the time, around the middle of the eleventh century. The movement was branded by the Catholic Church as heretical, with some authorities denouncing Cathars as not being Christian at all. It existed throughout much of Western Europe, including Aragon and Catalonia in Spain, the Rhineland and Flanders, and Lombardy and Tuscany in Italy.

In the early thirteenth century, the area of the Midi or southern France known as the Lengadòc (Languedoc) stretched from the Rhone valley in the east to the Garonne River in the west, and from the Auvergne in the north to the Roussillon in the south. This area had a cultural unity quite different from the north of France. It had different forms

of land ownership and inheritance, and even a different language—*Occitan* (the *langue d’oc*). And it was not part of the kingdom of France at the time.

The independent lords of the south strove to ensure that no single power could dominate the region. Nevertheless, one of them, the Count of Toulouse, who belonged to the St. Gilles family, was indisputably the most influential and powerful of them all. The domains and power of this family had grown through the tenth and eleventh centuries so that by the late eleventh century, Count Raimon (Raymond) IV had the resources to become one of the leaders of the First Crusade to the Holy Land. As the armies of the First Crusade passed through Constantinople, in her book *The Alexiad*, Princess Anna Komnene describes Raymond’s superior intellect, the purity of his life, and how greatly he valued the truth. For these reasons her father, the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I, held him in great esteem.



The Languedoc region.





Cathar traditions can be traced back to the prophet Mani, who lived in the Persian Empire in the third century CE.

The greatest rivals in Occitània to the Counts of Toulouse were the Counts of Barcelona. They acquired the kingship of Aragon in 1137; the kingship of Mallorca in 1228; and the kingship of Valencia in 1238. The lesser nobles of the region, like the Counts of Foix and the Viscounts of Béziers, Carcassonne, Narbonne, and Montpellier exploited the conflict between these great noble houses by transferring their allegiance from one lord to another to maximize their independence.

### Origins of Catharism

Much has been written about these remarkable mystics, their probable origin, their history and connections with other so-called “heretical” sects of the Middle Ages. Reliable information however, can be obtained from various historical reports and also from an intelligent interpretation of the reports compiled by the Inquisition. Naturally, discrimination must be used in analyzing those latter reports, as they are bound to bear the mark of that institution, its partiality, and fanatical spirit.

Cathar traditions can be traced back to the prophet Mani, who lived in the Persian Empire in the third century CE. He was a student of Buddhism and Chaldean philosophy, and delved into the mysterious knowledge of the Egyptians. Later on he became a devout Christian, and from the vast knowledge he acquired from those diverse spiritual sources, he drew up a synthesis on

which he based his teachings, trying through different paths to reach the Great Universal Truth. His disciples, who were called the Manicheans, spread his doctrine, which was based at one and the same time upon the spirit of renunciation of the Eastern religions and upon the great law of love and compassion of Christian inspiration.

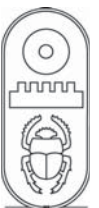
Interesting documents—writings of Mani and his disciples—were discovered shortly before World War I in Turkestan and China, and also in the Fayum in Egypt. Some of those documents escaped burning when the followers of Mani were persecuted. From the East, Mani’s followers migrated to Europe through the Byzantine Empire, initially to Bulgaria. According to some authors, the Cathars’ teachings spread from Bulgaria into Italy via Bosnia, and later—in a movement westward—spread to Spain and France, where we find them towards the end of the eleventh century and where they were called the “Cathars.”

### Monotheists

They believed in a sole, unique Divinity but admitted to the existence of two opposing principles which manifested as spirit and matter. As dualist Christians, they believed in Light and Darkness or good and evil. Light, or the positive constructive principle, was opposed to the negative, destructive principle.



The symbol of the Cathar dove hewn through a rock.



Through matter, the Soul—Humanity's Divine Principle—is plunged into Darkness, from which it has to work out its salvation through successive reincarnations, in a series of lives on Earth. Through suffering and the practice of love and charity, the Soul slowly emerges from the Darkness, from the delusion of matter, to eventually reunite with the Divine Light, the First Principle, the Creator, or the Divine.

### Initiations

In order to help their disciples in the slow and progressive unfolding of their souls, Cathars performed initiations. But to be worthy of those initiations, the followers had to purify themselves through gradual asceticism, through fasting, abstinence, and a great and sincere desire for perfection. Poverty was also considered a means of liberating the self from worldly fetters.

Hell did not exist for the Cathars; they believed that hell was a state of existence on Earth. The fire of the lower regions of the Powers of Darkness was the actual suffering of human beings, here and now, and not in some afterlife. The souls of humans, they believed, could therefore be saved and redeemed through the trials and tribulations of this terrestrial life.

Although specific, the Cathar teachings were not dogmatic. The work of Cathar ministers, usually referred to as Perfects by the Inquisition, was not to impose a blind faith but to convince their followers through persuasion and living openly as shining examples of purity and probity. They were truly practicing the highest possible spirituality, and deserved the appellation "Perfect" or the "Pure."

To the Cathars themselves they were simply called the *Bons Òmes* (Good Men), *Bonas Femnas* (Good Women), or simply as *Bons Crestians* (Good Christians). Such were the ministers, but there were of course more humble followers, the great multitude

of simple Believers who worked and prayed under the guidance of the Perfects, who instructed and tended them on the path of spiritual knowledge. The liberation of the soul from the bonds of matter and the love of others were the fundamental tenets of their doctrine.

Their leaders were well-read students of philosophy and took an active part in all discussions and controversies that might enlighten them. But academic teachings were not their only source of knowledge: through concentration and meditation they tried to attune directly with the Cosmic Spirit, the Consciousness of Christ. To this end, they regularly practiced fasting before initiation and occasionally after initiation; they also fasted before great religious celebrations.



A stone dove representing the Holy Spirit: One of the few known surviving artifacts recovered from the site of Montségur.

### The Consolamentum

One peculiarity of their rites was the laying-on of hands, called the *Consolamentum* or "Consolation." It was considered as a baptism. The Cathars did not recognize the Church's baptism by water as established by John the Baptist; for them there was only one true baptism—that of the Holy Spirit and as practiced by Jesus. Thus only could the Divine Spirit of Life penetrate the soul of humanity, permeating and transmuting the grosser vibrations of matter.

The Consolamentum was considered a means of redemption and at the same time as a consecration of the condition of purity attained by the disciple after a long period of fasting and meditation. This rite was

also practiced upon the dying, to help the passing of the soul to the Great Beyond. In such a case, the Consolamentum could also be given by a member of the family, or by a woman, provided that he or she had already received the sacrament; that is, that the mediator be fully and spiritually qualified to bestow it upon the dying.

The ordination as a Perfect was also conferred by the Consolamentum, to men and women; the women were consecrated deaconesses. In Western Europe, women were second or even third class citizens, but in Cathar society, women and men were equal.

The Cathars were individualists and believed that there was no road to evolution except through personal work and personal effort. Whatever your standing in society might be, noble or peasant, the same consideration was granted to all. The most humble of workers had as much of a right as their bishops to attune with the Cosmic Spirit, and the only factors that mattered were purity and perfection. The humblest neophyte therefore, could aspire to the highest spiritual development and attainment.

### **Cathar Beliefs**

Their beliefs about marriage in particular were distorted by false reports and misunderstandings of their adversaries in the Inquisition. Some authors claim that they were against marriage and preached abstinence and celibacy for all.



Cathar Cross etched in stone.

But that is inconsistent with their faith in reincarnation, for how could a person be reborn upon Earth if marriage and the family were condemnable institutions?

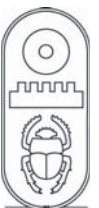
Certainly they held the state of celibacy in high regard, considering it a means for liberation of the senses and for the lessening of one's karma and reincarnations; but that was only for the Perfects—those who had already attained the required condition of purity. For the men and women who had to live “normal” lives, they acknowledged the necessity of marriage, although the only valuable sacrament in such case was the true union of two souls.

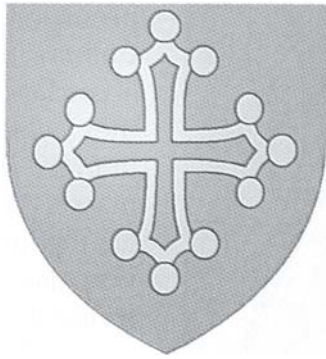
Among married people, those who received the Consolamentum were at times authorized by husband—or wife as the case may be—to break the bond of marriage so they could devote the rest of their lives to greater purification and more absolute asceticism.

Such was their probity that the giving of their word was sufficient bond and they refused to take oaths. In this regard they adhered strictly to the spirit of the second and eighth commandments of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This in particular was regarded as seditious, as oaths were what bound medieval society together; humans to their feudal superiors and humans to church.

### **Occitània**

Occitània was a land where the blending of several races produced strong, independent individuals, and where the Cathar teachers found propitious soil for the spreading of their religious ideas. The sum of their knowledge was translated into Occitanian. At this time Occitània had more in common with Aragon and Catalonia than it did with the north of France. Their language was very similar to the Catalan language. From now on, in this article I choose to use the names that they called themselves, rather than the





Occitan Cross.

French names you will find in most of the books about the Cathars.

This whole region had remained impregnated with ancient Roman civilization and refinement. The nobles and knights, the Counts of Toulouse, the Counts of Foix, and the Viscounts of Béziers, were learned scholars; and the burgesses were distinguished and emancipated minds. Esclarmonda de Foix, a romantic figure of medieval legend, and sister of Raimon-Rogier, Count of Foix was initiated into the Cathar faith, as was Raimon-Rogier's wife Phillipa. Count Raimon VI of Toulouse, though not adopting their religion, openly favored them, even taking sides with them at times against the Roman Catholic clergy.

The first centers of Catharism in the south of France were at Montpellier and Narbonne; from there they spread across the Pyrenees into Spain. Later on, Toulouse was their headquarters, and they had several bishops in Albi. In fact, it is from the name of that town that they were called "Albigenses" as well as Cathars, and the name Albigensian has remained attached to the persecutions they suffered at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church in many places such as Béziers, Carcassonne, Agen, and Razès.

The unusual purity of life of the Cathars was a great contrast to the appalling licentiousness and simony of the Catholic clergy of that epoch. While the Cathars were solely devoted to the welfare of the people, nursing and healing them, the Catholic

clergy extorted tithes from the people, kept mistresses, and sold all sacraments. Indeed, they were like the merchants in the Temple that Jesus drove out.

We have therefore on one hand Cathar men and women, renowned as weavers, agricultural workers, doctors, and educators, who conformed as closely as possible to the accepted Christian code of life, and on the other hand, we have a Catholic clergy of immense corruption and materialism. Moreover the prelates of Rome were often temporal lords with considerable estates and wealth, caring more for power and for the good of their own dynasties than for the welfare and spiritual health of the people. The popes occupied the position of "vicar of God" and much more for political reasons than for any defense of Christian principles, and it is not surprising therefore that so many ordinary people sympathized with the Cathars, while corruption of the clergy kept the mass of followers away from the Roman Catholic Church.

There was also a deep-seated antagonism between the clergy and the nobility of Occitània, for the nobility extended help to those whose extreme purity of life and disinterest in material wealth had won their respect. Furthermore, whereas the Cathars were no threat to the nobility's temporal power, the Roman Catholic clergy most definitely was. The Cathars were, socially and spiritually, several centuries ahead of their time. One of the most renowned of their ministers was Guilabert de Castres, who was Bishop of Toulouse and whose preaching and popularity gave much trouble to the Catholic Church at the beginning of the thirteenth century. He openly censured the corruption of the Catholic clergy and it was only a matter of time before things came to a head.

The Cathars believed that an unworthy person i.e., one who did not live the teachings of Christ, had no right to minister to others.

Title was nothing for them, and they looked only to the intrinsic value of the individual. The poorest laborer, if his or her mode of living and spiritual standards were high, was more qualified to become a minister than a person who had been ordained a priest merely by fiat from Rome. Ordination meant nothing to them.

This type of preaching was therefore a direct attack against the mandates of Rome. The simplicity of the lives of those mystics and their disinterest in temporal power were considered revolutionary. Their teachings were a most dangerous heresy, and a transgression against the established dogma of Roman Catholicism.

### Condemned by the Pope

Condemned as Manichaeans, this was sufficient pretext for Rome to order a crusade against the Cathars. Pope Innocent III (reigned 1198–1216)—in addition to organizing the Fourth Crusade, which was supposed to go to the Holy Land but instead attacked and conquered the Orthodox Christian Byzantine capital of Constantinople—was the driving force behind this.

While using coercive methods against the Cathars, the pope also tried to convert them by sending in the Cistercians, who were famous dialecticians, to preach to them. According to the extremely rigid rules of the Cistercian Order, their monks had to live in absolute poverty. As ascetics they compared favorably with the Cathars, for they practiced many of the same virtues. However, the Cathars were deeply devoted to their beliefs and found little reason in the Cistercian's appeals to change their ways, even with the persuasion of such worthy adversaries.

Numerous books have been written about the barbaric persecutions that the Cathars subsequently had to endure, so this aspect will not be delved into here. However, some of the most salient points of the fight



Pope Innocent III (1198–1216).

will help to shed some further light upon their history. From the middle of the twelfth century, various church councils condemned the Cathars. These seem to have been a series of premeditated and well-orchestrated events, and eventually the pope formally requested the assistance of the lords of the south of France. They were in effect asked to take up arms against the Cathars, and in return the Vicar of Christ (the pope) promised plenary indulgences as a reward. The Cathars were anathematized as heretics, and in accordance with the established norms of the day they were, in the eyes of the Church, no better than the infidel of the East and had to be killed en masse. At the same time as Innocent III was asking for the help of the Occitanian nobles and lords, he was also writing to the Archbishops of the South, trying to stimulate their zeal against the Cathars.

The papal legate, Pierre de Castelnau, had been unable to convince Count Raimon VI of Toulouse and bring him into the fight for the Church against the heretics. Raimon's fourth wife was Joan of England, the favorite sister of Richard the Lionheart. Interestingly, Richard's wife was a princess of neighboring Navarre, whose last king became King Henry IV of France who later figures in the naissance of Rosicrucianism. The son of Joan and Raimon VI was Raimon VII.

Castelnau excommunicated Raimon VI, but when the pope confirmed the sentence in brutally forceful and violent terms, Raimon VI quickly submitted to his authority. But the submission was not sincere, and after a



stormy controversy in Saint-Gilles, Castelnau again excommunicated him. Some time thereafter, in January 1208, Castelnau was murdered, run through by a lance, and—according to some—killed by one of Raimon's knights. Innocent III then appealed to the king of France, Phillippe Auguste, who was the suzerain of the county of Toulouse and to the "barons of the North to come and fight against the barons of the South."

Phillippe Auguste refused, and Innocent III had taken upon himself the whole responsibility of the crusade with only the help of the northern lords, to whom he again promised plenary indulgences in addition to the hope he gave them of winning new lands and booty. Under the threat of invasion to his domains, Raimon VI was again forced to pay homage to the Church and to separate himself from the other lords of the South.

### The "Holy" War

According to historical reports, the crusader army, led by Simon de Montfort, was composed of twenty thousand knights and some twenty thousand *vilains* (soldiers or free peasants, from which comes the English word "villain.") Although the lords of the South were fighting for the Cathars on



The crusader army was led by Simon de Montfort.

home territory, the odds were clearly stacked against them. It is not surprising, therefore, that Raimon VI, who was of irresolute character, submitted himself once more to the power of Rome. The pope, although unconvinced of his sincerity, was only too glad to weaken his adversaries, and for the time being, contented himself in separating Raimon from the other Lords.

The powerful crusaders army pursued the "heretics" who, under the leadership of Raimon-Rogièr Trencavel—Viscount of Béziers and nephew of Raimon VI—took refuge in Béziers. Despite their courageous efforts, this town, and later on Carcassonne, was taken and defeated. Before the carnage at Béziers, a knight asked Arnaud-Amaury, the Abbot of Citeaux—the crusade's "spiritual" leader—how they were to know the Cathars from the other inhabitants. "Kill them all," replied the holy Abbot, "God will know his own!"

An anonymous author wrote:

There was seen, the greatest slaughter of all ages; neither old nor young people were spared, not even children at the breast; all were exterminated. When seeing such butchery, the inhabitants took refuge in the big Church of Saint-Nazaire. The priests of the church were to ring the bells when all the heretics were dead. But the bells were never heard for neither robed priest nor clerk was left alive; all were put to the sword; none escaped. The town was sacked, then burnt to the ground, and no living creature was left in it.

The crusaders believed that they were helping the cause of Christianity by killing the heretics, but being allowed to loot the towns they took may have been a more compelling reason for their enthusiasm. And, of course, all their sins would be forgiven for having taken part in this crusade. Rape,



The crimes committed in the name of the Divine were many.

murder, torture, and theft, all sanctioned by the Church and all sins forgiven in advance—what more could medieval knights and knaves want?

Such was the spirit that animated the leaders of the crusade. The many crimes perpetrated in the name of the Divine were quite literally done for the Divine, or at least for God's Vicar in Rome. Participation in the crusade against the Cathars was therefore a blessed path to salvation, just as killing the infidel in the East, no matter what the brutality, was a road to heaven.

But there were some who, despite their persecutions of the Cathars, genuinely believed in their mission to stamp the Roman Catholic version of Christianity on all people, regardless of the brutality of the process. To them it was like taking a bitter pill—swallow it quick, endure the bad taste, and be done with it as quickly as possible. They were the monks of Citeaux, the Cistercians who were extremely devoted followers of their cult. Another was Saint Dominic, whose asceticism could only be compared to that of his enemies themselves.

It is one of the ways of intolerance, when the Powers of Darkness, with their subtle

artifices, ensnare those who believe in their own righteousness, and blind them with false reasoning and misunderstanding.

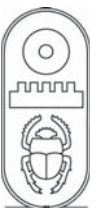
### Montségur

During the crusades, there were many changes of fortune in both camps. Some of the defeated Cathars succeeded in escaping. Through the help of the people and the lords who had revolted against the cruel fanaticism of the Church, the vanquished Cathars would sometimes remain hidden for considerable periods of time, and continued converting people to their cause.

This state of affairs continued up until their final stand in the formidable *castèl de Montsegur*, the citadel better known as Montségur (Mountain of Safety)—an ancient place of worship. A temple dedicated to a form of solar worship was said to have existed there several centuries before the Christian era, and in the Middle Ages, the castle became the stronghold where the Cathars fought their last battle.

Raimon de Perelha, Lord of Montségur, sheltered refugees in his castle as far back as 1209, even before the worst phases of the crusade reached his doors. In 1232 he received Guilabert de Castres, Cathar Bishop of Toulouse and one of the greatest Cathar minds, together with several other Cathar leaders. From then on, Montségur became the center of the Cathar Church, and towards the end of the crusade, was their last stronghold when Raimon VII—who had succeeded his father as Count of Toulouse, under duress from the French king in 1243—was forced to help fight the last of the Cathars and to destroy their final refuge.

On March 2, 1244, Montségur surrendered. There was a two-week truce. The terms seemed lenient: Everyone could go free if they allowed themselves to be questioned by and swore loyalty to the Church of Rome. For the Perfects, the choice was simpler, renounce Catharism or burn at the stake. The Perfects,



however, would not lie or take an oath, so their fate was sealed. They spent the fortnight caring for their charges and arranging their affairs. Then something extraordinary happened. Twenty-one ordinary Believers asked to be given the Consolamentum during the final two weeks—some on the very day before the final battle—thereby becoming Perfects, and knowing full well what the result would be. This act was a great testament to the appeal and power of Catharism and its powerful message.

Following the truce to think the terms over, the knights and their families went free while 205 Cathars were burned alive on the morning of March 16, 1244. There were too many to tie to individual stakes, so a palisade was built around a pyre. The Cathars were shut inside and the fires were lit. A stele commemorates the spot where 205 beautiful souls passed into transition.

### The Aftermath

After Montségur fell, a number of Cathar outposts managed to survive, at least until 1258. Pope Innocent IV promulgated the bull *Ad Extirpanda*, which allowed the torture of suspects, ordering the civil magistrates to extort from all heretics by torture a confession of their own guilt and a betrayal of all their accomplices. Thus gave the Church another weapon. Throughout the second half of the thirteenth century, the Cathars became increasingly isolated, and by the early years of the fourteenth century, there were very few Perfects left who could administer the Consolamentum.

The horrors of the Inquisition however, which had become a recognized institution of Rome under the name of the “Holy Office” in about the year 1223, were such that in many places the people of the South rebelled against the fanatical domination of the Roman Catholic Church. The Inquisitors confiscated houses and land from Cathars and encouraged others to pretend to

be Believers while betraying their friends and family. Such were the tactics of the Gestapo in other parts of France many centuries later.

For a few years towards the end of the thirteenth century, some Cathars, under the leadership of the Autier brothers, continued worshipping and practicing their faith until 1309, when Pèire Autier was arrested and burned at the stake. Their last known Perfect, Guilhèm Belibaste, was also betrayed and burned at the stake in 1321, after which the Believers fled, hiding in the wild region of Sabarthez until they all seemed to have disappeared, either because they had been killed, or because they had fled abroad to Spain and Lombardy.

As for the county of Toulouse, after Count Raimon VII died in 1250, his daughter was married to the brother of the king of France. After their deaths in 1271, the county was absorbed into the French royal possessions and the entire Languedoc finally came under royal control.

### Martyrs

We can honestly say that the faith of the Cathars was of such high quality that it can only be compared to that of the early martyrs of Christianity. Their doctrine was truly inspired by the pure spirit of the pristine Christian ideal, before the misrepresentation and deformation through the sectarianism of the clergy of later times.

Many suffered dreadful deaths through fire with the high courage of the early martyrs during the Roman persecutions. And yet, their doctrine was so deformed by the Inquisitors that they were accused of holding the belief that suicide was a lawful act. In some cases, they submitted themselves to what they called the *Endura*, either before the sacrament of Consolamentum or after they had been imprisoned. In the former case, the Endura was a very severe fast, not practiced with the idea of committing suicide, but as a means of liberating themselves from the sway



of the senses. In the latter case, when they were imprisoned, it was undertaken to try to escape the tortures of the Inquisition or death by fire, and they would therefore allow themselves to starve to death.

All epochs have had their contrast of Light and Darkness. In the darkness of the medieval ages, in a deeply humble manner, the sincere efforts of Cathars strove for inner liberation and shone with the light of pure spirituality. This affirmed that however insurmountable the obstacles may appear, the process of evolution continues its irrevocable motion throughout eternity. Evil may triumph temporarily, but for goodness and sanctity, final victory is always assured, even if that takes centuries to come.

Every action has its reaction, and the power of the popes was thereafter greatly weakened. The massacres and acts of savagery that the pope had unleashed, greatly diminished the authority of the Church. For a long time the “Vicars of Christ” (the popes) had lost their spiritual authority over the countries of Europe. Their violent and fanatical suppression of all forms of dissent and difference of opinion through the actions of the Inquisition left a permanent scar from which the Roman Catholic Church has taken centuries to recover.

In conclusion it may be said that although the Cathars seem to have entirely

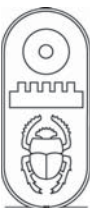
disappeared, some traces of their descendants still remain, and their doctrine and teachings were preserved and in fact may have been precursors to the Rosicrucian teachings of later centuries. If we compare their traditions and teachings with those of modern Rosicrucians, one can't help but see that they are based upon the same ancient fundamental truths deriving from the innate human sense of universal justice and the ardent aspiration for spiritual enfoldment.

### Epilogue

One of the greatest achievements of humankind is religion; yet paradoxically, it is also one of humankind's greatest enemies. When organized religion becomes the bedfellow of secular power, it is a recipe for disaster. Each religion thinks it is better than all others—it is human nature!

I often wonder if the great avatars and teachers of the past would be horrified to see what had become of their teachings. The Catholic Church eventually reformed itself, so the Church in this story no longer reflects the Church of today. At the end of the crusades, a whole way of life had been destroyed, along with the prosperity of one of the richest regions of France. But you can't entirely destroy an idea, and the story of the Cathars has survived despite all attempts to erase it from living memory.

*Al cap dels set cent ans, verdejara lo laurèl.*  
The laurel will flourish again in 700 years.



# ESCLARMONDE DE FOIX

*Hélène Bernard, SRC*

In her book entitled *Great Women Initiates*, *Hélène Bernard, SRC*, shares this short story of the life of one of the most prominent Cathars of the Languedoc in the south of France, a Good Woman or Bona Femna in every sense of the word.



In the year 1155, in the heart of the Occitan country, in a majestic castle overlooking the river Ariège, a second child was born to Lady Zebelia Trencavel de Carcassonne and Roger Bernard, Count of Foix. She was a little girl, and the wonderful and predestined name of Esclarmonde was given to her. It was from this haunt, like an eagle's nest perched on a mountaintop, that her father, a powerful man, managed his estates.

The house of Foix was of Iberian origin, all the way back to Adcantuan who had fought against Caesar. Heir to the manor of Foix through the counts of Comminges of Merovingian stock, it became, under the names of the counts of Carcassonne and Couserans, titular to the County of Foix around 1068. The feudal rule of the counts of Foix crept into the Ariège Valley and consisted of many manors, the majority of which were established under the reign of Charlemagne.

Through Andorra and Urgel, the county was directly connected with the Iberian Peninsula. In the central Pyrenees its sentinels on the steps of Spain were called *Montcalm*, *Vil-de-Soc*, *Siguer*, *Aston*, and *l'Hospitalet*, while *Aulus* and *Luchon* led to Gascony. Confident in the motto *Custos Summorum*,



Located at the center of the triangle of Carcassonne-Toulouse-Andorra, Foix lies in the foothills of the Pyrenees mountain range in southern France. The town is dominated by the imposing tenth-century château des Comtes De Foix, shown here. This was once the home of Raymond Roger and his sister, Esclarmonde.

“guardians of the high plateaus,” and under the protection of powerful armories, the walls of the monumental and solitary dwelling sheltered the happy childhood of Esclarmonde.

## Idyllic Days

In 1162, when Esclarmonde was seven years old, her father's eldest daughter, who was born from his first marriage to Cecile of Barcelona, was married. On the occasion of these magnificent wedding nuptials, the little girl saw for the first time the best of Occitan chivalry.

Esclarmonde's radiant beauty blossomed forth in this cultured and sparkling southern court, between her older brother, Ramon-Roger, nicknamed the *druz* (the initiate, the pure, the troubadour), and her little sister, Zebelia. In both summer and winter, the days were spent hunting and feasting. Travelers came and went, always enjoying the

open and warm hospitality of Roger Bernard and his family.

Immediately after sunset, with a fire crackling in the fireplace, guests were well-fed. Then, affected by the soft glow of candlelight, one listened, with open mind and soul, to the sacred texts and hidden words that the troubadours sang and declaimed from castle to castle in a secret language called the *Gai Savoir* (happy knowledge).

### The Courts of Love

Troubadours! This name alone rouses us: *Trovare-Trouve* (found). They had found a truth and, garbed in the hermetic colors green, yellow, and red, they spread their knowledge. Secret ambassadors and the bearers of news among the influential people of the time, these initiates called *fideles d'amour*, became the disciples and secret propagators of Catharism in Occitània.

“Courts of love” flourished in Foix, Aragon, Cerdagne, Gascony, and the Languedoc. Divine science and asceticism were highly valued, and borrowing from ancient druid teachings, they honored the law of numbers. This ancient oral tradition had its ultimate origins in the “mystery” initiations of the old Egyptian religion which over time spread into communities throughout the Mediterranean basin.



Seal of the Count of Foix.



Courts of love flourished in Foix, Aragon, Cerdagne, Gascony, and in the Languedoc.

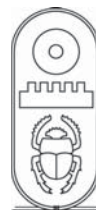
With a long lineage, extending through the Egyptians, Greeks, and Essenes, the Arabs became the keepers of this “science of the Magi,” and it was to seek this knowledge, rather than to conquer Jerusalem, that some of the first Crusaders started on their way, bringing back sacred knowledge from which Pyrenean Catharism was born.

But the proud knights also brought back a taste for luxury to which the Church of Peter and its servants had succumbed, for some bishops and abbots lived ostentatious lives, filled with the comforts of the best that money could buy. Esclarmonde watched and learned of the weaknesses of the clergy and the unvirtuous lives of many clerics.

### Marriage

Her adolescence was marked by the appearance of a Bulgarian (Bogomil) bishop called Nicetas. His “mission” gave structure and formality to Catharism as he organized its clergy and the statutes of its dissident Catholics. The House of Foix welcomed him, and young Esclarmonde and her brother Ramon-Roger were highly impressed by his personality.

Esclarmonde was too young to play a role in the management of a religion which called for nothing less than perfection. Nevertheless, she had much influence at the court of Foix. She was intelligent and refined and had famous troubadours as



teachers. Witty and talented, at twenty years of age, her reputation as a woman of superior intelligence and knowledge attracted many admirers and suitors to her. But like many of her peers, she sacrificed herself to a union ruled by politics. So in 1175 she married Jourdan III de l'Isle Jourdain, who was related to the counts of Toulouse. The name Jourdain (Jordan) was a reminder of his crusading ancestors, who had probably taken their name from the river Jordan in Palestine.

Jourdain's education was based on a particularly fervent form of Catholicism, but Esclarmonde was a Cathar and maybe she had hoped to eventually convert her husband. If their marriage was not a complete spiritual union, it was nevertheless a very fruitful one! Six children were born in the family home where Jourdain ruled by the letter and Esclarmonde by the intellect. First, there were two daughters, Escarone and Obisca; then three boys, Bernard, Jourdan, and Othon; and finally a little girl, Philippa.

For twenty-five years Esclarmonde led a dignified life with Jourdain. She had given up trying to convince her husband of the cogency of Cathar doctrine but watched very closely the development of the situation in Occitània. She conducted courts of love and remained in touch with the greatest "heretical" personalities of the time. The Catholic Church tried in vain to reclaim the noble "lost sheep." At Albi, in 1176, a council reminded them of their capital sins, and a little later, the archbishop of Lyon condemned them and accused the future Raymond VI of Toulouse of protecting them. Finally, on March 20, 1179, Pope Alexander III excommunicated them all.

### **Courage and Compassion**

In 1180, her little sister Zebelia married Roger I of Comminges. Their paths were different, but the two sisters respected each other and helped one another on several occasions.



The adolescence of Esclarmonde was marked by the appearance of a Bogomil bishop called Nicetas, who gave structure and formality to Catharism. The Bogomils were Christian Gnostics from Eastern Europe. Pictured here is one of only three Bogomil gravestones in Bosnia.

In 1181, Cardinal Henri of Albano openly declared war on the Cathar "sinners" and Jourdain was dragged into this repressive crusade. As an insane torrent of hatred and violence raged throughout the region and with a firmness of conviction, Esclarmonde first protected and then led the condemned people to the County of Foix. The Cardinal of Albano was furious and continued his cruelty. Monks loyal to him spread the rumor that Esclarmonde was responsible for this "ravage by fire and the sword." They had not forgiven her for her firm stand and sought to influence her husband against her.

During these difficult times, Esclarmonde displayed an unusual strength and exhibited extraordinary feelings of social solidarity; a very rare thing in the twelfth century. In 1185 Pope Lucius III allowed the wounded country to heal its wounds, and Esclarmonde resumed her life as lady of the manor, attending to her children.

In the months that followed, she had the great joy of seeing her brother Ramon-Roger,

whom she loved dearly, marry the delightful Philippa de Moncade. Philippa loved and admired Esclarmonde and followed in her footsteps on the perilous path of Catharism.

For many years, in spite of the turmoil, the Count of Foix, Roger Bernard, maintained peace on his estates. In 1188 however, he passed on, and on the threshold of the thirteenth century a new pope, Innocent III, was elected to office. The first years of the new century were very trying for Esclarmonde.

### Dove of the Paraclete

In 1203, her brother Ramon-Roger was taken prisoner, and in 1204, after twenty-nine years of marriage, her husband Jourdain de l'Isle Jourdain passed on. Having never ceased to love his wife, in spite of her "subversive" ideas, the clauses of Jourdain's will were in favor of Esclarmonde. His whole family was by now loyal to Catharism. Children, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law felt a deep affection and a great admiration for Esclarmonde.

Having no regard for the material things of life, Esclarmonde left to her children the wealth and huge estates of their father, then returned to her native mountains and remained in Foix to rule there in her brother, Ramon-Roger's, absence. Free to assert herself in her faith, she surrounded herself with officers and friends of Ramon-Roger, and proclaimed herself dedicated to the Paraclete (in biblical terms the Holy Spirit sent by Jesus following the Crucifixion). The knights and the people from the surrounding area responded to her appeal for unity for a single faith. She selected trustworthy tutors

for her nephews and devoted herself, body and soul, to her vocation.

Known as the "Dove of the Paraclete" Esclarmonde established social institutions, workshops, centers of apprenticeship in various branches, and especially hospitals for the elderly and those wounded in the war, as well as lodgings for the ever-increasing number of refugees. Under her leadership, convents for "Perfect Ones" and schools where poor children were taught the new spirit were founded. Led by her, the "Perfect Ones" went to every home. They assisted outcasts and took care of the sick. Unconstrained, the people were won over by their caring, charitable ways, and their pure form of mysticism.

### Perfect One

In 1206, after three years in captivity, Ramon-Roger rejoined his court. At last Esclarmonde could devote herself to the life she had been yearning for. She retired to Castellar de Pamiers. The high Cathar officers had nothing more to teach her, and Guilabert de Castres, her teacher and faithful friend, deemed her worthy to be raised to the rank of a "Perfect One" and Archdeaconess.

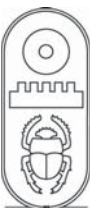
Accompanied by Auda de Fangeaux, Fais, the Countess of Dufort, and Ramonda Miro, Esclarmonde received the "Consolamentum" in Fangeaux. This purifying ceremony strengthened the new Archdeaconess in her faith, and she devoted all her time and vitality to the establishment of Cathar communities. Along with her activities, Esclarmonde undertook, with Raimon de Perelha, her knight-servant, and other dignitaries such as Guilabert de Castres, the reconstruction of the fortress of Montségur. Relations with the Church were becoming bitter.

### Church Scorn

Innocent III issued a sharp anathema against the innovators but Esclarmonde could not idly stand by while the South was so badly treated. The papal malediction



The Bogomil/Cathar expansion across medieval Europe.





The “Perfects” or “Good Friends” as they called each other, spread the Word to the faithful. Bound by very strict rules of conduct, they had taken a vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

only strengthened her convictions. In April 1206, for nearly one month, the seventh contradictory cross-examining council was held in Pamiers.

The Church had the fiery new bishop of Toulouse as its main representative. Esclarmonde, surrounded by Philippa and her beautiful daughters, Ermessinde and Indie de Fangeaux, participated passionately in these debates. She demanded complete equality between men and women, an established fact in the “rebellious” religion. Already prejudiced against women in general through his religious training, the prelate of Toulouse, annoyed by the intellectual abilities of his rival, challenged her: “Madam, go and spin your wheel; it does not become you to argue in such debates!”

### Conflict and Persecution

On November 17, 1207, the pope ordered the King of France to arm his soldiers and march against the “infidels,” as the Cathars were called. Indulgences and promises of salvation were granted to them. Esclarmonde prepared Montségur as the major center of resistance and moved the treasure of the Paraclete up to the high rock.

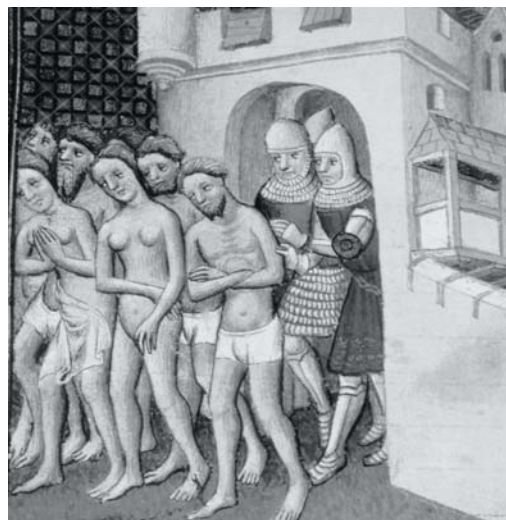
Surrounded by the deacons and the “Perfect Ones,” she often looked down toward the forests of Belena (a reminder of the Celtic deity of Light) and of Quier (the priest of the mistletoe). Soon, files of refugees

arrived, fleeing from the brutality of Simon de Montfort. For years, terrible repressions were carried out by his forces. The bishop of Foulques founded a brotherhood whose members were recruited among the most fanatical and violent enemies of the Cathars. Simon de Montfort murdered “heretics” by the thousands in a bloody frenzy, sparing none. The occupants of Béziers took refuge in a church upon the arrival of the tyrant and his mercenary abbots. It was then that the abbot of Citeaux cried out: “Kill them all, God will know His own!” And there, in that place of worship, these unfortunate people were burned alive, like so many others.

Finally, the King of France became disenchanted with the bloody, dishonorable way in which Simon de Montfort and his acolytes had led the crusade. Innocent III remained caught between his personal temperance and the growing ambitions of his subjects. The principle of the Holy War could not hide reality: a policy of conquest. For years, pillages, murders, and pogroms continued. But in 1227, Occitània experienced a period of respite.

### Cathar Revival

Having weathered the bloody times, Esclarmonde, almost in her eighties by now, believed the time was ripe to restore



Expulsion of the Cathars at Carcassonne in 1209.

good order within the Cathar religion. She helped and cared for the faithful adepts, and reorganized the clergy. Communities, hospices, and workshops were established throughout the area. The Archdeaconess conferred the Consolamentum and baptism, and supervised numerous convents. Catharism rose again from its ashes.

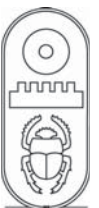
However, as late as 1229, the Cathars continued to be persecuted, and many lived deep in the woods or as discreetly as possible. Some found sanctuary with sympathizing noblepeople and a great solidarity was established despite the ceaseless repression. In August 1232, Guilabert de Castres and Esclarmonde returned to Montségur.

The Dove of the Paraclete was spared the pain of seeing the fall of her beloved castle, the sight of the final defeat, the martyrdom of her friends, and the final subjugation of her free Occitània, for in 1240 at Montségur, the Cathar princess passed on and “journeyed to the stars.” Guilabert de Castres had the mystical joy of secretly burying the great Esclarmonde, his faithful companion through times of joy and times of trial. From good times to bad times, they had served the good.

“Great Esclarmonde! A dove has flown away, but in the Cathar country your name remains forever engraved.”—Light of the World!



*The Dove of Peace*, by Jacquelyn Paull, SRC.



# PRISTINE CHURCH OF THE ROSE CROSS

While the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, founded in 1915, is and always has been a non-sectarian philosophical, initiatic, and educational organization, the founder and first Emperor of AMORC, Harvey Spencer Lewis, was also at one time the Bishop of the Pristine Church of the Rose Cross, which he founded. This church, whose tenets were primarily Gnostic in nature, in the broad sense of this term, was created by H. Spencer Lewis in San Francisco in the early 1920s.

Inspired by his childhood minister, S. Parkes Cadman, a radio church pioneer in New York City, H. Spencer Lewis decided to offer non-sectarian church services on a radio station in San Francisco. They included an opening ritual with vowel sounds, a musical program, a highly informative but brief discourse followed by a question and answer period, and a closing ritual. This was the first Radio Church in the western United States and was extremely popular.



H. Spencer Lewis, Bishop of the Pristine Church of the Rose Cross.

In H. Spencer Lewis's biography, *Cosmic Mission Fulfilled*, his son, Emperor Ralph Lewis, writes:

In the early twenties, the first radio broadcasting station established in San Francisco was known by the call letters KPO. On one or two occasions Harvey Lewis had spoken over that station. He had given an inspirational discourse on a Sunday morning. Here was a medium that reached into the home. It was novel as yet. At first, listeners had to make their own receivers, but the audience was increasing. Here was an opportunity to give a spiritual, a moral discourse to those who had no specific creed or who felt disinclined for some reason to attend one of the churches.

Why not have a *nonsectarian* service by air? It could eliminate dogmatic creeds with their biases and prejudices. It could include a discourse on moral principles and the psychology of religion, and explain the religious impulse. Such a program could also acquaint an audience with comparative religions, showing how spiritual concepts were syncretic and eclectic and not exclusive disclosures of any one sect.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, why not a *Radio Church*?

The response to the Radio Church was very positive. Ralph Lewis continues,

If there was such a response to a nonsectarian, religious program, or rather, a spiritual ceremony and discourse over the air, why not make



it an established institution? So again an idea in the mind of Harvey Lewis was materialized into what became the Pristine Church. The word pristine referred to a return to original or early principles.

In other words, it was to be a church to discuss spiritual and mystical concepts in their pure form, as they were before being converted or distorted by theological dialectics or cant. . . . It would be a church whose rituals would not be just an impressive and dramatic event with its symbolism and rites left shrouded in mystery. Rather, the psychic and emotional nature of the ceremonies and rituals were to be explained and were to implement the intellectual aspects, that is, the sermons or discourses.

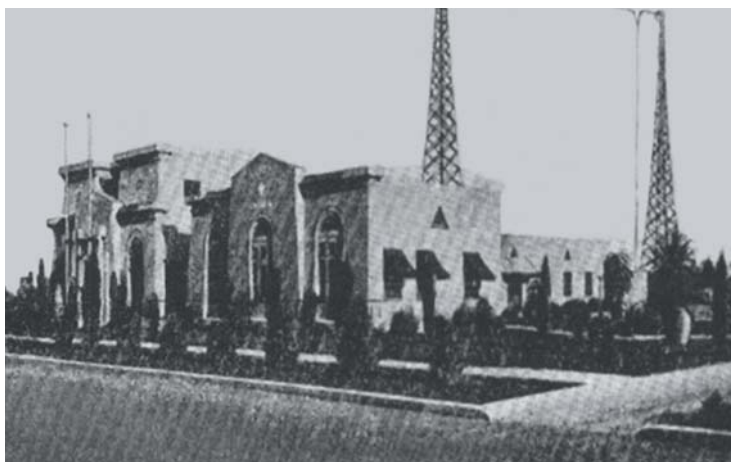
The Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, *not* being a religious organization, the Pristine Church was, therefore, established as an

entirely separate function. However, it not only attracted Rosicrucian members but hundreds of other persons who flocked to its doors each Sunday evening, particularly those who had not been church attendees for many years.

Within a few years, H. Spencer Lewis decided to focus on the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC rather than the Pristine Church of the Rose Cross, which ceased operations shortly thereafter. The Rosicrucian Order, AMORC (officially known as the Ancient & Mystical Order Rosae Crucis) has been incorporated in California as a 501c3 (non-sectarian, public benefit, educational) organization since 1928 and has positively influenced the lives of millions of women and men around the world over the past century.

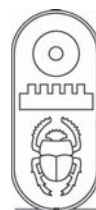
## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> H. Spencer Lewis received an honorary ordination in Hinayana Buddhism, honorary degrees from the Gold Cross of the Knighthood of the Temple of Jerusalem, the Brahminist Brotherhood, the Unknown Samaritans of Europe, and many honors from various esoteric orders.



Rosicrucian Park, 1931.

In the 1920s, H. Spencer Lewis built two large radio towers at Rosicrucian Park and a complete radio studio which he used for broadcasts related to the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC. Today the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC continues to use the latest technology, such as Facebook ([www.facebook.com/Rosicrucian.Order.AMORC](http://www.facebook.com/Rosicrucian.Order.AMORC)) and YouTube ([www.YouTube.com/RosicrucianTV](http://www.YouTube.com/RosicrucianTV)) to spread the Light of the Rosicrucian Tradition.



FROM ONE OF THE RITUALS OF THE  
PRISTINE CHURCH OF THE ROSE CROSS:

Let us pray:

Oh, thou who art the Way of Lao Tze,

The Equilibrium of Confucius,

The Braham of Brahma,

The Truth of Buddha,

The Unity of Zoroaster,

The Ra of Amenhotep,

The I AM of Israel,

The Christ of the Christian,

The Cosmos of the Rose and Cross,

And the God of our Hearts,

Hear Thou our prayer that we may  
know Thee as Brothers and Sisters  
in Thy great Family of being, and in  
Divine Consciousness as one together  
and with Thee in membership in this  
Holy Church under the direction of the  
Masters, visible and invisible.

So Mote It Be!

# THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

**E**onsidering the tragic persecution of Gnostic mystics, from their earliest history through the Cathars, as well as other mystics throughout the ages, the value of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is clear.

*This Declaration, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, was the result of the experience of the Second World War. With the end of that war, and the creation of the United Nations, the international community vowed never again to allow atrocities like those of that conflict to happen again. World leaders decided to complement the UN Charter with a road map to guarantee the rights of every individual everywhere. The document they considered, and which would later become the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was taken up at the first session of the General Assembly in 1946.*

*The first draft of the Declaration was proposed in September 1948 with over 50 Member States participating in the final drafting. By its resolution 217 A (III) of December 10, 1948, the General Assembly, meeting in Paris, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with eight nations (six Soviet Bloc countries, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia) abstaining from the vote but none dissenting.*

*The Declaration is reprinted below in its exact wording from 1948. Since then the United Nations has officially supported additional human rights, including the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and the Human Right to Water and Sanitation (2010).*

*([www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/))*



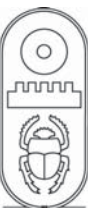
## *Prologue*

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,



Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

### *Articles*

#### **Article 1:**

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

#### **Article 2:**

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

#### **Article 3:**

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

#### **Article 4:**

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

#### **Article 5:**

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

#### **Article 6:**

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

#### **Article 7:**

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

#### **Article 8:**

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national

tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

**Article 9:**

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

**Article 10:**

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

**Article 11:**

(1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

**Article 12:**

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

**Article 13:**

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

**Article 14:**

(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

(2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

**Article 15:**

(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

**Article 16:**

(1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

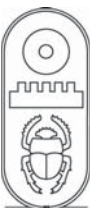
**Article 17:**

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

**Article 18:**

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.



**Article 19:**

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

**Article 20:**

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

**Article 21:**

(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

**Article 22:**

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

**Article 23:**

(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

(2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

(3) Everyone who works has the right

to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

(4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

**Article 24:**

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

**Article 25:**

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

**Article 26:**

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance

and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

**Article 27:**

(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

**Article 28:**

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

**Article 29:**

(1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

(2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

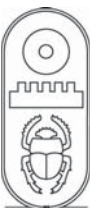
(3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

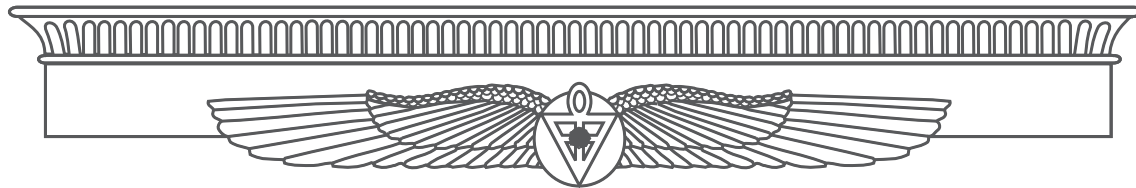
**Article 30:**

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.



Human Rights Day is celebrated each year on December 10, the date when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was officially adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948.





# ROSIKRUCIAN DECLARATION OF HUMAN DUTIES

## *Prologue*

As soon as humans became aware of the need to live in organized societies, they created diverse forms of government in order to assure the administration of these societies. To date, it appears that the interests and aspirations of individuals—and more generally nations—are best expressed through democracy. In fact, even though democracy is not perfect and includes many weaknesses, democratic societies are currently those that best protect Human Rights such as they are defined in the Universal Declaration.

Respect for the rights of all is certainly the basis of any democracy. However, any democracy that does not encourage respect for the corresponding duties bears in itself the seeds of decadence and fosters the emergence of a dictatorship. As history has shown, a society's good governance depends on the proper balance between every individual's rights and duties. When that balance is lost, whether at the level of the citizens or of those who govern them, the most extreme totalitarianism takes advantage of the situation and plunges those nations into chaos and barbarism.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, we note that in many countries that have enjoyed democracy for a long time, the rights of the citizens are emphasized over the duties that are incumbent on them as human beings, and thus the balance between the former and the latter is, if not lost, at least quite threatened. Being concerned that this imbalance could increase and lead to a deterioration of the human condition in those countries, we submit this Declaration of Human Duties to all those who share our concerns:

## *Declaration*

**Article 1:** It is each individual's duty to respect without reservation Human Rights such as they are defined in the Universal Declaration.

**Article 2:** It is each individual's duty to respect him-or herself and not to debase his or her body or conscience through behaviors or practices that jeopardize his or her dignity or integrity.

**Article 3:** It is each individual's duty to respect others, irrespective of race, gender, religion, social status, community, or any other apparently distinctive element.

**Article 4:** It is each individual's duty to respect the laws of the countries in which he or she lives, being understood that such laws should be based on the respect for the most legitimate rights of individuals.



**Article 5:** It is each individual's duty to respect the religious and political beliefs of others, as long as they do not harm human beings or society.

**Article 6:** It is each individual's duty to be benevolent in thoughts, words, and deeds, in order to be an agent of peace in society and an example to others.

**Article 7:** It is the duty of each individual who is of legal age, and in a fit condition to work, to do so, whether it be to support his or her needs or his or her family's needs, to be useful to society, to grow personally, or simply not to sink into idleness.

**Article 8:** It is the duty of each individual who is responsible for raising or educating a child to instill the child with courage, tolerance, non-violence, generosity, and more generally, the virtues that will make the child a respectable and responsible adult.

**Article 9:** It is in each individual's duty to assist anyone in danger, whether by direct

action, or by doing everything necessary so that qualified or authorized people can act.

**Article 10:** It is each individual's duty to consider the whole of humanity as his or her family and to behave in all circumstances and everywhere as a citizen of the world. This means making humanism the basis of his or her behavior and philosophy.

**Article 11:** It is each individual's duty to respect others' goods, whether private or public, individual or collective.

**Article 12:** It is each individual's duty to respect human life and to consider it the most precious good existing in this world.

**Article 13:** It is each individual's duty to respect and preserve Nature, so that present and future generations can benefit from it on all planes and consider Nature a universal heritage.

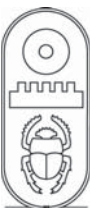
**Article 14:** It is each individual's duty to respect animals and to truly see them as beings that are not only alive; they are also conscious and feeling.

## *Epilogue*

If all humans carried out these fundamental duties, there would be few rights left to demand because everyone would benefit from the respect due to him or her and could live happily in society. This is why any democracy should not confine itself to promoting a "State of Rights," otherwise the balance mentioned in the Prologue cannot be maintained. It is also imperative to advocate for a "State of Duties," so that every citizen expresses what is best in humans in his or her behavior. Only by resting on these two pillars can civilization fully take on the status of humanity.

September 21, 2005

R+C Year 3358



# BEING A MYSTIC

*Christian Bernard, FRC*

**E**hristian Bernard, FRC, serves as the Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC. In this inspiring message he calls on us to approach life as mystics and to commune as one as mystics together.



In the expression *Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rose Cross*, we find the word “mystic.” This word does not designate anything odd, strange, or nebulous. Neither does it designate a state of permanent ecstasy. A person referred to as a mystic does not live isolated from the world and its problems, nor do they escape the trials and uncertainties inherent in the human condition. However, this word is too often used pejoratively, to represent someone who is often gentle and kind, true enough, yet who is in the main irrelevant, unrealistic, and lacking in all logic, being too utopian or “dreamy.”

The word “mystic” in fact encompasses something much wider. It indicates that we have to manifest equally the two polarities of our being: we have to be both realistic and idealistic, which means taking account of material occurrences, without neglecting the profound spiritual aspirations of our soul. These two concepts are often pitted against one another: and yet it is essential for them to be functioning with each other. We must endeavor to maintain this state of balance through daily work on ourselves. I use the word “endeavor” because being absolutely consistent and objective in respect of our habits, responses, and urges is not an easy or straightforward task. Our actions are



Christian Bernard, Emperor of AMORC.

often different from our intentions, and it is difficult for the result to be what we were hoping for, or rather, what we had set for ourselves. Nevertheless, even if our efforts are not always as sustained as they ought to be, it is essential that we keep in mind that a mystic should reflect harmony and balance.

When we approach life as mystics, we are inwardly stronger, and a dynamic calmness emanates from us, which many people can feel. The soul-force that we then carry is generally liked, even admired. But this force can also be the subject of envy or jealousy, and can spark animosity in some people. It is generally thought that only beauty, wealth, and social success generate negative feelings, however this is not the case. Peace Profound, calmness, and inner strength in a person can be sufficient to disturb others. This is why a so-called mystic

can be the object of unfounded attacks, even if their living conditions are in many ways unenviable. People do not understand why such a person can remain positive, despite their problems and tribulations. So, even in their misfortune, people become jealous.

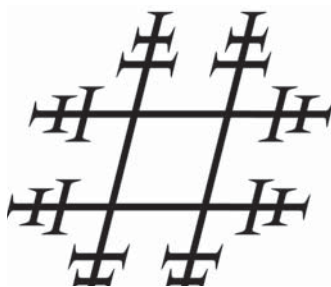
Conducting oneself as a mystic is not therefore an easy matter, but the amount of work to be accomplished and the difficulty of the task are of little consequence for the one who has faith, personal convictions, and a radiant inner consciousness. While their thoughts are often directed inward and they meditate and pray for others daily, they should not exclude from their life all contact with society and its realities. On the contrary, their enlightened spirit can bring much to those around them, whether few or many. Should they be fortunate enough to have a talent or a profession where they are in contact with the general public, what they say will bear promising fruit. Their voice and words will be an expression of the Divine. Whatever his or her circumstances and field of activity, a mystic must accomplish the union between the two worlds, the temporal and the intemporal, the material and the spiritual, so that the miracle of the one thing

may be accomplished, and he or she may make manifest the well-known dictum, "That which is above is like that which is below."

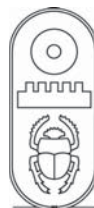
Being a mystic is to perceive that there exists a goal, that we are advancing towards a final summit, towards which we are being guided. Our guides are our virtues, among them courage and perseverance. When there appears in our sky the cloud of incomprehension, fear, doubt, and strife, and it threatens our progression on the path, let us act as mystics. The path leading to Illumination is arduous, and the temptation to stop our progress is at times strong. Vertigo can unsettle us, and the mist can grow thicker. Let us disperse this with our inner will and keep our eyes fixed on the summit. Let us not complain about what remains to be accomplished, but instead rejoice in the journey already travelled.

That which applies to our inner course and our evolution also applies to every other area of our lives, for, as I was saying before, students of mysticism are not ethereal creatures cut off from the world and its realities.

Let us be mystics, attuned with others, and, with a true communion of heart, let us be as one!



Imperator's Insignia.





---

Rosicrucian Park  
1342 Naglee Avenue • San Jose, CA 95191  
USA

