

Ecclesia Gnostica

A Gnostic Catechism

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P R E F A C E

Why a Gnostic Catechism?

"A Gnostic Catechism? What a preposterous idea and a contradiction in terms to boot!" Such and similar objections are likely to be forthcoming in response to the present effort. The word "catechism" readily conjures up visions of dogmatic belief, enshrined in rigidly formulated articles and designed to be memorized and mindlessly recited by children and by adults of childish minds. Yet a catechism is truly but a compendium of instructions, usually of a religious nature, arranged in the form of questions and answers. There is no necessary implication of dogmatism and even less of childish simple mindedness at all.

Still, when we attach the word "Gnostic" to "Catechism" we may encounter another problem. A Gnostic is by definition a knower, and since knowledge supersedes belief, a knower cannot very well be a believer. If a catechism is mainly a statement of beliefs, it is something that no Gnostic would have a need for. So far so good, but the issue under consideration is a bit more complex than that.

Throughout history there existed two principal ways of viewing Gnosticism. The first was rooted in the hostile critique of the heresiologist Church Fathers. It declared that Gnosticism was speculation and philosophizing resulting in a patchwork system of purloined parts from here and there. A catechism based on such a system would be worthless because the system itself would be worthless. The second way of viewing Gnosticism, which has been gaining in acceptance lately, is both

more fair and more accurate than the former. In this view, Gnosticism is grounded in the experience of Gnosis, which is the salvific and revelatory experience of transcendence. The experience of Gnosis then receives expression in the Gnostic Mythos which allows the Gnostic to amplify and assimilate the experience of Gnosis and also makes further experience of Gnosis possible.

Rushing to conclusions on the basis of only the first portion of this definition, some people come to exaggerate the importance of Gnosis at the expense of the Gnostic Mythos. They come to feel that nothing other than Gnosis matters, and that a Gnostic is simply one who has experienced Gnosis.

It is no doubt true that without Gnosis there is no Gnosticism, but it is also true that without the context of the Gnostic Mythos the Gnosis of the individual loses its salvific character. Our world harbors many people who have had impressive spiritual experiences which, however, never yielded any significant meaning. (The specific salvific meaning the Gnostic derives from the experience of Gnosis is redemption, which means liberation from the necessity of earthly existence.) Only when Gnosis occurs within a particular meaningful context will the Gnostic obtain optimal results from his experience. This does not mean that Gnosticism posits any kind of dogma against which to measure the authenticity of the experience of the Gnostic. What it means is that Gnostic sages and seers have brought forth from their own original experiences of Gnosis a vast and meaningful Mythos which represents the theoretical matrix for our practical experience. This mythic matrix is of course not closed; rather it invites modifications and additions of an appropriate nature from other seers and travelers on the Aeonial paths of Gnosis.

The catechism which follows is a manual of instruction in the Gnostic Mythos. Its aim is to instruct not only in one variety of this Mythos, but in the entire heritage of the Gnostic tradition, whereby we mean the teachings of the Gnostic sages and seers as found in their original writings, including the Nag Hammadi collection. The less reliable accounts and recensions of these teachings found in the writings of the Church Fathers have also been taken into consideration. The non-Christian Gnosis of the Hermetic writings has been considered also. The teachings of the Prophet Mani are often included. (It is increasingly evident to scholarship that the Manichaeian Gnosis is an organic part of the Gnostic tradition.) The spirit, if not always the letter of all known dispensations of the Gnostic tradition, finds its expression in this catechism.

Catechisms have been with us for a long time. It is believed that the first such compendia were based on the catechetical lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem in the Fourth Century A.D. The name originates in the Greek verb *katexein*, meaning to teach, and the first catechisms seem to have grown out of oral instructions given to those who were candidates for membership in the church.

Not only mainstream orthodoxy had catechisms, however. So called heretics, sometimes of a Gnostic or gnosticising orientation, often had their own catechisms. It was rumored that the Cathars of the Languedoc had a catechism, but no copy of this work has been found so far. The most famous "heretical" catechism was the one printed in 1498 (although existing earlier) which was used not by one but by three heterodox movements at once, i.e. the Waldenses of Savoy, the Brethren of the Common Life in Germany and the *Unitas Fratrum* in Bohemia. A catechism format was even employed by the renowned esoteric teacher of the 19th Century, H. P. Blavatsky,

in her work, *The Key to Theosophy*. (Indeed one is tempted to interject that if such a non-dogmatic system as Theosophy could employ this format, surely modern Gnosticism could do the same.) The French Gnostic Church possessed a catechism, written by Bishop Jean Bricaud and published in 1907. (See our bibliography.) It would seem that there exists ample precedent for our present effort.

Let us state then once and for all: This catechism was not prepared in order to create a Gnostic orthodoxy or to proclaim Gnostic dogmas. Rather it is designed to meet a twofold need, one general and the other particular. There exists a general need for concise, clear and authentic information regarding the Mythos held by the Gnostic tradition. The present age is characterized by much shallow thinking and a tendency to reduce meaningful ideas to nebulous nonsense. With the increase of publicity attached to some teachings of the Nag Hammadi material, Gnostic ideas and terms are being appropriated by uninformed sources. The name Gnostic is often misapplied. When everything is "Gnostic", nothing is Gnostic. Although far flung and poetic, the Gnostic Mythos is a specific one; one ought to know what it is and what it is not.

The other need is particular. It relates primarily to the Ecclesia Gnostica, a Gnostic church with which the author is associated, although other kindred churches might be interested also. Candidates for Gnostic Baptism, and for other sacraments, including Holy Orders, are in dire need of such information. Certainly they are not asked to blindly believe in the contents of the Gnostic Catechism. Rather, it is likely that they will be pleased to read a brief yet comprehensive statement of the Mythos to which they have been attracted. While few of them wish for some sort of litmus test of Gnosticism to which they are expected to conform slavishly, a compendium of ideas and

ideals, used as a point of reference will be welcomed by all. May all practitioners of the Gnostic tradition profit from the fruit of our present labors and may the holy cause of the Gnosis be furthered thereby!

+ Stephan A. Hoeller

Tau Stephanus I.

PRAYERS AND CREEDS

The Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, + and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Gnostic's Prayer

Almighty God, whose footstool is the highest firmament: Great Ruler of Heaven and all the powers therein: Hear the prayers of Thy servants who put their trust in Thee. We pray Thee, supply our needs from day to day: Command Thy heavenly host to comfort and succor us: That it may be to Thy glory and unto the good of man. Forgive us our transgressions as we forgive our brothers and sisters: Be present with us: strengthen and sustain us: For we are but instruments in Thy hands. Let us not fall into temptation: Defend us from all danger and evil: Let Thy mighty power ever guard and protect us, Thou great Fount of knowledge and wisdom: Instruct Thy servants by Thy holy presence: Guide and support us, now and forever. Amen.

The Hail Sophia

Hail Sophia, filled with light, the Christ is with Thee, blessed art Thou among the Aeons, and blessed is the Liberator of Thy light, Jesus. Holy Sophia, Mother of all gods, pray to the light for us Thy children, now and in the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory Be to the Father

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. (or "throughout the Aeons of Aeons") Amen.

An Act of Gnosis

We know Thee
Thou eternal thought
immovable, unchangeable, unlimited and unconditioned
remaining unchanged in essential essence
while forever thinking the mystery of the universe
manifesting three extensions of cosmic power
creation, preservation and destruction -
Thou, Lord of all.

We know Thee
Father
Thou secret, supreme and ineffable Maker
unchanging in essence
yet ever-changing in appearance and manifestation
visualizing as an act of consciousness the mystery of creation
and by an act of will absorbed into life -
Creator.

We know Thee
Son
Thou Word, Thou Logos
divine manifestation of the Lord
alone-begotten of the great stillness
begotten by an act of consciousness alone

coming to the flesh to destroy incarnate error-
Sustainer.

We know Thee
Holy Spirit
Thou giver of life and goodness
principle of love, beauty and compassion
remaining here on earth to guide and care for us
Thou, with the Father and the Son
art the wholeness upon which the manifested universe is
erected -
and Destroyed.

We know you
Messengers
custodians of the essential wisdom of the race
Preachers of the great Law
containing within yourselves spiritual insight and courage
living and laboring unselfishly
mediating between the supreme source and its creation
dedicated to the advancement of all.

We look to the union of the self
with the Fullness
and thus liberation
from the infinite chain of attainment.

Amen.

A Brief Credo

We acknowledge one great invisible God, the Unknown Father, the Aeon of Aeons, who brought forth with His providence: the Father, the Mother and the Son.

We acknowledge the Christos, the self-begotten Son, born from the virginal and ineffable Mother in the high Aeons: who in the Logos of God came down from above to annul the emptiness of this age and restore the fullness of the Aeon.

We acknowledge the Holy Spirit, our celestial Mother and consoler, who proceeded from Herself, a gift of Herself out of the silence of the unknown God.

We seek the gathering of the sparks of light from the sea of forgetfulness and we look to the glories of eternal life in the Fullness. Amen.

A Prayer to the Supernal Parents

All-powerful Lord, Our Father;
All-wise Lady, Our Mother;
Supernal parents of all that was, and is, and is to come;
Sustain us, your children this day.

Give us the wisdom to see your path,
And the strength to prevail in the darkest hour.
We thank you for the joys we have,
And for your grace bestowed on us
This day and every day.

May we thrive and grow in knowledge, wisdom and understanding. Now and forevermore. Amen.

An Act of Contrition

(Especially important when in danger of death)

Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee and I detest all my faults which I have committed, not because of punishment which I may receive but chiefly because with my faults I have turned away from Thee, my God, who art all-good, and who art wholly deserving of my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more, and I ask to be forgiven even as I forgive those who have offended against me. Amen.

A Morning Prayer

On waking, Heavenly Father, I sing Thy praises and I dare say to Thee again with confidence the prayer that the divine Master taught us:

Our Father who art in the depths of the Aeons, may Thy Holy Logos and Christ be understood and adored in the Universe; may the kingdom of Thy Holy Spirit come to us, may Thy will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us this day our spiritual nourishment, the strength and courage to earn the bread for our body. Forgive us for our digressions from Thy laws, as our assembly forgives those who repent of their sins. Support us in our state of weakness so that we may not be carried away by our passions and deliver us from the deceptive mirages of the Archons. For we have no other ruler than Thy beloved Son, Christ our Savior whose is the kingdom, the triumph and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Lord, our divine Propator, hear my prayer, listen to my supplication; let me hear the voice of Thy mercy from the morning, for it is in Thy hands that I place myself. I adore Thee, I praise Thee, I give Thee thanks from the morning.

I thank Thee for having protected me during the night from all the dangers and all the evils which could have harmed me and from which Thou hast covered me with Thy protection. During this day, remain my support, my strength, my refuge, my salvation and my consolation.

Oh my Father, I thank Thee for all the good things that I have received from Thee so far. It is also by an effect of Thy goodness that I have come to see this day; I want to use it to serve Thee. I devote to Thee all my thoughts, words, deeds and sorrows. Bless them, oh my God, so that there will be none which are not activated by Thy love and which do not tend to glorify Thee.
(From the usage of the French Gnostic Church)

An Evening Prayer

(With examination of conscience)

Night has spread its veils over us, everything invites us to meditate. I raise my thoughts to Thee, oh divine Propator, and I come into Thy presence to examine my conduct this day.

Did I not hide my religious thoughts when, on the contrary, I should have expressed them clearly? Have I not mixed the name of God with words of impatience, anger, untruth or thoughtlessness? Have I at all times had a firm will, and have I always subjected it to the light of Gnosis? Have I always preserved my spiritual dignity? Have I always been moderate in prosperity and patient in adversity? Have I been angry? Have I been proud, vain and ambitious? Have I always treated my neighbor like a brother or sister and with love? Have I acted out of hatred or vengeance? Have I abstained from gossip, from slander and from rash judgments? Have I put right the wrong caused to my fellowman? Have I always told the truth? Have I

always kept my word when it has been given? Finally, have I spent my day well?

These, oh my Father, are my faults; I admit them before Thee, and even though Thou hast no need of my confession, and Thou seest into the depths of my heart, I confess them to Thee nevertheless and I admit them to heaven and to earth because I have sinned in words, in thoughts, in deeds and omissions, and this is my fault, my grievous fault. Oh my God and my Father, I have missed the mark Thou has set for me; break the hardness of my heart and by Thy infinite strength and goodness, bring forth from it tears of penitence. Forgive me, oh my God, for all the wrong that I have done and caused to be done; forgive me for all the good I have not done, and which I should have done, or that I have done badly; forgive me for all the transgressions which I know and also for those which I do not know; I feel sincere repentance for them and I wish to make an effort to put them right.

Lord, oh divine Propator, who art the Father of the Lights and the Protector of all those who trust in Thee, deign to take me in Thy holy protection during this night and keep me from all earthly dangers and spiritual perils. During the sleep of my body make my soul watch in Thee. Subdue in me all wrong desires; make my conscience enjoy a holy tranquillity; take far from me all evil thoughts and all the dangerous illusions of the Archons. Grant Thy powerful protection to all whom I love; my parents, my friends and to all those who make up the household of the Gnosis and to all human spirits still wandering in this place of exile whether they be in the body or out of the body.

Father of the Lights, as I fall asleep, I place my trust in Thee and in the double and shining star of the Pleroma. Amen.

LESSON I

OF GOD AND THE UNIVERSE

1. What is God?

The infinite and eternal Reality behind all phenomena, known to the Gnostic under several names, such as the True God, the Unknown Father, the King of Light and many more.

2. What are some further characteristics of God?

Although being infinite, God is in a sense beyond all qualities; one may nevertheless affirm that God is the highest, perfect transcendental Existence in Whom everything originated and by Whom everything is sustained.

3. What is God essentially?

Essentially, God is potential Being, for in Him all potentialities are present.

4. What is God secondarily?

In a secondary sense God is Being in activity; He is Being in actuality.

5. How does the potentiality of God make its to actuality?

The word whereby we express the passage from potential Being to actualized Being is the term "to emanate". It is by such emanation (pouring forth) that the multitude of spiritual and material worlds and their fashioners emerge from the original potentiality of God.

6. Can there be more than one God?

If under "God" we understand the ultimate and true Reality then the answer is *no*. If the lesser emanated deities should be called

"Gods" then the answer would be yes. It is also possible to envision the ultimate God as the first God, and the Demiurge, the lesser god of this world, as the second god.

7. Is God a Holy Trinity?

Yes. The Gnostic tradition has always affirmed the existence of God as the Holy Trinity consisting of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

8. What are the properties of the three persons of the Holy Trinity?

The Father is characterized by activity, the creation of beings and their attraction; the Son by articulated intelligence (LOGOS) and the will to redeem; and the Holy Spirit by inspiration, fortification and vivification. In short: The Father is creator, the Son redeemer and the Holy Spirit sanctifier.

9. God being called "He" and Father and Son being masculine names, do we need to assume that the godhead is of the male gender?

No. God is totally beyond the limiting characteristics of gender. The ineffable qualities of the Divine, when receiving names in human language, have come to receive the common articles of "he", "she" and "it". It is not uncommon to find terms for God in Gnostic scriptures which are androgynous such as "Mother-Father" (METROPATOR), and the third person of the Holy Trinity (the Holy Spirit) is regarded by Gnostics as feminine.

10. Why is it that Gnostics do not apply "gender neutral" terms to God?

Traditional names such as "God the Father" or "God the Son" are instrumentalities whereby qualities and keynotes of profound mystical subtlety have been expressed within the limitations of human language. To substitute for them arbitrary products of

human thought would almost certainly lead to the loss of these qualities and keynotes.

11. Is this the only reason?

No. Gnostics know that ancient Divine Names are Words of Power, which, when uttered, bring forth from the Aeonial regions specific responses of grace. (A good example is to be found in the scripture *Thunder, the Perfect Mind*, where a Divine Being says: "I am the utterance of my name".) The effectiveness of such sacred theurgy should not be jeopardized by a change of names.

12. How did this universe come into existence?

Like all other things and beings, this universe was emanated by God.

13. Does this mean that the universe is God, or part of God?

The universe is not God in the exclusive sense, for God is by no means confined to this or any other universe. The universe, however, consists of the substance of God. It came forth from Him and to Him it shall return.

14. Is the universe good?

Since God is good and the universe was emanated by Him, it would be reasonable to assume that the universe is good. Yet we find that the universe contains some qualities that are good, others that are evil, and yet others that are indifferent.

15. Where do these qualities originate?

In contrast with the good qualities, the evil and the indifferent ones originate not in the goodness and wisdom of God, whose substance underlies the universe, but in the blindness and willfulness of certain spiritual entities who fashioned this substance into a universe. These half-makers (Demiurges), or

false rulers (Archons), are the cause of the ambivalent nature of the worlds of matter and mind.

16. Is God present in the universe?

Yes. God is present because He is everywhere. He is present as the source and end of all; He is present because ultimately all things are under His dominion; and He is also present because nothing is hidden from Him. This presence is known as omnipresence, which, however, does not denote omnipotence, since effective control of our universe is not exercised by God, but by the Demiurge and Archons.

17. Is this the only way in which God is present in the universe?

No. God is not only omnipresent but also immanent in the universe, for the underlying essence of all things is none other than God. Once again, this underlying essence does not imply effective control over the forms within which the essence is embodied.

18. Is God present within the human being?

God is present in the human being in a very special way, for the spirit in man contains God's effective presence. This is also at times called the Christ in us, described by St. Paul as our "hope of glory".

19. What will happen to the universe at the end of time?

When the present Aeon comes to an end, the seeds of light (redeemable spiritual portions) in the universe will be lifted up into the fullness of God (PLEROMA) while the darkness present in the universe will be left behind.

20. What is to be the fate of the unredeemed darkness of the universe?

Gnostic revelation is not unanimous on this question. There are indications that at least some portion of the darkness of the universe will go into a state of purificatory suspension to be redeemed in some future cycle. Other indications intimate that much of such darkness, particularly the material (HYLIC) world will be dissolved so that its existence will only have been an accident in limitless time.

LESSON II
OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLDS AND THE DEMIURGE

21. What is a spirit?

A spirit is a being that has a measure of consciousness and free will, but no material body, and thus will never die.

22. Are there many spirits?

Their number is immeasurable and they form both within and beyond the universe a vast, luminous realm which is called heaven by many traditions. Not all spirits are in this beneficent, luminous realm, however.

23. What are the spirits and their habitations called by Gnostics?

Both the spirits and their habitations are frequently called Aeons. (In a derivative sense, an age is sometimes also called an Aeon.)

24. How many categories are the spirits divided into?

The categories and hierarchies of spirits are very numerous and only a few are explicitly known. They range all the way from the highest deific Aeonic beings who dwell in perfect harmony, balance and bliss in the Fullness (PLEROMA), to the various kinds of angels, down to elementals and spirit-dwellers of nature.

25. What are angels?

Angels are spirits, upon whom great power, wisdom and holiness has been bestowed by God.

26. What does the word "angel" mean?

It means "messenger", for the most frequent role of angels is that of messengers and mediators between the PLEROMA and the world of humans.

27. Which angelic hierarchies and individual angels are known to us?

There are nine orders or "choirs" of angels: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions (or Dominations), Virtues, Powers, Principalities (Kingdoms), Archangels and Angels. The canonical scriptures mention three angels by name: the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. The Gnostic church adds to these a fourth: Uriel. Gnostic scriptures mention most of these angels and add numerous others such as the rescuer of Gnostics, Eleleth, and many others.

28. How do angels help humans?

Angels help humans by praying for them, by acting as messengers between the PLEROMA and our earthly dwelling place, and by serving as our guardian angels.

29. In what special ways do our guardian angels help us?

Guardian angels pray for us, protect us from spiritual harm (or at times also from physical harm), and inspire us to aspire to Gnosis.

30. Does each individual human have a guardian angel?

It has been commonly held by tradition that each person has a special guardian angel. Experience both Gnostic and otherwise bears this out. By the same token it must be recalled that the concept of the guardian angel has been influenced by a yet more profound mystery, i.e. that of the Divine Twin, or Twin Angel.

31. What is the Divine Twin or Twin Angel?

There are reports in Gnostic scripture and tradition about a celestial twin spirit who overshadows the human and at certain special times manifests to him. In *Pistis Sophia* such a twin comes to Jesus early in his life and unites with Him. The Holy Prophet Mani experienced several manifestations of his twin who finally united with him and took him to heaven.

32. Can spirits including angels be seen?

Not ordinarily. However, under special circumstances, angels have visibly manifested to humans. The visitation of the Holy Virgin Mary by the Archangel Gabriel and the revelation of the Koran to Mohammed by the same Archangel are two examples.

33. Are there spirits involved in our lives who are not good?

Yes. There are spiritual beings who have become estranged from God and from the PLEROMA and who are thus at best unwise and at worst evil.

34. Where are these estranged spiritual beings to be found?

They are found primarily in connection with the material universe and its mental and emotional aspects, for they are primarily responsible for the creation and management of these realms and for the suffering and sorrow that abide therein.

35. Are these estranged spiritual beings the same as the fallen angels that some Christians believe in?

There can be little doubt that the myth of the war in heaven and of the fall of Lucifer are but a form of the Gnostic statements about the estrangement of the Demiurge and his Archons from the PLEROMA.

36. What is the Demiurge?

He is called Demiurge or "half-maker" because he had taken the divine substance and fashioned out of it a world. He is the spiritual being who had become forgetful of his origins, even of God. He thinks that he is God and there is no other God before him.

37. By what names is the Demiurge known?

In Gnostic scriptures he is called YALDABAOOTH (child of chaos), SACLAS (fool) and SAMAEL (blind one). In later Gnosticizing lore he was at times identified with LUCIFER or SATAN, the prince of the powers of air.

38. Is the Demiurge evil?

He is classically regarded as flawed and foolish but not utterly evil. In medieval Gnostic traditions he became increasingly identified with evil.

39. Does the Demiurge have associates?

Yes, they are the Archons (rulers), and their desire is to rule over humans and other beings.

40. What is the relationship of the Demiurge to YAHWEH, the God of the Old Testament?

Not all the images of God in the Old Testament come from the same source. A good many are descriptions of the Demiurge. Some, such as those in the Wisdom Literature and in some Psalms, are of a much more exalted nature. Some Gnostic teachers held that the teachings of the Old Testament were a mixture attributable to three sources: the Demiurge, the elders of Israel and the True God.

41. If the Demiurge and his Archons are power-hungry and arrogant but not truly evil, are there, in addition, truly evil demons?

Yes. There exist monstrosities of evil which populate hellish regions in association with earth. Their origins are unknown. The name of one demon mentioned in Gnostic scriptures is YACHTANABAS, although there are others.

42. Can the Demiurge and his Archons be redeemed?

This possibility is alluded to in some Gnostic writings. At least one such being, the brother of the Demiurge, has turned to the good and been redeemed. His name is SABAOTH and also ABRAXAS. Cognate theories of universal redemption, even of demons and of the Demiurge, were articulated in early times by Origen (APOKATASTASIS PANTHON) and in our days by C. G. Jung (in *Answer to Job*).

LESSON III
OF THE HUMAN BEING

43. What is the human being?

The human being is a spirit (PNEUMA) endowed with reason and with free will combined with a soul and an animal body.

44. What is an animal?

It is a certain kind of soul (ANIMA, PSYCHE) combined with a body (SOMA).

45. In what way does the human differ from the animal?

The human being differs from the animal in that the human is connected with his true nature which is spirit.

46. Where does the spirit of the human being come from?

The spirit of the human being originates in the Divine Fullness (PLEROMA), from whence it descended into the soul and body.

47. How may the spirit (PNEUMA) of the human being be described?

The human spirit is a spark of God's light, an effective part of God, separated from God in outer manifestation, but retaining a living connection with its ultimate source.

48. How may the soul (PSYCHE) of the human being be described?

The soul consists of several components which at the present stage of human development are largely dominated by the thinking principle and to some extent by the feeling principle.

49. How may the body (SOMA) of the human being be described?

The body of the human being is composed of flesh (SARX) which is a form of matter (HYLE) albeit endowed temporarily with biological life.

50. Where do the soul and the body of the human being come from?

The soul is composed of immaterial substance brought about by the prolonged interaction of spirit and body (or bodies). The body is the product of biological evolution that has taken place on earth; a process influenced by the Archons.

51. For what reason did the spirits of human beings come to embody themselves on earth?

The classical scriptures of the Gnosis are not explicit on this subject. Other scriptures (*The Hymn of the Pearl*; the revelations of The Holy Prophet Mani) indicate that human beings come into souls and bodies in order to rescue earlier emanations of the divine light by refining and purifying the darkness.

52. Was the aim achieved which was set for the human spirits when they came down to earth?

Only in a very few instances. Almost all those which came down failed. Tempted by the deceptive mirages here below, they yielded to the impulses of the soul and body instead of retaining spiritual mastery over them. Thus the first or heavenly man became the man of earth.

53. How do some kindred traditions describe this calamitous event?

The Hermetic Gnosis states that charmed by the universe the human being yielded to the attractions of physical matter and

identified himself with it, and so was trapped in the body. The Jewish and Christian traditions call it the Fall.

54. How can the human being recover his original condition?

By Gnosis, which is the knowledge of his true nature and original condition, a portion of which is ANAMNESIS, the remembering of true things forgotten.

55. What stands in the way of humanity's recovery of its original condition?

The obstacle is ignorance (A-GNOSIS) manifesting in the forgetting of the real (AMNESIS).

56. Is there an original sin?

Yes and no. Being trapped in the body and deceived by the Archonic part of the soul, all humans suffer from a deficiency which they share with all of creation. This deficiency, however, is not the result of any particular sinful act on the part of human ancestors (Adam and Eve). Rather than being a sin (moral failing), it is an unfortunate existential condition.

57. What are the results of this existential condition?

As the result of this condition, humans are born as slaves of the earthly Demiurge and his Archons.

58. What sufferings do these Archonic powers make us undergo?

The afflictions attendant upon life in the realm of the Archons are very numerous. Some of these are: gravity (being earthbound), heat, cold, natural disasters, diseases, pain, death and the torment of re-embodiment in successive lives.

LESSON IV
OF GNOSIS AND SALVATION

59. What is Gnosis?

Gnosis is the revelatory and salvific knowledge of who we were, of what we have become, of where we were, of wherein we have been thrown, of whereto we are hastening, of what we are being freed, of what birth really is, and of what rebirth really is. This is an ancient definition which is still accurate.

60. Is there more than one kind of Gnosis?

The experience of Gnosis comes to human beings in individual manifestations, yet it always has common features and a common keynote.

61. Is Gnosis an experience or a doctrine?

It is both. The experience of Gnosis is mystical knowledge that liberates. This is both accompanied and preceded by a kindred kind of Gnosis that informs. These were called (by Clement of Alexandria) the Divine Gnosis and Human Gnosis respectively. The human or doctrinal part of Gnosis consists of a certain kind of knowledge of the spiritual, psychic and material worlds and their relationships.

62. How is Human Gnosis acquired?

Primarily by way of the study and assimilation of the teachings of the Messengers of Light and of the seers and sages of the Gnostic tradition and by way of the amplification of these by individual insight.

63. How does one come to Divine Gnosis?

By divine grace combined with sincere and informed human aspiration.

64. What specific help is there available to us in order to receive both Divine and Human Gnosis?

Such help comes to us from Messengers of Light and other enlightened teachers of Gnosis.

65. Was there a time when humans were without Gnosis?

From the beginning of the human race, some people were in possession of Gnosis. These early Gnostics were at times symbolically called the "Great Race of Seth", after Seth, the third son of Adam, who was recognized as the prototype of all Gnostics.

66. Who was the latest great revealer of Gnosis?

It was the Lord Jesus Christ, who acted both as the rectifier of the existing tradition of Gnosis and as the revealer of new elements of Gnosis.

67. Can Gnosis be given by another?

A Messenger of Light comes to enlighten humans by his teachings and to transform their spiritual lives by the mysteries he bestows on them. But only those in whom the true spiritual intuition ("the Light Mind") is awakened will welcome the message and benefit from the mysteries.

68. What are we to be saved from?

We are to be saved first from ignorance which prevents us from knowing our true source, our real nature, our condition and our destiny. At last we shall also be saved from the burden of earthly existence with its attendant conditions of suffering and exile from our true home.

69. What brings about salvation?

Salvation is brought about neither by faith (belief in God, or Christ) nor by works (the performance of good deeds), but by Gnosis.

70. Why is this so?

Because faith and works do not result in a radical change in the being of one's consciousness, but Gnosis does.

71. What does the radical change of consciousness brought about by Gnosis accomplish?

It establishes a renewed link of the soul with the spirit and of both with God. This breaks the bonds that have shackled our true being to the forces of earth. Ultimately it brings liberation from all earthly things.

72. What are the further benefits of salvation by Gnosis?

A turning away of the soul from the attachments of life, a constant straining upwards to the pure Divine Spirit, wherein is our true home. Also, God's friendship in this life, a good death, and after that a swift passage through cleansing regions to God's presence in the Fullness (PLEROMA) of divine glory, goodness and love.

LESSON V
OF THE LORD CHRIST

73. Who is the Lord Christ?

He is one of the High Aeons of the Fullness (PLEROMA); being the articulated thought (LOGOS) of God and the expression of God's redemptive power (SOTERIA), for which latter reason He is also called the Savior (SOTER).

74. Are the Lord Christ and Jesus one and the same person?

Jesus is the earthly manifestation of Christ, the celestial Aeon.

75. Did the celestial Aeon Christ manifest fully and equally during the earthly existence of Jesus?

No. The celestial Aeon Christ came to fully manifest in Jesus beginning with the baptism of the latter in the river Jordan at the hands of Saint John, the Baptizer. Yet, Christ was present in some measure and manner in Jesus before His baptism also.

76. Did the celestial Aeon Christ ever depart from Jesus?

It appears He did withdraw, at least to some degree, at the time of the crucifixion and death of Jesus, as indicated by the exclamation of Jesus; "Aeon, Aeon, why have you departed from me" (ELI, ELI, LAMA SABAKTANI).

77. Did the celestial Aeon Christ return to Jesus after Jesus' crucifixion and death?

Yes, He fully returned at the time of the resurrection when Jesus became "the Living One" (REDIVIVUS).

78. Did Jesus save humankind by His physical death on the Cross?

No. His physical death was merely a tragic incident in the sublime drama of His life.

79. Why have so many Christians come to assume that it was by His physical death that Jesus saved humankind?

Because many of them possess a consciousness that appreciates only physical reality and ignores the greater realities which are spiritual.

80. What is the spiritual reality of the suffering and death of Jesus?

The true sacrifice of the Aeon Christ and of His manifestation, Jesus, was not His physical death and the torments He endured prior to the same. His true sacrifice was His willing entry into the horrendous limitations of earthly embodiment. All spirits suffer grievously when entering into earthly embodiment; the sufferings endured by a high celestial Aeon of Christ's stature are incomprehensibly great.

81. It is true then that Christ sacrificed Himself for us?

It is most certainly true, but His sacrifice was a spiritual one.

82. What was the mission of Christ the Savior (SOTER) on earth?

It was threefold: (1) to deliver us from the slavery of the Demiurge and the Archons and to re-join us to our original state; (2) to contribute to the enlivening of the spiritual influences on earth (this has been at times interpreted as the restoration of God's kingdom on earth); and (3) to bring us back to the spiritual Fullness (PLEROMA), our homeland.

83. What were the means whereby Christ the Savior (SOTER) fulfilled His mission on earth?

The means were two: (1) He taught His teachings of liberation through the law of love, and (2) He bestowed illuminating and liberating mysteries on His qualified disciples. Both teachings and mysteries were to be handed down to God's people throughout the ages.

84. What do we learn from the sufferings of Christ?

From the sufferings of Christ we learn of the great love of God and of all the great Aeonial beings for humanity, who have sent the Savior (SOTER) to us. We also learn that earthly life is suffering for all spiritual beings, including Christ and ourselves.

85. What do we learn from the life of Christ?

From His life we may learn the pattern of the great drama of the life of spirit in material confinement; its vicissitudes and triumphs. This is what has been called the imitation of Christ (IMITATIO CHRISTI).

86. Is it true that Christ descended into hell?

In addition to descending into this hell we call the world, He also descended after the crucifixion into a state where the spirits and souls of many disembodied humans dwelt and waited for Him. The instructions He gave to and the mysteries He conferred upon these beings liberated many of them from the underworld (HADES, SHOEL) where they were. This journey of Christ is sometimes known as "the Harrowing of Hell".

87. Did Christ rise from the dead?

All the scriptures affirm that He came back to earthly life after His death and burial. The historic creeds say that He rose "according to the scriptures" (SECUNDUM SCRIPTURAS).

88. Why is Christ's resurrection of importance to us?

Because it serves as our example for our own resurrection.

89. How and when is our resurrection to take place?

It takes place by Gnosis while we are still in earthly life.

90. Did Christ remain on earth for some time after His resurrection?

At that time Christ remained on earth in order to impart the Gnosis to certain disciples. It is traditionally held that this time lasted for forty days, but longer time periods are mentioned in Gnostic scriptures.

91. How did Christ depart the earth?

After the time He spent on earth after the resurrection, He ascended in glory into the Fullness (PLEROMA).

92. Did Christ occupy a fleshly body like ours?

It is most unlikely that He occupied a body quite like ours. He walked on water, passed through walls, made His body shine like the sun; none of these can be done by way of a body of flesh. Valentinus stated that Jesus did not have a digestive system like other humans. Therefore Jesus' body has been called an appearance (DOKESIS).

93. Does this deny the incarnation (becoming flesh) of Christ, the Logos?

No, for there can be many kinds of different substances He may have used for His embodiment and they all would have served as His "flesh".

LESSON VI
OF OUR LADY SOPHIA

94. Who is our Lady Sophia?

She is a high Aeon of the Fullness (PLEROMA), whose name means Wisdom and who is of a feminine character.

95. Is Sophia only known to Gnostics?

Although She is known to Gnostics in a special way, Sophia was known to certain Biblical authors who wrote the Wisdom literature (Book of the Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus and Proverbs, and also the Song of Songs), to ancient philosophers such as Philo, and to certain theologians known as Sophiologists.

96. How is Sophia related to Christ?

She is His close associate (Sister Aeon or Twin Aeon) in the Fullness (PLEROMA).

97. Is Sophia "the Goddess" as some modern opinions imply?

No. Sophia is not a female counterpart to God, but rather She is a great and holy emanated aspect (HYPOSTASIS) of God.

98. Is Sophia then a goddess?

If by "a goddess" is meant a deity, or one among numerous deific beings then She may be called one.

99. Has Sophia ever been incarnate in human form?

None of the scriptures have intimated that She has.

100. Is there a narrative concerning the events in the story of Sophia after the fashion of the gospel narratives concerning Christ?

Yes. It is the book "Faithful Sophia" (PISTIS SOPHIA), although elements of Her story appear in other scriptures also.

101. What is the beginning of the story of Sophia?

Sophia's tale begins with Her going forth from Her Aeonial habitat in search of the Light. This going forth results in Her catastrophic fall from on high and into the torment of the lower Chaos.

102. How does the story of Sophia continue?

In Her state of anguish and affliction, Sophia gives birth to a hybrid being who becomes the Demiurge. She also exudes the elements from which the Demiurge subsequently fashions the world.

103. What does Sophia do after that?

She continues to call out to the Light for help in Her affliction. The Light hears Her and sends forth the Aeon Christ to console Her and to rescue Her. After many efforts, the work of rescue is accomplished and Sophia is restored to Her original dwelling place.

104. Has Sophia then totally departed from the manifest realm?

No. Her involvement in creation, especially of humans, and Her other deeds, indicate Her continuing care for Her children who are trapped in the world and in the bodies created by the Demiurge.

105. What are some of Her actions which indicate Her involvement with creation and with humanity?

There are many. One is Her rebuking of the Demiurge when he declares that he is the only God and there are no other gods before him. Another is Her gift of the spirit of the higher life to Adam, who was created as a witless cripple by the Demiurge. She also inspired Eve and the serpent in order to facilitate the exit of the first human pair from the fool's paradise where they were confined.

106. Has Sophia continued to aid humanity?

Yes. Scripture declares that She "enters holy souls and makes them friends of God". There is much evidence of Her helpful presence among us to this very day.

107. Is Sophia identical with the Virgin Mary?

No. Mary "the mother of the Lord according to matter" is an honored figure of the Gnosis, but she is a human woman, while Sophia is celestial.

108. Has Sophia overshadowed any human beings?

There are indications that such may have been the case. One example may be Helen in the story of Simon Magus, and another, Mary Magdalene, the chief disciple of Jesus.

109. Does Sophia appear to and communicate with humans?

Yes. She has done so to the Russian philosopher Solovyev (late 19th Century) and Her manifestations are not unknown today.

110. Do the contemporary teachings about the Virgin Mary (Mariology) have a relation to Sophia?

Yes. Such teachings as those about Mary's Assumption, and her role as joint redeemer (CO-REDEMPTRIX) and mediator

between God and humans (MEDIATRIX) can easily be applied to Sophia.

111. Why are the actions and roles of Sophia seemingly confounded with those of the Virgin Mary?

Because the Western exoteric church has suppressed and forgotten the figure of Sophia and was left thus with the lone figure of Mary to whom all feminine holiness and mysteries are now ascribed.

112. What is the duty of Gnostics toward Sophia today?

To render Her due reverence in prayer, liturgy, meditation, study, thought and action, and also to guard Her true identity in the confusion of tongues wherein She is confused with goddesses, earth mothers, Madonnas black and otherwise, and the politically motivated mythologizing of our era.

LESSON VII
OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND GRACE

113. What is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God and the third aspect (Person) of the threefold Godhead, or the Holy Trinity.

114. By what other names is the Holy Spirit called?

The Holy Spirit is also called the Comforter (PARACLETE), the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of God, the Creator Spirit, the Holy Mother Spirit, also by the Greek name PNEUMA HAGION, and the older English name Holy Ghost.

115. What polarity or spiritual gender is ascribed to the Holy Spirit?

In Gnostic usage the Holy Spirit is referred to as feminine.

116. What does the Holy Spirit do for creation and for humanity?

The Holy Spirit permeates and beneficently alters the archonic structures of the universe. (For this reason it is said that the Holy Spirit "renews the face of the earth".) The Holy Spirit also dwells in the Church as the source of her spiritual life and sanctifies souls through the gift of grace.

117. What are some of the special signs of the sanctification of souls by the gift of the grace of the Holy Spirit?

Some of these are: The fortifying of the soul, and the bringing of insight, wisdom and prophecy by way of Gnosis.

118. Does prophecy consist of foreseeing the future?

No. Prophecy is a special disclosure of Divine things to a human by way of Gnosis and only incidentally and occasionally involves glimpses of the future.

119. Is there an expected Age (AEON) of the Holy Spirit in human history?

Very probably. The medieval prophet Joaquin of Flora declared that the Age of the Father is past, the Age of the Son is passing and the Age of the Holy Spirit is approaching. The detailed interpretation of this teaching is a matter of opinion.

120. What is grace?

Grace is the effective manifestation of the supernal Life of God, appearing to us as a supernatural gift of God bestowed on us through Gnosis and also other means.

121. Is grace necessary for salvation?

Yes. Human beings cannot attain the eternal life and freedom of the Fullness (PLEROMA) by powers that are purely natural. Were this possible all humans would already be redeemed and have returned to their home. Therefore we need to be elevated to a transcendental plane through grace and we constantly need spiritual stimuli which come to us by grace.

122. How many kinds of grace are there?

Two kinds of grace are distinguished by tradition. They are: sanctifying grace and actual grace. There is also special grace which is a variety of actual grace.

123. What is sanctifying grace?

Sanctifying grace (also called habitual grace) is the grace that flows from the spark of God within our own spiritual natures. It is a permanent quality that is stimulated by God through His gifts and can be lost only through a lasting turning away of the soul from the spirit.

124. What is actual grace?

Actual grace is transcendental (supernatural) help coming from God that enables us to experience states of consciousness and perform acts that are beyond our natural powers. Souls in a state of relative separation from their spirits need the help of actual grace to gain access to sanctifying grace.

125. In what manner does actual grace come to us?

Primarily by way of the Messengers of Light and the liberating teachings and salvific mysteries they bring to us.

126. Can we resist the grace of God?

Because of the weaknesses implanted into our souls by the Archons we often resist the grace of God. We can do this because grace does not impose itself upon us by force but descends upon us gently in response to our free cooperation.

127. What are the principal ways of obtaining grace?

The principal ways of obtaining grace are three: (1) by the diligent study of the teachings of the Messengers of Light and of their agents; (2) by prayer, and (3) by the sacraments, particularly the Holy Eucharist.

LESSON VIII

OF THE CHURCH AND THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

128. What is the Church?

The Church is the assembly of persons who follow the same tradition, and practice the same sacraments; in short, of those who follow the same religion.

129. What is the meaning of "religion"?

The word "religion" is derived from the Latin RE-LIGERE, meaning to re-join or to join-back. Religion is the effort to effectively join the human soul to the human spirit and to join both of these to God.

130. Of what religion is the Gnostic Church?

The Gnostic Church is of the Christian religion (although it is also true that she is of the eternal religion of Gnosis that was always in the world).

131. Is this not a sign of limitation or of sectarian exclusiveness?

No. One can respect and study many religions, but one can effectively practice only one.

132. Is the Gnostic Church Christian in the same sense in which other churches call themselves Christian?

No. The Gnostic Church is Christian by her own definition, based on Gnosis.

133. Does this place the Gnostic Church outside of the fellowship (EKUMENE) of Universal Christendom?

No, because the criteria of what constitutes a Christian vary greatly among Christian people. The variations introduced by Gnostics are one set among many.

134. Who founded the Church?

The Lord Jesus Christ founded the Church. He did this when just before His ascension, He commissioned His apostles to make disciples of all nations. Earlier in His public ministry He instituted sacraments, chose the twelve apostles, and conferred sacred powers on them.

135. Why did Jesus Christ found the Church?

Jesus Christ founded the Church as a vehicle to bring human beings to redemption from the shackles that confine them to the realm of the Archons and to open to them the freedom and the glory of the Fullness (PLEROMA).

136. Have there been or are there other such vehicles besides the Church founded by Christ?

Since Messengers, Saints and Prophets have been sent by God from age to age to instruct and to assist human beings regarding salvation, it is understandable that there should be other vehicles of a kindred nature.

137. Why do Gnostics then belong to the Church founded by Christ in preference to any other such vehicle?

Because Christ is the latest of the supernal Messengers Whom in our age and place we recognize as our Redeemer (SOTER).

138. How is the Church enabled to lead souls to salvation?

The Church is enabled to lead souls to salvation by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who gives the Church life. This was first visibly manifested at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended in the form of tongues of fire.

139. Does the Holy Spirit still indwell in the Church as a whole?

Yes, but only in a general sense. The degree to which the Holy Spirit is effectively present in the various branches of the Church varies considerably.

140. What determines the degree to which various branches of the Church are enlivened and guided by the Holy Spirit?

There are two determinants: (1) the amount of Gnosis present, and (2) the purity and holiness of the leaders and members.

141. How does this pertain to the existence of the Gnostic Church?

Ever since the leaders of the exoteric (or mainstream) church cast out the Gnostics from their midst, they progressively excluded the guidance of the Holy Spirit from their assemblies. The need for a Gnostic Church thus became ever greater.

142. How did the Gnostic Church function throughout history?

At times in secrecy as a covert effort concealed within the body of the exoteric church, at other times as a fully separate and distinct body such as the Manichaeian and the Cathar churches, and many others.

143. What traditionally are the chief marks of the Church?

There are four such chief marks of the Church: (1) that the Church is one; (2) that she is holy; (3) that she is universal (catholic); and (4) that she is apostolic.

144. How are these marks present in the Gnostic Church?

The Gnostic Church is one because all her members aspire to the same Gnosis and have the same sacraments; the Gnostic Church is holy because her members aspire to a wholeness and integrity of life; she is also universal, or catholic, because she teaches and practices the faith of Gnosis which is not bound to time or to place; finally, she is apostolic because her authority proceeds from the apostles and their successors.

145. Is the visible Church connected with other invisible assemblies?

Yes. The earthly Church is the Church Militant, because she struggles against the evil of the Archons in the world; joined to her we find the Church Triumphant consisting of the liberated spirits in the Fullness (PLEROMA) and the Church Suffering, which consists of the souls and spirits of those who are neither in earthly embodiment, nor in the freedom of the Fullness (PLEROMA) but in the purgatorial immaterial realms. This is also known as the Communion of Saints.

146. What are the results of the Communion of Saints?

The results of the Communion of Saints are that the members of the one visible and the two invisible Churches are able to actively help each other.

147. How do the members of the Communion of Saints help each other?

The liberated spirits in the Fullness (PLEROMA) pray for and assist both their incarnate and dis-incarnate brothers and sisters, while the incarnate faithful can also by their prayers and good thoughts relieve the suffering and assist the purgatorial journey of those who have laid aside their vestures of flesh.

148. Where do the members of the three Churches dwell?

The members of the Church Triumphant dwell in eternal life in the blissful Land of Light (the PLEROMA) with God, His Aeons and Angels and happy souls. We of the Church Militant experience the suffering and conflict attendant upon earthly life, while the dis-incarnate souls are torn between their desire for the Land of Light and their attraction to the realm of darkness.

149. Does the Gnosis hold to the teaching of reincarnation?

Many Gnostic scriptures are silent on the subject. Others state that reincarnation exists as a hell, or as a purgatorial suffering involved in being attached to the fleshly body and to the turbulent mind or soul.

150. Does reincarnation merit the enthusiasm often lavished on it?

By no means. This teaching was long unknown to Western cultures and when rediscovered from Eastern sources, its value came to be exaggerated. Gnostic teachings have always regarded reincarnation as a calamity to be overcome by liberation.

151. What is death?

Death can be one of two things: (1) It can be the temporary release of the spirit from its material-psychic prison to be followed by return to some form of embodied wretchedness; (2)

If the Light spark is purified and resurrected by Gnosis, death will be its entry into eternal bliss and glory in God's Kingdom of Light, there to join the highest order of the Communion of Saints.

LESSON IX
OF THE SACRAMENTS OR MYSTERIES

152. What is a sacrament?

A sacrament is a sacred rite; the visible and outward sign of an invisible, inward grace of God. Anciently, a sacrament was called a mystery.

153. Is a sacrament always effective?

Yes, a sacrament is always effective and produces the result which it is designed to accomplish. The effectiveness of a sacrament can be reduced, however, when its recipient puts obstacles in the path of the workings of the sacrament, or when its ministering agents are insincere.

154. Are there preparations necessary for the reception of the sacraments?

Yes. Preparations are always necessary. To receive a sacrament in an unprepared state is a sacrilege, a profanation of a sacred thing.

155. Does the efficacy of the sacraments depend on the character or merit of the person who administers them?

No. The person administering a sacrament is only an instrument, or ministering agent. It is certainly desirable that such an agent should be in a holy state of consciousness but the effectiveness of the sacrament is not taken away by such matters, although it might be diminished.

156. What is necessary for the administration of a sacrament?

A sacrament first requires an outward sign, that is some external thing or action (such as the sign of the cross, or the anointing with oil). This is called the matter of the sacrament. Second, it requires a set formula or words, which is known as the form of the sacrament. To these is added the intention of the ministering agent which must be that of doing what the Church intends. These three are required for the workings of grace.

157. How many sacraments are there?

There are five initiatory sacraments to which are added two sustaining sacraments, thus adding up to seven. There are also two secondary or substitutional sacraments.

158. Which are the five initiatory sacraments?

The five initiatory sacraments (as explicitly stated in the Gospel of Philip) are: Baptism, Chrism (Confirmation), Holy Eucharist, Redemption and Bride-Chamber.

159. Which are the two sustaining sacraments?

They are the sacrament of Holy Orders and the sacrament of Extreme Unction and Healing.

160. Are there any other sacraments?

There are two other sacraments which may be called secondary or substitutional. These are the sacrament of Penance and the sacrament of Matrimony.

161. Why are these sacraments called secondary or substitutional?

Because Penance has been substituted for the sacrament of the Redemption, while Matrimony has been substituted for the sacrament of the Bride-Chamber.

162. How many sacraments do the exoteric churches administer?

The Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican exoteric churches administer seven sacraments, to wit: Baptism, Confirmation (Chrismation), Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Matrimony. Many Protestant bodies have reduced the number of sacraments further. All of the exoteric churches have suppressed and forgotten the two greater sacraments of the Redemption and the Bride-Chamber.

163. Who has instituted the sacraments?

In a general sense the Lord Jesus Christ instituted the sacraments. The institution of only some can be found in sacred scripture; however, in some form most of them existed since the beginning of creation.

164. Do the sacraments confer grace?

Yes. They confer sanctifying grace and a special grace called sacramental grace.

165. From whom do the sacraments receive their power to give grace?

The sacraments receive their power to confer grace from God through the agency of the LOGOS of God, who is Jesus Christ.

166. Why are Baptism and Penance often called sacraments of the dead?

Because they are administered to souls who either have not come to life by way of the spirit (Baptism) or have become spiritually dead through grave sin which needs to be absolved (Penance).

167. Why are all the other sacraments often called sacraments of the living?

Because their chief purpose is to give more grace to souls and spirits already spiritually alive through sanctifying grace.

168. Which are the sacraments that usually can be received only once?

They are Baptism, Chrism (Confirmation) and Holy Orders because they imprint upon the soul an indelible spiritual mark, called a character. (Exceptions to this rule are when there is reason to believe that any of these sacraments have been administered in a deficient manner, such as Baptism or Confirmation without the sacred oils, or ordinations performed in an incomplete manner.)

169. What is the general effect of all sacraments?

The grace of God is the life of God. Christ said that He came so that we may have life and have it more abundantly. He also said that He loved us and longed to give us life. The means whereby He gives us this divine life are the sacraments. It has also been said that just as an artist, using his brush as an instrument, paints a beautiful picture, so God through the sacraments draws His own image on the soul of man. Such is the sublime effect of the sacraments.

LESSON X

OF THE SACRAMENTS, CONSIDERED SINGLY: PART I

170. Which is the first initiatory sacrament?

It is the sacrament of Baptism, also known as the Baptism of Water because it employs water.

171. At what age should one receive the sacrament of Baptism?

Preferably when one has reached the age of reason, but infant Baptisms, using a simpler formula, are permissible.

172. What are the effects of the sacrament of Baptism?

Baptism liberates the body (SOMA) and soul (PSYCHE) from the dominion of the Archons, under which they fell at physical birth. (This perilous condition is called “original sin” by the exoteric church.) Baptism also washes away actual faults which the person may have committed prior to baptism. Baptism also joins an angel to the baptized soul, and facilitates the entry and exit of the soul from the body. It is this sacrament that affords us entry into the stream of Gnosis.

173. Who can administer Baptism?

A priest or deacon is the usual minister of Baptism, but in an emergency anyone may and should baptize.

174. What is a person to do after receiving the sacrament of Baptism?

A baptized person should participate diligently in sacred practices, particularly the Holy Eucharist. Such a person should also continue to study the sacred literature of the Gnosis.

175. What is the sacrament of Chrism or Confirmation?

Chrism or Confirmation is the sacrament through which the Holy Spirit comes to us and strengthens us in our determination to persist in the Gnostic life.

176. At what age should one receive the sacrament of Chrism or Confirmation?

Not before the time of adolescence.

177. Who is the usual minister at Confirmation?

It is the bishop.

178. What does the bishop do when he gives Confirmation?

He lays his hand on the head of each person and anoints his forehead with holy chrism.

179. What is holy chrism?

Holy chrism is a mixture of olive oil and balm, blessed by the bishop on Maundy Thursday. Unlike the element of baptism which is water, the chrism is combustible and thus symbolizes the fire of the Holy Spirit. Therefore this sacrament is sometimes called the Baptism of Fire.

180. What is the Holy Eucharist?

In the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ and are then received into the human organism. This sacrament unites us in a very special way with Christ the Savior and through Him with the Fullness (PLEROMA).

181. Is it the physical body and blood of Christ that we partake of in the Holy Eucharist?

No. It is His spiritual (PNEUMATIC) body and blood that we partake of under the appearance of the bread and wine.

182. How can the spiritual (PNEUMATIC) body and blood of Christ take on the appearance of the bread and wine?

Through the sacred phenomenon of Transubstantiation or Transelementation, which is brought about by the Holy Spirit.

183. Who instituted the Holy Eucharist?

Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper, the night of Maundy Thursday. When He said, "This is My Body", the entire substance of the bread changed into His spiritual (PNEUMATIC) body, and when He said "This is My Blood", the entire substance of the wine was changed into His spiritual (PNEUMATIC) blood.

184. How is the Holy Eucharist of Christ perpetuated?

Christ said: "Do this in remembrance of me" and therefore His representative, the duly ordained priest, repeats Christ's Eucharistic sacrifice within the context of the ritual of the Mass.

185. Is the Mass called the Holy Eucharist?

Yes, both the ritual of the Mass and the sacred substance of the consecrated bread and wine are usually referred to as the Holy Eucharist.

186. What did the Gnostic Church at times call the Holy Eucharist?

It was called the Ineffable Mystery.

187. Should we be frequent participants in the Ineffable Mystery of the Holy Eucharist?

Yes, for not to take advantage of this great gift would be to scorn the words of Christ the Savior (SOTER): "If you do not eat of my flesh and if you do not drink of my blood, you will have no true life in you".

188. How is one to prepare oneself for the reception of the Holy Eucharist?

By prayer and sincere contrition that purifies one of the stain of faults and unworthiness. Otherwise, in the words of St. Paul, we eat and drink our own judgment and condemnation.

189. What is the sacrament of the Redemption?

The sacrament of the Redemption is one of the two greater or esoteric sacraments practiced by Gnostics and mentioned in the Gospel of Philip. It has been repressed by the exoteric church. It is the first of the greater or esoteric sacraments.

190. What other names are used to describe the sacrament of the Redemption?

APOLYTROSIS, the CONSOLAMENTUM, the Renunciation, the Baptism of Air.

191. What is the effect of the sacrament of the Redemption?

The intention of the sacrament of the Redemption is to deliver a person from the shackles of the Demiurge and the Archons. The effects traditionally held are: (1) It remits all of one's faults and gives one the strength not to commit grave offenses; (2) It perfects in one the change produced by the Baptism of Water; (3) It makes one the temple of the Holy Spirit; (4) By its effects we become complete Christians (PERFECTI); (5) It renews the link between one's soul and the Twin Angel or Deific Double

from whom one has been separated at one's descent into the Archonic realm; (6) Finally, it assures one of one's liberation from the cycle of birth and death and thus frees one of the necessity of future embodiments on earth.

192. Who is eligible for the sacrament of the Redemption?

Adults over twenty years of age who have been baptized and confirmed and who are diligent practitioners of the Gnosis. (However, it is generally preferable to confer the sacrament on persons at or past mid-life.) Candidates should also demonstrate an unalterable conviction of not wishing to be re-embodied in the world.

193. What is the sacrament of the Bride-Chamber?

It is the second of the greater or esoteric sacraments, and is the final and the greatest of the initiatory sacraments. Like the Redemption, it also has been repressed by the exoteric church.

194. By what other names is the sacrament of the Bride-Chamber known?

The Bridal Chamber, the Sacred Wedding (HIEROS GAMOS) and the Mystery of the Syzygies.

195. What is the effect of the sacrament of the Bride-Chamber?

It completes all the effects of the sacrament of the Redemption and seals them for all eternity. Particularly it unites the soul in a final union with the Twin Angel or Deific Double and similarly also unites the soul with God in the Fullness (PLEROMA).

196. Who is eligible for the sacrament of the Bride-Chamber?

One who has received the sacrament of the Redemption (CONSOLAMENTUM).

197. How is the sacrament of the Bride-Chamber conferred?

At this time in history, the sacrament of the Bride-Chamber is not conferred in earthly form, but is received by the soul in its own realm, usually after bodily death. It is not impossible, however, that the Bride-Chamber may return in earthly manifestation when God so decrees.

LESSON XI

OF THE SACRAMENTS, CONSIDERED SINGLY: PART II

198. Why are the sacraments of Holy Orders and Extreme Unction and Healing called sustaining sacraments?

Because by Holy Orders the administering of grace in the Church is sustained, while Unction sustains the dying and the sick.

199. What is Holy Orders?

Holy Orders is the sacrament through which human beings receive the power and grace to perform the sacred duties of the clergy of the Church.

200. By what other term has the Gnostic Church sometimes referred to Holy Orders?

As the Mystery of the Great Name.

201. How many grades or offices of Holy Orders are there?

Nine; these are: cleric, doorkeeper, reader, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, priest and bishop.

202. Which among the grades is qualified to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and thus change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ?

The grades of priest and bishop.

203. What duties is a deacon qualified to perform?

A deacon may perform many duties, such as read the gospel, preach, and serve Holy Communion with the reserved sacrament, but may not celebrate the Holy Eucharist.

204. What are the duties of the lesser grades or orders?

They assist the bishop, the priests and deacons in various ways.

205. What are the effects of the sacrament of Holy Orders?

The effects of ordination to the holy orders are: (1) an increase in sanctifying grace; (2) the gift of sacramental grace, through which one in holy orders receives divine help in the performance of the ministry; (3) an indelible imprint that impresses itself forever on the soul; (4) the authority to perform certain sacred actions appropriate to the office concerned.

206. What are some of the requirements, that a person may receive Holy Orders worthily?

To receive holy orders worthily it is necessary: (1) that one be of good character and in a state of grace; (2) that one be informed in the Mythos of the Gnosis; (3) that one have the intention of devoting one's life to the sacred ministry; (4) that one be determined to teach and serve the Gnosis according to the teachings and practice of the Gnostic Church; and (5) that one should have the inward call from one's spirit and the outward call from one's bishop.

207. Who confers the sacrament of Holy Orders?

The bishop in his capacity as successor of the apostles, is the one who confers the sacrament of Holy Orders.

208. What is the apostolic succession?

The apostolic succession is the mechanism whereby the Holy Orders instituted and administered by Christ are transmitted to His sacramental servants throughout the ages. The Gospel of Philip says: "The Son anointed the apostles and the apostles anointed us".

209. What is the sacrament of Extreme Unction and Healing?

This sacrament is one, where, through the anointing with blessed oil by the minister and through certain special prayers, strength of soul and body are increased in ill or dying persons.

210. What has the sacrament of Extreme Unction and Healing been also sometimes called in the Gnostic Church?

It has been called the Mystery of the Pneumatic Unctions.

211. What are the effects of the sacrament of Extreme Unction and Healing?

The effects are: (1) an increase in sanctifying grace; (2) the gift of comfort and serenity in sickness; (3) preparation for entry into the higher worlds, and (4) healing of the body when expedient for the soul and spirit.

212. Who can administer the sacrament of Extreme Unction and Healing?

Only those in major orders (deacons, priests and bishops) can administer this sacrament.

213. What is a public healing service?

A public healing service consists of the administering of the unction and prayers to persons not necessarily in danger of death.

214. Should sacramental healing be used so as to take the place of medical help?

No. Spiritual means of healing exist to work along with and not to replace physical medicine.

215. What are the substitutional or secondary sacraments?

They are Penance and Matrimony.

216. Why are they called substitutional?

Because Penance came to substitute for Redemption and Matrimony for the Bride-Chamber, and also because their forms of administration underwent many vicissitudes and were subject to doubt and argument.

217. Have the two substitutional sacraments always been considered true sacraments?

No. But there always existed formulae of absolution (Penance), and nuptial blessings for couples.

218. Why do we consider them sacraments today?

Because the higher esoteric sacraments are not generally available, and these two sacraments symbolically represent and foreshadow them.

219. What is the sacrament of Penance?

Penance (absolution) is the sacrament whereby one is cleansed of faults which bind one to the realm of the Archons. (This is known popularly as the remission of sins.)

220. What is the effect of the sacrament of Penance?

Its effect is the experience of divine forgiveness.

221. What must one do to receive this sacrament fully and worthily?

One must: (1) examine one's conscience; (2) be contrite (sorry) for one's offenses; (3) have the firm purpose of not committing offenses again. (Verbal confession is not necessary, although it is sometimes desirable.)

222. What does the Gnostic regard as an offense (sin)?

Gnostics are concerned chiefly with offenses against the supreme commandment given to us by Christ Himself, namely to

love God with the totality of our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is the commandment that has replaced all others, therefore to offend against it is the only true sin.

223. What is guilt?

Guilt is the condition of the mind of the unforgiven. Gnostic Christians have no need of guilt, only of contrition whereby they gain forgiveness.

224. What is the outward sign of divine forgiveness?

It is the sacrament of Penance, or more correctly of absolution.

225. What is the sacrament of Matrimony?

Matrimony is the sacrament whereby two persons enter into a condition of marriage and thereby foreshadow under an earthly semblance the mystery of the Bride-Chamber.

226. What are the effects of the sacrament of Matrimony?

The effects of this sacrament are the presence of sanctifying grace and divine help for the married state.

227. Who administers the sacrament of Matrimony?

The two marital partners administer the sacrament to each other, with the priest acting as a solemnizing agent.

APPENDIX A

PRAYER

A. What is prayer?

Prayer is the lifting up of our minds and hearts to God.

B. How many forms of prayer are there?

There are two forms of prayer: vocal prayer and mental prayer.

C. How many categories of prayer are there?

There are three principal kinds of prayer: (1) prayers of petition and intercession; (2) prayers of adoration and praise; (3) prayers of contemplation. The former two are vocal, the latter one is mental. Prayers of intercession are addressed to Aeonial beings, saints and angels; all other prayers are addressed to God.

D. What do we need to keep in mind when uttering prayers of petition?

We have to keep in mind that God alone knows what is truly useful to the welfare of our spirits and that thus our petitions are contingent upon the will and wisdom of God. (Witness the prayer of Jesus in the garden: "however, not my will, but Thine be done.")

E. What is mental prayer?

Mental prayer is that prayer wherein we inwardly unite our hearts with God. Sometimes it is called meditation.

F. Are vocal and mental prayer both necessary?

Both are necessary facilitators of grace and Gnosis.

APPENDIX B
THE Gnostic IN THE WORLD

A. Do Gnostics strive to improve the world?

Yes, by improving themselves through Gnosis.

B. Why is this so?

The world is in large part the domain of the Archons. As such it is not perfectible. Still it can be somewhat improved and its inherent deficiency diminishes every time a human spirit attains to liberating Gnosis.

C. Are Gnostics inclined to any particular system of worldly government?

Individual Gnostics may support any worldly cause or none. The Gnostic world view, however, advises caution concerning all such involvements.

D. Does the Gnostic world view uphold or rebel against worldly "establishments"?

It does neither, for its attitude is well stated in one of its scriptures: "Do not put your trust in the potentates, rulers, and the rebels of this world, for their authority passes away and comes to an end and their works are as naught."

E. What is the chief requirement of the Gnostic in worldly society?

The chief requirement of the Gnostic in worldly society is an optimum degree of freedom, for without freedom the pursuit of Gnosis becomes very difficult. Since the freedom of Gnostics cannot be separated from the freedoms of all others, the freer all human beings are, the better this is for Gnosis and for Gnostics.

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