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MODERN Gnostics

The LGBTQ Iteration of an Ancient Heresy

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MODERN GnostICS

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There is a certain Proarche, royal, surpassing all thought, a power existing before every other substance, and extended into space in every direction. But along with it there exists a power which I term a Gourd; and along with this Gourd there exists a power which again I term Utter-Emptiness. This Gourd and Emptiness, since they are one, produced (and yet did not simply produce, so as to be apart from themselves) a fruit, everywhere visible, eatable, and delicious, which fruit-language calls a Cucumber. Along with this Cucumber exists a power of the same essence, which again I call a Melon. These powers, the Gourd, Utter-Emptiness, the Cucumber, and the Melon, brought forth the remaining multitude of the delirious melons of Valentinus. For if it is fitting that that language which is used respecting the universe be transformed to the primary Tetrad, and if anyone may assign names at his pleasure, who shall prevent us from adopting these names, as being much more credible than the others, as well as in general use, and understood by all?¹ – Irenaeus.

Introduction

I begin with that quote from the Early Church Apologist Irenaeus first, because it is one of my favorite quotes from Church history and second, because to my mind it drives home the fact that the theological and philosophical battle which we are fighting today over the concept of Biblical truth and the nature of reality is an extension of the battle the Church has been fighting for nearly two thousand years. Over the past year as I have been toying with the idea of this paper, I have been surprised and encouraged to see how many pastors and theologians have made the connection between the ancient heresy of Gnosticism and the ongoing Sexual Revolution unfolding before our eyes. The purpose of this paper is to analyze that connection, especially in regard to the Transexual revolution, and to see if there is any wisdom to be gleaned on how to confront it from those who have gone before us in this battle. To that end we will take a look at the ancient heresy of Gnosticism and how it was confronted, its defining traits that have been passed down to the modern Gnostics, and a Biblical response we can use as we stand for truth in this age of confusion.

¹ Irenaeus, 333.

The Ancient Gnostics

Who were the ancient Gnostics? That is a good place to start if we are to take the liberty of claiming to know their modern successors. While many know the basics of this group, their origins are shrouded in mystery. Some hold that they arose out of Christian ideas meeting up with Greek philosophy. Other suppose that the early Gnostic traditions can be traced back to pagan beliefs that found their way into the Church. Some even see Gnosticism arising out of Jewish mysticism and infiltrating the Church as it grew. Regardless of its origin, we know its effect. Gnosticism was one of the major heresies to threaten the Church in the first three centuries of its existence. As we know, the Church founded on Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Apostles flourished as it spread throughout the Roman world, and it knew a long period of theological peace, unity, and stability – probably lasting all of a couple weeks. Even before the ink on the letters of the New Testament dried there were false teachings sprouting up to confound the young religion. One of the earliest, and one which some scholars even believe we see evidence of in the letters of the New Testament, is Gnosticism.

Gnosticism arose as one of the major heresies by meeting a felt need in the church at that time. While there were many heresies to go around, Gnosticism was one of the three that truly posed an existential threat to the church alongside Montanism and Arianism.² Montanism, being a charismatic heresy, met the need for a dynamic religious experience and involvement in the life of the Church. Arianism, almost opposite of that, met the need for an intellectual religion, a religion that wouldn't flinch from interacting with the academics of the time.

² Docetism, Donatism, Sabellianism, Pelagianism, and more should not be discounted, these are major heresies some of which we still contend with, but most of these lacked the structure found in the big three. They threatened the integrity of the Church and its understanding of the Gospel but were not set up to be an alternative with as much weight as these three were. The Donatists would be the next in line but for them it was just the opposite, they were more structural than theological. Granted, that is my own personal reading of Church history.

Gnosticism, on the other hand, met perhaps a more base need, the need to be special and the need to be relevant. Just as with those first two heresies, we find the need Gnosticism met present in this day and age, just as we find Gnosticism itself, albeit grown up a little.³

The way Gnosticism met its perceived need was by presenting a culturally relevant religious system that benefited those capable of obtaining secret knowledge, a knowledge that proved the world was not what it seemed to be. The particulars of that knowledge depended on the teacher one would seek out. In that way, similar to the pagan mystery religions, Gnosticism came in many different shapes and sizes to fit varying contexts. However, there was a core of their belief that could be trace through most branches.

Their Religious beliefs? Being dualist, Gnostics held that the world was in a state of tension between the material and the immaterial. This tension exists because the material universe was never supposed to exist. In their view, all reality was perfect and whole in its spiritual form, over which was a great deity, one they often equated with God the Father of Jesus Christ not the God of the Old Testament. The greatness of this deity caused emanations that themselves came to be deities in their own right.⁴ There are many different families of deities that emanate and intermix depending on which Gnostic group you were part of, but all agree that at some point you get to what they called the Demiurge. This term, taken from Platonic philosophy, itself the thought or reflection of another god made manifest, decided to make something. That thing was the material realm. This act was considered the fall, and in it many

³ I probably take some liberties here, but my view is that Arianism never left us but, in our age, finds its largest proponent in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Montanism is indicative of a recurring heresy we see manifested in some modern charismatic churches, particularly those who deny the authority of the scriptures when compared to the whims of their leaders, often styling themselves apostles.

⁴ You can see a hint of this in the orthodox theology of Augustine, himself an escaped Gnostic, as he describes the nature of the Holy Spirit akin to the mutual love between the Father and the Son – *On the Holy Trinity* 15.17.27-31.

emanations or fragments of spirit became trapped in crass matter. In order to find salvation, that is escape from this universe of matter and a return to your spiritual abode, you need the correct knowledge that will set you free (hence the name Gnosticism). The problem is acquiring that knowledge. It is not readily available. For the Christian Gnostics there was only one source, the teaching of the greatest emanation to enter reality, Jesus. While he put on a show for his followers here on earth, to a special few he told the truth. If you could find the correct teacher, one who could trace a secret line to Jesus, you could learn this truth and the secrets needed to escape this realm. In doing this you rose from the mundane level of the typical Christian, who still might experience some level of salvation, to an exalted position of one having true Gnosis.

While on this path to escape, you had to deal with the duality of your own nature. Being a spiritual being trapped in a physical shell, you would not want anything to do with the physical realm. That led to the interesting division in the practice of Gnosticism. You had to go to one end or the other of the spectrum of human involvement in this world in order to signify your escape from it. For one group, asceticism was the answer. As you sought the path of escape, you would need to do away with fleshly requirements. Right off the bat, sex was tossed out. Too much fun. In fact, some took it in their hands to rearrange their anatomy and eliminate that desire. Good food, and mostly any food, were also out. Comforts were to be forgotten. A life stricter than the strictest of the desert monks was the way to go. Obviously, this branch could struggle to gain adherents at times, but the allure of being special was enough to draw in many people. Their birth rate was shot though.

The other side had a different view. Since all matter was evil, there really was nothing you could do that wasn't evil. If that is the case, you can and should pursue your every desire. These were the hedonists. Since nothing of matter matters, you can do what you like,

and it has no bearing on any eternal state. In fact, your procurement of enjoyment is a good thing, turning the physical to the metaphysical in the sensations you revel in. I get the feeling their birth rate was a little higher.

Either way you chose, there was still one great pleasure above all else. You were special. You were elite. You had knowledge, often hard won, that those others in the church did not have. You were more interesting; you weren't just a thing of meat but a spiritual emanation who must be greater since you were so much closer to enlightenment. In fact, you could be a god hidden in there somewhere. You could look down from your lofty perch and sneer at all those lesser folks who would never know the uniqueness of your experience. For that, many people were willing to seek out Gnosis, whichever path it might lead them down.

Why would we compare such a thing to the LGBTQ movement or the Transexual revolution that is upon us? To be fair, they are not the ancient Gnostics. Ancient Gnosticism had a religious framework that many in the LGBTQ movement would reject. There are philosophical elements that are long dated. But there is a core identity to the Gnostics that has persisted throughout the centuries, and it is this identity that the LGBTQ movement currently holds onto. As NT Wright wrote in a letter to the London Times,

The confusion about gender identity is a modern, and now internet-fueled, form of the ancient philosophy of Gnosticism. The Gnostic, one who “knows”, has discovered the secret of “who I really am”, behind the deceptive outward. This involves denying the goodness, or even the ultimate reality, of the natural world.⁵

How do we define a Gnostic identity then?

⁵ I struggled to find exact printing, but this was the letter to the editor on 7/4/2017 in response to several articles on gender and gender fluidity.

The Gnostic Identity

By means of specious and plausible words, they cunningly allure the simple-minded to inquire into their system; but they nevertheless clumsily destroy them, while they initiate them into their blasphemous and impious opinions respecting the Demiurge; and these simple ones are unable, even in such a matter, to distinguish falsehood from truth.⁶ – Irenaeus.

What are the fundamentals that defines a Gnostic? While Gnosticism was incredibly varied within itself, I make out five critical elements that give one a Gnostic identity, though this list is not exhaustive. These are characteristics that are capable of transferring themselves to other religious and philosophical contexts just as Gnosticism itself might have done from pagan religions into Christianity. These five characteristics are a Salvation by Knowledge, a Conscious Elitism, Cultural Relevance, Deliberate Redefinition, and Antagonistic Dualism.

The core identity of Gnosticism is where it gets its name from – gnosis, the Greek word for knowledge. The Gnostic idea was that one could achieve salvation only through special knowledge. This by itself is not a unique trait of Gnosticism. Even orthodox Christianity could be said to hold the same. We orthodox Christians contend that there are certain truths you must assent to by faith in order to be saved, namely the sufficiency and deity of Christ, the reality of your sins, the existence of God, pretty much all that is written down in the Nicene Creed. You could claim that those are items of knowledge needing to be known for salvation. However, for the Gnostic the concept of knowledge and salvation take on different meanings.

Salvation in the Gnostic view does not equate to the Christian view of salvation. For the Christian, salvation is necessary because of sin, an inherited brokenness and set of deliberate actions that separates us from God. Salvation is being put back into right relationship with God, through the work of Jesus Christ, with the hope that one would be able to spend eternity with

⁶ Irenaeus, 315.

God enjoying that relationship. In order to reach that salvation a sacrifice was needed to pay for the penalty of sin, and that could only be paid by God through the death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. For the Gnostic there is no sin in the sense that Christians understand the term. No action on our part separated us from God. Rather, it was the action of an outside deity that trapped us here, and it is this physical world which continues to delude us into thinking we are meant to be here. The only path to salvation is gaining the knowledge leading to self-actualization. Only by realizing who we truly are, are we saved. That is the key. That is how we find our fulfillment as we await our escape from the material. D.A. Carson put it this way, “salvation is secured, not by the substitutionary death of a sacrifice, but by the knowledge of one’s true identity.”⁷ So, the first characteristic is a salvation that brings self-fulfillment based on the knowledge of the true you that is hidden behind the flesh.

The second characteristic develops out of the rarity of the knowledge needed for salvation, the enduring characteristic of Conscious Elitism. To be saved required special knowledge that only special spiritual people could gain. To have it was to be among the elite, and this was something to be sought after. In the Gnostic myths some people were only material, some a mixture which might be described as soulical, but those able to get the knowledge needed for salvation were spiritual. In Ancient Gnosticism, this was a draw to those who felt the need to rise above those who were less than them in the church. As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire its first draw was to the downtrodden, those who were the subjugated and oppressed. Certainly, powerful people were called as well, but even as the majority of the population lived in poverty all the more did Christianity consist heavily of that group. As the

⁷ Carson, 35

powerful joined, there was tension between classes. We see that clearly in the New Testament, especially in a passage like 1 Corinthians 11:21-22 (ESV):

For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

Within that tension Gnosticism provided an alternative. You can be part of the church but have an exalted position. You were better and you were unique. While the masses were simple folks who might reach some level of enlightenment, you had a spiritual nature that they could not comprehend, and you were in contact with the experts who had the special knowledge which led to salvation. Everett Ferguson explains this damaging aspect,

*Individual Gnostic thinkers may indeed have been humble, but the Gnostic approach itself created different classes that placed the ones with the 'true insight' in a special camp superior to ordinary Christians. Intellectual elitism is a danger always to those 'in the know.'"*⁸

Cultural Relevance is the next characteristic. At the heart of Gnosticism was an attempt to be relevant to the culture and philosophies of the world. In its time, Ancient Gnosticism borrowed heavily from Greek paganism and philosophy to do just that, attempting to make Christianity relevant with the times, and this after barely a century. Seeing this bent Nicholas Perrin in his article on Gnosticism states that, "Much of what is commonly considered gnostic seems to reflect an accommodation to the Platonic philosophical orientation of the cultures."⁹ As we look at it, even the term for the creator of the material realm was taken from Plato, the Demiurge. In trying to conform to the worldly culture and satisfy some of that need for elitism by connecting with the elites of the world, Gnosticism had to bend, and occasionally break, the

⁸ Ferguson, 100.

⁹ Perrin, 256.

truths of Christianity. Once more, Ferguson states, “The risk is one that has to be taken in attempting to relate the Christian faith to whatever culture one finds oneself in, but the results of such an extreme appropriation warn against moving from communication to acceptance.”¹⁰ The Gnostics were full on accepting the wisdom of the world, and that was to their detriment.

The next characteristic, the one that facilitated its cultural relevance, is their Deliberate Redefinition. They claimed to be Christian, but the meaning of Christian terms would disprove that. The easiest step was simply redefining terms to meet the current need, so they introduced their own meaning into words that were already in use. This allowed them to keep the title of being Christian while holding to the worldly philosophies around them. We find them doing this with many Biblical stories, looking for new meaning and allegories to explain what is going on. A common tactic was to see number references as truly referring to the deities. We have stories where twelve comes up time after time, so twelve is really a reference to the twelve deities in action and arising from one another.¹¹ Again, Ferguson highlights the danger, “the Gnostics were able to use the Christian Scriptures and conform to the Christian creed, because they gave the words a different meaning.”¹² This allowed them to exist within Christianity and to subvert some people just coming into the faith who were trying to figure it out. In this way it used redefinition of terms like a parasite, as Perrin states, “Reliant on Biblical figures and terminology, Gnosticism has sometimes been regarded as a ‘parasitic religion’”¹³

¹⁰ Ferguson, 100

¹¹ Irenaeus, 343

¹² Ferguson 100

¹³ Perrin, 256

The final characteristic is Antagonistic Dualism. An exciting characteristic to round it out. I use this term deliberately to draw the difference between Gnosticism and many other religious views. There are many religions that preach dualism – that there is a balance in the universe between order and chaos, good and evil, and that they exist in lock step. Antagonism holds that there are forces in the universe that war against each other, sometimes in an eternal battle that might look like dualism for a time, while at other times there is a hope for victory. Both ideas are rejected by Christianity. There is no dualism, neither equal powers at war nor antagonism between God and the nature of the world He created. There is the omnipotent God and the world He created that He called good. There is the all-powerful God and then there is everything else that combined does not compare to Him. Evil is not equal in power to Good and Satan is no more than a wayward servant of God, not a power capable of truly contending with His majesty. There certainly is a war, but there is no question of victory. The glory goes to God. These things shape our worldview and give us hope that God is truly in control.

That cannot be said of Gnosticism. The Gnostics held that there was dualism in the antagonism between matter and spirit, matter being the evil creation of an evil or misled god and spirit being the essential nature of the highest deity. One side good and one side evil. The antagonism began with the faulty act of creation. The spirit is at war with the physical and the hope of victory is that the spiritual would reign, but there is not necessarily a guarantee to that effect. They were locked in this battle meaning that they had to have a very black and white view of the world. This became evident in their lifestyles – all or nothing, hedonist or ascetic. With such a view they held antagonism close to their heart, especially seen in a late Gnostic like Marcion, they could broach no difference of opinion in their camp. There is only Gnosis. Given these five characteristics, how does this equate to the Modern Gnostics?

The Modern Gnostics

Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than the truth itself.¹⁴ – Irenaeus.

How do the characteristic of Gnosticism line up with the LGBTQ movement? There has been a trend for some time to identify especially Transsexualism with Gnosticism. The earliest I was able to trace this back to in the literature was to Dr. Oliver O'Donovan in his paper *Transsexualism and Christian Marriage*. This article, in a 1983 edition of *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, started a discussion of what the Church's response should be to the newly arising phenomenon of transsexual marriage where one partner had undergone surgical alteration. While he seemed to lean on the side of accepting the metaphysical sense of self as an accurate understanding of sex, he made a note of how this could be seen as a gnostic idea.

If I claim to have a "real sex," which may be at war with the sex of my body and is at least in a rather uncertain relationship to it, I am shrinking from the glad acceptance of myself as a physical as well as a spiritual being, and seeking self-knowledge in a kind of Gnostic withdrawal from material creation.

Returning to Nicholas Perrin, as he develops his idea of Gnosticism in the modern world he turns to developments in existentialism and postmodern philosophy.

Seeing self-actualization as the means of transcending a hostile universe, Gnosticism has been rightly deemed the forerunner of modern Existentialism. It is equally appropriate to compare Gnostic hermeneutics with deconstructionism's emphasis on the instability of the linguistic sign: both rely on the metaphysical judgment that creation is fundamentally incoherent. For Gnosticism, existentialism and deconstruction alike, salvation/knowledge is obtained individually, quite apart from the mediation of communal interpretations and instructions.¹⁵

¹⁴ Irenaeus, 315

¹⁵ Perrin, 258.

While that draws a line from Ancient Gnosticism through philosophical developments up to some ideas found in the LGBTQ movement, can they really be called Modern Gnostics? I would say yes, especially as we see those five characteristics at work under the rainbow flag, Salvation by Knowledge, a Conscious Elitism, Cultural Relevance, Deliberate Redefinition, and Antagonistic Duality.

When it comes to the modern Gnostics, one of the surest areas of connection is in the concept of Salvation by Knowledge. Just as with the ancient Gnostics, there is a perversion of what Salvation and Knowledge mean. For the modern Gnostic, salvation can be equated with self-actualization. Thanks to Maslow's hierarchy of needs this has been drummed into many of us, but for the modern gnostic this is truly salvation. To reach the point of being who you truly are inside is to find fulfillment. Like the ancient Gnostic, there is no concept of sin as we know it, aside from violating consent, but real brokenness is living a "lie" about who you are so salvation is finding a way to uncover that, making this a social and psychological salvation. The means of salvation then is the special knowledge of what you are inside. If you can come to a realization of that you have salvation in hand, but that is only validated if what is inside differs from the outer expression. That aligns closely with the ancient Gnostics. For the youth of our age this leads to countless identity issues where ever new genders need to be concocted to fit your secret knowledge, and sometimes only you have this experience. What we find is that the nature of this knowledge and the salvation it brings leads directly to the second characteristic that is shared, the Conscious Elitism.

The Modern Gnostics are the elite because of the knowledge they have, the salvation they have obtained, and the support of cultural elites around them, those experts who extol the

knowledge they have obtained. You are more unique based on what is inside. This is the fulfillment of that need to be special, the need to be unique, the need to be better. The elite power structure this creates is the modern phenomenon of intersectionality. Your power and privilege is based upon the knowledge you have obtained about your identity that might have brought shame in any other age. The more diverse genders you can claim, the more elite status you have. It should sadden us that people in our culture, and yes this is a primarily western and American cultural issue, that they need to find something to fill the void of identity in such a way. By being different they are able to have a place. Given any internal psychological struggle with sexual identity or orientation, said struggles now blessed by the elites, they can simply find the knowledge and have an elite place in society of their own making.

Where this interacts directly with the Church is with the push for cultural relevance especially as the LGBTQ movement makes forays into the Church. First it is right to acknowledge that this movement is only possible because of the idea of the self that developed out of the Christian understanding of the world, much as modern science and philosophy also have Christianity to thank for their existence. Regardless, our secular culture has left Christianity behind in the modern era. Those who claim to be in the Church but who also claim to be proponents of the sexual revolution seek to bring theology into relevance with the culture, seeking to make the philosophies of the world part of the church. Doing so is branded as love and is claimed to be a legitimate theological exercise. This relevance often takes two routes. The first is the movement to place experience over Scripture. One mother who had the experience of raising a child who came out as transsexual demonstrated how a desire for relevance overcame orthodox beliefs. After dismissing the idea of Biblical authority this mother writes, "If Jesus were a parent, he would not have turned away from the transgender child and he

certainly would not have tossed them from his life. Focus only on loving and accepting the transgender people who paths cross yours.”¹⁶ You can hear the truth in there, but the purpose is to be relevant to the world and choose its ways over Scripture, as she goes on, “Is it not more peaceful to live in a world where we invite everyone to the assembly? Where everyone is welcome to the table?”¹⁷

Just the same as the ancient Gnostic, to reach this relevance Deliberate Redefinition is needed. By now most people are aware of the many redefinitions that have been taking place at the behest of these modern Gnostics. Grammar rules have been updated to promote new gender schemes. Words we once knew have been redefined and repurposed to promote new ideologies. I have found this present in nearly all the Trans-apologetic writers I have read. One common example was just one of the many uses of redefinition found in Austen Hartke’s *Transforming*. For this young lady who has tragically rejected her sex, she sees in the image of the eunuch the life of the transsexual person. She redefines the concept of being an actual or spiritual eunuch to justify her position:

*While all Christians are indeed called to become a part of the topsy-turvy kingdom, Jesus says this teaching about eunuchs is not for everyone. Not every Christian is born intersex, has their body changed without their consent, or feels the call to a life outside the gender and sex norms of their times.*¹⁸

This extends beyond theology. In order to interact with the culture this movement has taken to redefining many things, from marriage to gender. The necessary results being an academically

¹⁶ Evan, 130.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Hartke, 108.

driven mindset that needs to redefine the world to fits its evolving views which stand in contrast to the religious standards of the community.

Finally, is there antagonistic dualism? That may be one of the clearest areas both ontologically and methodologically. When we turn to the Transsexual or non-binary side of the movement we see this common formula -

I am a (Fill in the Blank) trapped in a (Fill in the Blank) body.

That is just about the definition of antagonistic dualism. For those who claim to find themselves on the spectrum of genders, they claim that their bodies do not reflect their inner self and so either that body needs to be denied or it needs to be altered to match the internal self. This is a fascinating dualism, as there is antagonism between the material and the immaterial though the material can be made to look like the immaterial, and many holding this view deny the immaterial side to begin with. With the ancient Gnostics they chose the hedonist of ascetic path, modern Gnostics mostly stick to the hedonist path, but they have new shades of color for it.

Sadly, this is something that can show up in Christianity, especially among trichotomists¹⁹ A common saying I have heard which matches too well to the Gnostic view is that we are spirit critters in an earth suit.²⁰ When our time comes, we burst out and into the spiritual realm. That is a faulty view that denies our nature which is as an embodied soul. You might be able to logically divide parts, but we are all one unit complete as body, soul, and spirit. For the modern Gnostic, though, they have taken this dualism to be a point of pride, they willfully reject the material, even celebrating the rejection with parties. It is interesting that as sexual identity comes up in some Gnostic literature, we see inklings of what was to be. One great example is

¹⁹ Me being a trichotomist.

²⁰ That was a favorite saying of the late trichotomist Bill Gillham.

found in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas where, in sayings 112-114, as we see the mutability of nature so that one can be made ready for enlightenment:

Jesus said, "Woe to the flesh that depends on the soul; woe to the soul that depends on the flesh." His disciples said to Him, "On what day will the kingdom come?" Jesus said, "It will not come while people watch for it; they will not say, 'Look, here it is, 'or 'Look, there it is' but the kingdom of the father is spread out over the earth, and men do not see it.'" Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mariham go out from among us, for women are not worthy of the life." Jesus said, "Look, will lead her that I may make her male, in order that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter into the kingdom of heaven."²¹

That Gnostic image reaches far too many of our young women nowadays, as Abigail Shirer brings up in her book, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing our Daughters*. What we see is that ancient Gnosticism at its core has been able to make the jump into the modern world as the modern Gnostics of the LGBTQ movement.

Does this really matter? Is this just an intellectual exercise to draw connections with ancient thoughts? This matters because we do need to approach the paradigmatic shifts in our culture not from a political or sociological view but from a theological view. What we see in the LGBTQ and transsexual movement is nothing less than a religious revival. This is the self-centered theology of our age meeting its highpoint. As theologians and leaders in the Church, how then should be approach this concern?

²¹ Schneemelcher, 112-114.

The Biblical Response

*For this reason, I have brought forward their modes of expressing themselves, that thus thou mightest understand the deceitfulness of their procedure, and the wickedness of their error.*²² –
Irenaeus.

Now it is time for the response. How do we as Christian leaders confront this rising conflagration that is seeking to engulf us? And make no mistake, even now there is a push to make speaking against the sexual revolution illegal activity, so it is seeking to engulf us. What are we to do? Here I will lay out five suggestion we can take as a Biblical response: Learn from our Elders, Take the Hits, Take the Long View, Speak the Truth, and Love Well.

Learn from our Elders

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Ephesians 4:11-14

It is comforting to remember that those who came before us faced circumstances no less challenging than what we face today. In fact, often their situations were far more dire. Despite those challenges they held on and saw some measure of victory. We can look back to those men

²² Irenaeus, 329

of faith who came before us and do likewise. When it comes to confronting Gnosticism, perhaps the greatest champion in church history we can look to is Irenaeus.

It was Irenaeus who looked out from his place of ministry and saw the danger brewing in this thing called Gnosticism. As more and more church members began to fall for this secret knowledge, he felt compelled to respond. Being only the third generation from Jesus – he sat at the feet of Polycarp who was a disciple of the Apostle John – Irenaeus spoke with a great deal of authority. His way of confronting the growing problem was straightforward. Instead of backing down and being quiet, he was willing to talk about it openly while challenging it with scripture, he boldly reduced their worldview to a point of absurdity, and he challenged their claims to authority. What would learning from him look like for us?

To follow in his footsteps would take us being willing to confront the LGBTQ movement where we see it in our communities without backing down. In the name of love and living in peace it is very easy to ignore the concern or turn to other issues, but even now people in our congregation, especially the younger ones, are being exposed to these ideologies. Irenaeus knew that the carefully crafted lies of the Gnostics would “draw away the minds of the inexperience and take them captive.”²³ That is happening to us as well. To be ready to stand against it we first need to make sure that we have a firm grasp on the Scriptures. I hope that needs not be said, but that is the first place. Second, we must have some understanding of the modern Gnostics even as he had a great understanding of the Ancient Gnostics. Hearing their arguments and reading their studies are necessary for confronting the lies that will be brought before our congregations. With that down, openly challenging the modern Gnostics will require us refuting their lies in our sermons when applicable to the text, and God will make it applicable as is needed. Eventually,

²³ Irenaeus, 315.

no matter how small or remote we are, we will find this entering the church at some point. What do you do? Be willing to engage. Entire denominations have fallen because the majority who knew there was an issue refused to step up and say anything. We have the authority of the Scriptures – do not be afraid of using it or you are sheathing your sword before the battle starts.

Walking in Irenaeus' footsteps would also include reducing the LGBTQ and especially the Transsexual worldview to its absurdity. It is absurd and even contradictory, but now with decades of its influence many of the so-called 'experts' espouse the LGBTQ worldview, and it takes courage and bluntness to point out that no number of PhDs can change what truth is.

That goes hand in hand with the last way, challenging their authority. While appealing to the experts is a logical fallacy, it is still a common way to shut down arguments in our day. At this point we need to be bold standing up to these claims of authority. We might not be able to say we are grand-disciples of John, but we have access to the Word of God and can stand on that authority. Their claims of authority need to be derided. Now that the "science" has changed on sexuality we cannot bow down to the idols the world worships. Scientist and doctors who make claims about transsexual identities cannot be upheld or given any credence. They created fields to produce what they wanted – of course their studies would give them the data they want to have. Do not sit back and take it. If you see this as a battle we must face, then let's turn to those before us who have fought this fight and learn something from them. In doing this we are not turning to our elders to find secret knowledge to salvation, we are proclaiming the freely given truth that was passed down to the Apostles. And if we are to pass that on to the next generation ourselves, we need to speak the truth.

Speak the Truth

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 8:31-32

It's hard to imagine how much of a challenge this one can be. You would think that speaking the truth would be easy, but with all the mental health concerns and struggles among that community it seems at times that the best thing we can do is change our language to be encouraging and affirming, even if we don't believe in their lifestyle changes. Just think about the problem of mental illness. We are told that by using the wrong language (which just happens to be the right language) we are causing incredible harm. Speech is violence. However, even in affirming communities' mental issues depression and suicide remain very high – and we are not helping people by lying.

What I mean by this is that we have to stop giving in to the perversion of language that we have witnessed. I know this firsthand – as a Millennial I have experienced an altered sense of reality dealing with these issues thanks to public school and popular concepts. I naturally go along with the changes in language that amount to lies. For example, you might notice I have been using the term transsexualism instead of the more common transgender. The term transsexual fell out of favor of the LGBTQ community as gender was touted as their new buzzword. Gender is a term given new meaning in the past few decades for the purpose of separating sex from the physical characteristics. Its addition to our vocabulary was for the purpose of promoting the sexual revolution and yet we jumped right in there using that term.

It may be controversial, but we can speak the truth about these situations and about people. I know that even close friends of mine would heartedly disagree, but I say we need to

reclaim the language. Use the words meant to be used. In all love tell the truth. Do not use made up or substituted pronouns. Talk about things as they are. Do not respond to corrections. You may deadname or misgender, but you will be speaking the truth. A lie will never set someone free; it is the truth that sets free. Of course, if you speak the truth, get ready to take the hits.

Take the Hits

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:6-7

When you speak the truth, the Gnostic mentality will reach for the expert and the elite to “correct” the situation. That is the purpose of Elitism, you are special, and you know more. While this tactic runs afoul of the Law of Expert Dynamics – For every expert there is an equally credentialed and opposite expert – it is still one used against us. We should not bow to the expert but rather there are times we simply need to take the hit. If we speak the truth that is exactly what we will find. What we need to do is continue trusting God even as we suffer hits. This can be hard, not necessarily for the direct pain we experience if we are ostracized or kicked off of platforms, but rather the relationships we long to have that get strained. This takes faith in what God is doing. Do not get angry and hit back, rather stand for truth and endure the consequences.

What will those hits look like? These will include loss of reputation, loss of relationship, verbal attacks, doxing, legal challenges, physical violence, and more. We need to be willing to walk through the fire for the sake of truth and for the sake of our congregations. If laws do get

passed which will restrict what we can say than we need to be willing to stand up and continue despite the cost. I am not particularly concerned about fighting to get the rules changed. In fact, having the law against us might drive the truth home even more, but we will need to take that stand. Sometimes that means taking some blows. We can do that and turn the other cheek because we can take the long view.

Take the Long View

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

2 Peter 3:8-9

This is not a battle won overnight, and it is recurring because the Enemy is patient. We are not going to beat Gnosticism outright – we haven’t in two thousand years. It might be demanded of us to adjust to the culture now being dictated by the modern Gnostics, and this may be attractive at times, but we have to look to a much longer view. We stand on the immovable Rock of Ages. While we can try to marshal our forces, get political power, do what we can – God is proving over and over that only He can do the work. And that is how it’s supposed to be. To take the long view is to step back into the framework of the Bible and see that we are on this journey to Revelation. Whatever the pressure feels like it is now we know that God Himself will work it out. We don’t need to pull a Moses and try and do it all ourselves. As I considered this it reminded me of the basic framework I use for viewing the Bible, as the repeating idea of God making a case for Himself against the frailty of man. Sorry for getting a little dispensational – but each step if God showing us that man cannot do it.

- Innocence – In an environment without sin if man tries to do it alone, he fails.
- Conscience – With simply the Image of God on him man will still run from God.
- Government – With basic rules to govern man still will not follow God.
- Law – Even with the holy law of God, knowing what is required, man falls short.
- Grace – Even with the example of the Body of Christ the world by and large fails.
- Millennium – A thousand years of Christ's reign and mankind will still turn from God.

All proof we can't do it, even with progressively more help. We need to hand it over to Him and continue standing firm in the time we are given. This will mean sticking to the historical truths and not yielding to the pressure to compromise knowing that we may not live to see the victory, but that God will get it. And in all this, we need to love well.

Love Well

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

1 John 3:18

Love is the answer when those who are against us but are not our enemies suffer the consequences of their sins. They might train their antagonism on us, but we must love them in return. It is all too easy to get polemical and attack, but we need to love these people who get caught in the modern Gnosticism. Even as I am one who struggles with empathy, my heart breaks for people struggling in these types of sexual sin. For many, this did not come about by choice, and choosing to live the Christian life for some will come with challenges I am so thankful I do not have to walk with. Even those sold out to this modern Gnosticism need us to love them well. That means not seeing them as the enemy. Our enemy is not one of flesh and

blood. We can't look at them as simply a political opponent, as an obstacle to our vision of the world. We need to be welcoming to these modern Gnostics, not in a way that endangers the church but in a way that brings them to our dinner table and allows us to engage in a way we can be transparent, honest, and loving. When you speak, let it be with love. When you interact, let it be for their benefit. Meet needs that might come up. Be there and love well. While our words might be labeled harmful and bigoted, let our actions show our love in a way that cannot be denied. In doing so we may reach these modern Gnostic with the love of Christ and bring them back into the fold.

Conclusion

This Gnosticism is all around us and even striving to enter the Church. Will we live like the early proto-Gnostics and decide the easy course of going with the culture, or will we stand like the Church Fathers of the second and third century who were willing to be embarrassed, exiled, or even executed for the truth. Remember, as leaders it is not ourselves we chiefly need to worry about, it is the flocks we have been entrusted with. Will we lead them well in the trials ahead and set for them the example that words matter, matter matters, truth matters, love matters, and the glory of God matters the most? Let us boldly stand for Biblical truth and Christ-like love in this confused generation and perhaps shine a light do away with some of that confusion.

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