

The Pauline Canon and Gnosticism

PETER JONES

Abstract

Gnosticism and canon are as different as contemporary theological liberalism and biblical orthodoxy! Indeed, the latest versions of liberalism seek to create a “new” view of Christianity shorn of any notion of creed or canon and based precisely on the faith of their ancient Gnostic counterparts. While the early church in its most ancient creed affirmed the validity of Scripture (1 Cor 15:3-8), the Gnostics spent a good part of their time reviling those Scriptures—opting for a “canon within the canon”—and the God, the Creator, who inspired them. This perennial heresy returns today in various spiritual forms of paganized Christianity, but they will not prevail against the historic rock of the biblical canon.

While the reader might be tempted to believe that Gnosticism is an ancient heresy that the church dealt with definitively in the first three centuries, nothing could be further from the truth. Gnosticism is alive and well today, present in unusual places in its various modern forms, both within and outside the church. The canon is an idea that deeply divided ancient Gnosticism from biblical orthodoxy, and in the same way it also divides modern forms of Gnosticism from contemporary biblical orthodoxy.

I. Definition of Gnosticism

Gnosticism was a second- to fourth-century heresy claiming that salvation could only be gained through esoteric, mystical knowledge, or *gnosis*—the knowledge that one is divine. Gnostics held that the material world (matter) is evil and that only the spirit is good. Gnosticism thus proposes a search for the self, based not in historical scriptural revelation or in reason, but within one's own self, via mystical, out-of-body experiences and trances. In the Gnostic system, the Creator of material things is actually Satan, and the Old Testament is understood to be full of diabolical lies and foolishness. The true Gnostic God is the Father of the Totalities, and the true Jesus is a spirit-being sent from this pantheistic reality behind all things. Matter is illusion and history is without significance.

The Gnostic writings are extensive. In particular, fifty ancient texts, the earliest of which dates from the end of the second century A.D.—the so-called Nag Hammadi library—were found in 1945. For some progressive “Christians” this promised a new day for a deconstruction of orthodoxy both in its theological and in its historical claims. They hailed these Gnostic Gospels as the “lost” books of the Bible, attempted to date some of them, like the *Gospel of Thomas*, in the first century, and must wonder why they were not part of the Canon.

In the 1970s, Harvard scholar Elaine Pagels won awards for her book *The Gnostic Gospels*, in which she tries to show these gospels to be an early, valid expression of Christianity that was later suppressed by patriarchal, power-hungry bishops.¹ Harvey Cox, in 2009, stated that early Christian Gnosticism has been proven by modern scholarship to exist from the earliest times and will be the basis of interfaith spiritual dialogue.² Cox wondered what would happen when “the cat is completely out of the bag,” when everyone learns that much of original Christianity was actually Gnostic and that from now on we no longer need creeds and canons.³ In 2012, Diana Butler Bass, a historian of Christianity and a leading voice in progressive and “emergent” Christianity, announced in her book *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, in perfectly Gnostic terminology, that God is now “defined in less dualistic terms” in favor of “finding one's self in God and find[ing] God in one's self.”⁴ For Bass, this

¹ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979).

² Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 87.

³ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of the Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

involves praying to God as “our Mother” and seeing God “less in terms of an absolutist, sin-hating, death-dealing ‘almighty Father in Heaven’ and more in terms of ... the nourishing spirit of mother earth.”⁵

II. *Gnosticism and the Canon*

In spite of the late twentieth-century liberal attempt to rehabilitate Gnosticism as a genuine form of early Christianity, as noted above, not one of the Gnostic texts met the criteria for canonicity when the canon was formally constituted in the fourth century, so none were included. This was not because of the power-hungry bishops, as Pagels claims, but because Gnostic theology was a total denial of authentic Christian faith. As to canonicity, New Testament scholar Ben Witherington argues that “Gnosticism was a nonstarter from the outset because it rejected the very book the earliest Christians recognized as authoritative—the Old Testament!”⁶ Interestingly, even the so-called proto-Gnostic Marcion (who rejected the Old Testament and created the first “canon” around A.D. 150 containing New Testament books shorn of any references to the Old Testament) did not include in his canonical list the *Gospel of Thomas*, considered the earliest Gnostic book. This exclusion is telling, since Marcion was an early and committed Gnostic who would have given anything to include such a gospel, since it fit his own criteria so beautifully. Though some radical New Testament scholars have claimed that Thomas is earlier than Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Marcion’s omission can only mean that the *Gospel of Thomas* was written later than A.D. 150, in which case subsequent Gnostic texts were written later as well. Thus none of them could qualify according to the canonical criterion of apostolicity, which accepted only books written by an apostle who saw the historical Jesus.⁷

III. *Gnosticism and Paganism*

In spite of the Gnostic gospels’ superficial “Christian” elements, such as a focus on Jesus, the early Christian fathers knew that Gnosticism was merely a variant of ancient paganism with a few “Christian” additions.⁸ The mystery

⁵ Ibid., 186.

⁶ Ben Witherington, *The Gospel Code: Novel Claims About Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Da Vinci* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 115.

⁷ See Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 73–75.

⁸ See Peter Jones, *Stolen Identity: The Conspiracy to Reinvent Jesus* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2006).

religions of the Greco-Roman Empire (in particular the worship of the goddess of the underworld, Isis) captured the attention of certain Gnostic sects. Hippolytus, the second-century anti-Gnostic church father, documented that the Gnostics of his day sought “the wisdom of the pagans,”⁹ in particular by attending Isis-worshipping ceremonies, in order to understand “the universal mystery.”¹⁰ This is akin to the interfaith worship services we observe today. However, it was clear in the early days that Gnosticism had nothing to do with the faith of the Bible, especially since it denied any value to the Old Testament and rejected the fundamental defining doctrines of the New Testament.

A case in point is the thinking of the so-called disciple “Thomas” of the *Gospel of Thomas*. When “Jesus” asks him, “Who do men say that I am?” (as in the canonical Gospel narrative of Matt 16:16), Thomas answers, “Master, I am incapable of saying what you are like.” At this, Jesus rebukes him, saying, “I am not your master.” Then the Gnostic Jesus takes Thomas to one side and tells him secrets. When he returns to the other disciples, they ask about the secret teaching, but Thomas refuses to tell them, knowing, as the text states, that “they will stone him.” This is a hint as to what the secret teaching was. Stoning was the Jewish penalty for blasphemy—making oneself God. Jesus will not allow Thomas to call him master because Thomas has “drunk from the bubbling stream.” Jesus further declares, “He who drinks from my mouth will become like me. I will become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed.”¹¹ Thomas is the true Gnostic who knows himself to be divine, like Jesus. Here in this enlightenment of *gnosis* that Thomas undergoes, the Creator-creature distinction of biblical revelation is utterly undermined.¹² So from whence does this unbiblical thinking arise?

IV. *Gnosticism and Hinduism*

The same destruction of the Creator/creature distinction has become widespread in the West due to the invasion of Eastern Vedic practice. Gnosticism was and still is a Western version of Hindu paganism—to which, ironically, so many “Christian” liberals now flock to discover “true” spirituality—that

⁹ Quoted by Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 14.

¹⁰ Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 5.9.10; cf. Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 199), 147, 154; ANF 5:57.

¹¹ *Gospel of Thomas*, saying 13, in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 108.

¹² See my larger treatment in Jones, *Stolen Identity*, 64–66.

same “universal mystery” the Gnostics sought in the days of Hippolytus. There is, however, a radical difference between Christianity and Hinduism:

Hinduism sees the physical realm as more or less one and the same as God. It considers the cosmos of no importance in seeking God. Christian belief sees God as separate from physical realm of earth and yet it is a reflection of His goodness and glory. Though it is under a curse, it still speaks to man about His creator and one day will be redeemed with man.¹³

There is no possible synthesis.

As we noted above, Bass suggests rediscovering the worship of the goddess, and Cox rejects creeds for the sake of amorphous “spiritual” practice. But the comparison goes deeper. Scholars have long suggested a profound relationship between the Vedic traditions of Hinduism and Gnosticism.¹⁴ Both reject the flesh as an illusion and seek absorption into the spirit. The term *gnosis* closely resembles the Hindu term *Veda*, since the Sanskrit root of *Veda* is *vid*, to know. Thus these two religious systems are actually known by the same term, which means “knowledge.” This is not factual or intellectual knowledge but spiritual enlightenment. Both require various mystical techniques for acquiring the higher states of altered consciousness. In Hinduism, deep mysticism via the mindless repetition of mantras achieves the enlightened goal of non-dual perception. In the Nag Hammadi *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, Hermes, the father, “instructs the initiate in secret knowledge and guides him into an ecstatic experience of the eighth and the ninth” levels of bliss.¹⁵ This includes a written chant: “a o e eee ooo iii oooo ooooo uuuuuu oo oooooooooo oooooooooo oo.”¹⁶ Pagels states correctly, “They [the Gnostics] argued that one’s own experience offers the ultimate criterion for truth ... Gnosticism has nothing to do with belief but with dimension of experience and religious imagination.”¹⁷ This connection with Eastern religions is clearly shown by Pagels, who seeks to characterize Gnosticism as “a wider valid expression of Christianity”;¹⁸ in her personal

¹³ “Hinduism and Christianity,” Trail Christian Fellowship, http://www.trail.org/pages/page.asp?page_id=273593.

¹⁴ Mark H. Gaffney, *Gnostic Secrets of the Naassenes: The Initiatory Teachings of the Last Supper* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2004), 160.

¹⁵ James Brashler et al., “*The Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth*: Introduction,” *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 292.

¹⁶ *The Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth* 10–15.

¹⁷ Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 25.

¹⁸ Elaine Pagels, “What Was Lost Is Found: A Wider View of Christianity and Its Roots,” in *Secrets of the Code: The Unauthorized Guide to the Mysteries of the Da Vinci Code*, ed. Daniel Burstein (New York: CDS Books, 2004), 100.

life also, she inevitably tries to blend Buddhism with her version of Christianity,¹⁹ a version so “wide” that it has lost all coherent meaning.

V. *Gnosticism and Sexuality*

Not only is Gnosticism returning through Eastern spirituality, it is taking the West by storm in its redefinition of sexuality. Robert Reilly, a Roman Catholic jurist and astute cultural observer, recently formulated his critique of the modern homosexual movement by describing it as a contemporary form of Gnosticism because it reinvents reality.²⁰ He argues correctly that Gnosticism does not accept the evidence of material reality, but rather looks within for personal truth. It is true that certain contemporary views of sexuality reject the “given-ness” of biology, favoring the idea of “gender” as a self-constructed result of individual choice. In my own study of this ancient heresy,²¹ I discuss how Gnosticism’s dualism between flesh (bad) and spirit (good) resulted in the rejection of the objectivity of the flesh, including normal marriage and childbirth (“flee maternity” and “destroy the works of femaleness,” *Dialogue of the Savior* 144.9–10). It proposed the spiritual construct of androgyny as the ideal (*Gospel of Thomas* 22) and therefore thoroughly rejected heterosexuality.

Interestingly, a modern Gnostic scholar, June Singer, at the height of the sexual revolution in the 1960s, wrote a programmatic book, *Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality*,²² in which she called for a new sexual theory (though her old Gnostic template was not exactly new). She declared, “We have at hand ... all the ingredients we need to fuse the opposites within us.” Clearly she had in mind more than an open acceptance of androgyny/homosexuality: “What lies in store as we move towards the longed-for conjunction of the opposites ... [is when] the human psyche realize[s] its own potential through building its own cosmology, and supplying it with its own gods.”²³

This clear statement of religious intent and the programmatic joining of the opposites, not just of male and female but of God and creation, represents the radical rejection of the Twoist universe and the transcendent

¹⁹ Pagels stated this in a public address that I attended.

²⁰ Robert R. Reilly, “The New Gnosticism of the Homosexual Movement,” *The Catholic World Report* (May 12, 2015), http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3869/the_new_gnosticism_of_the_homosexual_movement.aspx. See also his insightful work, *Making Gay Okay: How Rationalizing Homosexual Behavior Is Changing Everything* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014).

²¹ Jones, *Stolen Identity*, 96–101.

²² June Singer, *Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976), 207, 267, 275.

²³ *Ibid.*, 124.

God who created it.²⁴ Just like the Gnostic “goddess” Zoe, who “breathed [fire] upon his [Jahweh’s] face ... and threw him down into Hell” (*Hypostasis of the Archons* 95.8–14), Western culture rejects the Creator via the massive spread of both neo-Gnostic spirituality and neo-Gnostic sexuality, now with constitutional authority.

If ever we needed a canon, it is now, both in its broader and narrower sense. If the Gnostics, as Pagels states, “have nothing to do with belief” and everything to do with “experience and religious imagination,” then Gnosticism has no canonical worldview. Each Gnostic believer is a canon unto himself, which eventually produces utter chaos, which is what we are beginning to see today. This is the very opposite of canon in Christian orthodoxy. The biblical notion is based upon a very particular view of God. God, who is distinct from the world and Creator of it, engages with human beings at specific times and places to establish a gracious covenant sealed by written documents. That is how ancient treatises were established—with written texts. That is how God established his covenant with Israel, as Meredith Kline so ably shows.²⁵ As the Apostle Peter said, “We have the more sure word of [written] prophecy” (2 Pet 1:18).

VI. Irenaeus, Anti-Gnostic Church Father and the Preservation of the Canon

Irenaeus (A.D. 125–202), bishop of Lyon, became one of the greatest and most successful opponents of the heresy of Gnosticism. His principal work is *Against Heresies*, a defense of orthodox Christianity specifically against its Gnostic rivals. Irenaeus was born in A.D. 125, and when he was a young man living in Smyrna (Turkey), he became a disciple of Polycarp, who, at the age of 86, was burned at the stake for his refusal to deny his faith (A.D. 156). Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John, the author of a number of New Testament writings, particularly the Fourth Gospel, which is a first-hand

²⁴ I use the term Twoist to describe the worldview of the Bible, which sees between God and the creation the expression of two kinds of existence. Such an understanding of this ultimate relationship explains the place of Twoist values that God placed within the created order to remind us of that ultimate distinction.

²⁵ Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 76–93. Here is the full text which identifies the prophetic word as written “Scripture”: “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:18–19 ESV).

account of the life of Jesus. In his first epistle John states,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1–3 ESV)

Irenaeus clearly understood that there was an objective revelation of truth, beginning with Jesus, who claimed to be “the truth,” as John noted in his Gospel (John 14:6), a truth that was passed on from generation to generation by faithful teachers and had to be guarded and preserved (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14). This is doubtless the earliest sense of *canon*. Irenaeus understood the notion of the guarding of the deposit. This “deposit,” whether written or unwritten, is the earliest form of canon. Irenaeus called what had been handed down from the apostles the “rule” (Latin *regula*) or “canon” (Greek *kanon*) of the faith. He says in his *Against Heresies* 1.10.1:

The church, dispersed throughout the world ... received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God the Father Almighty ... and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, incarnate for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets predicted the dispensations of God: the coming, the birth from the Virgin, the passion, the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension of the beloved Jesus Christ our Lord.²⁶

He meant by the “canon or rule of faith” the summary of what the Old Testament and the apostles taught about the faith and what had been preserved orally and via the written texts from the apostles known to him. At that time, there was no definitive list of apostolic books, so the canon was the teaching of faithful men who preserved the apostolic teaching. This rule was to be used to test the teachings of various prophets and church leaders as to their orthodoxy, and as far as Irenaeus was concerned, the Gnostics failed the test on every point. As already noted, the very notion of a canon was foreign to Gnostics, for whom spirituality was based on “ever-changing experience and imagination” and for whom sexuality was what one perceives oneself to be. Spirituality was not dependent on fixed elements of historical revelation, and sexuality was not dependent on a pre-existing divine creation.

²⁶ Translated by Robert M. Grant in his *Irenaeus of Lyons: The Early Church Fathers* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 70.

VII. *The First Canon*

Was Irenaeus misguided? Are the New Testament scholars correct who argue that the church began with a Gnostic, anything-goes faith to which the present church must now conform? Such was the judgment of the famous early twentieth-century liberal scholar Walter Bauer. Bauer claimed that early Christianity was so diversified and theologically confusing that there were no clearly defined orthodox or heretical opinions.²⁷ This argument has held sway among liberal biblical scholars up to the present time. Thirty years ago I published an article with the intriguing title, “1 Corinthians 15:8: Paul the Last Apostle,”²⁸ not particularly looking for issues of canon or early church theology. However, as I worked on that verse, its context revealed some fascinating facts about the early church and about the church’s first canon.²⁹ Verses 3–8 give every reason to believe that we have in our hands the very first “creed” or canon of the early church, for the following reasons:

- This creed predates Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15:3, Paul says to the Corinthians, “For I delivered to you as of first importance *what I also received*.” He explicitly renounces any claim to authorship, treating the text as a fundamental statement of the gospel that he received from others in the church who predated him.
- Some interpreters claim that Paul “received” this text directly from the Lord Jesus. However, while Paul does say in 11:23, in the account of the Last Supper, that what he received was “from the Lord,” in fact, because of its virtually verbatim repetition of the gospel account of the words of Jesus inaugurating the Last Supper, Paul doubtless meant by the term that he received the account directly from the Lord via those who were present when the Lord spoke those words. Paul is dependent on others who preceded him in the faith, leaders he elsewhere calls “those who were apostles before me” (Gal 1:17).

²⁷ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Mifflintown, PA: Sigler Press, 1996); see the excellent work of Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 19.

²⁸ Peter Jones, “1 Corinthians 15:8: Paul the Last Apostle,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 36 (1985): 3–34.

²⁹ I am not the only scholar to assert this. See Michael Goulder, “The Baseless Fabric of a Vision,” *Resurrection Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996), 48. See also Gary Habermas, “Tracing Jesus’ Resurrection to Its Earliest Eyewitness Accounts,” in *God Is Great, God Is Good: Why Believing in God Is Reasonable and Responsible*, ed. William Lane Craig and Chad V. Meister (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 212; Gerd Lüdemann and Alf Özen, *What Really Happened to Jesus: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 9, 15; Mike Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 224–25.

- There is internal evidence that the text was not written by Paul. It has a Semitic flavor, containing the Semitic name Cephas to refer to Peter, and referring to Scripture using a non-Pauline expression. To cite Scripture, Paul uses the phrase “as it is written,” actually thirty-one times—and later in v. 45. The phrase “according to the Scriptures” is never Paul’s way of speaking, which betrays the fact that Paul is citing a text not his own.
- The text contains typical elements of a creed: “that ... that ... that ... that” (vv. 3–5). To those creedal statements, which include the appearance to Peter, there follows a list of confirming facts: “then ... then ... then ... then” (vv. 6–7), followed by a closing statement, added by Paul, “last of all” (v. 8). It is clear that original Christianity, from the beginning, was fixed, not fluid—expressed in an inviolable creedal form. Creeds, by nature, are meant to last. Interestingly, as a measure of his sense of authority, Paul writes himself into this creed (v. 8).
- Paul affirms that what he received from others was first in importance (v. 3), doubtless because this text was first in time—no doubt the first, original statement of the faith of the Jerusalem church. This is a text established by the original apostles in the thirties in Jerusalem, since all the people mentioned, including Peter, are from Jerusalem in the earliest days—the twelve, James, all the apostles, the five hundred, all of whom witnessed the appearances during the forty days after the death and resurrection of Jesus. In other words, Paul mentions all those who believed during the first month of the history of the faith. None of them were Gnostics!
- This creed contains the very fundamentals of Christian orthodoxy that were rejected by the Gnostics: Christ’s historic atoning death, his burial, and his resurrection, the last confirmed by many eye-witnesses and Christ-appointed apostles, as well as by the inspired witness of the Old Testament Scriptures. This creed contains the essential content of the gospel witness, the very subject matter that was subsequently worked out in the apostolic writings of the first century. The Gnostics hated the Old Testament, rejected the cross and the resurrection, and held that Yahweh, the Creator, would one day be thrown into hell.
- This gospel, says Paul, is the one gospel that the original church, both Jewish and Gentile, believed and the one that all the apostles preached. “Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1 Cor 15:11). It is evident that the early church was not an incoherent mixture of Gnostic and orthodox believers. In the early period it really was one apostolic church.

The cat is “completely out of the bag,” but not when, as Cox believes, the contemporary church understands that the ancient church was a spiritual group of Gnostics who rejected creeds and doctrines and relied entirely on the Spirit. Rather, it is “out of the bag” when the church understands that Gnosticism was clearly a later apostasy, always and consistently rejected by biblical orthodoxy from the very beginning. Taking seriously 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, we are compelled to conclude that this text must be dated in the mid-thirties of the first century and that Paul received it directly from the founding apostles in Jerusalem no later than the mid-thirties. This being the case, there is no time for a “fluid period” in which the earliest Christians believed whatever they wanted in total incoherence. In fact this text forces us to state that the Christian gospel was fixed from the beginning and that what we have in 1 Corinthians 15 is the original canon of the church, from which the final written canon organically derives.

VIII. *Paul, the Last Apostle*

It follows that if Paul’s “last of all” in v. 8 closes the apostolic circle (and I believe it does³⁰), then this text implicitly raises the principle of the closing of the canon. There is no further foundational revelation. The notion of a unique apostolic ministry of revelation, limited to the time of Christ’s incarnation and appearances, carries within it the idea of completed revelation as norm or canon for the church, which the church later formally established by affirming the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as apostolic and authoritative. Not a wisp of Gnosticism appears in the earliest “canon” of 1 Corinthians 15:3–8; nor in the writings of the apostles as they circulated in the second and third centuries, preserved by faithful men; nor in the final canonical list of New Testament writings established in the fourth century. From the earliest centuries, the church gave us an implacable, consistent historical witness that Gnosticism was always considered an alien religion by original, Christ-inspired orthodoxy. We must say of liberal “Christian” Gnosticism today what the great German Gnostic specialist Kurt Rudolph said of ancient Gnosticism: it is “a parasite prosper[ing] on the soil of a host religion.”³¹ If that is true, the cat is indeed out of the bag!

³⁰ For further strength and detail to this argument, please consult Jones, “1 Corinthians 15:8: Paul the Last Apostle.”

³¹ Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 55.