

**Cybergnosticism? A Study of Contemporary  
Christian Faith Communities in Cyberspace**

**Graham J.G. Hill**

**This dissertation is presented as partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Theology (Coursework &  
Dissertation)**

**College of Theology**

**The University of Notre Dame Australia**

**Supervisor: Rev Dr Thomas Ryan, S.M.**

**August 12, 2004**

# Table of Contents

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Abstract</b>   | Page 3   |
| <b>Signed Statement &amp; Acknowledgements</b>  | Page 4   |
| <b>Chapter 1: Introduction (Cybergnosticism? A Study of<br/>Contemporary Christian Faith Communities in Cyberspace)</b> | Page 5   |
| <b>Chapter 2: Characteristics of Gnosticism 1: Foundational Issues</b>  | Page 30  |
| <b>Chapter 3: Characteristics of Gnosticism 2: Specific Issues</b>  | Page 45  |
| <b>Chapter 4: Perspectives on Human Personhood</b>  | Page 60  |
| <b>Chapter 5: Perspectives on Christian Community</b>   | Page 72  |
| <b>Chapter 6: Engagement with the World and Social Behaviour</b>  | Page 84  |
| <b>Chapter 7: Findings, Implications, &amp; Conclusions</b>   | Page 96  |
| <b>Appendix 1: Concepts Analysed in N6</b>  | Page 102 |
| <b>Appendix 2: Coding of Website Documents</b>  | Page 104 |
| <b>Appendix 3: Details of the Chosen Websites</b>   | Page 116 |
| <b>Bibliography</b>   | Page 118 |

# Abstract<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation explores the research question ‘What gnostic-like elements are present within contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace?’ The research methodology is qualitative. It involves the examination of Gnostic documents and secondary scholarly sources on Gnosticism, and the detailed analysis of primary source written texts presented at the seventeen designated online contemporary Christian faith communities.

The two chapters immediately following the introduction examine the important foundational and specific issues relevant to a study of Christian Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. They serve not as a detailed study of these forms of Gnosticism, but rather as a distillation of its principal characteristics. These characteristics are used as benchmarks in the Content Analysis of the contemporary Cyber faith communities. The following three chapters use these benchmarks in the detailed examination of the online Christian faith communities’ particular perspectives on human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour.

This dissertation concludes that human beings need some bodily engagement and gathering with others in order to experience authentic Christianity, that God is present within Christian communities in Cyberspace demonstrating his grace and redemption, and that while the Christian communities in Cyberspace manifest some Gnostic tendencies, they also contradict the core values of early Gnosticism. It is an overstatement, then, to label them as ‘cyber-Gnostic’.

---

<sup>1</sup> The length of the dissertation, excluding footnotes, appendices and bibliography, is 27,453 words.

## **Signed Statement**

This dissertation is the candidate's own work and contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of the candidate's knowledge, this dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis. Also: I agree that this dissertation may be made available for consultation within the University library; I agree that the dissertation may be made available for photocopying; and, I note that in any case, my consent is required only for the three years following acceptance of my dissertation.

**Graham J.G. Hill** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Acknowledgements**

It is important to acknowledge the following people for their assistance in the writing of this dissertation:

- Reverend Doctor Thomas Ryan, SM: For his scholarly supervision, and diligent critique and oversight
- Doctor Roger Vallance, FMS: For his thorough oversight of my use of QSR N6, and other qualitative research methodologies
- Reverend Doctor Michael Jackson: For his inspirational theological teaching, and encouragement to pursue postgraduate theological research
- Reverend Doctor Brian Boyle: For his relentless demand of theological excellence

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### **An Explanation of the Problem and The Significance of the Research**

The title of this dissertation is ‘Cybergnosticism? A study of contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace’, and the research question is ‘What gnostic-like elements are present within contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace?’ A study of this nature, comparing Christian faith communities in Cyberspace and Christian Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD has not been undertaken before, and is therefore significant at this stage in church and western history. As Groothuis notes,

Any epistemological or ethical analysis of cyberspace must come to terms with the metaphysics of cyberspace in its diverse manifestations... (rather than) simply assuming that the only effect of cyberspace communications is to speed up and extend information transfer’. In the same paragraph he suggests that a naïve approach to cyberspace relationships is ‘technological *somnambulism*, or sleepwalking through technological change by assuming that radically new technologies do not produce radically new social arrangements or uniquely shape whatever content they contain.<sup>2</sup>

An awareness of the formative power of computer-mediated forms of communication and of cyberspace relationships has led to a growing and new discourse about online Christian faith communities and their relationship to dualistic philosophical systems. While they do not specifically use the term, some scholars have even suggested that these communities are a form of ‘Cybergnosticism’.<sup>3</sup> This conversation has not been significantly analysed or mapped, especially with reference to the specific publications, manifestations, and positions held by such

---

<sup>2</sup> Groothuis, D.R. 1998, ‘Christian Scholarship and the Philosophical Analysis of Cyberspace’. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 41, p. 633. Dr Douglas Groothuis is associate professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary, and the author of *The Soul in Cyberspace*.

<sup>3</sup> For example: Groothuis, D. 1999, *The Soul in Cyberspace*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR.

groups themselves, and, as yet, no in-depth postgraduate or postdoctoral studies have thoroughly studied the gnostic-like assumptions of these contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace. Wertheim suggests,

A techgnostic spirit can, in particular, be discerned among many cyberspace enthusiasts... (However) even in its non-electronic forms Gnosticism has often been problematic. With their focus on transcendence, Gnostics through the ages have often inclined towards a Manichean repudiation of the body, and along with that has been a tendency to disregard the concerns of the earthly world and earthly communities.<sup>4</sup>

Such assertions about the gnostic-like elements of contemporary Christian faith-communities in cyberspace and their comparison with aspects of Gnosticism need to be rigorously critiqued, rather than treated lightly or superficially. Christian theology has long stressed the incarnational importance of physical community and life in the flesh, along with the associated obligations and responsibilities. The body is affirmed and orthodox Christianity does not devalue life in the flesh.

We must not, however, assume that these Christian faith communities in cyberspace are embracing a kind of 'Cybergnosticism', without critical evaluation and comparison. While Wertheim may assert that the 'religion of cyberspace rehashes many of the most problematic aspects of Gnostic-Manichean-Platonist dualism',<sup>5</sup> this assertion has not been rigorously tested as to its credibility, particularly with reference to contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace. Such examination is critical since many postmoderns are seeking and possibly finding God in cyberspace faith communities, and the Church needs to consider how to respond.

Ess is far more hopeful than Wertheim when he writes,

Cyberspace thus presents the prophetic church with a tensional medium... one whose attractiveness as a medium for addressing the spiritual sensibilities of the young is countered by the medium's hostility to the prophetic vision, as the medium of cyberspace also encourages more apocalyptic, even Gnostic

---

<sup>4</sup> Wertheim, M. 1999, 'Is Cyberspace a Spiritual Place?' *Cybersociology* (Online magazine at <http://www.cybersociology.com/>), 7, p.6. Dr Margaret Wertheim is the author of *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet*.

<sup>5</sup> Wertheim, M. 1999, p.7.

forms of salvation. In the face of this tension, there are two additional features of cyberspace that weigh in favour of the prophetic. One, despite the seeming freedoms of disembodied individualism on the Net, there is much to suggest that social interaction in cyberspace is not self-sustaining... Two, the character of communication and the style of authority facilitated on the Internet may also favour more prophetic forms of community.<sup>6</sup>

The Church also needs to consider how its worship, community, mission, and witness might be relevant for this generation, while itself being transformed or shaped by the emerging 'cybered' millennium and generation. The research question, then, has major implications for the emerging shape of self-presentation, spirituality, community, and incarnational ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## The Research Context

The growth of interest in researching cyber spatial spirituality, philosophy, self-presentation and identity, human community, theology and missiology is evidenced by the recent expansion of the literature and academic treatment of these subjects.

Participants in cyber-spiritual activities have been described in respect to Gnosticism,<sup>7</sup> the search for God in the digital world,<sup>8</sup> the post-modern paradigm and world-view,<sup>9</sup> historical and metaphysical conceptions of space and human

---

<sup>6</sup> Ess, C. 2003, *Prophetic Communities Online? Threat and Promise for the Church in Cyberspace*, pp. 2-3. Published online at <http://www.drury.edu/ess/church/church.html>. Dr Charles Ess teaches in the Philosophy and Religion Department of Drury University.

<sup>7</sup> Berger, D.O. 1999, 'Cybergnosticism: Or, Who Needs a Body Anyway?' *Concordia Journal*, 25, pp.340-345; Davis, E. 1998, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Religion in the Information Age*. Harmony Books, Nevada; Mann, G. 1995, 'Techno-Gnosticism: Disembodying Technology and Embodying Theology'. *Dialog*, 34, pp.206-212; Mann, G.A. 1995, 'Em-bodied Spirit/In-spired Matter: Against Tech-gnosticism' in Tilley, M.A. & Ross, S.A. (eds.). 1995, *Broken and Whole: Essays on Religion and the Body*. Universities of America, Lanham, M.D.

<sup>8</sup> Cobb, J.J. 1998, *Cybergrace: The Search for God in the Digital World*. Crown Publishers, New York; & Groothuis, D.R. 1997, *The Soul in Cyberspace*. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

<sup>9</sup> Fisher, J. 1997, 'The Postmodern Paradiso: Dante, Cyberpunk, and the Technosophy of Cyberspace' in Porter, D. (ed.). 1997, *Internet Culture*. Routledge, New York; Gay, C.M. 1998, 'The Technological Ethics, and the Spirit of (Post) Modern Nihilism'. *Christian Scholar's Review*, 28, (1), pp.90-110; Hayles, N.K. 1993, 'The Seduction of Cyberspace' in Conley, V.A. (ed.). 1993, *Rethinking Technologies*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis; Kevin, C. 1997, 'Surfing the Sacred: Meeting God for Lunch @ the Global Ethics Café'. *Sojourners*, 26, pp.63-64; & Lyons, D. 1995, 'Jesus in Disneyland: The Church Meets the Postmodern Challenge'. *ARC*, 23, pp.7-36.

consciousness,<sup>10</sup> communal form and essence,<sup>11</sup> and Christian mission and theology.<sup>12</sup> There is a dearth of quality consideration in journals and books, however, on the issue of contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace.

Postgraduate research has already been undertaken on issues such as emerging practices of self-presentation in cyberspace, including multiple personae and hyper-contextuality,<sup>13</sup> cyberspace and computers in local church ministry and evangelisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,<sup>14</sup> and forms of virtual communities, such as self-consciously constructed communities of interest, physical communities stemming from online gatherings, and a 'virtual collectivity'.<sup>15</sup>

Fernback examined the multifaceted nature of virtual communities, and the varieties of experience by its proponents,<sup>16</sup> while Giese conducted an ethnographic study of USEnet newsgroups on the Internet, exploring the inter-relatedness of communication, culture, and technology.<sup>17</sup> Other research has examined the relationship between the global information superhighway and post-modern Christian spirituality. Research has also detailed online community, ministry, and evangelisation,<sup>18</sup> discourse, media muscle, and sources of knowledge on the

---

<sup>10</sup> Wertheim, M. 1999, *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to The Internet*. Doubleday, London.

<sup>11</sup> Ronell, A. 1996, 'A Disappearance of Community' in Moser, M.A. (ed.). 1996, *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>12</sup> Morgan, T.C. 1995, 'Cybershock: New Ways of Thinking Must Be Developed for the Church to Keep Pace in the Coming Information Age'. *Christianity Today*, 39, pp.78-86; & Sweet, L. 1999, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture*. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

<sup>13</sup> Allen, C.L. 1996, *Virtual Identities: The Social Construction of Cybered Selves*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (Ph.D.), Northwestern University.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, T.D. 1997, *Hearing the Word in Our Own Language: Computer Use in the Local Church for the Twenty-First Century*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (D.Min.), United Theological Seminary.

<sup>15</sup> Fernback, J.L. 1998, *The Wired Community: An Exploration of the Cultural Practices of the Citizens of Cyberspace*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (Ph.D.), University of Colorado at Boulder; & Ohler, J.B. 1994, *A Case Study of Online Community*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (Ph.D.), Simon Fraser University.

<sup>16</sup> Fernback, J.L. 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Giese, J.M. 1996, *Place Without Space, Identity Without Body: The Role of Cooperative Narrative in Community and Identity Formation in a Text-based Electronic Community*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (Ph. D.), The Pennsylvania State University.

<sup>18</sup> Fjeldstad, A.H. 1997, *Communicating Christ on the Information Superhighway*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (D.Min.), Fuller Theological Seminary; Mays, P. 1999, *The Challenge of Generation X: Unchurched Xers and the Churches that Reach Them*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (Ph.D.), Asbury Theological Seminary; Pavlik,



Internet,<sup>19</sup> and the nature of the experience of spirituality in a computer-mediated context and the intersection of computer mediation and spirituality as linked by social interaction.<sup>20</sup> There have been studies on the implications of the emergence of a global post-modern cyber-culture, and its relationship to subjectivity, cultural values and authority, and notions of space, information and community,<sup>21</sup> and the spirituality of Christ in respect to post-modern science<sup>22</sup> (see *Theses/Dissertations* in the *Bibliography* for a list of postgraduate studies to-date).

While the above-mentioned studies have provided important insights into cyberspace, cyber-culture, post-modernity and spirituality, no specific postgraduate or postdoctoral research has been conducted in the area of specific manifestations of gnostic-like elements within contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace. There are increasing calls for more qualitative or in-depth research in this field of study – or at least to compare and contrast online religious communities with Gnosticism in general.<sup>23</sup> While the term “Cybergnosticism” is rarely used in the literature,<sup>24</sup> the comparison between Christian spiritual experience in cyberspace and Gnosticism is made in at least fifteen books and articles, and this study will seek to question the validity of such a comparison through significant Content Analysis of contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace.

---

S.C.M. 1999, *Between Outlander and Outlaw: A Case for the Outlier in Reinventing Community*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (Ph.D.), University of Pittsburgh; & Wyndham, M.A. 1996, *Cyberchurch: Christian Community in Cyberspace*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (Ph.D.), The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

<sup>19</sup> Lambiase, J.J. 1997, *Who Speaks in Cyberspace: Powerful Discourse, Media Muscle, and Sources of Knowledge on the Internet*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (Ph.D.), The University of Texas at Arlington.

<sup>20</sup> Matishak, A.M. 1999, *Computer-mediated Communication and Spiritual Experience: On-line Discussion of the Numinous*. Unpublished masters thesis (M.A.), University of Calgary.

<sup>21</sup> Pritchard, R.A. 1996, *Desire and Death in Cyberspace: Deconstructing Current and Emergent Pedagogies of Virtual Reality Technologies*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (Ph.D.), University of Toronto.

<sup>22</sup> Weatherly, A.B. 1994, *Christ and Quarks: The Spirituality of Jesus and Postmodern Science*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (D.Min.), United Theological Seminary.

<sup>23</sup> Berger, D.O. 1999; Davis, E. 1998; Ess, C. 2003; Groothuis, D.R. 1997 & 1998; O’Leary, S.D. 1996, ‘Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks’. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 64, pp.781-808; & Wertheim, M. 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Some exceptions include: Ess, C. 2001, *The Word Online? Text and Image, Authority and Spirituality in the Age of the Internet*. Published online at <http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1901ce.html>; Berger, D.O. 1999; & Davis, E. 1994 & 1998.

# Research Question(s), Assumptions, and Methodology

The primary areas of comparison between spiritual experience in cyberspace and Gnosticism made in the literature seem to be:

1. Disembodiment (and, therefore, associated perspectives about the nature of human personhood). As Groothuis notes,

Much of the technological imperative finds its restless energy in the desire to lessen or eliminate the agonies of embodied existence in a world so resistant to the yearnings of the soul.<sup>25</sup>

2. The Construction of Self (as opposed to given human nature and the normative self).<sup>26</sup> Again, Groothuis sums this up by saying,

Cyber-Gnostics have struck a bargain with the underachieving earth. Instead of rejecting it as pure refuse, they use its physical resources as the launching pad into an artificial, but strangely spiritual, realm of being... The self seems especially protean and plastic when largely removed from the envelopments of real-life interaction with other human beings... Disneyland is better than what it simulates because it is safe, sanitized, and full of youthful employees with perpetual smiles. The same dynamic is at work in cyberspace.<sup>27</sup>

3. Individualized Existence and Experience, and Engagement with the World (incarnational communities are downplayed in the individualized quest for the ‘knowledge which saves’). This is explained by Ess as he points out that Cybergnosticism...

Runs the specific danger of contradicting the *prophetic* emphases of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – the call... to form a community characterized by the elimination of all social distinctions, a community of shared human prosperity... This prophetic vision follows from an essentially *optimistic* vision of the world – one that affirms first of all the goodness of all Creation, including body,

---

<sup>25</sup> Groothuis, D.R. 1997, p.89..

<sup>26</sup> For example Gackenbach, J. (ed.). 1998, *Psychology and the Internet: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Transpersonal Implications*. Academic Press, San Diego, California.

<sup>27</sup> Groothuis, D. 1999. p.40-41.

sexuality, and community among the human, natural and divine domains. But cybergnosticism... emphasizes a contempt for the created order that seeks escape from rather than fulfillment in the material world.<sup>28</sup>

So the question of whether there exists a kind of ‘Cybergnosticism’ among these contemporary Christian faith communities in Cyberspace needs to be more rigorously examined. The development of theories about the spirituality of cyber-churches, grounded in data gathered from those online communities themselves, contributes significantly to this field of study, informs the contemporary Christian church, and guides the development of strategies for ministry and mission to postmodern people.

## **The Research Question**

The Research Question, then, is ‘What gnostic-like elements are present within contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace?’

## **Component Questions, and Dissertation Structure**

The Research Question can be further articulated as component questions, which form the dissertation structure:

- i. What are the theological and philosophical underpinnings of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Gnosticism, particularly with regard to human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour? (Chapters 2 and 3 after the introduction in Chapter 1)
- ii. What gnostic-like and non-gnostic-like elements are present within contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace, particularly with regard to human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour? (Chapters 4-6)
- iii. What findings, implications, and conclusions may be drawn from this study of contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace? (Chapter 7)

---

<sup>28</sup> Ess, C. 2001, p.4.

## The Research Assumptions

The following assumptions influence this research and underpin the interpretation of the data in relation to the three categories that are the dissertation's focus:

1. Assertions about the gnostic-like elements of contemporary Christian faith-communities in cyberspace and their comparison with aspects of Gnosticism need to be rigorously critiqued, rather than treated lightly or superficially.
2. Early Christian Gnosticism had understandings about community, human personhood, and engagement with the world, which may be distilled and outlined.<sup>29</sup>
3. Forms of Christian Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, such as Valentinianism, Basilidianism and Marcionism, are appropriate forms of Gnosticism for this study, since they are particular forms of Gnosticism that caused major problems for the early Church, and since they contain all the elements needed for a contained comparative study.
4. Contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace also hold understandings about community, human personhood, and engagement with the world, which may be analysed.
5. The understandings that early Christian Gnosticism and contemporary Cyber faith communities hold about community, human personhood, and engagement with the world may be compared and contrasted.
6. One must not assume that gnostic-like elements are present within contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace without rigorous examination of their primary documents. Similarly, one must not assume that these Christian faith communities in cyberspace are embracing a kind of 'Cybergnosticism', without critical evaluation and comparison.
7. Through the brief examination of early Christian Gnosticism and the thorough application of Content Analysis to the primary source documents of cyber faith communities, one may arrive at reliable, valid and appropriate conclusions about gnostic-like tendencies within contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace.

---

<sup>29</sup> Rudolph, K. 1983, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*. T&T Clark, Edinburgh. p.55.

8. Such an examination is critical since many postmoderns are engaged in cyberspace faith communities, and the Christian Church needs to consider how to respond to this phenomenon.
9. As stated earlier in this dissertation, the Church needs to consider how its worship, community, mission, and witness might be relevant for the emerging generation, while itself being transformed or shaped by the “cybered” millennium/generation.
10. This study, then, is critical to our understanding of the shape of self-presentation, spirituality and community on the Internet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
11. Gnostic-like tendencies may lead or point to underlying attitudes and outcomes that can develop into distortions in the understanding of the Christian Gospel, even despite the quite different contexts.
12. An adequate Biblical Theology of creation necessarily pervades the assumptions of this study. In such a creation theology all creation is viewed as good, as a work of God's love, and specifically as expressing God's blessing activity toward human beings. The original blessing of creation is a demonstration of God's grace whereby he creates us for an intimate and profound relationship of sharing in the divine love of God, and the passion of the Trinity, forever. This stands in contrast to the Fall-redemption view of grace and creation, which portrays the world as evil and only redeemed through the grace of God as a remedy for sin and the corruption of human beings and the world. In an adequate theology of creation, however, creation is seen as the sacrament of God's self-communication to humankind whereby he both establishes us in an irrevocable relationship with himself and constitutes us in our own unique being and identity.

Brueggeman understands that a genuine Biblical Theology views the 'blessedness' of creation rather than the presence of sin as primary, (without disregarding the reality of the Fall or the presence and influence of sin).<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Christian anthropology and creation theology suggest a creative tension of realities that are distinct but not separate, such as body and soul, matter and spirit, union and separation, and nature and grace. Polarising these realities

---

<sup>30</sup> Brueggemann, W. 1972, *Religious Despisers of Culture*. Augsburg Fortress Press, Augsburg. Especially Chapter 1, 'Religious Despisers of Culture'.

by setting them up in opposition to each other leads to distorted theological perspectives as exemplified in Gnosticism, especially when the body, matter or world are viewed as evil or inferior.

## The Research Methodology

The research methodology is by a form of qualitative research in the examination of documents, and in the analysis of specific primary source texts available at the seventeen (17) designated online contemporary Christian faith communities.<sup>31</sup> Primary sources from websites formed the text for the analysis. A thorough comparison of these primary sources and the three key aspects of Gnosticism outlined were undertaken.

The two chapters immediately following the introduction have been entitled *Characteristics of Gnosticism 1* and *Characteristics of Gnosticism 2* respectively. They outline the main characteristics of Christian Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries with regard to its perspectives on community, human personhood, and engagement with the world. This is done not as a detailed study of these forms of Gnosticism but as a distillation of its principle characteristics as found in theological and historical works.<sup>32</sup>

These principle characteristics were then used as a yardstick in the Content Analysis of the contemporary Cyber faith communities. Rudolph affirms the validity and possibility of such an approach in his chapter on *The Main Features of Gnostic Ideology and Mythology in Gnosis*.<sup>33</sup> While acknowledging that there were a great

---

<sup>31</sup> Others may be analysed also if revealed to contain pertinent material.

<sup>32</sup> Works that will be consulted in this process include both primary and secondary documents, including: Ferguson, E. (ed.) 1993, *Gnosticism in the Early Church*. Garland, New York; Filoramo, G. 1990, *A History of Gnosticism*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford; Hendrick, C.W. & Hodgson, R. (eds.) 1986, *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*. Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA; Hultgren, A.J. & Haggmark, S.A. (eds.) 1996, *The Early Christian Heretics: Readings from their Opponents*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis; Pagels, E. 1981, *The Gnostic Gospels*. Vintage Books, New York; Pagels, E. 1975, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters*. Trinity Press, Philadelphia; Perkins, P. 1993, *Gnosticism and the New Testament*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis; Robinson, J.M. 1990, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Harper San Francisco, San Francisco; Rudolph, K. 1983, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*. T.&T. Clark, Edinburgh; Turner, J.D. & McGuire, A. 1997, *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years*. Brill, New York; Walker, B. 1983, *Gnosticism: Its History & Influence*. The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire.

<sup>33</sup> Rudolph, K. 1983, p.53.

variety of Gnostic teachings and systems, Rudolph writes that ‘the essential basic features of Gnosis can easily be extracted from the gnostic traditions, even if they belong to the teachings of different schools,’<sup>34</sup> and he understands that Gnosis and Gnosticism denote same thing. He further asserts that if we seek for ‘some specific elements of this Gnosis there are a number of ideas which repeatedly occur in most of the traditions and form their basic framework.’<sup>35</sup> He then goes on to articulate connected characteristics that are the central idea and myth of Gnosticism, as well as a dualistic view of the world on a monistic background ‘which determines all of its statements on a cosmological and anthropological level’<sup>36</sup>, and embedded in this theological dualism on a monistic background is the doctrine of God in Gnosis, cosmology, cosmogony, anthropology, soteriology, eschatology, ethics, social practices, and perspectives on community and human relationships.

Perkins agrees with the importance and validity of analysing the material within the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Gnostic texts in order to construct a framework of Gnostic belief and theology.<sup>37</sup> Again, Jonas writes ‘despite the indisputable variety of gnostic groups and tendencies which did not acknowledge any ultimately binding teaching authority, it ought to be possible to identify some constant elements which make it possible to grasp the existence of gnosis as an autonomous entity.’<sup>38</sup> Rudolph, Perkins and Jonas, then, have proposed the idea of the development of an overview of early Christian Gnosticism that can be used to critique its central ideas, theologies and myths, and this has been undertaken in this dissertation.

## Sources Used

While this dissertation concentrates mainly on primary sources from cyber communities, the rationale for the use of both primary and secondary sources in the

---

<sup>34</sup> Rudolph, K. 1983, p.55.

<sup>35</sup> Rudolph, K. 1983, p.57.

<sup>36</sup> Rudolph, K. 1983, p.57.

<sup>37</sup> Perkins, P. 1993, p.4. Perkin’s major concern, of course, is to construct a framework of Gnosticism by which to understand the New Testament materials.

<sup>38</sup> Jonas, H. 2003, ‘Return to the Divine Origin: The Gnostic Transformation’ in *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, p.462.

overview of early Gnostic perspectives is that these enable us to provide a distillation of their characteristics to measure the findings of the Content Analysis against these primary characteristics, without the complex analysis of Gnostic primary sources that is certainly beyond the scope of this Master's dissertation. Once such a yardstick has been established in chapters 2 and 3 (in order to measure the communities under investigation in terms of 'gnostic-like elements') the following chapters (chapters 4-6) seek further to answer the question 'What gnostic-like elements are present within contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace, particularly with regard to community, human personhood, and engagement with the world?' through Content Analysis.

## **Content Analysis**

The primary method employed in this study is Content Analysis (often called Document Analysis), and entails an examination and critical evaluation of the context and content of the primary source documents by a form of qualitative research.<sup>39</sup> The primary source documents that have been analysed are, as mentioned above, specific written texts presented by seventeen (17) designated contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace, as listed below (all these websites were first accessed in April 2003, and last accessed in August 2004, with much engagement with and examination of these websites happening during those sixteen months)<sup>40</sup>:

Alpha Church - <http://www.alphachurch.org/>

Cyber-Church.com - <http://cyber-church.com/>

First Church of Cyberspace - <http://www.godweb.org/>

First Internet Christian Church -

<http://www.angelfire.com/al/1stinternetChurch/index.html>

Jesus.com.au - <http://jesus.com.au/html/page/home>

Owlnook - <http://www.owlnook.com/>

Phuture - <http://www.phuture.org/>

---

<sup>39</sup> Bogdan, R.C and Biklen, S.K. 1992, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. Allyn & Bacon, Boston, M.A.

<sup>40</sup> Please see Appendix 3 for more detail on each of these websites.



Positive Church Online - <http://www.websyte.com/PositiveChurch/>

St. Thomas Community Church of the Internet -

<http://members.tripod.com/st.tcommchurch/home.html>

The Chapel on the Web - <http://thechapel.org/>

The Edge - [http://www.youth.co.za/theedge/the\\_future/main\\_the-future.asp](http://www.youth.co.za/theedge/the_future/main_the-future.asp)

The First International Church Of The Web - <http://ficotw.org/>

TheOoze - <http://www.theooze.com/main.cfm>

Virtual Church - <http://www.virtualchurch.org/>

Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua - <http://www.dogchurch.org/>

VURCH.COM - <http://vurch.com/>

WebChurch - <http://www.webchurch.org/>

These seventeen have been chosen because of their broad influence amongst the Christian community in cyberspace, the large number of members they claim to have, their critical discussions about matters of faith, the fact that they are English-language websites (since the author of this dissertation is not proficient in other languages), and their willingness to discuss issues broader than the Internet. It is possible to broadly put these communities into two subgroups:

1. Those that exist solely for providing participants with an online worship and or faith experience (10 of the above communities) i.e., they do not have any link with mainstream or organized religion.
2. Those that also provide forums for online worship and faith, but also seek to engage participants in broader reflections on faith, spirituality, and life issues (7 of the above communities) i.e. they do have a link with mainstream or organized religion, in the sense that they encourage participants to engage with their social and religious settings in a “prophetic” manner, with regard to social justice and mercy, contemporary communication of the faith, and encounter with the system.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, I noted that websites with explicit links to specific churches or organized religions were usually poorly put together, rarely visited, and could not make a genuine leap into the world of the Christian online.

The reason both subgroups are being included in this study is that together they provide an accurate representation of contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace, which they could not do singularly. The term 'faith communities' is being used because these are communities that claim to lead participants into both worship of the Christian God, and an experience of rich faith in the same God.

The seventeen websites listed above were found by searching a range of Search Engines, including Google, Yahoo, AltaVista, MSN, AOL, Lycos, and Netscape. These Search Engines were searched using such phrases and words as Cyberchurch, Christian Communities Online, Internet Church, and the like. The seventeen websites were then chosen on the basis of their membership size, breadth and representation of content and style, broad influence in the Cyberchurch community, English-language content, and ability to represent the subgroups mentioned above adequately. The sites were explored in their entirety, and all text available on each site was examined and downloaded into QSR N6 – nearly 500,000 words worth of documents. This text was downloaded from each website into Microsoft Word as plain text, and then downloaded into QSR N6 for examination and qualitative Content Analysis.

As mentioned previously, the method of qualitative research that has been employed in this study is Content Analysis. It is inductive rather than deductive and involves examination of documents for the presence of particular content both manifest and inferred. Content Analysis 'begins with the act of identifying concepts present in a given text or set of texts, and then seeks to go beyond presence by exploring the relationships between the concepts identified.'<sup>42</sup> The presence or absence of content and such connections is an indicator from which one may draw a hypothesis or make interpretations. Stemler writes,

Content analysis is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Berelson, 1952; GAO, 1996; Krippendorff, 1980; and Weber, 1990). It allows inferences to be made which can then be corroborated using other methods of data collection (Krippendorff, 1980). Content analysis enables

---

<sup>42</sup> From the *Writing@CSU Writing Guide* online at <http://writing.colostate.edu/references/research/content/com2b2.cfm>.

researchers to sift through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion (GAO, 1996). Krippendorff (1980) notes that "[m]uch content analysis research is motivated by the search for techniques to infer from symbolic data what would be either too costly, no longer possible, or too obtrusive by the use of other techniques" (p. 51). Further, it is a useful technique for allowing us to discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention (Weber, 1990). While technically content analysis is not restricted to the domain of text, in order to allow for replication, the technique can only be applied to data that are durable in nature.<sup>43</sup>

Content Analysis is a powerful data reduction technique, which is systematic and replicable, and which provides for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding. It is unobtrusive, and useful in dealing with large volumes of data. The technique of Content Analysis extends far beyond simple word frequency counts, and allows for an analysis of the frequency and interrelation of concepts, hypotheses, and ideas.

Content Analysis enabled this study to outline commonly held perspectives about community, human personhood, and engagement with the world among these contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace. The primary question that has been addressed in this Content Analysis of the primary sources is 'What gnostic-like and non-gnostic-like elements are present within contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace, particularly with regard to human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour?'

Why would one choose to focus on community, human personhood, and engagement with the world as the topics of the study, rather than, for example, eternal life and or the person of God? What is it about Cyber faith communities that make these three topics the key ones for analysis?

I have chosen human personhood, community, and engagement with the world as the basis of comparison for these reasons:

---

<sup>43</sup> Stemler, S. 2004. 'An Introduction to Content Analysis.' *ERIC Digest*. June 2001. The 500,000 words worth of data that has been examined remains saved in Microsoft Word and QSR N6 on my computer and USB Pen Drive, so that the data is durable in nature, re-examinable, and unaffected by the changes to these websites in Cyberspace.

1. Human personhood, community, and engagement with the world are the primary comparisons made in the literature. As mentioned previously, the comparison between Christian spiritual experience in cyberspace and dualistic systems, such as Gnosticism, is made in the literature. Disembodiment and the construction of self are grouped as 'human personhood', and individualized existence and experience in represented 'community' and 'engagement with the world'.
2. With specific reference to Gnosticism, although theologies about eternal life and the person of God were important distinctions within that dualistic system of thought, they do not seem to hold the same place within online Christian spirituality, and so do not make useful bases of comparison.
3. Dualistic and cyberspace assumptions may at times present as disembodied spiritual quests (and, so, questions about human personhood emerge), and as individualized pathways to salvation – I may 'connect' with 'identities' around the globe, but will I experience the realities of incarnational community and significant engagement with the world?

Content Analysis of the primary online source materials has been carried out through the following process:

1. ***Formulation of the Research Question:*** 'What gnostic-like elements are present within contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace?'
2. ***Choice of Units of Analysis:*** All specific written texts online at the seventeen (17) designated Cyber faith communities listed. This included all of the main page of each website, all of the other pages of each website, and all links in the site to any other related material written by the Webmaster or the primary authors of each website.
3. ***Coding through Selective Reduction:*** These texts were then analysed through searching extensively for critical words, sets of words, or phrases that were indicative of the research question, and that determined the levels of analysis and generalization. Following is a brief outline of the ***Concepts Coded and Levels of Analysis:***

- A. ***Categories Coded:*** The main themes discerned on an initial reading of the data were human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour. The Category of Base Data, Self-definitions, Descriptions and Aims was also established in order to capture descriptive data from each website. The coding, however, was interactive, providing the freedom to develop some or all of these categories and concepts during the coding process. Having said that, as far as possible these three categories (Human Personhood; Community; Engagement with the World and Social Behaviour) were maintained so that the text was consistently examined for very specific concepts, and by allowing some flexibility we allowed new material to be incorporated into the coding process. A dynamic process such as this has had important bearings on the study's results.
- B. ***Levels of Analysis and Relational Analysis:*** Individual words, sets of words, and phrases were analysed. The relationships between these concepts (and their synonyms) were also analysed using QSR N6.
- C. ***Concepts Analysed:***<sup>44</sup>
- C.1 Human Personhood***
  - C.2 Community***
  - C.3 Engagement with the World and Social Behaviour***
  - C.4 Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions and Aims***
4. ***Coding for Frequency, Context and Relationships between Concepts:*** Coding was then undertaken to indicate the frequency, contextual setting, and relationships between the concepts (in all of the specific written texts online at the seventeen (17) designated Cyber faith communities listed).
5. ***Deciding on the Level of Generalization:*** Concepts were coded as the same or similar even when they appear in different forms. For example, 'cyber-church' and 'online-church'. On these occasions their similarity or difference

---

<sup>44</sup> Please see Appendix 1: Concepts Analysed in N6.

was determined and appropriately coded. Levels of implication were also determined. For example, does ‘online church’ imply ‘virtual church’?

6. ***Translation Rules:*** A set of rules was then developed so that less general concepts were translated into more general ones. For example, the concept ‘Net-based church’ is generally thought to imply ‘Web-based church.’ The study made such implicit concepts explicit, and then coded for the frequency of their occurrence.
7. ***Un-coded Information:*** Information in the text that was not coded (except for common words like ‘the’ and ‘a’) were viewed as relevant and important unless proven otherwise, and were used to re-examine or even modify the coding scheme.
8. ***Descriptive Factors that Constitute and Limit the Evidence of the Concepts of Human Personhood, Community, and Engagement with the World and Social Behaviour:*** Along with the conclusions of the brief overview of early Christian Gnosticism in chapters 2 and 3, the descriptive factors that constitute and limit the evidence of each of the three categories listed above emerged out of the words, sets of words, and phrases analysed.

The descriptive factors were also constituted and limited by (and provided a hermeneutical window on) the key Christian theological perspectives common to the three categories of human personhood, community, and engagement with the world. As mentioned previously, an adequate theology of creation sees creation as the sacrament of God's self-communication to humankind, through which he places us in a profound relationship with himself and constitutes us as unique and dignified human beings in all aspects of our createdness. Therefore, Christian anthropology and creation theology suggest that each of these three categories entail a creative tension of realities that are distinct but not separate, such as body and soul, matter and spirit, union and separation, and nature and grace. When two different but interrelated aspects of a reality are set up in opposition, and when they are viewed as separate rather than distinct, there is the movement toward

distorted perspectives on human personhood, community, salvation, the world, the nature of Christ and of God, and the like, as exemplified in Gnosticism.

9. ***Coding the Text using QSR Nudist Version 6 (N6) and Undertaking Cognitive Mapping:*** The texts were coded using QSR Nudist version 6 (N6), as they emerged during the examination of the texts over a 6-month period. N6 is the latest version of the NUD\*IST software for code-based qualitative analysis. It facilitated management of non-numerical unstructured data with processes of indexing, searching and theorizing. Coding systems allowed for monitoring and managing the emergence of ideas. Coded material was displayed for analysis, revision of coding and coding-on to new categories. N6 provided tools that facilitated the qualitative testing of hypotheses, location of patterns, and pursuit of developing theories and concept relationships. The relationships between the concepts were coded, and evaluated through the process of Cognitive and Concept Mapping<sup>45</sup> in an effort to represent these relationships visually for comparison. The relationships were evaluated for their strength, their sign (whether they are positively related or negatively related), and the direction of the relationship (to determine which concept influences the other).

Through this process of detailed and systematic analysis of the text, scrutiny of its many messages, and mapping of the connections and relationships embedded therein, the hermeneutic question of interpretation was addressed.

10. ***Analysis of Results:*** Once coding was done, codes were analysed, themes were developed, tests were conducted regarding working hypotheses, and the

---

<sup>45</sup>Dagan defines Cognitive and Concept mapping in the following manner. 'Cognitive mapping may be defined as a process composed of a series of psychological transformations by which an individual acquires, codes, stores, recalls, and decodes information about the relative locations and attributes of phenomena in their everyday spatial environment. Simply put, it is the process of creating a mental map. Concept mapping is a type of cognitive map, in this sense, representing a structured process, focused on a topic or construct of interest, involving input from one or more participants, that produces an interpretable pictorial view (concept map) of their ideas and concepts and how these are interrelated. Basically, a concept map is a graphical representation of the structure of knowledge.' Dagan, R. 2004. *Cognitive Mapping*. Online at <http://intraspec.ca/cogmap.php> Intraspec, CA. (Accessed July 2004).

data was examined in order to draw whatever conclusions were possible, when seen in relation to the summary of early Gnosticism in chapters 2 and 3.

11. ***Reliability and Validity:*** The examination and analysis process involved, therefore, the utilization of a document system (N6) to store and retrieve text and to store references to other external data sources. It also involved searching for words, phrases and concepts in the 500,000 words of text downloaded from the websites (all this text was explicitly examined) and automatically indexing the results, and the creation of an index system for the data, linking its categories and exploring their links with the data using a "tree" structure for the indexing nodes, plus free nodes available for temporary coding and non-hierarchical index structures.

Appendix 2 shows where documentation (text) from each website has been deemed relevant to one of the themes of the dissertation, and has been coded at a particular area of the dissertation, such as community, human personhood, or engagement with the world and social behaviour. Appendix 2 notes that, for example, Alpha Church, which is a website with little content, has text relevant to Community and Base Data (2 'nodes' or areas), whereas Phuture, which is a large website, has text relevant to about half of the themes of the dissertation (27 'nodes' or areas).

All the 500,000 words of text were explicitly and thoroughly examined, and the result was the emergence of the concept categories in Appendix 1. This rigorous analysis involved, then, not only representative data from the websites, but a thorough examination of all of the data on the websites, and this analysis therefore captures the essence of the websites and hence this field.

Data was accessed, edited and indexed through the N6 node and document browsers, and search tools allowed data in multiple documents to be collectively treated in the study. Emerging understandings were recorded in memos making sense of the data using the on-board text editor, patterns were found and analysed in the indexing, and hypotheses and answers were



recorded for further exploration. Bibliographic information was recorded and related to the textual data by N6, and then results, notes, memos and answers were added to the data and indexed for further analysis, examination of codes, the development of themes, and the testing of theories, working hypotheses, and ideas. The result of this intensive activity was the concept categories in Appendix 1, the detailed coding of the text as outlined in Appendix 2, and the reliable and valid interpretation of the data for the formulation of the dissertation.

It is important to note here that the conceptual and hypotheses analysis was the crucial element for the development of theories and the structuring of this dissertation, and that N6 was simply a tool of analysis.

## **Definition of the Terms**

Following is a brief definition of some key terms used in this dissertation:

1. 'Cyberspace': The place where computer networking hardware, network software, and people using them converge.
2. 'Content Analysis': A method of analysis used in qualitative research in which text (notes) are systematically examined by identifying and grouping themes and coding, classifying and developing categories.
3. 'Gnosticism': Ancient Christian heresy, arising out of it in the second century, and eventually evolving into various forms from then onward. Believed in the antithetical dualism of the spirit, which is good, and matter, which is evil. Spirit is trapped in us by matter and we need to know that in order to restore the spark to the godhead. Can be thought of as an ancient counterpart to existentialism.
4. 'Cybergnosticism': The belief that the physical world is impure or inefficient, and that existence in the form of "pure information" is better and should be pursued. Gnosticism as expressed in Cyberspace.
5. 'Dualistic': Philosophical belief that reality is essentially divided into two distinct kinds of stuff. Typically mind and body or the related pair, spirit and matter. One concept in each pair is often deemed superior to the other.

6. 'Techgnosis': Religious impulses and magical dreams permeate the history of technology, and especially information technology. Those that speak of Techgnosis suggest that we need to peel away the utilitarian shell of technology (and especially cyberspace) to reveal the mystical, spiritual, and Gnostic fervour that is present therein.
7. 'Internet': A worldwide network of networks that all use the TCP/IP communications protocol and share a common address space. First incarnated as the ARPANET in 1969, the Internet has metamorphosed from a military internet-work to an academic research internet-work to the current commercial internet-work. It commonly supports services such as email, the World Wide Web, file transfer, and Internet Relay Chat. The Internet is experiencing tremendous growth in the number of users, hosts, and domain names. It is gradually subsuming other media, such as proprietary computer networks, newspapers, books, television, and the telephone. Also known as 'the net', 'the information superhighway', and 'cyberspace'.
8. 'Cyber-church': Ideally, a cyber-church facilitates worship, faith, Christian education, evangelization, and community on the World Wide Web. These may be attached or non-attached to an existing church or Christian movement.
9. 'Online': Referring to anything connected to a computer network, and especially accessing cyberspace.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The particular parameters of the study are fivefold:

1. Its perspective is limited to Christian theological considerations of contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace, in relation to Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.
2. It is limited in terms of primary sources. These are specific publications, manifestations, and positions held by seventeen (17) designated online contemporary Christian faith communities, as listed previously, and the limited primary sources available on Christian Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.

3. It has a limited timeframe. The possibilities for such a study will be continually expanding as the scope of cyberspace expands and since forms of Gnosticism continue to evolve. This study, therefore, has as its sole focus contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace, as studied between April 2003 and August 2004.
4. It is limited in having a specific focus within these communities: that of the specific assumptions about human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour.
5. It is limited to English language websites (primarily because the author is not fluent enough in other languages to examine such websites, and English is the main language of the Internet).

## **Referencing Texts from Websites**

There has been no formalization of how texts from websites should be referenced. Therefore, any quotations from websites will merely note the website name, and the QSR N6 data reference from the textual analysis. Such text is available upon request.

## **Issues of Representation**

Another issue that arises is that of representation, that is, to what extent does text on the websites represent the 'official' position of those websites? I have endeavoured to solve this problem in this dissertation in the following ways:

1. When a quotation is directly from the website itself, and therefore represents its 'official' position, such phrases as these are used: 'The First Church of Cyberspace proposes', 'In the Positive Church Online there is found the statement', 'The Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua pronounces', 'WebChurch recognises', 'For some websites, and especially Phuture, TheOoze, and The Edge, Incarnation is valued', 'Here are some quotes that illustrate such positive views', and the like. There is no reference to any specific author when the quotation is extracted directly from the website's 'official' documentation, unless, of course, that author is the Webmaster.

2. When a quotation is from a contributor to the website, such as an independent author, who might not necessarily represent its 'official' position, such phrases as these are used: 'An author in Phuture suggests', 'A contributor to The Edge writes', and the like. In such quotations, there is always specific reference to an individual who is posting on the website, in order to distinguish that quote and person from the 'official' authors of the website.
3. It is worth noting, however, that I have not been able to find one example of an independent author disagreeing with the 'official' position of the website they are posting on. Sometimes they seek to clarify, expand, or broaden the 'official' position, yet they seem to invariably agree with the overall content and sentiment of the 'official' position.

## **N6 Reference Numbers**

The quotations in the text include a reference number from N6, which is always the N6 text unit. For example, 'The First Church of Cyberspace: 617-621,' is a reference to lines 617-621 of the downloaded text (from the website into Microsoft Word, and then into N6) from The First Church of Cyberspace. This is helpful for the reader because it demonstrates and reveals the source of the quotation, and gives the reader the possibility of verify the accuracy of the quotation and its use, by investigating the N6 or Microsoft Word primary data.

## **An Outline of the Dissertation Chapters**

Following is an outline of the dissertation chapters, which lead the reader through an introduction to the methodologies of the study, the core philosophical and theological aspects of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Christian Gnosticism, an examination of the perspectives on human personhood, Christian community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour, and the findings, implications, and conclusions of this dissertation.

**Chapter 1:** Introduction (Cybergnosticism? A Study of Contemporary Christian Faith Communities in Cyberspace).

**Chapter 2:** Characteristics of Gnosticism 1: Foundational Issues.

**Chapter 3:** Characteristics of Gnosticism 2: Specific Issues.

**Chapter 4:** Perspectives on Human Personhood.

**Chapter 5:** Perspectives on Christian Community.

**Chapter 6:** Engagement with the World and Social Behaviour.

**Chapter 7:** Findings, Implications, and Conclusions.

## Chapter 2

### Characteristics of Gnosticism 1: Foundational Issues

The definition of ‘Gnosticism’ and ‘Gnosis’ has not been an easy task for scholars; so much so that a committee of scholars at an international conference on ‘the origins of Gnosticism’, held in Messina, Italy, in 1966, wrestled through to the following thoughtful definition of ‘Gnosticism’:

The Gnosticism of the second-century sects involves a coherent series of characteristics that can be summarised as the idea of a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into the world of birth and death, and needing to be reawakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be fully reintegrated. Compared with the conceptions of a devolution of the divine, this idea is based ontologically on the conception of a downward movement of the divine whose periphery (often called Sophia or Ennoia) had to submit to the fate of entering into a crisis, and producing – if only indirectly – this world, upon which it cannot turn its back, since it is necessary for it to recover the pneuma – a dualistic conception on a monistic background, expressed in a double movement of dissolution and reintegration.<sup>46</sup>

The committee was also concerned about drawing a distinction between ‘Gnosticism’ of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries and ‘Gnosis’, by defining ‘Gnosis’ as ‘knowledge of the divine mysteries reserved for an elite’.<sup>47</sup> In this definition, ‘Gnosis’ as a concept not only covers the above-mentioned knowledge, but also the broader movements characterized by such knowledge or ‘gnosticizing ideology’,<sup>48</sup> which certainly pre-date and exist independently of (or interdependently with) Christianity. The origins of such ‘gnosticizing ideology’ include Platonism, Alexandrian philosophy, Zoroastrianism and other Persian philosophies, and possibly, though contentiously, the Buddhism of India.<sup>49</sup> This dissertation will

---

<sup>46</sup> Bianchi, U. (ed.). 1967, *The Origins of Gnosticism: The Colloquium of Messina, 13-18 April 1966*. E.J. Brill, Leiden. pp.26-27.

<sup>47</sup> Bianchi, U. (ed.). 1967, p.26.

<sup>48</sup> Arai, S. quoted in Wilson, R. 1978, ‘Slippery Words, 2: Gnosis, Gnostic, Gnosticism.’ *Expository-Times*. 89, p.298.

<sup>49</sup> Renwick, A.M. 1982, ‘Gnosticism’ in Bromiley, G.W. (ed.). 1982, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, p.485.

follow the Messina methodology, using the terms ‘Gnosticism’ and ‘gnostic’ with specific reference to ‘classical’ gnostic systems of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, while appreciating that the term ‘Gnosis’ might be applied much more broadly to movements and ideologies preceding and following this era.<sup>50</sup>

Firstly, given the complexity and dense terminology surrounding discussions about Gnosticism, which is partly due to the complexity of Gnostic theologies, we will seek to provide a brief explanation of the main ideas in the Messina definition of Gnosticism. The main ideas are presented below, with a clarification of each:

1. ‘A coherent series of characteristics...’ - The Messina definition, then, agrees with authors such as Rudolph, Perkins, and Jonas (as noted above) that an overview of early Christian Gnosticism is possible through a consideration of its coherent and principal series of characteristics.
2. ‘Summarised as the idea of a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into the world of birth and death...’ – This is a central idea in the gnostic myth. Human beings have a soul that has been created by the evil powers of the world (hence their passions, desires and instincts), and they also have a spirit (a divine spark) that has been given them by the Highest God, and derived from the divine realm. This spirit is imprisoned by the evil powers of this world in human bodies, and is thus ‘fallen into the world of birth and death’.
3. ‘Needing to be reawakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be fully reintegrated.’ – The spirit (or sparks of light and particles of *pneuma*) within human beings is reawakened by gnostic knowledge and through encounter with the divine, and redemption happens when these sparks are freed from the imprisonment of the world and the body and are collected

---

<sup>50</sup> Rudolph criticizes this distinction since in his mind ‘Gnosis’ and ‘Gnosticism’ is the same thing, but we will carry on the Messina delineation for clarity of terms. Rudolph, K. 1983, p.57.

together and brought back to the Highest God, from which they came, and re-integrated into him.

4. 'A devolution of the divine...' – This means that the divine is fractured, decentralized, and convoluted. 'Devolution' should be understood as a movement downward rather than an evolutionary movement upwards or forwards. Within the divinity itself there is a rupture, a cosmic accident or fall, and the world and human beings come into existence because of this fatal rupture. How does this cosmic accident happen? The mirror image of the Highest God takes on an autonomous existence and becomes a new being, lower than the Highest God, yet also a part of him (she is often called Sophia). This begins a differentiation within the divine. From Sophia, the gnostic mother goddess, emanates a sequence of divine graduations, and these graduated 'powers' are often called 'aeons'. These beings are not contrary to or of a different substance than the Highest God, yet they are not quite he, for they are 'devolution' of him. And so the Highest God is not responsible for the creation of material or earthly things.
5. 'This idea is based ontologically on the conception of a downward movement of the divine...' – The divine splinters into various beings, of the same substance as him, but not exactly him. Lower divinities (such as the Old Testament God) are therefore responsible for evil, matter, the creation of the world, and flesh.
6. 'Whose periphery (often called Sophia or Ennoia)...' – Sophia is the Perfect Aeon (or the divine graduation and being who is most like the Highest God), yet she is not the Highest God himself. She is the gnostic mother goddess, and is sometimes called Barbelo. It was from her transgression that the world and all matter was created, if only indirectly.
7. '(Sophia) had to submit to the fate of entering into a crisis, and producing – if only indirectly – this world...' – From Sophia comes (emanates) the God of



the Old Testament (or *Ialdabaoth*, the ‘demiurge’ in gnostic literature), who creates human beings and the world. This theology allowed the Gnostics to maintain a negative view of creation and matter, and to reject the God of the Old Testament. Material and earthly things are the responsibility of the inferior God of the Old Testament (the demiurge), who happens to be ignorant of his inferiority, and the Highest God stands apart from these things.

8. ‘Upon which it cannot turn its back, since it is necessary for it to recover the pneuma...’ – The Highest God chooses to correct the error of Sophia and the demiurge however, by reflecting himself in human form in the waters of the lower heavens, so that the demiurge (the Old Testament God) unknowingly and through fascination with the form reflected in the waters decides to create such a being. The Highest God then tricks the demiurge into imparting some of the pure light (pneuma) he has received from Sophia into human beings so that they may live. The demiurge then is not the only one to possess the particles of light (pneuma), which he had stolen from the heavens through Sophia, and this potential element of the divine can be brought back to the Highest God (its origin) through human beings. This divine spark within human beings can be reintegrated with the divine through secret knowledge and gnostic enlightenment. This gnostic knowledge and enlightenment, therefore, is the path of salvation and redemption for human beings.
  
9. ‘A dualistic conception on a monistic background...’ – There is proposed in gnostic theology an evil principle that stands alongside the Highest God. The world and all things material are the product of this evil principle, and there is a cosmic struggle between these dual forces of darkness and light. Behind this dualism is a monistic conception of the Highest God, who is eternal, immortal, unnameable, imperishable, immeasurable, perfect, and incomprehensible, and he is the genuine core and ultimate substance of all things. Although all things exist in him, he is insuperably distant from the world and all of the created order, and thus originates the metaphysical

dualism of Gnosticism, which results in the gnostic repulsion toward the world, the body, and all matter.

10. 'Expressed in a double movement of dissolution and reintegration.' – There is a disbanding or fracturing that happens within the divine, and therefore within the universe, that is paralleled or resolved by a reintegration of persons back into the divine through the gnostic enlightenment of the human person, and through reintegration of the divine sparks into the Highest God.
  
11. The Messina definition in summary, therefore, suggests that Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century sects involves coherent characteristics, which may be summarized as the idea of a divine spark in man (the human spirit or *pneuma*), which is unfortunately fallen and imprisoned. This spirit needs to be reintegrated with the Highest God, who is its source. The Highest God has fractured into various beings, of the same substance as him, but not exactly him, and the most perfect of these is Sophia, from whom comes the God of the Old Testament (the demiurge). Sophia commits an error of judgement that allows the demiurge to create all things material, and the Highest God must restore the divine spark within human beings to himself, through the redemption of human beings from all things corrupted, embodied, and material, through gnostic knowledge and enlightenment. Such gnosis, then, is the source of human and cosmic redemption and salvation.

## **The Philosophical and Theological Underpinnings of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Gnosticism**

With the Messina definition established, the general philosophical and theological underpinnings of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Gnosticism will now be considered. In chapter 3 there will follow an explicit examination of gnostic considerations about human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour. This

addresses component question (i) on pages 11-12: ‘What are the theological and philosophical underpinnings of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Gnosticism, particularly with regard to human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour?’ (Chapters 2 and 3 after the introduction in Chapter 1). The sources used in this examination included the scholarly considerations of persons such as Jonas, Logan, Pagels, Pearson, Perkins and Rudolph, as well as English translations of the Church Fathers, apocryphal texts, hermetic writings, Mandaean and Manichean writings, and the Nag Hammadi texts,<sup>51</sup> and these were used to examine the key themes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century gnostic movements such as Valentinianism, Basilideanism, Saturninianism, and Marcionism.<sup>52</sup>

Waldstein, in his attempt to construct the overarching Gnostic myth, quotes Jonas, who views Gnosticism and its mythology as story from the unitary principle *Entweltlichung*, located within seven patterns of transition or ‘schemata’, that ‘form a system that tends toward what Jonas calls “the foundational Gnostic myth.”’

... the distance of the world from God (the schema of distance); the enclosure of the world (the schema of the dwelling place or cavern); the imprisonment of human beings in the world (the schema ‘far down’ or ‘here’); the experience of being lost (the schema of the labyrinth or of multiplicity); the self that does not belong to the world (the schema of negativity or point-like isolation); God as utterly above the world (the schema ‘high up’ or ‘outside’ or ‘there’) – in addition, orientations of movement implied in all these schemata and constitutive of their unity: fall, sinking, loss of the origin and

---

<sup>51</sup> See Bibliography for the details of the works of Jonas, Logan, Pagels, Pearson, Perkins and Rudolph that were consulted. See also: Jonas, H. 2003; Hedrick, C. & Hodgson, R. (eds.). 1986, *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, & Early Christianity: Fourteen Leading Scholars Discuss the Current Issues in Gnostic Studies*. Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Mass.; Hultgren, A.J. & Haggmark, S.A. (eds.). 1996, *The Earliest Christian Heretics: Readings from their Opponents*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis; Robinson, J. 1977, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Harper and Row, San Francisco.

<sup>52</sup> These were four distinct movements within Gnosticism of the 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. (1) The Valentinians were the most influential and important school within Gnosticism of the second century AD, and they originated from the gnostic philosopher Valentinus (born around 100 AD). Among other things he taught that the world was the creation of the Demiurge, and that a whole genealogy of several generations of Aeons existed, instead of one Son. (2) The Basilideans were founded by Basilides, and he was noted for teaching that the world is continuously evolved from a *pansperma* or germinal ‘seed of the world’ in which all things find their origin. (3) Saturninus of Syria, who was a heavily dualistic and gloomy, material-hating ascetic, led the Saturninians. For Saturninus the God of the Hebrews was only an angel, and the Son did not have a real body, marriage was a base adultery from the first love of God, and meat eating was indulgent sin. (4) The Marcionites were a product of the vision of Marcion, who condemned the God of the Old Testament, and drew up his own gnostic canon of scripture. He was fervently ascetic, and condemned all Christian connections with the world and with matter.

the reversal of all these in an inverse process (the schema of movement down or up or of becoming distant and returning).<sup>53</sup>

Gnosticism, therefore, was characterised by a profound dualism and alienation that governs the relationship between human beings, the world, and God. The deity is completely other, unknowable through the wisdom or speculation of humankind, in no way resembling the substance of the cosmos, 'which it neither created nor governs and to which it is the complete antithesis: to the divine realm of light, self-contained and remote, the cosmos is opposed as the realm of darkness.'<sup>54</sup> Its creation is the result of a tragic indiscretion by the lower Sophia who vainly attempted to produce an offspring like the Mother without a consort or the approval of God, and her product was an abortion – the ignorant, arrogant demiurge (the Old Testament Creator God).<sup>55</sup> The demiurge, the Archons, and the inferior rulers not only created the world, but also obstruct human beings from access to and true knowledge of the One and of salvific *gnosis*, which requires supranatural enlightenment and illumination.

Furthermore, in Gnostic thought the cosmos and the human body are restrictive prisons, conspiring to separate humans from God, and this urge for mystical knowledge and freedom from the constraints and oppression of the world and the flesh, shaped Gnostic theology, cosmology, anthropology, eschatology, and morality in ways we will further examine in this chapter. It also shaped their Christology, which in turn had a profound affect on their concepts of human personhood, the world, ethics, and community:

Called to awakening and repentance from this world of exile and oblivion, and granted the saving knowledge, he/she is then baptised in the threefold name of the Gnostic triad, Father, Mother, and Son, and anointed as a Christ in the mysterious right of the five seals marking the descent of the Spirit. He/she is thereby called to live a life of ascetic denial of the world and its

---

<sup>53</sup> Jonas, *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist*, 1:259, in Waldstein, M. 2000, 'Hans Jonas' Construct "Gnosticism": Analysis and Critique.' *Journal-of-Early-Christian-Studies*. 8,3, pp.362-363.

<sup>54</sup> Jonas, H. 1992, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*. Routledge, London. 42.

<sup>55</sup> Logan, A.H.B. 1997, 'At-onement: The Nature and Challenge of Gnostic Soteriology.' *Scottish Journal of Theology*. 50,4,485.

hostile powers and structures, including sexual division, the material body, fate and astrology and even the worldly systems of justice and morality – all the creation of the Demiurge (the ‘prince of this world’) and his archons – until death and the return to the unknown God.<sup>56</sup>

Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries of the Christian era was a mixture of gnosticizing movements represented by the above-mentioned well-known groups, which engaged vigorously with Christianity, and threatened the distinctive nature of many orthodox doctrines and Christian or ecclesiological behaviours, causing the leaders of the Church at the time to respond theologically and with a deep sense of urgency about the dangers of ‘gnosticizing ideologies’ and theologies.

## **Human Personhood, and Gnostic Knowledge and Salvation**

Gnostic anthropology held an elite claim to superior, enlightened knowledge that is critical for true human freedom and salvation, since *gnosis* is considered a requisite to salvation (as opposed to faith or the observance of the law), and since true knowledge of self and of the Divine is salvific knowledge. The Messina definition of Gnosticism, which we have examined earlier, describes this theology as ‘a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into the world of birth and death, and needing to be reawakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be fully reintegrated’<sup>57</sup>, and this reintegration through gnostic knowledge leads to salvation and redemption. This entails an eschatology that not only reserves salvation for those with *gnosis*, but ultimate destruction for the cosmos and the minions of the cosmos, for nothing material may be redeemed or saved.

The polarities of gnostic salvific theories, and models that define salvation as liberation from social oppression, tend to oversimplify human need, the witness of scripture, and the narrative contours of salvation in the orthodox Christian theological tradition. Salvation is deeply rooted in human history, profoundly

---

<sup>56</sup> Logan, A.H.B. 1997, 50,4,485-486.

<sup>57</sup> Bianchi, U. (ed.). 1967. See also Newman, E. 1998, ‘Theology and Science without Dualism.’ *Cross Currents*. 48,1, p.40.

relational, mediated through the person and work of Christ, incarnationally orientated, mutually defined and outworked (by the human and the divine), and eschatologically hope-filled. The experience of Jesus Christ as saviour, not salvation through some special acquisition of knowledge, lies at the very origins of Christianity, and needs to be rediscovered and embodied in appropriate and communicable ways at the beginning of a new millennium, to guard against any gnosticizing trend.

Salvation, then, is not primarily an idea or a theological concept, it is an experience of grace that transforms the whole life of the human person, and that is intensely practical and social. Salvation may also be considered to be a type of holistic healing (rather than a mind-centred adoption of secret knowledge), an exemplar-model for the business of living (in the person and work of Christ), and a process of relationship and pervasive communion that is measurably interpersonal. Our common need for redemption and salvation equates to personal and societal oppression, the realities of the presence of personal sin, guilt and condemnation, being closed in on oneself, and the need for the healing power of love. True other-centred living, inner healing, and holiness lend credibility to the orthodox Christian description of salvation, since the message of salvation is holistic (meaning, it enters such broad arenas as healing, 'exorcism', proclamation, forgiveness and reconciliation, liberation and freedom, physicality and spirituality, belief and faith, service and compassion, and others) rather than mono-focussed (such as on gnostic 'knowledge'). Salvation is a sphere of God-initiated grace, and has been continually happening in God's world, and God in Christ Jesus privileges humans to intimately participate in the liberation of all things, whether spiritual or material.

## **Human Personhood and Relationship**

In orthodox Christian theology, human beings are certainly relational, and yearn for identity, heredity, and destiny. These things are the evidence of both the *imago Dei*, and the presence of divine grace. Our identity and heredity is sourced in God's creation of our beings and our formation in his image. His grace fulfils the human yearning for a destiny and hope. The unquenchable desire for more than this life

offers, the frustration of the inadequacy of everything acquired and achieved, and the radical protest against death, are the human yearnings for grace and redemption.

This urge is essentially a relational one, and much human suffering is the direct result of alienation and isolation. At their core, human beings are essentially interpersonal, relational, and intersubjective – created in the image of a relational God, who enjoys perfect relationship, love and communion within Trinity. We are invited into this relationship, and communion with the Divine and with other persons is the means of salvation and fulfilled living. This communion, moreover, extends into the interconnectedness of people with all things non-human, and we are therefore subject to the consequences of our actions upon the same. It is true that to be human means that our bodies (bodiliness and sexuality), human nature, and the entire created orders are related. Humans are thoroughly connected with the social, political and economical structures and institutions of the world, as well the ecological environment, and, as such, are subject to the consequences of their actions in these forums, and therefore have a profound responsibility for that which is created, whether living or inanimate. Human beings are essentially relational, and yearn for genuine community, without the gnostic extremes of asceticism and licentiousness.

## **Gnostic Perspectives on Matter and Human Beings, in the Light of Orthodox Christian Theology**

Within Gnosticism there is a dualistic perspective on the relationship between matter and spirit, with the contention that matter is evil and perversely corrupted, that evil itself is sourced in matter, and that the cosmos (and the human body), having been created by an inferior demiurge, is a dungeon in which human souls are held captive. The Highest God is not responsible for the perversion that is material things, therefore. The demiurge is the source of matter, creation and evil. This demiurge is the creator of the world and matter, is quite distinct from the Deity, and is identified with the God of the Old Testament who is considered inferior and remote from the Supreme Being who is sharply removed from all things materials. The demiurge, or inferior creator of the world, is responsible for the Old Testament, the Law, all

created things and evil itself. From this understanding of God and his relationship to all things material emerges a docetic Christology that denies the full humanity of Christ in the Incarnation, and denies the reality of a literal suffering and crucified Christ. The Supreme God (who is not the Old Testament God) is understood as impersonal and incapable of physical suffering, since he is immeasurably removed from the matter of the world, so the Christ must not have had a literal body or been fully human.

Gnostic theology is a syncretistic combination of Christian, Platonic, Alexandrian, Zoroastrian, Persian, and possibly Indian Buddhist philosophies and theologies, able to be referred to as a ‘distinct religious movement, or cluster of movements, attested in history; that is to say, one can speak of “the Gnostic religion” as a discrete historical phenomenon, distinct from, even if closely related to, Judaism and Christianity’<sup>58</sup>, yet highly parasitical in nature, growing substantially out of and away from Judaism and intricately engaging the Christian myth. Yet its perspectives on the human body, matter, creation, and the participation in these things by the Divine, are radically at odds with the orthodox Christian view.

We will compare these theological foundations in Gnosticism with orthodox Christian theology in greater detail here, since this area is so critical to our study. This understanding of the relationship between matter and spirit (matter as evil and spirit as good) is critical to gnostic and gnosticizing theologies.

Human beings, in orthodox Christian theology, are clearly created beings. The Genesis account describes human beings as being created by God in his image, as sexual creatures, not self-sufficient, but profoundly relational. We are formed from ‘dust’, not as a closed historical event, but as process. Not only are we fashioned from ‘clay’ by our Creator at our conception; our entire lives are a testimony to the process of renewal and creative Divine genius. To be a creature is to be shaped by God from naught, and to be birthed into a process of being called and created, so that

---

<sup>58</sup> Pearson, B.A. 1992, ‘Eusebius and Gnosticism’ in Attridge, H.W. & Hata, G. (eds.). 1992, *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*. Wayne State University Press, Detroit. p.292.



we might fulfill our God-ordained purpose, to glorify and praise God through matter. We are continually being created, and so are firmly located within the created order. Nicholas Lash, in *Believing Three Ways in One God*,<sup>59</sup> wrote: ‘What makes the doctrine of createdness good news is the discovery that God makes the world ‘parentally’.’ Humanity experiences the parental nature and love of God in its created-ness or embodiment.

God continually forms and sustains creation parentally, and human beings are a part of creation, enjoying the filial care and concern of the Creator Father. Humanity, though at times deluded by visions of grandeur and self-sufficiency, is not self-made, but is continually created out of the abundance of God’s immeasurable love and grace. Humanity, formed by God and located within the world, is interdependent, not merely sharing the origins of other created things, but being woven into the fabric of the created order in mysterious and inexplicable ways.

We share the realities of gender, reproduction, sexual appetite, and sexual differentiation with other living creatures, and, like other living things, these elements of sexuality are highly prone to abuse, environmental factors, power and gender relationships, genetic influences, time and space, socialization, fear and intimidation, pleasure and freewill, individuality, ambiguity, fluidity and mystery. Our sexuality proclaims our location within the created order. This sexuality is a mirror of the web of relationship that all created things share in, and so the pathological urge to live as ‘non-sexual’, spiritual beings (I’m not referring to celibacy here), or, conversely, to indulge in animalistic, impersonal sexual practices, is to deny the relational essence of our matter, and to live without communication, communion, or genuine life. Both ends of the spectrum are dualistic, failing to appreciate humanity’s relational embedding in creation.

As created beings the created order, or the ‘world’, is the theatre in which our lives unfold – sexuality, work, family, commitments, spirituality, politics, society, suffering, ecology, achievement, failure, creative arts, etc – even though throughout history the human response to this reality has been mixed, hostile, ambiguous, and

---

<sup>59</sup> Lash, N. 1992, *Believing Three Ways in One God*. SCM, London, p.43.

sometimes gnostically orientated. Religious and spiritual movements have moved between the poles of the deification of the sensual and the repulsion of all things ‘unspiritual’, and have often sought to enable adherents to escape the worldly realities of birth, death, sexuality, and human society.

In the historical and eschatological significance of the Incarnation we are affirmed as created beings, and the created order is itself honored, as God comes into our created context to redeem and heal, affirming the intrinsic and theological value of created matter and humanity as part of creation. In the Incarnation Christ reveals his ongoing relationship to creation, which includes humankind, and his willingness to engage with the contours of creation, being time, space and matter. Human nature, essence and being are radically liberated and graced by the immanence (and transcendence) of Christ in the Incarnation, as part of creation we experience grace, freedom, personal dignity and the source of our inner yearning. In assuming human form, God unambiguously and forcefully declared creation to be good, humanity to be of incredible intrinsic value, and salvation to be located in our humanity, as all of creation is redeemed without altering its essence.

There is therefore a theological and ‘earthy’ unity between the realities of creation and Incarnation, which we freely share in. God’s ongoing creative activity and incarnational presence sustain a Christ-dependent world that is in real relationship with the Divine, even though the Creator is radically distinct from it. God is in ongoing relationship with creation, which includes humanity. An existentially dependent creation, including humanity, is not independent of its Creator, and is a recipient of his ongoing creative process, goodness, relational covenant, and incarnational immanence. And so humanity, as part of creation, ‘gives glory to God’.

Glorification of the Creator is the creation’s ultimate purpose – along with relational, non-subsumed union with the God. Creation’s future is to be revealed as the kingdom of glory, praise, and exaltation of the Creator. The history of creation, past, present and future, is the place where God’s glory is magnificently revealed and consummated. Humanity, as part of creation, is destined to glorify God along with the rest of creation.

As beings that are essentially part of creation, we share, along with the rest of creation, the history of God's salvific relationship to the world, and as creatures made in the image of both God and creation, uniquely charged with its care, we are to treat the rest of creation with the deep honor that reflects how our identity, heredity, and destiny is enmeshed with it, and redeemed along with it. Human beings don't exist in transcendent, subduing, monarchical relationship to the rest of creation; humanity, as part of creation, participates, communes, communicates, loves, repents, and breathes in the mysterious interrelationships of the created order, finding salvation and divine life through the incarnational presence of God in this very theatre.

A gnosticizing dualistic, utilitarian, and subjugating understanding of creation is nonsense and ultimately self-destructive, as human history testifies (nuclear proliferation, ecological genocide, unconscionable genetic experimentation, loss of biodiversity, global warming, viral metamorphoses, and the like). We cannot escape the consequences of our actions toward the rest of the created order precisely because humanity is a fundamental part of creation, and because God freely engages in a loving paternal relationship with creation.

Since humanity is part of creation, the dimensions of world, body and history are closely related in a Christian understanding of humanity. As created beings, humans are embodied in skeletal, muscular, respiratory, nervous, and cardiovascular systems (to name a few), this embodiment is in the world (we are immersed in structural and systemic realities - political, economic, social, religious, and the like), and the theatre upon which this drama is played is human history (time, space, matter, the realm of the spirit, and living organisms colliding in cosmic drama since the creation of the world).

Since this is the case, dualism is in vain, for the body and the soul are one, as the body is enlivened and given form by the soul, and the soul finds expression and spiritual completion through the body. Consequently, humanity as a soul/body unity is located ontologically in the world; there is no other arena in which human beings 'live and breathe and have their being'. To delude other human beings by

encouraging them to neglect the body, society (world), and their heritage that is located in history, through perverse and gnostic-like religious doctrines and practices, is blasphemous, and is to deny them the opportunity to live full and rich human lives.

As inextricably part of creation, human beings are soul and body, within history and society, and this existential and fleshly unity is consubstantial in nature, an active rather than passive dynamic, as spirit and flesh enrich, complement, and complete each other in the stage show of the past being made present (human history), and in the astoundingly inconsistent and terrifying, yet beautifully God-formed and redeemable, existence of the human race in social settings.

To compel human beings to see themselves as conflicted entities in constant battle with their corrupted and corrupting flesh, or as spiritual beings that need disciplined existential formation in order to achieve contemplative release or ‘nothingness’, as freedom from the body and the world, is to deny the goodness and wisdom of the Creator, for it is to see the creation as innately flawed, conflicted and debased, a perspective that blasphemes the holiness and sufficiency of the Incarnation and of the Creation. Having said that, we recognize that there is a ‘struggle’ that is part of life and discipleship if only of the ‘false’ with the ‘true’ self. To recognize this struggle is not, however, to concede ground to Gnostic dualism.

We have examined the general philosophical and theological underpinnings of Gnosticism. Our focus in the next chapter becomes more specific and deals with the areas of human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour.

## Chapter 3

### Characteristics of Gnosticism 2: Specific Issues

Our consideration will now focus on the specific perspectives of Gnosticism with regard to human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour, as per component question (i), pages 11-12.

#### Human Personhood

Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries maintained a distinct tripartite concept of the human person, which was a direct result of Gnostic mythology. The Gnostic anthropological creation myth, though it has some variations in the various Gnostic schools, focuses on the paradise story of Genesis 2-3, and unravels, in its barest possible form, as such: The supreme God acts to correct the error and indiscretion of Sophia by reflecting his image in human form in the waters of the lower heaven; the demiurge and the archons are so taken by this image that they decide to create such a being; the Archons of the seven Authorities each make a contribution to the soul of the human being; the angels of the highest God fool Ialdabaoth into imparting some of the pure light into Adam so that he lives;<sup>60</sup> now those particles of light can return to their origin through the redemption of human beings; and, these humans also have now not only a soul, but trace elements of the divine spirit (a divine spark), which make them superior to the powers of the cosmos.

The four archons then employ matter through the four elements of the world, as well as passions, instincts and desire, to imprison and entomb the soul-spirit in a body, and all of the human psychic and material components are fashioned by these archons, beginning with the head and working downward, as detailed in *Ap. John* (II, I). 15:29-17:31.:

---

<sup>60</sup> Williams, M. 1996, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. p.119.

The first one began to create the head: Eteraphaope-Abron created his head; Meniggesstroeth created the brain; Asterechme the right eye; Thaspomocha the left eye; Yeronumos the right ear; Bissoum the left ear; Akioreim the nose; Banen-Ephroum the lips; Amen the teeth, etc.<sup>61</sup>

The Gnostic myth then proposes that demons and archons are assigned to rule over the different senses, the passions and the emotions; a destructive, rebellious spirit, hostile to God, is implanted in human beings by the four archons to contradict and work against the divine spark; a woman is created from Adam by the demiurge so that he can possess and wield Sophia's power; and sexual desire is fostered in the human heart to cause them to struggle against and continue to contradict the divine spirit within.

Therefore a tripartite concept of the human person is maintained, in which the body is a tomblike prison, both the body and the soul are created by the evil powers of the world with all of their passions, sexual desires, and instincts, and the spirit (spiritual seed or divine spark within) is the only part of humankind that retains the divine spark of light that may return to the highest God, the only thing that is of any value with regard to the human person, and the only thing capable of being redeemed and saved.<sup>62</sup>

Since the soul is the seat of human passions it is devalued along with the prison of the body, and the spirit within is exalted as the source of enlightenment and the bearer of the divine spark; yet not all human beings maintain a similar relationship between the body, soul and spirit,<sup>63</sup> since persons are either 'pneumatic', 'psychic', or 'fleshly' ('earthly' or 'material').<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> *Ap. John* (II, I). 15:29-17:31, in Robinson, J. (ed.). 1977, pp.107-109.

<sup>62</sup> Jonas, H. 2003, pp.467-470.

<sup>63</sup> Edwards, M.J. 1990, 'Neglected Texts in the Study of Gnosticism.' *Journal of Theological Studies*. 41, pp.30-31.

<sup>64</sup> Paul the Apostle uses the same tripartite approach in his theological anthropology – spirit (*pneuma*), soul (*psyche*), and body (*soma*). Whereas *soma* refers explicitly to the body, when Paul uses the word *sarx* (flesh) he is often referring to the whole, unregenerate man, and therefore *sarx* should not be considered synonymous with *soma*.

Jonas quotes Irenaeus as confirming that according to the Valentinians: ‘There are three kinds of human beings, the pneumatics, the psychics and the material, like Cain, Abel and Seth; they use these three biblical figures to demonstrate the three natures, not in the individual human being, but in the human race as a whole’.<sup>65</sup> While the fate of the psychics remains in the balance, the fleshly are headed for destruction, and only the elite, spiritual, enlightened pneumatics are unquestionably preserved for salvation, and these are somewhat compelled to convert the ordinary Christian from a mere psychic experience of the divine, which is tenuous and dangerous, to an exalted pneumatic encounter with God that leads to salvation. The pneumatics are convinced that through their mystical, secret knowledge they have experience far more than the psychic Christian, who needs to be freed to pneumatic awareness, higher forms of worship, a mystical experience of the One, and a gnostic certainty of salvation, and from lower, degenerate levels of awareness and communion with God.<sup>66</sup>

Humans live, then, with the tension between matter and spirit, and the soul of the person may either proceed upwards through participation in the spiritual, or move downwards through a desire for the material, fleshly and earthly realm. Sophia stands at the intersection of this polarity, and this gnostic anthropology explains the presence and tension of the divided self. Only through *gnosis* can one become fully integrated and progress upward toward the Divine and his liberation. Some of the Nag Hammadi scriptures describe an enthronement that is yet to be unveiled as the human soul ascends through the spheres and receives an unction.<sup>67</sup> The coming of the True Man is coupled with gnostic enlightenment, illumination and anointing with the Unction of the Life Eternal, and such an experience is only available through the pathway of *gnosis*.

The human body and its physiological processes are also used analogously for describing and considering such gnostically interrelated themes as theology,

---

<sup>65</sup> Irenaeus. *Adv. Haer.* 1.7.5, quoted in Jonas, H. 2003, p.469.

<sup>66</sup> Pagels, E. 1973, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*. Abingdon Press, Nashville, pp.120-121. For Logan’s defence of some of these perspectives and fervours see: Logan, A.H.B. 2001, ‘Truth in a Heresy? 4. Gnosticism Source.’ *Expository Times*. 112,6, p.191.

<sup>67</sup> Robinson, J. 1977, p.38.

cosmology, soteriology, and sociology. Since the body as material is contrary and opposed to the spiritual spark within humans, it is used to symbolise negative cultural, anthropological, and structural processes and rulers on varying levels, and since it entombs the spirit and makes it numb to the presence and purposes of the Divine, it is used negatively in its embryological, mortological, and cosmological symbolism.<sup>68</sup> According to Gilhus, ‘the orifices of the body and their discharges are the marginal points of the system. It is – like every structured system – vulnerable at its margins, and those marginal areas are seen as especially dangerous,’ and the female physiological processes are especially used in ‘the negative evaluation of theology, cosmology, society and material existence,’<sup>69</sup> since the female reproductive organs, sexual desire, and human instincts and impulses were created by the demiurge to prevent human beings from pure and redemptive *gnosis*. The products and intimacies of sexual intercourse and human sexuality are rigorously denigrated, and the metaphor of birth is used to describe the creation of the cosmos as a repulsive birth-product, a miscarriage, and an abortion.

In Gnosticism, the sexually compelled human body and soul is a filthy, repulsive, entombing prison, or body of darkness or beast,<sup>70</sup> and *The Treatise on Resurrection* pronounces that ‘The afterbirth of the body is old age, and you exist in corruption.’<sup>71</sup> The body, then, is reflective of and connected to the hierarchical order of the archons, as well as being a perverse and frustrating cage for the human spirit, the divine spark within the human person.

It may be understood, then, that this gnostic theological anthropology embodies the dualistic gnostic tension between spirit and matter, and has profound implications for how they constructed their theologies of creation, Jesus, and most significantly salvation. It also impacted their approach to ethics, since if the body is depraved,

---

<sup>68</sup> Gilhus, I. 1984, ‘Gnosticism: A Study in Liminal Symbolism.’ *Numen*. 31,111.

<sup>69</sup> Gilhus, I. 1984.

<sup>70</sup> *Apocryphon of John* (II, I) 31:4, in Robinson, J. (ed.). 1977, p.116; *Paraphrase of Shem* 1:15; 19:27; 45:34, in Robinson, J. (ed.). 1977, pp.309, 317, & 327.

<sup>71</sup> *Treatise on the Resurrection* 47:17-19, in Robinson, J. (ed.). 1977, p.52.



imperfect or evil then what does it matter how one uses or abuses it? This leads to extremes of asceticism and licentiousness among gnostic practitioners and schools.

Gnostic docetic Christology is closely linked with these perspectives on the human person and the body in Christian Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. The Christ needed only to have a spiritual body - an *ochema*, the semblance of a body, made of a pneumatic substance - that allowed him to descend to the world of flesh.<sup>72</sup> A variation of this idea is found in the gnosticizing 'separation' christology, enabling them to propose that the spiritual Christ unified with the human being Jesus of Nazareth for the period between the baptism and the crucifixion, and the undesirable body of the man Jesus was left behind as the heavenly Christ returned to the supreme God. In both instances the fleshly element of the doctrine of the Incarnation is denied as repulsive and incredulous, and by means of various artifices the concept of Christ's actual physical death on the cross is rejected and eliminated, and the salvific role of the crucifixion is seriously undermined and supplanted by the quest for gnostic knowledge.

So we have the following Gnostic texts denying the full, embodied humanity of the Christ, and rejecting his 'fleshly' parts, just as the human body in the human experience is seen as an unfortunate, sluggish, less-than-worthy substance:

'Sometimes, when I made to touch him, I encountered a material, firm body; another time, when I touched him, the substance was immaterial and unbodily, as if it did not exist.'<sup>73</sup>

'John, as far as the crowd down there in Jerusalem are concerned, I was crucified and pierced with lances and reeds, and given vinegar and gall to drink. But now I am talking to you... I am not the one on the cross... thus I have not suffered any of those things that they will say about me'.<sup>74</sup>

'I did not die in reality, but in appearance... it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder. I was another on whom they placed the crown of thorns. But I was rejoicing in the height... And I was laughing at their ignorance.'<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Quispel, G. 1996, 'The Original Doctrine of Valentinus the Gnostic.' *Vigiliae-Christianae*. 50,4, p.343.

<sup>73</sup> *The Acts of John*. 93, in James, M.R. (ed.). 1924, *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, online at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/noncanon/acts/actjohn.htm>

<sup>74</sup> *The Acts of John*. 97-101, in James, M.R. (ed.). 1924. Clarendon Press, Oxford, online at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/noncanon/acts/actjohn.htm>

<sup>75</sup> *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*. NHC VII/2, 55:18f, 56:9-14,18-20, in Robinson, J. (ed.). 1977, p.332.

‘He whom you saw on the tree, glad and laughing, this is the living Jesus. But this one into whose hands and feet they drive the nails is his fleshly (σαρκικον) part, which is the substitute being put to shame, the one who came into being in his likeness.’<sup>76</sup>

For the Gnostic, then, the human person is tripartite and only the divine spark or spirit is worthy and able to experience salvation, by an ascent to the heavenly realm and the supreme One, and a reintegration into the divine, through an immersion in *gnosis*.<sup>77</sup> This kind of theology seriously undermines the public nature and responsibility of faith, as we will see in the gnostic views of community and social behaviour.

## Perspectives on Human Community

The writings of the Church fathers confirm that Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries was located in various schools or sects, and the existence of Gnostic writings themselves confirm that there must have been gnostic communities behind these texts that would have maintained some form of ecclesiology or understanding about the nature and theology of human community and the Church.

The Gnostics, however, were generally opposed to any formal manifestation of a social system. Enthusiasm for liberation from the inferior soul, rejection of the human body as undesirable, and repulsion toward the perceived binding social constructs of the Church and the world and their rulers, led to the development of a liminal, loosely connected fraternity within gnostic sects – communities based on simple social structures with functional leadership and mystical perspectives on interconnectedness, rather than formal hierarchies. These Gnostic communities not only stood in opposition to existing and ‘corrupted’ social structures, aside from when they were accommodating Hellenistic culture for their own purposes and gain, but also formed their own meaningful *communitas*. Gilhus even suggests that,

---

<sup>76</sup> *Apocalypse of Peter*. NHC VII/3, 81.15-23, in Robinson, J. (ed.). 1977, p.344.

<sup>77</sup> Pearson, B.A. 1984, ‘Gnosticism as Platonism: With Special Reference to Marsanes (NHC 10,1).’ *Harvard-Theological-Review*. 77,1, pp.67-68.

The anti-structure of gnostic *communitas* is revealed in its antinomian character, be it as freedom from or rebellion against the Law; in the violating of family-ties, either in the form of absolute asceticism or as promiscuity; and in the abolishment of status-distinctions. *Communitas* is established on the principle of equality within.<sup>78</sup>

A pneumatic-charismatic-organic formation of each gnostic community stood in contrast to the hierarchical order they perceived in the Church.<sup>79</sup>

Jonas proposes that the two main models of *communitas* or *thiasos* the Gnostics followed were the cultic and mystery associations and the philosophical schools.<sup>80</sup> These were formed in the effort to distinguish themselves from the existing Church and religious institutions, to prevent an overarching organization to come into existence, to provide a basis for interpersonal exploration of the mysteries and for participation in their own unique forms of worship, sacraments, prayer and cult, to secure a location for a community of fellow pneumatics dedicated to achieving *gnosis*, to develop rituals, initiation rites, and necessary self-organization to sustain their movements, to permit loose gatherings on the basis of specific needs and situations, and to decide what activities, whether social, ministerial, or missiological, were needed and acceptable at any given time.

The Christian Gnostics did, infuriatingly for their opponents (especially for the leaders and teachers of the orthodox Christian Church), see themselves as Christians, and consequently adopted the concept of the *ekklesia* as they depicted themselves as the true elect, the *pneumatics*, the only genuine and solely chosen and sanctified 'church' in the world.

Tertullian is particularly damning of these communities, but some of his polemic gives us insight into the egalitarian, anti-hierarchical, participatory and experiential nature of these communities. Even their negative analogous use of femininity and

---

<sup>78</sup> Gilhus, I. 1984. p.119.

<sup>79</sup> A gnostic group that stands in stark contrast to this general model is the Manicheans, whose structures were very developed and hierarchical, involving a distinct division between the *electi* (perfect) and the *auditores* (hearers).

<sup>80</sup> Jonas, H. 2003. p.487.

the female anatomy seems to be overridden by their commitment to full participation of the pneumatics regardless of their sexuality (and sometimes because of their sexuality, suggests Grant<sup>81</sup> and Buckley):<sup>82</sup>

Nor will I omit a description of the manner of life of the heretics, portraying it in all its looseness, its worldliness, its low human character, without dignity, without authority, without church discipline, and utterly in keeping with their own faith. To begin with, one does not even know who is a catechumen and who is a believer. They go in together, they listen together, they pray together... All are puffed up, all promise knowledge. The catechumens are already *perfecti*, even before they have received any instruction. And then, the heretical women – how impertinent and presumptuous they are! They take it upon themselves to teach, to engage in disputes, to carry out exorcisms, to promise healings, perhaps even to baptise too... Nowhere is promotion easier than in the camp of the rebels, where mere physical presence counts as virtue. So one of them is a bishop today, another tomorrow; someone is a deacon today and a lector tomorrow; or else, a priest today and a layman tomorrow. For they entrust the priestly functions to laymen too.<sup>83</sup>

Those who participated in these Gnostic communities were, however, gripped by a consciousness that focused on individualism and on ‘individual transcendence’<sup>84</sup>, and manifested the following characteristics.

## **An Individualized Experience and Transcendence**

For the gnostic there was a personal sense of calling that did not need to be validated by the community or any other existing institutions, and a deeply held conviction that it is *I* who is *pneumatic*, and the Gnostic knows this because of an intensely personal and experiential revelation to oneself. The idea was valued that an ‘encounter with Christ is a recognition of one’s own hidden, unknown true identity... the discovery

---

<sup>81</sup> Grant, R. 1985, ‘Gnostic Spirituality’ in McGinn, B. & Meyendorff, J. (eds.). 1985. *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. Crossroad, New York. pp.54-55.

<sup>82</sup> Buckley, J. 1994, ‘Libertines or Not: Fruit, Bread, Semen and Other Body Fluids in Gnosticism.’ *Journal-of-Early-Christian-Studies*. 2, pp.17-21.

<sup>83</sup> Tertullian. *Praescr.Haer.* 41, in Jonas, H. 2003, p.487.

<sup>84</sup> Perkins, P. 1980, *The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism*. Paulist Press, New York, p.10.

of self... (which is an) experience to be actualised.<sup>85</sup> This experience was coupled with a passionate concern for personal reward for one's *gnosis* and spiritual status, both in this life and the one of come, in the form of sensory pleasure or illumination, and mystical and metaphysical personal transformation.

## **An Absence of Personal Obligation**

An absence of a personal obligation to the Mosaic Law, the Church's ethical or social teachings, and the political and social institutions of the state, existed within gnostic individualism, as well as an indulgence in autonomously determined and critiqued freedoms and ethics, often expressed in extremely individualistic and self-selected libertinism or asceticism.

## **Individually Gained Sanctification and Freedom**

There also emerged a belief that it is the assertion of the individual's will and effort that moves one from the status of *material* or *psychic* to *pneumatic*. Also the idea that salvation from determinism (fate) and to illumination is only accomplished through the working out of one's own redemption and self-realization, for 'only by living to the full his human adventure was the Gnostic able to realize his dream of freedom.'<sup>86</sup> Jonas writes that, 'The immediate illumination not only makes the individual sovereign in the sphere of knowledge (hence the limitless variety of gnostic doctrines) but also determines the sphere of action'<sup>87</sup> and Pagels maintains that, 'Only on the basis of immediate experience could one create the poems, vision accounts, myths, and hymns that Gnostics prized as proof that one actually has attained gnosis.'<sup>88</sup> These are useful summaries of the grip of individualism and privatised spirituality found within Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries of the Christian era.

---

<sup>85</sup> Green, H.A. 1985, *The Economic and Social Origins of Gnosticism*. Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, p.215.

<sup>86</sup> Filoramo, G. 1990, *A History of Gnosticism*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, p.189.

<sup>87</sup> Jonas, H. 1992, p.46.

<sup>88</sup> Pagels, E. 1980, *The Gnostic Gospels*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, p.145.

Gnosticism's perspectives on human community, therefore, were both a reaction against the institutionalism and formalism of the existing Church and other Hellenistic religious institutions, and a manifestation of anticosmic and highly individualized mythological paradigms. Their organic, participatory, experiential, and decentralized expressions were equally matched by their individualized and privatised spirituality.

Therefore, a range of community expressions and approaches to social ethics is evidenced in Gnosticism, which were particularly demonstrated through asceticism as a means of intimate connection with God, and licentiousness as a result of indifference to human ethics or the laws of the demiurge of the Old Testament. These social, ethical and ritual dimensions of Gnosticism were held together by the complex, syncretistic, evolving mythology, added to and developed by each individual Gnostic teacher so that these myths and communal rituals became highly complex and rigorous.

## **Engagement with the World and Social Behaviour**

We have already seen that the world in Gnostic thought is the creation of the lower Old Testament God. The indiscretion and deviance of Sophia (who is not herself the Highest God) causes a fatal rupture within the divine – this cosmic accident or fall brings about the birth of human beings and the world, through *Ialdabaoth*, who is the lower and perverted creator God of the Old Testament, who creates the world in ignorance of his own limitations and smallness in comparison with the Supreme God.<sup>89</sup> In this way the Gnostics explained their negative view of the created world

---

<sup>89</sup> The following gnostic quote describes the creation of the Old Testament God by Sophia. Sophia herself is not the Highest God, but the one who is closest to him. The quote explains how the Gnostics were able to attribute the creation of the world and all things material to an inferior and evil being (the Old Testament God, who they often called *Ialdabaoth*), and reserve things spiritual, good and perfect to the Highest God (sometimes called the *Pneuma* by the Gnostics). 'Our sister, the Sophia, being an Aeon, conceived a thought, and through the thought of the Pneuma and Prognosis, attempted to project from herself the Image. The Pneuma (the Highest God) had not approved and had not given her permission, nor her Partner and Consort, the male Virginal Pneuma... Her thought could not remain ineffective, and her work emerged imperfect, and ugly in appearance, since she had produced it without her Consort... She saw that it (the Old Testament God) was different in form, having the appearance of a snake and a lion. Its eyes streamed fire. She cast it (the Old Testament God) away from her, outside of those areas, so that none of the immortals might see it, because she has borne it in Ignorance. She

and its structural and social constructs, as well as their rejection of the Old Testament concept of God as perverted and evil.

While this explains the mythological basis for the Gnostic suspicion of the created world, its powers and its material, we now must explore how the Gnostics regarded engagement with or participation in the world, what level of social interaction and involvement was seen as desirable, and how they felt compelled to behave morally and practically in society.

Williams, in *Rethinking Gnosticism*, argues that the Gnostics maintained a much higher level of social participation and cultural engagement than has usually been proposed.<sup>90</sup> The main arguments Williams suggests to support this contention are listed here, along with some responses:

- (1) These supposed ‘anticosmics’ may not have had a ‘calculated indifference or marked antipathy toward the Roman order’, since many of them voluntarily choose to live and immigrate to the city of Rome, which suggests they were not completely hostile to political culture. This suggestion is certainly a significant one, although proximity does not equal engagement or participation, and the Gnostics certainly shunned the value of social engagement and secular participation in the process of personal salvation and redemption.<sup>91</sup>
  
- (2) Tertullian of Carthage complained that those who leaned toward ‘heresies’ socialised too much with worldly or culturally influential people, that their general conduct was too earthy and on the human level, that they too readily appointed people of public office or obligation to roles in leadership, and that they did not clearly distinguish between those who were full believers and those who were outsiders. This charge by Tertullian, however, may be

---

bound it in a cloud of light and set a throne in the midst of a cloud... She gave it the name *Ialdabaoth*. *Apocryphon of John*. 36.16-38.14, in Robinson, J. (ed.). 1977, p.104.

<sup>90</sup> Williams, M.A. 1996, ‘Anticosmic World-Rejection? or Sociocultural Accommodation?’ pp.96-115.

<sup>91</sup> Williams, M.A. 1996, pp.101-102.

interpreted either as Williams does, or as Tertullian's concern about their lack of respect for conventional social orders or authority structures, since they devalued these social concerns and structures so acutely.

- (3) Irenaeus of Lyons charged the Valentinians and Basilideans of indulging in food offered to idols, celebrating pagan festivals, and enjoying murderous spectacles between animals and gladiators, and Williams suggests that this is evidence that they did not withdraw completely from the world, but were fully engaged with it. Irenaeus' accusation, however, may also be evidence of their libertinism and extravagant violation of traditional religious concerns and norms, as a direct result of the lack of respect for the body, ethically concerned Christian communities, and perceived 'earthly preoccupations' of those Christian groups who considered salvation to be in the context of relationships within and beyond a believing community.
- (4) The widespread Gnostic devaluation of martyrdom demonstrates that they were 'advocating the toning down of Christian sociopolitical deviance'. Yet it may also be suggested that this unwillingness to suffer for a greater cause, and desire instead to engage in non-threatening philosophical pursuits, demonstrated a Gnostic disregard for 'material' or 'physical' expressions of faith, or that hatred of the world and of the body resulted in a lack of interest in ethics.

The incongruence between the seeming accommodation of Hellenistic culture and tradition, and the rejection of the material world and its structures, can be explained, according to Williams, by the self-evident fact that:

Not all, and not even some of the most interesting, of the groups, figures, or texts that have conventionally been labelled "gnostic" were in fact all that socially or politically deviant, on a scale of relative social or political deviance – and therefore are not best described as "anticosmic" or "world-rejecting" in any social or political sense.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Williams, M.A. 1996, p.106.



This last contention by Williams deserves significant recognition, in my opinion, since it seems evident that gnosticizing ideology does not necessarily preclude one from an engagement in contemporary philosophical, cultural, and analytical concerns, and since while some Gnostic groups clearly maintained a significant and ‘anticosmic’ distance from the prevailing Hellenistic culture, such as the Marcionites, others certainly seemed to be able to reconcile their philosophical dualism with their interest in social and cultural engagement through a tendency toward a lower level of socio-cultural tension, such as the Valentinians, Basilideans, the two Theodoti, and Natalius. These latter were able to justify this philosophically by claiming that a participation in political and social forums was expedient for their cause and movement, and not threatening enough to rob them of their pure, higher, pneumatic state. It also allowed them to effectively proselytise, which the Valentinians and Basilideans were effective in doing.

These differing levels of socio-cultural tension, participation and concern within Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries help to explain the contradictory emphasis we see in Gnostic social behaviour and ethics. Libertinism and asceticism coexist in Gnosticism. The pneumatics, in the Gnostic worldview, were completely free from rigid external ties and obligations, and their bodies were used as mere vehicles for enlightenment and liberation, and so they were free to practice both indulgent libertinism and self-imposed asceticism as they saw fit, and as best served the immediate needs of their ‘fraternity’ and spiritual impulses.

This existential approach to life and morality was compelled by the desire for full human experience, and an unrestrained immersion in the pleasures, struggles, and indulgences of life, so that the demiurge and his unnatural laws and restrictions would not control the pneumatic. A life separated from the world meant both a life separated at times from the restraints and perverse boundaries of the world, hence libertinism, and at times from the sensual delights and fleshly concerns of the world, hence asceticism, and, as mentioned above, various Gnostic groups concerned themselves with varying degrees of social accommodation and anticosmic alienation.

The result is that Gnosticism offers no genuine systematic ethical constructs or guidelines for the adherent, and this is not surprising given the Gnostic view of the

temporality of this life and the world, and its soteriological emphasis on *gnosis*, which is not defined by conduct, obligation or compulsion. The emphasis on *gnosis* also shaped their understandings of salvation in terms of what aspect of human personhood is saved (the spirit), their perspectives on the nature of the Church (spiritual and far from institutional), and ultimately the division between faith and practice, religion and ethics, and individual personhood and community responsibility.

Gnostic engagement with the world and perspectives on social behaviour, therefore, seem to be centred on such things as an overarching disdain for the created order and its worldly structures, varying levels of socio-cultural tension between Gnostic groups, and an opportunity for entertaining philosophical considerations and debate about contemporary social, political, religious and cultural issues while renouncing the confines of institutional structures. They also emphasised the freedom to choose libertinism, asceticism, or something in between, on the basis of one's own gnostic journey, and this individualized experience is also true of what moral and ethical perspectives a gnostic might choose for oneself.

## **Conclusion**

Chapters 2 and 3 have outlined the critical features of Christian Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries with particular regard to its perspectives on human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour. At the heart of Gnosticism is the conviction that spiritual things are good and material things are evil. Because matter is evil then the body is considered to be a tomblike prison, both the body and the soul are corrupted and ultimately repulsive, and the spirit is the only part of the human being that is redeemable.

Again, since matter is evil, there is an overarching disdain for the created order and its worldly structures, and an individualized approach the morality, social participation, and ethics. Their dualistic worldview plus their emphasis on individualized experience meant that their perspectives on human community were both a reaction against the institutionalism of the existing Church and other

Hellenistic religious organizations, and a manifestation of extremely individualized mythological perspectives. Their participatory, experiential, and decentralized understanding of community was matched by their individualized and privatised spirituality, since their understandings of community were never allowed to encroach on their privatised experience of the divine. Both the experiential and the privatised shaped their experience and expressions of human community.

It has not been a detailed study, since this is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It has, however, provided a distillation of Gnosticism's principal characteristics to use as a measuring rod for comparing the Content Analysis of the contemporary Christian faith communities in Cyberspace. That is our next task in relation to human personhood (Chapter 4), community (Chapter 5), and engagement with the world and social behaviour (Chapter 6).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Perspectives on Human Personhood**

This chapter compares cyber-faith-community and Gnostic perspectives on human personhood. Analysing the content of Christian communities in cyberspace in relation to human personhood, and comparing this data with the understandings of human personhood that characterised 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Gnosticism achieved this. Chapters 4-6 answer Component Question (ii), ‘What gnostic-like and non-gnostic-like elements are present within contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace, particularly with regard to human personhood, community, and engagement with the world and social behaviour?’

#### **Essential Conceptions of the Human Body**

The essential conceptions of the human body in Christian communities in Cyberspace are predominantly positive. Such phrases as ‘man is an active participant in the creative process... we are animated bodies, not embodied spirits’,<sup>93</sup> ‘the centrality of the community to the gospel means that the message is never disembodied’,<sup>94</sup> and ‘we are embodied selves... complete people... we don’t just live in our heads’,<sup>95</sup> demonstrate these predominantly positive perspectives on the human body. A writer in TheOoze refers to Bernard of Clairvaux’s “In Cantica” Sermon 20 when he writes that the ‘truth that God is not known if God is not loved is not without parallel in our daily existence. What husband or wife wants to be loved by their mate in the mind alone? Love is expressed from the centre of our being, and finds expression in the body, soul, and spirit. It’s greatest demonstration is in the Incarnation.’<sup>96</sup> This contrasts the idea in Gnosticism of the body as a tomblike prison, and as degenerate.

---

<sup>93</sup> TheOoze: 11560-11565.

<sup>94</sup> Phuture: 8598-8608.

<sup>95</sup> Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua: 965-973.

<sup>96</sup> TheOoze: 22914-22924.

An exception is found in TheOoze where another writer tells of his experience of a very intense worship experience. He writes that as he began to express his feelings to God, his body wanted to do the same. It wanted to give all it had to God. However he claims that he had a revelation or realization that this was not enough. He began to realize that the body could not adequately express what his spirit felt, and that he needed more limbs to praise the Lord with his body.

‘I described it on a tithe envelope that night as “My spirit wasn’t made for this physical body, which only serves to limit my expression of worship.” That is why sometimes the spirit can not even use words of this mouth to express God through intense prayer.’<sup>97</sup>

While it may be argued that this is the only example that can be found of a negative perspective on the human body among the communities in cyberspace, it might also be suggested that it is not negative at all but rather an awareness of the limits of embodiment.

It is worth, however, raising a question about the general view on human personhood presented in these websites, since it might be argued that the medium as such militates against a positive view of embodiment, leaving one with the impression that the websites are saying one thing but in reality communicating another in the form of communication, which is cyber-technology. The medium, then, might be the actual message. We will examine this question in greater detail in Chapter 5. For all that, the formal message being sent by the websites is overwhelmingly positive with regard to their essential conceptions of the human body.

## **Relationship between Spirit, Soul and Body**

The body, soul, and spirit of the human person are equally valued in Christian communities in Cyberspace, which is quite contrary to Gnostic thought. This can be seen in such ideas as ‘as a whole creature, we are not divided into the old modern understanding of man as body, soul and spirit. We are animated bodies, not

---

<sup>97</sup> TheOoze: 22332-22350.

embodied spirits'.<sup>98</sup> Virtual Church suggests that 'the order of my nature is now spirit, soul and body; the order that God designed.'<sup>99</sup>

The understanding of the difference of the terms 'body', 'soul', and 'spirit' embraced here is that while the body is the entire physical structure of a human being, the soul is a rational-spiritual substance made 'like God', and made by him, sustaining and directing the body, and God probably creates each individual soul at the moment that he gives it a body. The soul, then, is the spiritual or immaterial part of humans, and the seat of human personality, intellect, will, and emotions, and it survives the body after death. The term 'spirit' should be regarded as synonymous with the 'soul' in the writings in the Christian communities in Cyberspace, while in Gnostic philosophy the soul is distinct from the spirit, since the soul is as corruptible as the body and a product of the lesser and lower Old Testament God, and the spirit is immortal and incorruptible and made in the image of the Highest God. Christian communities in Cyberspace reject this tripartite view, taking a bipartite one, which values the spirit, soul, and body equally.

## **Means of Redemption and Salvation**

For the Christian communities in Cyberspace, the concept of redemption and salvation involves:

1. A recognition of the unique and gracious role of Jesus Christ;
2. Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, based on his work and person alone;
3. The fallen state of human beings, in so much as 'that by nature and by choice, all men are sinners, destitute of all power to save themselves... Therefore the only means of salvation of sinful men is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit on the basis of the atoning work of Christ through personal faith in Christ',<sup>100</sup>;
4. A process;

---

<sup>98</sup> TheOoze: 11565.

<sup>99</sup> Virtual Church: 6514.

<sup>100</sup> First International Church of the Web: 77-81.

5. The need to be ‘born again’ in order to be saved; and,
6. Regeneration through faith in Christ.
7. It also involves a holistic redemption of life, work and education, according to one of the authors in Phuture, which is one of the cyber-churches:

Jesus and Paul came from a culture that viewed life in holistic terms. St Patrick was heavily influenced by the Eastern Orthodox Church and consequently viewed his mission to the Irish to include all aspects of life, work and education as worthy of redemption. A Gnostic like separation would have seemed absurd to men such as these. Christianity is about a life offered in worship to God in the every day as opposed to the pursuit of ecstatic experiences. The difficulty is in reducing worship to the singing of songs and such ecstatic pursuits, and seeing salvation and holiness in similar terms.<sup>101</sup>

Another Phuture author suggests that ‘the question of social gospel or personal gospel will be a fossil paradigm because personal salvation will not simply be limited by the dichotomies of modernist thought, but will bring salvation to society, and society will see salvation of power structures in such a way that lead to personal salvation as a by-product’<sup>102</sup> – this perspective on structural salvation was repugnant to the Gnostics.

Only the Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua differs from these orthodox views, embracing universalism, questioning orthodox Christian theology and the intelligibility of its arguments, and considering Gnostic-like alternatives.

## **Role of the Passions, Emotions and Senses**

In the Christian communities in Cyberspace, the passions, emotions and senses are depicted as desirous once sanctified and regenerated, a part of God’s design for human beings, the catalyst for spiritual movements, a forum for reaching postmodern people with God’s truth and love, an opportunity for multi-sensory and ‘alternative’ worship experiences, and a source of moral imperative.

---

<sup>101</sup> Phuture: 3861-3871.

<sup>102</sup> Phuture: 19772-19779.

Here are some quotes that illustrate such positive views: ‘the primary reason why movements exist is spiritual passion’<sup>103</sup>; ‘teenagers need to use every part of their beings to express who they are... radical teenage Christians bursting with fireworks of pent-up emotion and energy in the presence of an awesome God’<sup>104</sup>; ‘all our sense can stir up powerful memories and images, some good and some bad. When they work together they can bring us to a new level of worship’<sup>105</sup>; ‘I think something the modern church has forgotten is that we have five senses, and, at most, church worship uses two, three tops – sight, sound and smell. But we have five and we need to strive to use all five in worship to have a meaningful experience’<sup>106</sup>; ‘He is your heavenly Father and He delights to give you the fulfillment of the desires He has placed in your heart’<sup>107</sup>; ‘Gut-feel in the form of some ultimate concern, rather than reason, is the source of moral imperative’<sup>108</sup>; ‘Blessed is the person whose desire for God has become like the lover’s passion for the beloved. John Climacus, mystic, in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*’<sup>109</sup>; and, ‘Life without passion isn’t life’<sup>110</sup>. There is no hint here that the soul is created by evil powers with all their passions, sexual desires, and instincts, as Gnosticism suggests.

The only negative perspective is articulated about feelings from a few websites, suggesting such things as ‘faith is independent of our feelings, it is an act of will, of our true self reaching out beyond our senses, our emotions, our patterns of behaviour to the reality of God’.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Phuture: 3178-3187.

<sup>104</sup> The Edge: 6078-6082.

<sup>105</sup> TheOoze: 12004-12012.

<sup>106</sup> TheOoze: 11896-11900.

<sup>107</sup> WebChurch: 1274-1278.

<sup>108</sup> Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua: 657-660.

<sup>109</sup> Vurch: 1265-1269.

<sup>110</sup> WebChurch: 248-252.

<sup>111</sup> WebChurch: 3078-3086.



The Positive Church Online also, remarkably, contests that the emotions and passions are:

‘the point where we exhibit our immaturity and human frailness... (since) we cannot see beyond the limits of our own emotions and our partially developed minds as we evolve to becoming the loving conscious beings we are destined to be. This is the Promised Land! We need and we use god as a support system...’<sup>112</sup>

Such ideas are in the minority though, in the Christian communities in Cyberspace.

### **Spirituality: Pneumatic, Psychic and Fleshly Persons**

In Gnosticism, people are considered pneumatic, psychic, or fleshly, depending on their perceived level of spirituality. There is a scent of this in the considerations of some of these websites, for example, the ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit turbo-charges you with God’s power’,<sup>113</sup> and presumably makes one a higher-level Christian, and ‘until a climactic ecstatic experience similar to the one described in Chronicles is reached’<sup>114</sup> one is bound by intellectualism, critiques of enemies, and an enmity between their spiritual and secular lives, and ‘we think we are human beings who occasionally have spiritual experiences, but we are really spiritual beings who are here to have human experiences.’<sup>115</sup>

Other websites are more explicitly Gnostic in this regard, suggesting that ‘each of us is here to find our paths to enlightenment and spiritual maturity, so that we may in time collectively reach our zenith and develop to be the true brotherhood of man.’<sup>116</sup>

However, in other texts spirituality is considered as very earthy, on the plain of what the Gnostics might have considered fleshly, proposing that the spiritual life is best articulated and embodied in the ordinariness of life, such as work, family, friends,

---

<sup>112</sup> Positive Church Online: 2105-2109.

<sup>113</sup> First Internet Christian Church: 305-310.

<sup>114</sup> Phuture: 3846-3850.

<sup>115</sup> Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua: 565-569.

<sup>116</sup> Positive Church Online: 512-516.

food, and recreation, and in the yearnings of life expressed ‘in the sale of candles, art, music, holidays, garden products, etc.’<sup>117</sup> So there are a variety of conclusions on this issue presented in the Christian communities in Cyberspace.

## **Sexuality, and Physiological Symbolism**

In Gnosticism, sexual intercourse and human sexuality are considered perverse, and, as discussed earlier, the metaphor of birth is used to describe the creation of the cosmos as a repulsive birth-product, a miscarriage, and an abortion. The sexually orientated human body and soul is a corrupted, filthy, entombing prison, subject to impulses that must be overcome through Gnostic knowledge.

There is a range of views about sexual intercourse and human sexuality expressed in the Christian communities in Cyberspace, but none of them embrace such a pessimistic view. Some examples include the ideas that ‘our true religion is the beliefs that guide our spiritualities, our politics, our sexuality, our lifestyle and our relationships’<sup>118</sup> as a positive expression of spirituality and sexuality; high forms of moral and ethical values should be pursued; sexuality is a wonderful God-given gift (‘It is during the adolescent years that life-long patterns are set regarding whether one will control or be controlled by their God-given sexual urges. It is crucial that parents understand, teach, and model the positive, sacred biblical perspectives of sexuality’)<sup>119</sup>; chastity and abstinence could be promoted more seriously as alternatives to casual sex; young people need to rediscover the joy and beauty of sex as God intended it to be experienced (‘We need to break the age-old view of the church and sex, that has the church saying: “sex is dirty”, so “keep it for marriage”. We need to help young people discover the joy and beauty of sex – and spread the subversive news that contrary to popular media opinion, the best sex CAN be found

---

<sup>117</sup> The Edge: 10003-10007.

<sup>118</sup> Phuture: 9885-9890.

<sup>119</sup> The Edge: 2085-2104.

within the confines of a loving marriage'<sup>120</sup>); and that human sexuality and sexual relations may reflect the love within the Godhead.

## **Christology and Incarnation**

In Gnosticism, the embodiment embraced in the doctrine of the Incarnation is denied as needless and incredulous, and, as discussed during our brief introduction to Gnosticism, by means of various artifices the concept of Christ's actual physical death on the cross is denied, and the salvific role of the crucifixion is intentionally undermined and replaced by the quest for gnostic knowledge.

In the Christian communities in Cyberspace, the Incarnation and orthodox Christology is upheld, as when the Virtual Church writes that Christ, who, for us men and our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man'<sup>121</sup>. The Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua proposes that the Christian Church has 'lots of dogma, and confuses that dogma with the central symbol of Christianity, namely the event of Christ, the incarnation of God as a human being'<sup>122</sup>, and WebChurch recognises that at Christmas we celebrate 'the God who came among us – the Lord Jesus Christ, God incarnate.'<sup>123</sup>

For some websites, and especially Phuture, TheOoze, and The Edge, Incarnation is valued as 'the greatest model of mission',<sup>124</sup> developing 'skills in creating incarnational forms of church and worship'<sup>125</sup> are incredibly important, in the context of discipleship and church planting 'the sensors must allow the intuitive pioneers to

---

<sup>120</sup> The Edge: 13728-13840.

<sup>121</sup> Virtual Church: 1166-1173.

<sup>122</sup> Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua: 4227-4234.

<sup>123</sup> WebChurch: 2946-2953.

<sup>124</sup> Phuture: 389-399.

<sup>125</sup> Phuture: 1619-1629.

find new avenues of incarnation'<sup>126</sup>, 'incarnation is essential to God's mission'<sup>127</sup>, and 'more lasting forms of generational innovation will encourage generational ministers to specialize in doing incarnational ministry throughout the lifetime of members of that generation.'<sup>128</sup> Not only is Christ's physical death and incarnation honoured on these sites, it is held up as our model for mission and ministry.

## **Nature and Possibilities of Human Knowledge**

The Gnostics pursued an elite acquisition and claim to superior, enlightened knowledge that, in their philosophy, is critical for true human freedom and salvation. *Gnosis* was considered a requisite to salvation (as opposed to faith, the observance of the law, or baptism and initiation into the Church), and true knowledge of self and of the Divine was understood as salvific knowledge.

The nature and possibilities of human knowledge is presented in Christian communities in Cyberspace in many different ways. One Phuture author, who is influenced by a postmodern rejection of modernistic approaches to knowledge and information, announces that 'knowledge as the sole root of discipleship is dead... long live community and experience!'<sup>129</sup> In the Positive Church Online there is a suggestion that 'we are inquisitive creatures with an innate thirst for knowledge and a dire need to shore-up the foundations of our lives through our beliefs',<sup>130</sup> and that 'many people who never heard the historic Christ have had experiential knowledge of the Christ within and would hold, with Paul, that the Eternal Christ was known before the historic Christ'<sup>131</sup>, implying that knowledge as conceptual formulations or mind-centred acquisition and reasoning, is inadequate, and that there are other valid form of knowledge that may be explored.

---

<sup>126</sup> Phuture: 10299-10309.

<sup>127</sup> TheOoze: 9486-9503.

<sup>128</sup> The Edge: 9733-9743.

<sup>129</sup> Phuture: 4712-4722.

<sup>130</sup> Positive Church Online: 689-699.

<sup>131</sup> Positive Church Online: 4859-4866.

A TheOoze writer remarks that ‘although knowledge does not equate intimacy (with God), it is hard to imagine intimacy without knowledge’<sup>132</sup>, suggesting that knowledge is part of the picture, but not the whole picture. Another TheOoze writer, ridiculing what he suggests is the modern Church’s separation of knowledge from life, and theology from practice, notes that ‘disillusionment with Rationalism is obviously promoting a recovery of Wisdom. And by “wisdom” instead of “rationality”, we intend to understand knowledge as part of a more holistic schema that culminates in the task of “living well”, not merely “thinking well”’.<sup>133</sup>

In the Positive Church Online there is found the statement that ‘religious knowledge, like the appreciation of beauty, is not attained by a logical process of thought but by experience and feeling’<sup>134</sup>, and this is a common critique by postmodern thinkers in the Christian communities in Cyberspace.

So there is much articulated about the nature and possibilities of human knowledge in the Christian communities in Cyberspace, but not a single website takes the Gnostic view that knowledge is the key to enlightenment or salvation.

## **Theology of Creation**

As outlined in the Research Assumptions, a genuine Biblical Theology of creation views all creation as good, as a demonstration of the immeasurable love of God, and specifically as expressing God's generosity toward human beings. There are also fallen and sinful aspects of the created world that need to be appreciated, and which explain the need for redemption. We have proposed that in authentic Biblical Theology ‘creation is seen as the sacrament of God's self-communication to

---

<sup>132</sup> TheOoze: 9702-9713.

<sup>133</sup> TheOoze: 22876-22895.

<sup>134</sup> Positive Church Online: 4879-4889.

humankind whereby he both establishes us in an irrevocable relationship with himself and constitutes us in our own unique being and identity.<sup>135</sup>

The Gnostics, however, polarised the realities of creation by setting up matter and spirit in opposition to each other, by viewing the body, matter and world as evil and inferior, and by denying the actual hand of the Most High God in the process of creation.

In the Christian communities in Cyberspace a theology of creation is only briefly articulated, except in the debate between Creationism and Evolutionary theories. The theology of creation that emerges, however, is certainly not Gnostic. Here are some examples:

‘God’s continual involvement and participation with people is the most compelling aspect of the narrative culminating in God Himself taking on the form of His own creation and becoming ‘one of us’.<sup>136</sup> Creation, then, is ongoing, and the Most High God is so involved in the process and unashamed of it that he takes on the form of it in the Incarnation.

‘Human beings are a special part of God’s creation’ and ‘must think ethically about all creation’.<sup>137</sup> Creation is very valuable, therefore, just as created human beings are of immeasurable worth.

‘Redemption is an extension of the original creative act, with Yahweh calling his world and people to authentic and whole life and love. And because he is involved in it, he wants us to be working with him.’<sup>138</sup> The original creative act is sacred and ongoing, revealed as such in the plan and outworking of redemption, and symbolic or revelatory of God’s authentic and whole life and love.

## Conclusion

An examination of the textual evidence on these websites suggests that the Christian communities in Cyberspaces’ perspectives on Human Personhood are predominantly positive and contrary to Gnostic thought, aside for a few exceptions, especially in the

---

<sup>135</sup> Page 13 of this dissertation.

<sup>136</sup> Phuture: 12547-12562.

<sup>137</sup> The Edge: 13153-13164.

<sup>138</sup> TheOoze: 11550.

areas examined above. Human persons, as body, soul and spirit, are generally upheld as holistically redeemable, made intentionally in the image of the Most High God, holy and sacred, and of great worth to God in every aspect of our being.

## Chapter 5

### Perspectives on Christian Community

This chapter considers the relative perspectives on human community in Gnosticism and Christian communities in Cyberspace. Please refer back to Component Question (ii). Thank you.

#### **Embodied or Individualized Spirituality**

The Gnostic movements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries were significantly opposed to hierarchical or institutional forms of community, as well as the authority structures that usually accompany the same. From their dedication to the freedom of the spirit from the inferior soul and body, and their rejection of any binding social contracts or constructs, emerged liminal, loosely connected fraternities, based on like-mindedness in their pursuit of gnostic salvation and enlightenment. It is worth quoting Gilhus again here, when he proposes that, ‘the anti-structure of gnostic *communitas* is revealed in its antinomian character, be it as freedom from or rebellion against the Law; in the violating of family-ties, either in the form of absolute asceticism or as promiscuity; and in the abolishment of status-distinctions. *Communitas* is established on the principle of equality within.’<sup>139</sup> Pneumatic-charismatic-organic communities were formed with functional leadership, loose affiliation, and with mystical and philosophical engagements being the source of connectedness.

This form of connectedness and loose, non-hierarchical, mutually disaffected affiliation is also evident in many of the Christian communities in Cyberspace. These Christian communities in Cyberspace have formed similar loosely associated fraternities, dissatisfied with the existing Church, and content to stimulate each other philosophically from a physical and emotional distance - a kind of disembodied relation. The First Church of Cyberspace suggests, for instance, that ‘Stephen’s sermon envisions what to many would appear to be a radical model for Christian

---

<sup>139</sup> Gilhus, I. 1984, p.119.



community, The Church of All People. He argues that Jesus came to the world, not to start a new religion, but to “abolish religion as the world has known it”<sup>140</sup>, and the Webmaster of the Positive Church Online concludes that he is ‘happy with the community that has developed online, and (I) apologize that it will be crippled temporarily. Soon as I can figure out how to get this system reinstalled on the new server, I’ll post another note here.’<sup>141</sup> The First Internet Christian Church proudly announces that ‘to many people around the world, First Internet Christian Church is their main link to Christianity, as they live and work in isolation from the Church of Jesus Christ’<sup>142</sup>, and Vurch even goes so far as to recommend that you ‘don’t go to church – Go to Vurch.com!’<sup>143</sup> These groups do not see embodiment as important to community, and clearly prefer physical and organisational distance.<sup>144</sup>

The implications of this perspective are that the Christian faith and spiritual experience may become disembodied, un-incarnational, impersonal, fanciful, and hyper-individual; the virtual community may challenge the very meaning of community and the nature of our social existence and experiences; truth can be disguised, altered, fabricated, perverted, and disembodied in Cyberspace, since ‘on the Internet, nobody knows that you’re a dog’<sup>145</sup>; the relevant equality of each participant needs to be considered; and true trust may possibly never be achieved in cyber-spatial relationships – yet genuine relationship and community is built on trust:

Trust does not reside in integrated circuits or fibre optic cables. Although it involves an exchange of information, trust is not reducible to information... (Rather) trust is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behaviour, based on the commonly shared norms... of other members of that community.<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> First Church of Cyberspace: 617-621.

<sup>141</sup> Positive Church Online: 651-655.

<sup>142</sup> First Internet Christian Church: 87-97.

<sup>143</sup> Vurch: 9-19.

<sup>144</sup> It is important to note here that only 4 of the 17 ‘cyber-churches’ are represented in this group.

<sup>145</sup> Groothuis, D. 1999, *The Soul in Cyberspace*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, p.126.

<sup>146</sup> Fukuyama, F. 1995, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. Free Press, New York, pp.25-26.

Cornish ponders whether we may become

A non-society – a poorly integrated mass of electronic hermits, unable to work well together because we no longer play together. Institutions such as the family, community, church, and nation will face the challenge of seeking support from people whose loyalty is almost entirely to themselves.<sup>147</sup>

Yet there are other websites that are very passionate about embodied forms of community that develop deep and lasting spiritual relationships. Phuture, for example, is a website concerned about challenging existing models of church, and developing flexible and non-institutional forms of church, but in an embodied, earthy, interpersonal way, as can be seen in the following quotes:

‘The Greek word for church is ‘ecclesia’ which means the ‘called out community’ and that sounds more like a revolution. So these called out ones gather to tell stories, remember Christ, practise disciplines and liturgy, and teach and equip others to do likewise.’<sup>148</sup> ‘The missional church thinks that life is holistic and believes that God is interested in the whole person. It does not fear what God has inspired and encourages its communities to incorporate nature, the arts, and all the senses in worship.’<sup>149</sup> ‘I strongly believe in the value of community. Mission is not done alone but in community. Western fishing is with a rod, alone. Eastern fishing is done with a net in groups... The centrality of the community to the gospel means that the message is never disembodied. The word must always become flesh, embodied in the life of the called community.’<sup>150</sup>

Similarly, The Edge declares that the ‘development of community within the church, and the development of the church as community now have unparalleled importance’<sup>151</sup>, and a writer in TheOoze proclaims that ‘the opportunity of building solid communities is wonderful... To be effective in an emerging world, the church must take both paths, the digital and the communal.’<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>147</sup> Cornish, E. 1996, ‘The Cyber Future,’ *The Futurist*, Jan-Feb, Special Edition, p.4.

<sup>148</sup> Phuture: 405-409.

<sup>149</sup> Phuture: 453-464.

<sup>150</sup> Phuture: 562-572, & 8598-8608.

<sup>151</sup> The Edge: 5884-5889.

<sup>152</sup> TheOoze: 2970, & 19282-19368.

Challenging the idea that a cyber-church alone is sufficient for discipleship and community, a passage in TheOoze considers ‘the danger of the digital path is to mistake the communication possible for genuine community... Community is the shared experience of a life lived together, not the result of shared information... Communities enhanced by the digital environment, but not replaced by it.’<sup>153</sup> Similarly, the Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua warns that ‘to the extent that the church exists in your head, you can do church on the Internet. But we’re embodied selves. We’re complete people. We don’t just live in our heads. There is an aspect that involves personal encounter – sight, sound, touch – that you just don’t get through the web.’<sup>154</sup>

To sum up, some of the Christian communities in Cyberspace have a gnostic-like distaste for embodied community, while others see such embodiment as critical for the health and future of the Church. So it is misleading to assume that all of these websites hold a similar disinterest in embodied community.

## **Church Leadership and Authority**

As noted above, early Gnosticism rejected existing forms of church leadership and authority, and opposed hierarchical models that imposed boundaries and religious requirements. They did, however, honour functional, informal, and charismatic leadership, especially if that leadership was liberal, philosophically learned, spiritually ‘enlightened’ in the Gnostic mysteries, and personally powerful.

Overwhelmingly, the Christian communities in Cyberspace honour the same kind of leader, seek such leaders to be raised up and developed, and are suspicious of institutionally appointed leaders.

Postmodern leaders are visionaries spellbound by the past. An ancient-future faith unapologetically lives out of "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3. NKJV). Postmodernity is becoming more ancient and

---

<sup>153</sup> TheOoze: 19335-19358.

<sup>154</sup> Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua: 965-973.

more future at the same time. Postmodern leaders keep the past and the future in perpetual conversation... My premise is there is an emerging community rising or breaking away from Christendom and they have some distinct values that characterise them. We are in that place between two eras or times. Where new things are birthed.<sup>155</sup>

Pioneering, freethinking, institutionally offending, imagination inspiring, practitioner-teacher leaders seem to be their preference – especially those with a missional, prophetic, and or apostolic inclination, who have been rejected or misunderstood by the existing church.<sup>156</sup> These kinds of leaders are very much like those that founded Gnostic sects.

## **The Existing Church and a Sense of Personal Obligation**

The Christian communities in Cyberspace are a mirror of early Gnosticism in many of their perspectives on the existing church and their low sense of personal obligation to it. The websites were either formed as an alternative to the existing church, or as a forum to critique and criticise it, and none of the seventeen Christian communities in Cyberspace have formal connections with an existing, embodied church.

Phuture understands its primary audience to be the

Messy, chaotic under 30's, the ones that do not fit traditional training models, the energetic and frenetic dreamers that stick out like sore thumbs in existing churches but the ones that live and breath the pop culture in which they live; these are the raw materials, the Travellers in Dreamland, Phuture Travellers... (Since) the institutional basis of the church, and even the professionalism of the clergy are regarded with suspicion.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>155</sup> Phuture: 664-678.

<sup>156</sup> 'The entrepreneurial leaders, the dreamers and the mavericks that will invent and live the church of tomorrow live at the edges of the existing institution. Consequently they do not have direct access to opportunities for leadership, personal or theological development.' Phuture: 1163-1177. There are numerous examples of their preference for these kinds of leaders. A few of them may be found in the following references: Phuture: 205-222 & 1212-1259; The Edge: 885-941; TheOoze: 23093-23107, and; Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua: 16579-16589.

<sup>157</sup> Phuture: 1200-1210, & 12071-12081.

They are a conglomeration of those who stand outside and critique the existing church, its structures, and its ways, while imagining what the church would look like if it were divested of all its trappings. The necessity of the existing church is even challenged, since the ‘need for traditional church structures to critically evaluate their legitimacy, in the light of their impending doom, grows exponentially.’<sup>158</sup>

## **Postmodern Justifications and Considerations**

Some of the Christian communities in Cyberspaces’ rejection of the existing church and its communities are based on extensively expounded postmodern justifications and considerations. There is the view that contemporary Western culture is in the process of epic change, and that this tsunami of cultural movement has rendered the existing Western Church and its communities as redundant. Therefore many of these groups in cyberspace are enquiring into alternative models of mission, ministry, community, and church. They propose that the shifts in Western culture have necessitated this. ‘The Western church is still running creation science seminars trying to prove the existence of God, while the missional church is journeying with a postmodern culture that says “which god”? Scientific, methodical information is no longer the desire of people, but rather a hunger for spirituality.’<sup>159</sup>

The conversation referred to in the paragraph above about the existing church is being challenged and broadened by Christian thinkers and leaders who perceive positive possibilities in the cultural shifts for the shape of embodied Christian communities, and a greater opportunity for the existing church to remain adaptable, relevant, and fluid.

For example, Gallagher’s constructive (or *creative postmodernity*) and deconstructive (or *passive/superficial lived postmodernity*) poles of postmodernity, are a good stimulus for thought regarding the possible shape of an integrated, paramodern, creative and holistic expression of postmodernity in the existing church

---

<sup>158</sup> The Edge: 5883-5896.

<sup>159</sup> Phuture: 576-605.

and its communities, led by those who ‘as distinct from the radical destroyers’ are ‘hopeful purifiers. Instead of delighting to dance on the grave of modernity, these want to rescue it from its excesses and contradictions. From the point of view of religious faith, these less extreme postmoderns are potential dialogue partners for theology in its reflections on culture and faith.’<sup>160</sup>

Gallagher provides a very useful distinction between ‘theoretical and negative postmodernism’, which is deconstructively obsessed, and ‘an emerging sensibility of postmodernity’, which is constructively inclined. Creative postmodernity, in Gallagher’s assessment, aims at wholeness, gropes at forms of life that bridge the divisions of modernity, searches beyond certitudes, revisits spiritual, community, and religious roots and heritages, recognises wounds and disappointments, is spiritually hungry because of cultural desolation, and ‘open to the prophetic, the cosmological, and the mystical or participative dimensions of religious experience.’<sup>161</sup> He goes on to write in the same paragraph that ‘a postmodern spirituality can be born that does justice both to core relationship of faith, the radical concreteness of Christ and his prophetic challenges for our broken worlds, and equally values the wise shyness of a negative theology, reticent to explain its mystery, or to name it too neatly, and above all suspicious of cheap words’, and this understanding is receiving widening recognition as people search for a more creative and constructive form of postmodernism, that revolves around ‘relationship, mystery, experience, passion, wonder, creativity, and spontaneity... the place just beyond words, the shore of mystery.’<sup>162</sup>

Another way of describing this shift that Gallagher is noticing away from deconstructive postmodernity (and its negative impact on postmodern understandings of the value of existing Christian communities), toward constructive expressions of this cultural movement, is articulated in Phan’s *The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity*.<sup>163</sup> Phan elaborately describes how the transferral and expression of

---

<sup>160</sup> Gallagher, M.P. 1997. p.93.

<sup>161</sup> Gallagher, M.P. 1997. p.96.

<sup>162</sup> Mike Yaconelli, quoted in Jones, T. 2001, p.90.

<sup>163</sup> Phan, P.C. 2001, ‘The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity’, *Theological Studies*, p.62.

wisdom and truth in Western Culture has moved away from *mythos* (narrative mythologies explaining the origin and function of the cosmos and the place of humans within it, reinforcing a group's identity and social cohesiveness, preserving and expanding the wisdom of the particular community, making truth claims, and prescribing behaviours) and *logos* (philosophical transmission of perennial truths through reason, literacy, and or textual interpretation), and might be rediscovered in *morosophia*, the path of foolish wisdom, which is mediated through spiritual intuition, divine revelation, spiritual discipline and contemplation, negative and mystical theology, unknowing-ness, holy simplicity, learned ignorance, oxymoronic intelligence, and holy foolishness.

Such an exploration of alternative means of the communication of meaning, truth and wisdom in our culture by Phan is a brilliant example of what Gallagher is describing as the contemporary constructive postmodern search to construct possibilities of hope, communication, the transference of traditional meaning systems in relevant forms for the emerging generation, and the ongoing formation of holistic embodied Christian communities.

Phan's methodology and spirit, then, exemplifies Gallagher's creative postmodernity, as Phan recognises that foolish wisdom has profound resonance with the postmodern world, since it brings about the 'unification of all contradictions' (*coincidentia oppositorum*), is rooted in 'learned ignorance' (*docta ignorantia*), flourishes in paradox and irony, rejects the wisdom of proud rationality, maintains the premium of intuition, is pervaded by an undercurrent of scepticism, relativism, pluralism and diversity, and is congenial to fantasy and the wisdom of the holy imagination. The *Morosophia* that he writes about also leads us beyond the despair of the postmodern rejection of *mythos* and *logos*, and provides hope in the discovery of truth and wisdom, especially when animated by love and holiness in authentic Christian community. As Phan demonstrates in his article and Gallagher highlights in his book, there is a movement among contemporary (especially young) scholars and thinkers to construct a hope-filled postmodern future that is community-orientated rather than individualistic. Sire believes that such a future will eventuate through cultural introspection and a reflective looking back on the past, learning from our mistakes, and forge ahead with a proactive constructive effort, for 'if our

culture is to move toward a hopeful future, it will first have to move back to a more realistic past, pick up from where we began to go wrong, take into account the valuable insights of what has happened since and forge a more adequate worldview.’<sup>164</sup> This process is also important for the forging of hope-filled and authentic embodied postmodern Christian communities.

## **The Cyber-spatial Medium and the Articulated Message**

The Christian communities in Cyberspace that are passionate about embodied forms of community face a particular dilemma.<sup>165</sup> The dilemma is that the cyber-spatial medium encourages a form of spirituality that is quite different from their formally articulated message – a spirituality that is disembodied and nebulous. The medium, therefore, profoundly influences the message, as discussed briefly in Chapter 4.

There are various ways that these particular Christian communities in Cyberspace seem to deal with this problem, and these are worth exploring here. While the following examples of social engagement are not confined to contemporary Christian communities in Cyberspace, they are examples of how the cyber-communities that are passionate about embodied forms of community endeavour to deal with the dilemma that the cyber-spatial medium might overwhelm the formal message about the importance of embodiment.

Firstly, many of them encourage rigorous discussion about, and application in, embodied and ‘earthy’ solutions and approaches to:

- Mission and ministry
- Worship and community
- Social justice, action, and compassion
- Culture, faith, conversion, and personal transformation
- Anti-globalization and world economic debates
- Apologetics and evangelization

---

<sup>164</sup> Sire, J. 1988, *The Universe Next Door*. InterVarsity Press, Leicester.

<sup>165</sup> The cyber-communities that most clearly demonstrate this concern for embodied forms of community are the First International Church of the Web, Owlnook, Phuture, The Edge, and TheOoze.



- Applications and approaches to the Scriptures
- Church health and growth
- Models of discipleship and ministerial and missional training
- Spirituality, prayer, leadership development, and personality and gift assessment
- Ecumenical and interdenominational cooperation and engagement
- Contextuality and participation in mission and ministry (whether Western mission or other)
- Changing the contours and accessibility of the Church in order to meet the needs of a Western postmodern culture and youth
- And other such areas

These issues are discussed honestly, sometimes with a rigour that would make the conventional or traditional church uncomfortable, and with a particular emphasis on how to embody these things in everyday life.

Secondly, they are not afraid of multi-religious dialogue and engagement, and its implications for embodied Christian spirituality and living. They vigorously discuss such themes as Wicca, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, the New Age, postmodern paganism and eclecticism, the re-emergence of ancient mythologies and regional spiritual practices, the growth of cults and New Religious Movements, homosexual and heterosexual differences in personified experiences of God, and so forth. The aim is to explore how Christians and others experience God and spirituality in their 'fleshly', everyday lives.

Thirdly, they engage and participate in reflections on contemporary cultural and Australian issues, such as homosexual parenting and child rearing, refugees and asylum seekers, the Iraqi occupation and American military and political influence, globalization and the loss of localized languages and traditions, pacifism and militarism, the rise of various fundamentalisms and liberalisms, global poverty and wealth and the inequalities therein, and other such issues. Rather than allowing their participants to become immersed in Cyber-spatial worlds and paradigms, they seek to get them engaged in broader and more concrete horizons.

Fourthly, they exegete Western and Eastern cultures in such a way that they are training their participants to be capable cultural exegetes, and this helps their members to learn the skills to studying their own cultures. Popular culture, film, music, and television are particularly examined.

Fifthly, they examine 'sacred cows' in the Christian tradition in order to equip their participants to better dialogue with them and their proponents in their embodied Christian lives. These themes include: were miracles meant to be temporary?; why new ideas around the church do not and can not work; racism in Christian ideology; marriage, divorce and remarriage; women leaders in the church; can homosexuals change?; will homosexuals be in heaven?; killing sacred cows in the Church; sacred cows – blocking the future of the Church; and be selectively indignant in Christian life, ministry, and community.

Sixthly, they often provide forums, events and occasions for their participants to meet 'in the flesh', while getting to know each other and engage with each other personally. These include family BBQs and philosophical, theological, and missional get-togethers for those living within certain regional areas (especially city areas). They also form networks of interpersonal and missional relationships, such as Forge Australia, the Centre for Evangelism and Global Mission, Reframe Network, and Dreamland Australia.

So there are various and thoughtful ways by which the pro-incarnational contemporary Christian communities in Cyberspace deal with the tension between the cyber-spatial medium and the articulated, formal message. To work against the medium's tendency to encourage disembodiment, false constructions of the self, and gnostic-like spirituality, these Christian communities in Cyberspace encourage rigorous discussion about and immersion in embodied expressions of faith and community, multi-religious dialogue and engagement, engagement and participation in reflections on and exegesis of cultural issues, the examination of 'sacred cows', and the provision of embodied forums. Whether these endeavours adequately combat the cyber-spatial impulse toward disembodiment is open for debate and further investigation.

## **Conclusion**

While some of the Christian communities in Cyberspace are very positive about embodied forms of community and see them as ultimately essential to Christian discipleship and faith, others have a gnostic-like aversion for embodied community. The data indicates that all of the Christian communities in Cyberspace are suspicious of institutionally appointed leaders. In this they mirror early Gnostic perspectives on the existing church. They are also pessimistic about the legitimacy and relevance of the existing church in the current cultural shifts, and face the dilemma that, even if they are comfortable with embodied Christian communities, the cyber-spatial medium encourages a form of spirituality that at the very least discourages authentic human contact. These particular communities, however, employ very intentional strategies to help people embrace an incarnational life, mission, and ministry, and these have been discussed in detail on pages 80-82.

## Chapter 6

### Engagement with the World and Social Behaviour

This chapter analyses and correlates the online and Gnostic perspectives on engagement with the world and social behaviour. Refer back to Component Question (ii).

#### Essential Nature of the World, Matter, and Culture

We have already seen that the world, matter, and culture in Gnostic thought are the creation of the lower Old Testament God. In this way the Gnostics explicated their pessimistic conception of the created cosmos and its configuration, as well as their denunciation of the Old Testament notion of God, instead considering Him to be depraved and malevolent.

The world, matter, and culture in the contemporary Christian faith communities in cyberspace are depicted in a variety of ways, but none quite as degrading as the Gnostic view of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.

**A.** Some see these elements of the created order as fallen and in need of redemption.

For instance:

‘It is not hard to see that we live in a sinful world. Murder, theft, greed, and deceit are all around us.’<sup>166</sup> ‘There is an ideal world, perhaps only in the Kingdom of Heaven... But then there is also the real world, the one we inhabit... however much we deplore the state of affairs.’<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup> Chapel on the Web: 166-169.

<sup>167</sup> First Church of Cyberspace: 1990-2004.

‘Observe the current culture. Unless your sense are dulled and conscience dead, you will find that the increase in gross immorality described in (2 Timothy 3:1-4) is underway.’<sup>168</sup>

‘And when we look around us, at the increasing violence, at the rise of a homosexual sub-culture and staggering divorce figures... One is inclined to say that the collapse of a civilisation begins on the inside and works its way out.’<sup>169</sup>

‘The Church will have tribulation in the world. It’s important to notice that the “tribulation” faced by the Church originates from the world and comes from the world system controlled by Satan.’<sup>170</sup>

‘The examples given of the times of Noah and Lot are examples of a corrupt world and cities overtaken by the judgement of God. So our world is corrupt, and indeed sees the same behaviour that corrupted these societies.’<sup>171</sup>

## **B. Others have a more positive view of the state of the world, matter, and culture:**

‘It’s about a loving missionary God incarnating the world to save it. It’s about mission being at the heart of the Trinity, and many in the church have forgotten it.’<sup>172</sup>

‘Culture is a gift from God, and we need to have the courage to exegete the cultures we encounter and to establish meaningful worship and common spirituality.’<sup>173</sup>

‘When we think that we (human beings) are the only spiritual beings in our world, we deceive ourselves. The spirit of God creates, sustains, pervades, participates in, and is present in, the whole world.’<sup>174</sup>

‘You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars... And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.’<sup>175</sup>

‘The world is charged with the grandeur of God.’<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> First Internet Christian Church: 864-872.

<sup>169</sup> The Edge: 691-695.

<sup>170</sup> Virtual Church: 2859-2873.

<sup>171</sup> WebChurch: 598-602.

<sup>172</sup> Phuture: 2776-2788.

<sup>173</sup> TheOoze: 563-570.

<sup>174</sup> Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua: 587-593.

<sup>175</sup> Vurch: 806-814.

<sup>176</sup> Vurch: 923-927.

Therefore some of the Christian communities in Cyberspace, like the Gnostics, have a low view of the created order, even if it is not quite as dramatic or debasing as the Gnostic view, and others have a much higher and affirmative analysis of the same.

## **Engagement with the World**

### **The Online Communities' Self-Understandings and Self-Definitions**

In Chapters 2 and 3 we demonstrated how some forms of early Gnosticism, such as the Valentinians, Basilideans, the two Theodoti, and Natalius, were inclined toward a lesser degree of socio-cultural tension than other Gnostic movements, and, therefore, were able to effectively reconcile their philosophical and theological dualism with their discerning participation in social and cultural forums. They justified this philosophically by claiming that an involvement in political and socio-cultural forums was advantageous for their cause, and not foreboding enough to rob them of their unadulterated, exalted, pneumatic condition. It also permitted them to proselytise, which the Valentinians and Basilideans were skilled in doing. Proximity to Rome and their 'fleshly' neighbours was expedient for this. Other Gnostic movements chose rather to distance themselves and pursue a spirituality of reclusion and separateness.

These variances of perspective are also evident in the Christian communities in Cyberspace. Some have chosen proximity, engagement with the world, and proselytisation, such as the First International Church of the Web, Owlnook, Phuture, The Edge, and TheOoze, and encourage their members to do likewise. The First International Church of the Web declares that 'our mission is evangelization, ministering, and equipping... It is our belief that the Internet represents the single greatest evangelizing tool ever created by mankind'<sup>177</sup>, the Webmaster of Owlnook confesses that 'My life mission is the faithful and strategic stewardship of my God-given gifts and resources to bless my family, the community of God's people and the

---

<sup>177</sup> First International Church of the Web: 1-41.

nations'<sup>178</sup>, and Phuture states that it is committed to 'Facilitating an organic movement of God amongst the New Global Culture'<sup>179</sup>, which, in Phuture terms, includes engagement with postmodern western culture through contemporary missiological practices. The Edge believes that 'Christians should not be content to be reactive to old issues – we need to be proactive. We need to be influencing culture and staying ahead of issues that will arise in the future'<sup>180</sup>, while TheOoze describes itself as a labyrinth, 'the inward journey is followed by an outward journey... Being in a real world, with real people, in real time.'<sup>181</sup>

Others have chosen reclusion, a disengaged 'cyber-spirituality', and the promotion of Christianity from the distance of the World Wide Web, such as the Chapel on the Web, Cyber-Church, First Church of Cyberspace, First Internet Christian Church, St. Thomas Community Church of the Internet, Virtual Church, and WebChurch. The Chapel on the Web sees itself as 'your spiritual oasis on the Web. We invite you to relax, explore, contemplate, find inspiration and draw closer to God.'<sup>182</sup> Other websites declare their faith from the distance of the World Wide Web, as is demonstrated by Cyber-Church's admission that 'our mission is to bring Jesus Christ to the Internet and to unashamedly present His Gospel of Love and Grace to all that visit here'<sup>183</sup>, the First Church of Cyberspace's contention that they bring 'Christianity online in a strong, Net savvy, and non-pedagogical manner... (We bring) Christianity online with thoughtfulness, humour and a willingness to address the more controversial questions that tend to be avoided by the traditional church'<sup>184</sup>, and the First Internet Christian Church's sense of call that 'we believe that modern technology was given to us by God to spread the Gospel. Furthermore, we believe that much modern technology is mentioned in the Book of Revelation.'<sup>185</sup>

---

<sup>178</sup> Owlnook: 55-61.

<sup>179</sup> Phuture: 21.

<sup>180</sup> The Edge: 1-28.

<sup>181</sup> TheOoze: 35-206.

<sup>182</sup> Chapel on the Web: 1-3.

<sup>183</sup> Cyber-Church: 1-8.

<sup>184</sup> First Church of Cyberspace: 23-46 & 370-388.

<sup>185</sup> First Internet Christian Church: 54-105.

Other Websites disengage themselves not only from their culture and society, but from other embodied forms of Christianity, as is demonstrated in the following declarations:

‘If you feel drawn to the St. Thomas Church, you can become a member. There are no tithes or other financial obligations, just a belief in Christ and a wish to become a part of our community.’<sup>186</sup>

‘The Virtual Church only exists on the Internet – it is a website that serves as a compendium of Christian resources. The Virtual Church is not affiliated with any one physical church body’<sup>187</sup>, and ‘Consider (us) your spiritual home on the Internet... The WebChurch exists to help you connect with God.’<sup>188</sup>

Other Christian communities in Cyberspace seem indifferent to engagement with the world, and or critical of orthodox Christianity, such as the Alpha Church, Jesus.com.au, Positive Church Online, Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua, and Vurch. Alpha Church admits that it is designed to be ‘a full online Christian global Church... You may worship solely with us twenty-four/seven’<sup>189</sup>, while Jesus.com.au sees itself as an ‘experiential knowledgebase, focusing on mutual understanding and mutual challenge in regard to Jesus-focussed spirituality... It links to and interacts with the best examples it can find of aggressively anti-Christian material.’<sup>190</sup> The Positive Church Online distances itself from orthodox Christian faith, and says that it is about an ‘Inner-Light / Healing Spirit, a Quaker-orientated New Thought ministry sharing empowering Positive Spirituality online.’<sup>191</sup> The Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua unashamedly declares that they are ‘friendly to all people of good will, including those other than Christian, and those other than straight. Moral relativists may experience hot flashes of insight that they, too, have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge. You may bring your dogma, but only if it

---

<sup>186</sup> St. Thomas Community Church of the Internet: 11-38.

<sup>187</sup> Virtual Church: 43-55.

<sup>188</sup> WebChurch: 1-20.

<sup>189</sup> Alpha Church: 1-14.

<sup>190</sup> Jesus.com.au: 1-13.

<sup>191</sup> Positive Church Online: 4-6.



doesn't bite'<sup>192</sup>, while Vurch boldly announces 'don't go to church! – Go to Vurch.com!'<sup>193</sup>

In summary, the range of positions held by the contemporary Christian communities in Cyberspace on engagement with the world may be sorted into three categories: (1) Proximity, engagement with the world, and proselytisation (In relation to the discussion on pages 80-83 about the influence of the cyber-spatial medium on the formally articulated message, it is only those Christian communities in Cyberspace that fit into this category that conscientiously strive against the medium's tendency to encourage disembodiment, false constructions of the self, and gnostic-like spirituality); (2) Reclusion, a disengaged 'cyber-spirituality', and the promotion of Christianity from the distance of the Internet (and even, at times, disengagement from embodied forms of Christianity); (3) Indifference to engagement with the world, and or criticism of orthodox Christianity. These represent a spectrum of attitudes about engagement with the world, from keen interest to complete disinterest.

### **Sociopolitical Deviance or Adherence?**

As varying levels of socio-cultural tension, and sociopolitical deviance and adherence can be demonstrated within Gnostic movements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D., so this can also be drawn from Christian communities in Cyberspace. Many of the Christian communities in Cyberspace recommend considerable sociopolitical deviance, such as Phuture, which surmises that 'State and Church coexist as equals crossing over into each other's realms through politics and the government of the day... Christianity was not birthed this way. It was considered a Jewish cult, was a grass roots movement, and its people were marginalised'<sup>194</sup>, The Edge that preaches that on the whole the Church has failed to produce good leaders of civil society, since in the past 'leaders that the church has produced have often

---

<sup>192</sup> Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua: 4-28.

<sup>193</sup> Vurch: 9-19.

<sup>194</sup> Phuture: 330-335.

been too parochial and out of touch with the mainstream socio-political and socio-economic issues’, and the Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua, which blatantly suggests that they ‘oppose both right-wing and left-wing fundamentalism in politics.’<sup>195</sup>

Others, nonetheless, are ambivalent, indifferent, adherent, or recommend the reformation of personal spirituality as politically and socially subversive, such as the Webmaster of Vurch who believes that the ‘success of our political and corporate life has been at the expense and the neglect of the soul. As a result, very sick souls are making important decisions. That is why I decided that finding and nurturing one’s soul is a social and political act as well as a personal one.’<sup>196</sup>

## **Ethical Concerns**

We have seen that the Gnostic ideal resulted in both a life removed at times from the fetters of the world, hence libertinism, and at times from the bodily pleasures of the world, hence asceticism, and the effect, therefore, was that Gnosticism offered no authentic systematic ethical constructs or guiding principles for the adherent. The overwhelming majority of the Christian communities in Cyberspace, however, concern themselves with upholding orthodox Christian ethical values, and refer to the Scriptures in this endeavour. Only the Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua stands apart in this exercise, being ‘devoted in large part to the ethics of honesty over and against the ethics of moral purity.’<sup>197</sup>

Interestingly, however, only five of the seventeen Christian communities in Cyberspace address ethical issues with regard to social justice, compassion and concern. These five are First Church of Cyberspace, Phuture, The Edge, TheOoze, and the Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua. Similarly, only these five discuss the ethical issues surrounding ecology, the environment, global warming and

---

<sup>195</sup> Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua: 183-193.

<sup>196</sup> Vurch: 889-896.

<sup>197</sup> Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua: 10529-10535.

greenhouse emission, overpopulation, nuclear proliferation, and the like. Therefore the discussions in the Christian communities in Cyberspace seem to be vastly focussed on general ethical principles, personal morality, and esoteric matters. Yet this is still at odds with early Gnosticism, which was mostly unconcerned with any of the above, except for esoteric justifications for libertinism or asceticism.

## **Mission**

Of all the early Gnostic movements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century, only the Valentinians and Basilideans were committed to proselytisation and a missionary endeavour. Within the seventeen Christian communities in Cyberspace, those that are enthusiastically committed to mission through genuine incarnational engagement with the world are the First International Church of the Web, Owlnook, Phuture, The Edge, and TheOoze, and those that seek to evangelise through the safety and distance of the World Wide Web are Cyber-Church and the First Internet Christian Church. Therefore only seven out of the seventeen Christian communities in Cyberspace have a missionary or evangelistic impulse.

Like the early movements of Valentinianism and Basilideanism within Gnosticism, these seven Christian communities in Cyberspace are in the minority. Seclusion and personal forms of spirituality seem to be the preference for both early forms of Gnosticism and the Christian communities in Cyberspace. Yet those with missional instincts write prolifically and excitedly on this subject, especially in relation to mission to postmodern western culture, as is demonstrated in Phuture:

For the last fifteen hundred years the church has been at the centre of society and involved with the state. Today in a postmodern era there is a new emerging church rising from the midst of a irrelevant, dated church... They embrace their culture with simple abandonment. They have smashed the walls of the church and the invisible barriers of the church to reach the world around them. While at the same time living counter cultural lives that interact with ancient prayers and age-old disciplines. They are rediscovering liturgy, service and prayer as the fuel for mission.<sup>198</sup>

---

<sup>198</sup> Phuture: 305-326.

## **Summary**

In summary, there are a variety of perspectives held by the present-day Christian communities in Cyberspace on engagement with the world, and these views may be summarized into the three categories articulated above. Likewise, varying levels of socio-cultural tension, and sociopolitical deviance and adherence can be demonstrated in these cyber-communities, just as such variance could be evidenced in early Christian Gnosticism. Similarly, those groups in Cyberspace that are interested in Christian mission are in the minority, as was the case in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Gnosticism.

In contrast to this mirroring of a variety of perspectives on the key issues explored above, the cyber-communities' ethical considerations do not reflect that of early Gnosticism. In the Cyberspace communities, there is a concern for general ethical principles and personal morality, while early Gnosticism lacked an interest in any of the above, except for esoteric justifications for libertinism or asceticism.

It is safe to suggest then that in terms of engagement with the world, the contemporary cyber-spatial communities and early Gnosticism are very similar in their variety of approaches to engagement with the world, except in the case of ethical musings.

## **Social Behaviour**

### **Wealth, Career, and Social Ambition**

Gnosticism encouraged an existential approach to life and social realities, and the unrestrained quest for full human experience, and we have articulated how this expressed itself as an unrestrained immersion in the pleasures, struggles, and indulgences of life, so that the demiurge and his unnatural laws and restrictions would not control the pneumatic. This approach shaped their attitudes toward wealth, career, and social ambition, not that all Gnostics pursued these, but there was

more in Gnostic ideology to encourage indulgence in the pleasures of the world than to forgo them.

In stark contrast, most discussions about wealth, career, and social ambition in the Christian communities in Cyberspace are centred on a realignment of our values with biblical ones, the inequalities of capitalism and upward-mobility, and the possibility of the re-emergence of the values of the Kingdom of God in Western culture. For example, the Webmaster of the First Church of Cyberspace writes that ‘what I am suggesting is that the human failures of global capitalism – its abandoning of local communities, its transformation of all values into exchange values, its concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a new international elite – these failures may be disguised by a perverse rendering of the clash of civilisations thesis’<sup>199</sup>, and an author of an article in *The Edge* declares that ‘churches need to take up the Biblical mandate to be stewards of the environment, to be healers of the sick, defenders of those who have no rights, and helpers to the widows and orphans. It is time for middle class congregations to consider their privileged position seriously in the light of the story of the rich young ruler.’<sup>200</sup>

## **Participation in Public and Secular Spheres**

Although the Gnostics largely rejected the importance of participation in public and secular spheres in the process of personal salvation and redemption, they, mostly, did not condemn their members for such involvement.

The Christian communities in Cyberspace seem mostly to recognise the presence of God in culture, public forums, and the secular media, and encourage their members to be active participants, sometimes for the sake of personal redemption, but usually for the sake of societal and cultural redemption. ‘Could it be that these movies offer what neither secular culture nor organized religions have succeeded in providing for

---

<sup>199</sup> First Church of Cyberspace: 2961-2978.

<sup>200</sup> *The Edge*: 11178-11188.

a certain generation, namely, a path to salvation?’<sup>201</sup> asks the Webmaster of the First Church of Cyberspace, while listing such movies as *The End of the Affair*, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, *The Hurricane*, *Dogma*, *Chocolat*, *Fight Club*, *Stealing Beauty*, and *American Beauty*, and suggesting the Gospel themes weave themselves through secular media and spheres.

## **Privatised or Public Spirituality**

A privatised spirituality symbolised Gnosticism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. Spirituality in some of the Christian communities in Cyberspace is characterised as an inward journey requiring and leading to outward expression, ministry, and mission<sup>202</sup>, and an antithesis to a retreat ‘into the private spirituality and dispensation of superficial goods and services to a people burnt-out by their culture, who are ready to embrace anything that can give them community or ritual’ – rather Christians are to ‘gently point them to the road of discipleship which leads to the foot of the Cross’.<sup>203</sup>

Other authors in the Christian communities in Cyberspace debate between each other (often on the same website) about whether spirituality is a privatised or public matter. For example, ‘I am responsible for my relationship with the Creator. I come into this world alone and leave in the same company. Connecting with God, as I understand Him, is an individual and private matter’<sup>204</sup>, is contrasted with this proposal on the same website: ‘As secularisation occurred, Christianity retreated into an upward and personal faith. In recent years the established church has become a place for privatized “me” religion – a therapeutic religion of feel good Christianity. The younger evangelicals assert the church is not a private but a public faith.’<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>201</sup> First Church of Cyberspace: 3363-3373.

<sup>202</sup> First Church of Cyberspace: 4546-4556.

<sup>203</sup> Phuture: 9949-9959.

<sup>204</sup> TheOoze: 23204-23214.

<sup>205</sup> TheOoze: 22846-22858.

So, like early Gnosticism, some of the Christian communities in Cyberspace advocate a privatized spirituality, whereas unlike early Gnosticism, others are dedicated to a public faith.

## **Conclusion**

In the Christian communities in Cyberspace there are variances of perspectives on engagement with the world, and these include an emphasis on proximity and proselytisation, a disengaged ‘cyber-spirituality’ and the promotion of Christianity from the distance of the World Wide Web, and a noticeable indifference and/or critical view of orthodox Christianity and its views on created things. Such discrepancy can also be established amongst Gnostic movements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, in their thinking about sociopolitical deviance or adherence, public or privatised spirituality, and the essential nature of the world, matter, and culture.

However, unlike early Gnosticism, many of the websites interest themselves in safeguarding orthodox Christian ethical norms, and some even evangelise through proximity and involvement in the world. Discussions about affluence, vocation, and social drive in the Christian communities in Cyberspace are pivoted on a repositioning of our ideals with biblical ones, the disparities of capitalism and wealth-accumulation, and the likelihood of the return of the standards of the Kingdom of God in Western society. The Christian communities in Cyberspace largely acknowledge the existence of God in civilization, civic discussions, and worldly channels, and persuade their affiliates to be energetic contributors, sometimes for the sake of one’s own liberation, but usually for the benefit of collective and social emancipation.

Therefore, the variation in perspectives between movements within early Gnosticism and Christian communities in Cyberspace, on engagement with the world and social behaviour, are similar, yet the ancient movements and the Christian communities in Cyberspace are at great odds, often, in areas such as ethics, mission, wealth and social ambition, and involvement in public and secular spheres. So there is some

resemblance to Gnosticism in the Christian communities in Cyberspace in this area, but it is partial and ambivalent.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Findings, Implications and Conclusions**

#### **Findings**

There has been a recent and expanding discourse about online Christian faith communities and their rapport with the theoretical ideals and communal structures of dualistic philosophical systems. Until now there has been no significant research in this area, especially with direct analysis of the specific publications, manifestations, and positions held by such groups themselves. However, Western postmodern culture is experimenting with various forms of spirituality and church, and new cultures of faith are emerging that need to be critically analysed and discussed, since these cultures, including cyber-culture, will significantly shape the future of the church.

We have demonstrated that at the core of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Gnosticism is the belief that spirit is valuable and matter is corrupted. Therefore there is an ultimate suspicion and dislike for the world and its institutions, and an individualized, esoteric, disembodied approach to morality, social participation, and ethics.

We have also discovered that there are noteworthy similarities and differences between the attitudes and values of early Gnosticism and the Christian communities in Cyberspace.



While the Christian communities in Cyberspace perspectives on human personhood are remarkably contrary to Gnostic thought, the range of ideas about the worth of engagement with the world and upholding good social behaviour are similar to Gnostic movements. Yet, again, the Gnostic sects and the Christian communities in Cyberspace are opposed, often, in areas such as ethics, mission, wealth and social ambition, and involvement in public and secular spheres. So there is some correlation between Gnosticism and the Christian communities in Cyberspace in the area of engagement with the world and social behaviour, but it is qualified and limited.

Again, in the area of incarnational models of community, some of the Christian communities in Cyberspace are very optimistic about embodied forms of community and value them as critical to the healthy and genuine expansion of the Kingdom of God in postmodern Western culture, and others have a gnostic-like distaste for earthy and tangible shapes of Christian community.

On the other hand, we have clear evidence that all of the Christian communities in Cyberspace are resistant to institutionally appointed hierarchical structures and their leadership. They also parallel early Gnostic perspectives on the existing church. The problem also remains that even the Christian communities in Cyberspace that are satisfied about the legitimacy of embodied community run the risk of contradicting this through the esoteric, disembodied, distanced medium of Cyberspace and cyber spatial communication. These websites, however, employ very intentional strategies to integrate their participants in embodied and concrete forms of spirituality, community, ministry, friendship, and mission.

These findings indicate, then, that while the Christian communities in Cyberspace manifest some Gnostic tendencies in a range and variety of areas, they also are opposed to, in many other ways, the core perspectives and values of early Gnosticism. It is an overstatement, then, to label them as 'cyber-Gnostic'.

## **Implications**

Rather than grouping these Christian communities in Cyberspace as ‘cyber-Gnostic’ it is better to try to understand them as an emerging expression of church in Western postmodern culture, and to critique them with the same diligence and fairness as other forms of church. They are an expression of contemporary culture.

The powerful undercurrents of cultural change bring with it a heightened global analysis of cultural diversity and change, the creation of academic fields of study such as ‘cultural studies’, a growing recognition of the associated cultural conflict that is emerging, and a sense of the ‘secular marginalisation’ that has occurred as the pressures of global secular Western culture have kept spirituality and religious concern relegated to the private rather than the public spheres of life. In such a pluralistic and rapidly changing cultural environment, one of the primary tasks for theology ‘is to understand why the Christian vision, which has such eloquent and encompassing impact on people in the past, seems to have lost meaningfulness in today’s cultural situation.’<sup>206</sup> So a critical agenda of theology is to understand the complex and fluid relationship between the Christian faith and human culture, which, naturally, includes cyber-culture, including their reciprocity, dynamic forms of inculturation, and the lively languages of spirituality and meaning making that are evolving.

Gallagher’s synthesis of the core elements of culture enables us to understand the complexity of the issues that face us as we examine cyber-culture and how it is evolving.<sup>207</sup> Culture is humanly produced, embodying human freedom and transcendence, is rooted in the past yet constantly evolving, and takes shape as a selective set of assumptions that include religiosity, spirituality, and ultimate religious visions. It involves an entire way of life shared by people-groups and providing solidarity and identity, includes a complex web of meanings, beliefs, values, customs, practices, and traditions, and is embodied in institutions, systems, and symbols. Culture ranges from the mundane to the mystical and existential, is self-communicating and conflict-prone during times of rapid cultural flux, is fallible

---

<sup>206</sup> Gallagher, M.P. 1997, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*. Darton, Longman and Todd, London.

<sup>207</sup> Gallagher, M.P. 1997.

and renewable, and is usually rooted in religious consciousness, although contemporary Western culture is faced with a crisis of division between itself and religion.

Recognition of the hand of the divine within human culture will shape authentic gospel inculturation and articulation in a way that not perceiving this mystical element could not, and in such a way that the faith-culture relationship mines the depths of the current activity and expressions of the Spirit of God in contemporary Western postmodern cyber-culture. Such inculturation takes shape with a clear view of the prevenient grace of God within and upon cyber-culture, the development of a missionary spirituality that is unconvinced by the secular-versus-sacred paradigm, and with a deep resonating conviction that the *Imago Dei* actively resides in and participates with all cultures in diverse, pluralistic, prophetic, and renewing ways. As Newbigin writes,

God in his patient and long-suffering love sustains the created world, and the world of human culture, in order that there may still be time and space for repentance and for the coming into being of the new creation within the womb of the old. God still cherishes and sustains the world of creation and culture, in spite of its subjection to illusion and vanity.<sup>208</sup>

The evidence of the preveniently gracious and independently initiated activity of God in our contemporary culture is manifold. Sweet notes that an incredible spiritual change has ‘hit postmodern culture. This wave will build without breaking for decades to come. The wave is this: People want to *know God*. They want less to *know about God* or *know about religion* than to *know God*. People want to experience the “Beyond” in the “Within”.’<sup>209</sup> And, so, we perceive the *mission Dei*, God’s cosmic activity in creation, culture, redemption, and consummation. This takes place in the ordinary corridors of human history and culture, not just in and through the Church, although at times the Church may be privileged to participate. We also recognise the active participation and presence of God within the formation, yearnings, salvation, and sustenance of human culture in general and cyber-culture in particular. This activity and presence may be thought of as even more profound than

---

<sup>208</sup> Newbigin, L. 1989, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, p.194.

<sup>209</sup> Sweet, L. 1999. p.420.

the human elements within culture - yet to distinguish artificially between the two would be to set up an artificial dichotomy. Cultural formation and transformation that honours the Creator is never solely a human product, for 'the real author of this humanized history is the Holy Spirit.'<sup>210</sup>

Cyber-culture and Christian communities in Cyberspace, then, need to be dealt with in all their diversity, with recognition of the presence of grace and fallenness in all cultures, rather than simplistically labelling them as 'cyber-Gnostic'.

A spirituality of postmodern culture is evolving in cyberspace and in embodied communities, and is necessary for the future health and growth of the Christian church in the West. Participants in Christian communities in Cyberspace need not reject this form of online spiritual practice and community, but they do need to appreciate that holistic and Christian spirituality is fostered in the church and the individual through practical guidance in the process of inculturation, rediscovering the art of spiritual direction, teaching the full range of the prayer experience, and using Scripture as transformative prayer.

Christian spirituality is also nourished as one is led into solitude, silence and contemplation, is shown how the experience of spiritual desolation has deep roots in the Christian mystical tradition, through using personality models, and reinterpreting and reinventing 'monastic practices for the non-monk',<sup>211</sup> such as silence, liturgy, stability, *Lectio Divina*, and prayerful work. Postmodern persons in cyberspace can enjoy rich spiritual experience in that forum, while being introduced to the experience of families of Christian practice, such as communion, worship, discipline,

---

<sup>210</sup> This is demonstrated in *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World", in which, as Bosch interprets it, 'The history of the world is not only a history of evil but also of love, a history in which the reign of God is being advanced through the work of the Spirit. Thus, in its missionary activity, the church encounters a humanity and a world in which God's salvation has already been operative secretly, through the Spirit. This may, by the grace of God, issue in a more humane world which, however, may never be seen as a purely human product – the real author of this humanized history is the Holy Spirit.' Bosch, D.J. 1996, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, p.391.

<sup>211</sup> Jones, W.P. 1994, 'Monastic Practices for the Non-Monk', *Quarterly Review*, Fall, pp.227-240.

witness, teaching and nurture, and compassion,<sup>212</sup> and being led through the process of moving ‘from solitude to community to ministry.’<sup>213</sup>

## Conclusions

We can conclude from this examination therefore, that:<sup>214</sup>

1. It is inaccurate and far too simplistic to label Christian communities in cyberspace as Cyber-Gnostic.
2. Christian communities in Cyberspace should be considered in their entirety and diversity, with a genuine appreciation of the presence of grace and fallenness in Cyberspace, rather than simplistically labelling them as Cyber-Gnostic.
3. God is present in cyber-culture and within Christian communities in Cyberspace, and is at work in these forums to demonstrate his grace, redemption, and truth.
4. Ultimately, human beings come to a point of needing some bodily engagement and gathering with others to be authentic Christians.

To sum up, as stated earlier in this thesis, the conclusion of these findings, therefore, is that while the Christian communities in Cyberspace exhibit some Gnostic inclinations in an array and assortment of areas, they also disagree with, in many other ways, the core values of early Gnosticism. It is an exaggeration and embellishment, then, to brand them as Cyber-Gnostic.

---

<sup>212</sup> Dean, K.C. and Foster, R. 1998, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*, Upper Room, Nashville, pp.105-122.

<sup>213</sup> Nouwen, H. 1995, ‘Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry’, *Leadership*, Spring.

<sup>214</sup> These are listed in order of importance, and also in order of the general to the particular.

## **Appendix 1: Concepts Analysed in N6**

Below are the concept categories developed in N6 after thorough examination of the 500,000 words of text from the websites.

### ***Concepts Analysed:***

#### ***1. Human Personhood***

- 1.1 Essential Conceptions of the Human Body
- 1.2 Relationship between Spirit, Soul, and Body
- 1.3 Means of Redemption and Salvation
- 1.4 Role of the Passions, Emotions and Senses
- 1.5 Spirituality: Pneumatic, Psychic, and Fleshly Persons
- 1.6 Sexuality, and Physiological Symbolism
- 1.7 Christology and Incarnation
- 1.8 Nature and Possibilities of Human Knowledge
- 1.9 Theology of Creation

#### ***2. Community***

- 2.1 Cyberchurch or Embodied Community
- 2.2 Church Leadership and Authority
- 2.3 The Existing Church
- 2.4 Postmodern Justifications and Considerations
- 2.5 EPIC – Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, and Communal
- 2.6 Individualised Experience, Transcendence and Salvation

### **3. *Engagement with the World and Social Behaviour***

- 3.1 Engagement with the World
  - 3.1.1 Proximity and Proximity Spaces
  - 3.1.2 Sociopolitical Deviance or Adherence
  - 3.1.3 Ethical Concerns
  - 3.1.4 Social Justice, Compassion, and Concern
  - 3.1.5 Ecology and the Environment
  - 3.1.6 Mission
- 3.2 Social Behaviour
  - 3.2.1 Wealth and Financial Status
  - 3.2.2 Career and Social Ambition
  - 3.2.3 Participation in Public/Secular Spheres
  - 3.2.4 Libertinism or Asceticism
  - 3.2.5 Privatized or Public Spirituality
  - 3.2.6 Interpersonal Relationships with Outsiders
- 3.3 Essential Nature of World and Culture

### **4. *Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions and Aims***

- 4.1 Alpha Church
- 4.2 Chapel on the Web
- 4.3 Cyber-Church
- 4.4 First Church of Cyberspace
- 4.5 First International Church of the Web
- 4.6 First Internet Christian Church
- 4.7 Jesus.com.au
- 4.8 Owlnook
- 4.9 Phuture
- 4.10 Positive Church Online
- 4.11 St. Thomas Community Church of the Internet
- 4.12 The Edge
- 4.13 TheOoze
- 4.14 Virtual Church
- 4.15 Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua

- 4.16 Vurch
- 4.17 WebChurch

## Appendix 2: Coding of Website Documents

This appendix shows where documentation (text) from each website has been deemed relevant to one of the themes of the dissertation (that is, coded at a particular area of the dissertation, such as community, human personhood, or engagement with the world and social behaviour).

For example, Alpha Church, which is a website with little content, has text relevant to Community and Base Data (2 ‘nodes’ or areas). Phuture, which is a large website, has text relevant to about half of the themes of the dissertation (27 ‘nodes’ or areas).

```

+++++
+++++
+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Alpha Church
++ Coded at 2 nodes.
(3)          /Community
(5 1)        /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/Alpha Church

```

```

+++++
+++++
+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Chapel on the Web
++ Coded at 4 nodes.
(1 3)        /Human Personhood/Mean of Redemption & Salvation
(2 3)        /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the
World & Culture
(3 4 1)      /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, &
Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
(5 2)        /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/Chapel on the Web

```



++++  
++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Cyber-Church

++ Coded at 4 nodes.

- (1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation
- (2 1 6) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Mission
- (3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
- (5 3) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/Cyber-Church

++++  
++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: First Church of Cyberspace

++ Coded at 19 nodes.

- (1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation
- (1 4) /Human Personhood/Role of the Passions, Emotions & Senses
- (1 6) /Human Personhood/Sexuality, & Physiological Symbolism
- (1 7) /Human Personhood/Christology & Incarnation
- (1 8) /Human Personhood/Nature & Possibilities of Human Knowledge
- (2 1 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Sociopolitical Deviance or Adherence?
- (2 1 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Ethical Concerns
- (2 1 5) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Ecology & the Environment
- (2 1 6) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Mission
- (2 2 1) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Wealth & Financial Status
- (2 2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Participation in Public/Secular Spheres
- (2 2 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Libertinism or Asceticism?
- (2 2 5) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Privatized or Public Spirituality?

- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture
- (3) /Community
- (3 2) /Community/Church Leadership & Authority
- (3 3) /Community/The Existing Church
- (3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
- (5 4) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/First Church of Cyberspace

++++  
++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: First International Church of the Web  
++ Coded at 5 nodes.

- (1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation
- (2 1 6) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Mission
- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture
- (3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
- (5 5) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/First International Church of the Web

++++  
++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: First Internet Christian Church  
++ Coded at 10 nodes.

- (1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation
- (1 4) /Human Personhood/Role of the Passions, Emotions & Senses
- (1 5) /Human Personhood/Spirituality: Pneumatic, Psychic, & Fleshly Persons
- (1 9) /Human Personhood/Theology of Creation
- (2 2 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Libertinism or Asceticism?
- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture
- (3 1) /Community/Cyberchurch or Embodied Community?

(3 2) /Community/Church Leadership & Authority  
(3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, &  
Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation  
(5 6) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/First Internet Christian  
Church

++++  
++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Jesus.com.au

++ Coded at 2 nodes.

(2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the  
World & Culture

(5 7) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/Jesus.com.au

++++  
++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Owlnook

++ Coded at 4 nodes.

(2 2 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social  
Behaviour/Libertinism or Asceticism?

(2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the  
World & Culture

(3 2) /Community/Church Leadership & Authority

(5 8) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/Owlnook

++++  
++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Phuture

++ Coded at 27 nodes.

(1 1) /Human Personhood/Essential Conceptions of the Human Body

(1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation

(1 4) /Human Personhood/Role of the Passions, Emotions & Senses

(1 5) /Human Personhood/Spirituality: Pneumatic, Psychic, & Fleshly Persons

(1 6) /Human Personhood/Sexuality, & Physiological Symbolism

(1 7) /Human Personhood/Christology & Incarnation

(1 8) /Human Personhood/Nature & Possibilities of Human Knowledge

(1 9) /Human Personhood/Theology of Creation

- (2 1 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Sociopolitical Deviance or Adherence?
- (2 1 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Ethical Concerns
- (2 1 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Social Justice, Compassion & Concern
- (2 1 5) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Ecology & the Environment
- (2 1 6) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Mission
- (2 2 1) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Wealth & Financial Status
- (2 2 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Career & Social Ambition
- (2 2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Participation in Public/Secular Spheres
- (2 2 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Libertinism or Asceticism?
- (2 2 5) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Privatized or Public Spirituality?
- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture
- (3) /Community
- (3 1) /Community/Cyberchurch or Embodied Community?
- (3 2) /Community/Church Leadership & Authority
- (3 3) /Community/The Existing Church
- (3 3 1) /Community/The Existing Church/Postmodern Justifications & Considerations
- (3 4) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal
- (3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
- (5 9) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/Phuture

+++++

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Positive Church Online

++ Coded at 13 nodes.

- (1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation
- (1 4) /Human Personhood/Role of the Passions, Emotions & Senses
- (1 5) /Human Personhood/Spirituality: Pneumatic, Psychic, & Fleshly Persons
- (1 8) /Human Personhood/Nature & Possibilities of Human Knowledge
- (2 1 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Sociopolitical Deviance or Adherence?
- (2 2 1) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Wealth & Financial Status
- (2 2 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Libertinism or Asceticism?
- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture
- (3) /Community
- (3 2) /Community/Church Leadership & Authority
- (3 4) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal
- (3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
- (5 10) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/Positive Church Online

++++  
 +++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: St. Thomas Community Church of the Internet  
 ++ Coded at 3 nodes.

- (1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation
- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture
- (5 11) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/St. Thomas Community Church of the Internet

++++  
 +++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: The Edge  
 ++ Coded at 26 nodes.

- (1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation
- (1 4) /Human Personhood/Role of the Passions, Emotions & Senses
- (1 5) /Human Personhood/Spirituality: Pneumatic, Psychic, & Fleshly Persons
- (1 6) /Human Personhood/Sexuality, & Physiological Symbolism

- (1 7) /Human Personhood/Christology & Incarnation
- (1 8) /Human Personhood/Nature & Possibilities of Human Knowledge
- (1 9) /Human Personhood/Theology of Creation
- (2 1 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Sociopolitical Deviance or Adherence?
- (2 1 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Ethical Concerns
- (2 1 5) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Ecology & the Environment
- (2 1 6) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Mission
- (2 2 1) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Wealth & Financial Status
- (2 2 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Career & Social Ambition
- (2 2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Participation in Public/Secular Spheres
- (2 2 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Libertinism or Asceticism?
- (2 2 5) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Privatized or Public Spirituality?
- (2 2 6) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Interpersonal Relationships with 'Unbelievers'
- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture
- (3) /Community
- (3 1) /Community/Cyberchurch or Embodied Community?
- (3 2) /Community/Church Leadership & Authority
- (3 3) /Community/The Existing Church
- (3 3 1) /Community/The Existing Church/Postmodern Justifications & Considerations
- (3 4) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal
- (3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
- (5 12) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/The Edge

++++  
++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: TheOoze

++ Coded at 29 nodes.

- (1 1) /Human Personhood/Essential Conceptions of the Human Body
- (1 2) /Human Personhood/Relationship between Spirit, Soul & Body
- (1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation
- (1 4) /Human Personhood/Role of the Passions, Emotions & Senses
- (1 5) /Human Personhood/Spirituality: Pneumatic, Psychic, & Fleshly Persons
- (1 6) /Human Personhood/Sexuality, & Physiological Symbolism
- (1 7) /Human Personhood/Christology & Incarnation
- (1 8) /Human Personhood/Nature & Possibilities of Human Knowledge
- (1 9) /Human Personhood/Theology of Creation
- (2 1 1) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Proximity & Proximity Spaces
- (2 1 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Sociopolitical Deviance or Adherence?
- (2 1 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Ethical Concerns
- (2 1 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Social Justice, Compassion & Concern
- (2 1 5) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Ecology & the Environment
- (2 1 6) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Mission
- (2 2 1) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Wealth & Financial Status
- (2 2 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Career & Social Ambition
- (2 2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Participation in Public/Secular Spheres
- (2 2 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Libertinism or Asceticism?
- (2 2 5) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Privatized or Public Spirituality?
- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture

- (3) /Community
- (3 1) /Community/Cyberchurch or Embodied Community?
- (3 2) /Community/Church Leadership & Authority
- (3 3) /Community/The Existing Church
- (3 3 1) /Community/The Existing Church/Postmodern Justifications & Considerations
- (3 4) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal
- (3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
- (5 13) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/TheOoze

+++++

+++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Virtual Church

++ Coded at 18 nodes.

- (1 2) /Human Personhood/Relationship between Spirit, Soul & Body
- (1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation
- (1 4) /Human Personhood/Role of the Passions, Emotions & Senses
- (1 5) /Human Personhood/Spirituality: Pneumatic, Psychic, & Fleshly Persons
- (1 6) /Human Personhood/Sexuality, & Physiological Symbolism
- (1 7) /Human Personhood/Christology & Incarnation
- (1 8) /Human Personhood/Nature & Possibilities of Human Knowledge
- (1 9) /Human Personhood/Theology of Creation
- (2 1 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Sociopolitical Deviance or Adherence?
- (2 1 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Ethical Concerns
- (2 1 6) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Mission
- (2 2 1) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Wealth & Financial Status
- (2 2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Participation in Public/Secular Spheres
- (2 2 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Libertinism or Asceticism?
- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture



- (3 2) /Community/Church Leadership & Authority
- (3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
- (5 14) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/Virtual Church

++++  
 ++++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua

++ Coded at 23 nodes.

- (1 1) /Human Personhood/Essential Conceptions of the Human Body
- (1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation
- (1 4) /Human Personhood/Role of the Passions, Emotions & Senses
- (1 5) /Human Personhood/Spirituality: Pneumatic, Psychic, & Fleshly Persons
- (1 6) /Human Personhood/Sexuality, & Physiological Symbolism
- (1 7) /Human Personhood/Christology & Incarnation
- (1 8) /Human Personhood/Nature & Possibilities of Human Knowledge
- (1 9) /Human Personhood/Theology of Creation
- (2 1 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Sociopolitical Deviance or Adherence?
- (2 1 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Ethical Concerns
- (2 1 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Social Justice, Compassion & Concern
- (2 1 5) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Ecology & the Environment
- (2 2 1) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Wealth & Financial Status
- (2 2 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Career & Social Ambition
- (2 2 4) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Libertinism or Asceticism?
- (2 2 5) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Privatized or Public Spirituality?
- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture
- (3) /Community
- (3 1) /Community/Cyberchurch or Embodied Community?

- (3 2) /Community/Church Leadership & Authority
- (3 4) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal
- (3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
- (5 15) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua

++++  
 ++++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: Vurch

++ Coded at 10 nodes.

- (1 4) /Human Personhood/Role of the Passions, Emotions & Senses
- (1 5) /Human Personhood/Spirituality: Pneumatic, Psychic, & Fleshly Persons
- (2 1 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Engagement with the World/Sociopolitical Deviance or Adherence?
- (2 2 1) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Wealth & Financial Status
- (2 2 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Career & Social Ambition
- (2 2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Participation in Public/Secular Spheres
- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture
- (3 1) /Community/Cyberchurch or Embodied Community?
- (3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
- (5 16) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/Vurch

++++  
 ++++++

+++ ON-LINE DOCUMENT: WebChurch

++ Coded at 11 nodes.

- (1 3) /Human Personhood/Means of Redemption & Salvation
- (1 4) /Human Personhood/Role of the Passions, Emotions & Senses
- (1 5) /Human Personhood/Spirituality: Pneumatic, Psychic, & Fleshly Persons
- (1 7) /Human Personhood/Christology & Incarnation
- (1 8) /Human Personhood/Nature & Possibilities of Human Knowledge

- (2 2 1) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Wealth & Financial Status
- (2 2 2) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Social Behaviour/Career & Social Ambition
- (2 3) /Engagement with the World & Social Behaviour/Essential Nature of the World & Culture
- (3 2) /Community/Church Leadership & Authority
- (3 4 1) /Community/EPIC - Experiential, Participatory, Interactive, & Communal/Individualized Experience, Transcendence & Salvation
- (5 17) /Base Data, Self-Definitions, Descriptions & Aims/WebChurch

### **Appendix 3: Details of the Chosen Websites**

This appendix gives some details of the websites chosen, including any data available regarding their length of existence, rate of hits, amount of text, whether sole organization or part of a corporeal church (websites contributing to corporeal faith intentionally will be included in this second group, whether or not they have an 'official' relationship with an existing church), number of web-pages, pictures or just text, and professional or amateur presentation.

The abbreviation used for the name of each website in the following table is noted below (for example Alpha Church is 'AC').

Alpha Church (AC) - <http://www.alphachurch.org/>

Cyber-Church.com (CC) - <http://cyber-church.com/>

First Church of Cyberspace (FCC) - <http://www.godweb.org/>

First Internet Christian Church (FICC) -

<http://www.angelfire.com/al/1stinternetChurch/index.html>

Jesus.com.au (JC) - <http://jesus.com.au/html/page/home>

Owlnook (OWL) - <http://www.owlnook.com/>

Phuture (PH) - <http://www.phuture.org/>

Positive Church Online (PCO) - <http://www.websyte.com/PositiveChurch/>

St. Thomas Community Church of the Internet (STCCI) -

<http://members.tripod.com/st.tcommchurch/home.html>

The Chapel on the Web (CW) - <http://thechapel.org/>

The Edge (TE) - [http://www.youth.co.za/theedge/the\\_future/main\\_the-future.asp](http://www.youth.co.za/theedge/the_future/main_the-future.asp)

The First International Church Of The Web (FICW) - <http://ficotw.org/>

TheOoze (TO) - <http://www.theooze.com/main.cfm>

Virtual Church (VC) - <http://www.virtualchurch.org/>

Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua (VCBC) - <http://www.dogchurch.org/>

VURCH.COM (VUC) - <http://vurch.com/>

WebChurch (WC) - <http://www.webchurch.org/>

| <b>Site Name</b> | <b>Length Of Existence</b> | <b>Hits Per Day</b> | <b>Text Units (Lines)</b> | <b>Sole Or Corporeal</b> | <b>Number Of Pages</b> | <b>Pictures Or Just Text</b> | <b>Professional Or Amateur</b> |
|------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>AC</b>        | 5 years                    | ?                   | 203                       | Sole                     | 15                     | P+T                          | A                              |
| <b>CC</b>        | 7 years                    | ?                   | 2190                      | Sole                     | 31                     | P+T                          | A                              |
| <b>FCC</b>       | 10 years                   | ?                   | 4690                      | Corp                     | 40+                    | P+T                          | P                              |
| <b>FICC</b>      | 5 years                    | 6                   | 917                       | Sole                     | 18                     | T                            | A                              |
| <b>JC</b>        | 4 years                    | 50                  | 853                       | Corp                     | 20                     | P+T                          | P                              |
| <b>OWL</b>       | 3 years                    | ?                   | 551                       | Sole                     | 12                     | P+T                          | A                              |
| <b>PH</b>        | 5 years                    | 100+                | 22822                     | Corp                     | 100+                   | P+T                          | P                              |
| <b>PCO</b>       | 6 years                    | 20                  | 5718                      | Sole                     | 18                     | P+T                          | A                              |
| <b>STCCI</b>     | 2 years                    | ?                   | 421                       | Corp                     | 5                      | T                            | A                              |
| <b>CW</b>        | ?                          | ?                   | 420                       | Sole                     | 11                     | P+T                          | A                              |
| <b>TE</b>        | 4 years                    | 100+                | 18317                     | Corp                     | 100+                   | P+T                          | P                              |
| <b>FICW</b>      | 7 years                    | 10                  | 2483                      | Sole                     | 33                     | P+T                          | A                              |
| <b>TO</b>        | 6 years                    | 100+                | 26686                     | Corp                     | 100+                   | P+T                          | P                              |
| <b>VC</b>        | 9 years                    | ?                   | 9801                      | Sole                     | 30                     | P+T                          | A                              |
| <b>VCBC</b>      | 9 years                    | ?                   | 22234                     | Corp                     | 100+                   | P+T                          | P                              |
| <b>VUC</b>       | ?                          | ?                   | 1799                      | Sole                     | 13                     | P+T                          | P                              |
| <b>WC</b>        | ?                          | ?                   | 3709                      | Sole                     | 18                     | T                            | A                              |

Please note: When there is no information available on an area a question mark is inserted. Also, almost none of these website reveal their membership numbers or how often their websites are updated, so these have been left out of the table.

## Bibliography

- Allen, C.L. 1996, *Virtual Identities: The Social Construction of Cybered Selves*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D.), Northwestern University.
- Alpha Church - <http://www.alphachurch.org/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- Anderson, T.D. 1997, *Hearing the Word in Our Own Language: Computer Use in the Local Church for the Twenty-First Century*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (D.Min.), United Theological Seminary.
- Ap.John (II, I). 15:29-17:31, in Robinson, J.M. 1990, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Harper SanFrancisco, SanFrancisco.
- Apocalypse of Peter. NHC VII/3, 81.15-23, in Robinson, J.M. 1990, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Harper SanFrancisco, SanFrancisco.
- Apocryphon of John (II, I) 31:4, in Robinson, J.M. 1990, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Harper SanFrancisco, SanFrancisco.
- Arai, S. quoted in Wilson, R. 1978, 'Slippery Words, 2: Gnosis, Gnostic, Gnosticism.' *Expository-Times*. 89.
- Berger, D.O. 1999, 'Cybergnosticism: Or, Who Needs a Body Anyway?' *Concordia Journal*, 25.
- Bianchi, U. (ed.). 1967, *The Origins of Gnosticism: The Colloquium of Messina, 13-18 April*. E.J. Brill, Leiden.
- Bogdan, R.C and Biklen, S.K. 1992, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. Allyn & Bacon, Boston, M.A.
- Bosch, D.J. 1996, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York.
- Brueggemann, W. 1972, *Religious Despisers of Culture*. Augsburg Fortress Press, Augsburg.
- Buckley, J. 1994, 'Libertines or Not: Fruit, Bread, Semen and Other Body Fluids in Gnosticism.' *Journal-of-Early-Christian-Studies*. 2.
- Cobb, J. 1998, *Cybergrace: The Search for God in the Digital World*. Crown, New York.
- Cornish, E. 1996, 'The Cyber Future' *The Futurist*, January-February, Special Edition, 4.
- Cyber-Church.com - <http://cyber-church.com/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- Dagan, R. 2004. *Cognitive Mapping*. Online at <http://intraspec.ca/cogmap.php> Intraspec, CA. (Accessed July 2004).
- Davis, E. 1998, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information*. Harmony Books, New York.

- Dean, K.C. and Foster, R. 1998, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*, Upper Room, Nashville.
- Edwards, M.J. 1990, 'Neglected Texts in the Study of Gnosticism.' *Journal of Theological Studies*. 41.
- Ess, C. 2001, *The Word Online? Text and Image, Authority and Spirituality in the Age of the Internet*. Published Online at <http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1901ce.html>. (Accessed January 2004)
- Ess, C. 2003, *Prophetic Communities Online? Threat and Promise for the Church in Cyberspace*. Published Online at <http://www.drury.edu/ess/church/church.html>. (Accessed January 2004)
- Ferguson, E. (ed.) 1993, *Gnosticism in the Early Church*. Garland, New York.
- Fernback, J.L. 1998, *The Wired Community: An Exploration of the Cultural Practices of the Citizens of Cyberspace*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Colorado at Boulder.
- Filoramo, G. 1990, *A History of Gnosticism*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- First Church of Cyberspace - <http://www.godweb.org/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- First Internet Christian Church - <http://www.angelfire.com/al/1stinternetChurch/index.html> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- Fisher, J. 1997, 'The Postmodern Paradiso: Dante, Cyberpunk, and the Technosophy of Cyberspace' in Porter, D. (ed.). 1997, *Internet Culture*. Routledge, New York.
- Fjeldstad, A.H. 1997, *Communicating Christ on the Information Superhighway*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (D.Min.), Fuller Theological Seminary.
- Fukuyama, F. 1995, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. Free Press, New York.
- Gackenbach, J. (ed.). 1998, *Psychology and the Internet: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Transpersonal Implications*. Academic Press, San Diego, California.
- Gallagher, M.P. 1997, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*. Darton, Longman and Todd, London.
- Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World", in Bosch, D.J. 1996, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York
- Gay, C.M. 1998, 'The Technological Ethics, and the Spirit of (Post) Modern Nihilism.' *Christian Scholar's Review*, 28, (1).
- Giese, J.M. 1996, *Place Without Space, Identity Without Body: The Role of Cooperative Narrative in Community and Identity Formation in a Text-based Electronic Community*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D.), The Pennsylvania State University.
- Gilhus, I. 1984, 'Gnosticism: A Study in Liminal Symbolism.' *Numen*. 31.

- Grant, R. 1985, 'Gnostic Spirituality' in McGinn, B. & Meyendorff, J. (eds.). 1987, *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. Crossroad, New York.
- Green, H.A. 1985, *The Economic and Social Origins of Gnosticism*. Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia.
- Grenz, S.J. 1996, *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Groothuis, D. 1999, *The Soul in Cyberspace*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR.
- Groothuis, D.R. 1998, 'Christian Scholarship and the Philosophical Analysis of Cyberspace.' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 41.
- Hayles, N.K. 1994, *The Seduction of Cyberspace*, in Conley, V.A. (ed.). 1994, *Rethinking Technologies*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Hedrick, C.W. & Hodgson, R. (eds.). 1986, *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, & Early Christianity: Fourteen Leading Scholars Discuss the Current Issues in Gnostic Studies*. Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Mass.
- Hultgren, A.J. & Haggmark, S.A. (eds.) 1996, *The Early Christian Heretics: Readings from their Opponents*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Irenaeus. *Adv. Haer.* 1.7.5. Quoted in Jonas, H. 2003, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- James, M.R. (ed.). 1924, *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. Online at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/noncanon/acts/actjohn.htm> (Accessed January 2004)
- Jesus.com.au - <http://jesus.com.au/html/page/home> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- Jonas, H. 1992, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*. Routledge, London.
- Jonas, H. 2003, 'Return to the Divine Origin: The Gnostic Transformation'. In Jonas, H. 2003. *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Jonas, H. 2003, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Jonas, H. 2000, *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist*, 1:259, in Waldstein, M. 2000, 'Hans Jonas' Construct "Gnosticism": Analysis and Critique.' *Journal-of-Early-Christian-Studies*. 8,3.
- Jones, T. 2001, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Jones, W.P. 1994, 'Monastic Practices for the Non-Monk', *Quarterly Review*, Fall.
- Kevin, C. 1997, 'Surfing the Sacred: Meeting God for Lunch @ the Global Ethics Café'. *Sojourners*, 26.
- Lambiase, J.J. 1997, *Who Speaks in Cyberspace: Powerful Discourse, Media Muscle, and Sources of Knowledge on the Internet*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D.), The University of Texas at Arlington.



- Logan, A.H.B. & Wedderburn, A.J.M. (eds.). 1983, *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honor of Robert McL. Wilson*. T&T Clark Limited, Edinburgh.
- Logan, A.H.B. 1997, 'At-onement: The Nature and Challenge of Gnostic Soteriology.' *Scottish Journal of Theology*. 50,4.
- Logan, A.H.B. 1997, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism*. T&T Clark, Edinburgh.
- Logan, A.H.B. 2001, 'Truth in a Heresy? 4. Gnosticism Source.' *Expository Times*. 112,6.
- Lyons, D. 1995, 'Jesus in Disneyland: The Church Meets the Postmodern Challenge'. *ARC*, 23.
- Mann, G.A. 1995, 'Em-bodied Spirit/In-spired Matter: Against Tech-gnosticism' in Tilley, M.A. & Ross, S.A. (eds.). 1995, *Broken and Whole: Essays on Religion and the Body*. Universities of America, Lanham, M.D.
- Mann, G.A. 1995, 'Techno-Gnosticism: Disembodying Technology and Embodying Theology'. *Dialog*, 34.
- Matishak, A.M. 1999, *Computer-mediated Communication and Spiritual Experience: On-line Discussion of the Numinous*. Unpublished Masters Thesis (M.A.), University of Calgary.
- Mays, P. 1999, *The Challenge of Generation X: Unchurched Xers and the Churches that Reach Them*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D.), Asbury Theological Seminary;
- Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. 1984, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Sage Publications, London.
- Morgan, T.C. 1995, 'Cybershock: New Ways of Thinking Must Be Developed for the Church to Keep Pace in the Coming Information Age'. *Christianity Today*, 39.
- Nash, N. 1992, *Believing Three Ways in One God*. SCM, London.
- Newbigin, L. 1989, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Newman, E. 1998, 'Theology and Science without Dualism.' *Cross Currents*. 48,1.
- Nouwen, H. 1995, 'Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry', *Leadership*, Spring.
- O'Leary, S.D. 1996, Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.
- Ohler, J.B. 1994, *A Case Study of Online Community*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D.), Simon Fraser University.
- Owlnook - <http://www.owlnook.com/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- Pagels, E. 1973, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*. Abingdon Press, Nashville.
- Pagels, E. 1975, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters*. Trinity Press, Philadelphia.
- Pagels, E. 1980, *The Gnostic Gospels*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.

- Paraphrase of Shem 1:15; 19:27; 45:34, in Robinson, J.M. 1990, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Harper SanFrancisco, SanFrancisco.
- Pavlik, S.C.M. 1999, *Between Outlander and Outlaw: A Case for the Outlier in Reinventing Community*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Pittsburgh;
- Pearson, B.A. 1984, 'Gnosticism as Platonism: With Special Reference to Marsanes (NHC 10,1).' *Harvard-Theological-Review*. 77,1.
- Pearson, B.A. 1992, 'Eusebius and Gnosticism.' In Attridge, H.W. & Hata, G. (eds.). 1992. *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*. Wayne State University Press, Detroit.
- Pearson, B.A. 2001, 'Early Christianity and Gnosticism in the History of Religions.' *Studia Theologica*. 55,1.
- Perkins, P. 1980, *The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism*. Paulist Press, New York.
- Perkins, P. 1993, *Gnosticism and the New Testament*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Perkins, P. 1995, 'Creation of the Body in Gnosticism' in Law, J.M. (ed.). 1995, *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Phan, P.C. 2001, 'The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity', *Theological Studies*, 62.
- Phuture - <http://www.phuture.org/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- Positive Church Online - <http://www.websyte.com/PositiveChurch/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- Pritchard, R.A. 1996, *Desire and Death in Cyberspace: Deconstructing Current and Emergent Pedagogies of Virtual Reality Technologies*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Toronto.
- Quispel, G. 1996, 'The Original Doctrine of Valentinus the Gnostic.' *Vigiliae-Christianae*. 50,4.
- Renwick, A.M. 1982, 'Gnosticism' in Bromiley, G.W. (ed.). 1982, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Robinson, J.M. 1990, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Harper SanFrancisco, SanFrancisco.
- Ronell, A. 1996, 'A Disappearance of Community' in Moser, M.A. (ed.). 1996, *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Rudolph, K. 1983, "'Gnosis" and "Gnosticism": The Problems of their Definition and their Relation to the Writings of the New Testament' in Logan, A.H.B. & Wedderburn, A.J.M. (eds.). 1983, *The New Testament and Gnosis*. T&T Clark, Edinburgh, Scotland.
- Rudolph, K. 1983, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*. T&T Clark, Edinburgh.

- Sire, J. 1988, *The Universe Next Door*. InterVarsity Press, Leicester.
- Stemler, S. 2004. 'An Introduction to Content Analysis.' *ERIC Digest*. June 2001.
- St. Thomas Community Church of the Internet -  
<http://members.tripod.com/st.tcommchurch/home.html> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- Sweet, L. 1999, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Tertullian. *Praescr.Haer.* 41, in *The Acts of John*. 93, in James, M.R. (ed.). 1924, *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, Online at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/noncanon/acts/actjohn.htm> (Accessed January 2004)
- The Chapel on the Web - <http://thechapel.org/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- The Edge - [http://www.youth.co.za/theedge/the\\_future/main\\_the-future.asp](http://www.youth.co.za/theedge/the_future/main_the-future.asp) (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- The First International Church Of The Web - <http://ficotw.org/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*. NHC VII/2, 55:18f, 56:9-14,18-20, in Robinson, J.M. 1990, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Harper SanFrancisco, SanFrancisco.
- TheOoze - <http://www.theooze.com/main.cfm> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- Treatise on the Resurrection* 47:17-19, in Robinson, J.M. 1990, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Harper SanFrancisco, SanFrancisco.
- Turner, J. & McGuire, A. (eds.). 1997, *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*. Brill, Leiden.
- Turner, T.D. & Majerick, R.D. (eds.). 2000, *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*. Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta.
- Virtual Church - <http://www.virtualchurch.org/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua - <http://www.dogchurch.org/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- VURCH.COM - <http://vurch.com/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)
- Waldstein, M. 2000, 'Hans Jonas' Construct "Gnosticism": Analysis and Critique.' *Journal-of-Early-Christian-Studies*. 8,3.
- Walker, B. 1983, *Gnosticism: Its History & Influence*. The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire.
- Weatherly, A.B. 1994, *Christ and Quarks: The Spirituality of Jesus and Postmodern Science*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (D.Min.), United Theological Seminary.

WebChurch - <http://www.webchurch.org/> (First Accessed in April 2003, and Last Accessed in August 2004)

Wertheim, M. 1999, 'Is Cyberspace a Spiritual Place?' *Cybersociology* (Online Magazine at <http://www.cybersociology.com/>), 7. (Accessed January 2004)

Wertheim, M. 1999, *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet*. Doubleday, London.

Williams, M. 1996, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.

Williams, M.A. 1996, 'Anticosmic World-Rejection? or Sociocultural Accommodation?' in Williams, M. 1996, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.

Wilson, R. 1978, 'Slippery Words, 2: Gnosis, Gnostic, Gnosticism.' *Expository-Times*. 89.

*Writing@CSU Writing Guide* online at <http://writing.colostate.edu/references/research/content/com2b2.cfm>. (Accessed January 2004)

Wyndham, M.A. 1996, *Cyberchurch: Christian Community in Cyberspace*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D.), The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.