

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 26, Number 3

July • August • September 2006

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Confucianism
Nare Krishna
Freemasons
Jehovah's Witnesses
Humanism
Jainism
Judaism
Neopaganism
MOONIES
Univeralism
Wicca
Islam
Hinduism
MORMONS
BAHA'I FAITH
Buddhism
Scientology
Satanism

Exposed!

In this Edition:

RAS Celebrates Its 60th Year!	2
<i>By JoAnn BeVier</i>	
Dear Reader	3
<i>By Rev. Laurence J. Sutherland</i>	
The "Jesus" of the Cults	4
<i>By Dr. Ron Carlson</i>	
Age Of The Earth	7
<i>By Robert F. Helfinstine</i>	
The Gospel of Judas: The Truth Behind the Hype	15
<i>By Steve Lagoon</i>	
Question From Readers	24
<i>By Steve Lagoon</i>	
Quiz - Theology and Practices of the Cults	28



*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1John 4:6*

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The Religion Analysis Service (RAS) Celebrates Its 60th Year!

Certainly 60 years of existence and service is an achievement that few organizations can celebrate. The Religion Analysis Service (RAS), with the Lord's blessing, has done this, but not without periodic testing and change.

The history of RAS has been written in ten year increments. In the last ten years RAS has moved from a storefront property in Robbinsdale, MN, then to Oakdale, MN, and more recently to an office at the U of MN in Minneapolis. In 2004 Dr. and Mrs. JoAnn Bevier retired after 25 years of service, and Dr. Ronald Mc Roberts assumed the presidency of RAS and Rev. Laurence Sutherland the editorship of The Discerner.

Over the years hundreds of people have benefited from the literature carried in the bookstore and also from the articles in The Discerner.

RAS exists through the prayers and support of faithful people who see the value of such a ministry. May God continue to bless RAS and every reader!

JoAnn BeVier

DEAR READER

We have had a very positive response to the new format of *The Discerner*. We sense too a genuine interest in the topics that we address and how they are presented. Personally I am delighted that many have taken the quiz on the cults that we initiated in the previous issue. I am including another quiz this time as well. This one may be a little more difficult since it deals with the theology and practices of various groups. The quizzes demonstrate the fact that there are many aberrant and unbiblical teachings and movements current today.

With this issue we welcome Dr. Ron Carlson, an advisory member of RAS, into the circle of contributing authors of articles for *The Discerner*. His clear contrast and delineation of numerous cults with the Jesus of the Bible is very helpful as we survey the cultic scene. Jesus' question to Peter is just as actual and needful today: "What do people (the cults included) say about me?" (Matthew 16:13). We also welcome Robert Helfenstine, a former scientist at Honeywell, as he writes about the age of the earth and its relevance to our stance to biblical truth. Bob and I enjoy frequent breakfasts together, and I am always challenged by the depth of his expertise and reflection on biblical archaeology.

Then we can always count on Steve Lagoon to do resourceful research on issues presently confronting the Church. While refuting the so-called "new discovery" of the Gospel of Judas, he is also laying bare the baseless claims of Gnosticism in whatever garb it comes (e.g. the Da Vinci Code, Christian Science, et.al.)

I wish you insightful and inspirational reading. Please let us know if we can help you with any questions or conflicts you have with strange or unbiblical teachings.

Yours sincerely,

Laurence J. Sutherland

THE “JESUS” OF THE CULTS

By Dr. Ron Carlson

In Matthew chapter 24, Jesus’ disciples came to him and asked, “Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” In responding to this question, it’s very interesting what Jesus identified as the foremost sign of his second coming and of the end of the age, “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.”

Today we are seeing the fulfillment of this warning sign as never before. Our world is literally flooded with false “christs” and false messiahs. It is estimated that there are over 1,000 cults in America alone with some 25-30 million followers! And each of these false cults promotes his own man-made version of “Jesus Christ” who is not the Jesus of the Bible.

So, who is the “Jesus” of the cults?

Jehovah’s Witnesses say that Jesus is actually Michael, the Archangel. He was the first creation of God. He came to Earth as a man, died on a stake, and rose from the grave invisibly as a spirit. Jesus then returned invisibly to Brooklyn, N.Y. in 1914 to head-up the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

Mormons (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) teach that Jesus is the spirit brother of Satan. He was once a human being like you and me, but through good works he evolved spiritually to become a god. However, Jesus is just one god amongst a pantheon of gods, all of whom were once human and evolved to become gods themselves. Jesus was born to Mary through physical incest when his father god had sexual relations with her. And Mormons teach that the blood and cross of Christ is foolishness and cannot fully atone for our sins (ever notice how there’s no cross on any Mormon church or temple?).

Christian Science and Mary Baker Eddy say that Jesus was only a man and that Christ is a Divine idea. Furthermore,

Jesus never did any supernatural miracles; he simply showed people their mental illusions of sin, evil, illness and disease. Christian Science says that Jesus did not die and his resurrection was only in a spiritual sense.

Sun Myung Moon (the Korean messiah) claims that Jesus was a man who failed his divine mission and he, Rev. Moon, is the second coming of Christ to unite the world under the banner of the Unification Church.

The **Bahai** say that Jesus is only one of nine great world manifestations; he is not a unique path to salvation and all religions are basically the same.

Unitarians believe that Jesus was a good man who was mistakenly deified by his followers.

Freemasonry teaches that Jesus was only a moral teacher. He was no better than Buddha, Confucius, Moses or Mohammed. They deny that Jesus was the light of the world and claim that Freemasonry is the true light of humanity.

Scientology and L. Ron Hubbard claim that Jesus is a false dream.

Spiritists say that Jesus is an advanced medium in the 6th sphere of the astrological projection (wherever that is?).

Unity teaches that Jesus is a man who perfected a divine idea.

Rosicrucians claim that Jesus is a manifestation of cosmic consciousness.

Transcendental Meditation says that Jesus was an enlightened guru who never suffered or died for anyone.

The more you study the false cults, the more you realize that the “Jesus” of the cults is not the Jesus of the Bible. All of the cults promote their own false, man-made versions of Jesus Christ; they are counterfeits and cannot save anyone.

So, who is the real Jesus?

In John 1:1 we read, “In the beginning was the Word (Jesus), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” A few verses later in John 1:14 we learn, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

In Colossians 1:15 Paul tells us that Jesus “is the visible image of the invisible God...” In Colossians 2:9 Paul says, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...”

The real Jesus is the one true God of all creation. He is the second person of the eternal Triune Godhead. He loves us so much that He broke into human history and split history into B.C. and A.D. to personally reveal Himself to us. The Bible says that Jesus came to “seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10; John 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:8-9). And as Acts 4:12 declares, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Have you put your faith in the real Jesus Christ?

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Dr. Ron Carlson is founder and president of Christian Ministries International. He is recognized as one of the foremost authorities and lecturers in the areas of Cults, World Religions, Evolution vs. Creation, and Christian Biblical Apologetics.

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To receive more information about Ron and Jason Carlson and Christian Ministries International, log on to their website www.jude3.com

AGE OF THE EARTH

By Robert F. Helfinstine

In these days when we read or hear information relating to the age of the earth, the most likely number will be in billions of years. This does not fit a literal reading of the Bible. The reaction of some Christians to insistence that the long ages are not valid is “What difference does it make?” It makes a difference when we consider that the Bible is God’s written word, (I Peter 1:20,21), and God does not lie.

The ideas of long ages, and dating techniques used to compute long ages, are inventions of mortal man and are not subject to rigorous scientific proof. The geology professor that taught the course in Nuclear Geology, in response to a request for proof for long ages, stated: “There is no proof. It’s mostly speculation. But I choose to believe.” Choosing to believe is not science, it is religion.....(Ref. Alexander, Calvin, PhD, Univ. of MN., Jan. 5, 1982)

What is taught in schools is that there is proof for long ages because we can calculate it. What is generally not known by teachers and students alike is that they have been given philosophy in place of facts.

God and Time

God exists outside of time. I AM (Exodus 3:14):God is (John 8:58). The past, present and future in our time frame of existence are all the same to God.

When did time begin? Gen. 1:1:”In the beginning (of time), God created the heaven and the earth.”

What was there before Gen. 1:1? Only God in three Persons, spiritual beings.

Where there is no physical space or matter, there is no reckoning of time.

God and the concept of time in Biblical terms:

Psalm 90:4: “A thousand years in God’s sight are as yesterday.”

2 Peter 3:8: “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

Three Aspects of God

God of creation

God of revelation: He told us that He created, how He created, when He created, and why He created.

God of salvation: Our redemption was planned before He created. 2 Tim. 1:9

Calculating the Age of the Earth from the Bible

From God's Word and its record of human history, the age of the earth can be calculated to a period of thousands of years. Time differences exist between the Masoretic and Septuagint texts, but both are less than 10,000 years.

What does the record actually tell us? There are a number of opinions as to what the Scripture says. Authorities generally agree that the literal-day interpretation of Genesis not only is a "legitimate" interpretation of the text, but that it is the obvious view.

This view is held by Dr. Davis Young, Dr. Pattle Pun, and others, even though they do not believe this interpretation. They disagree with this literal description of creation because it does not fit their "scientific" view of the origin of the earth. The creation sequence as stated in Genesis is also questioned.

Gap Theory

To accommodate long ages, it was assumed by some that there were long periods of time between the specified steps of the creation account. Those who wish to accept the theoretical long ages of the earth as determined from radiometric dating assume that there were millions of years between Gen. 1:1 and Gen. 1:2.

Day-Age Theory

A similar view of the creation period considers each day as a geological age in which gradual changes in the physical structure were accompanied by gradual changes in the plant and animal life.

Objections to the creation account given in Scripture are not scientific but philosophical.

"If the story of the "evolution" of the earth, as proposed by those who hold to the theory, were presented in the same format as the Biblical account of creation, would it be

believed as a scientific explanation of the origin of the earth and life?" (CRS Quarterly March 1979, p203, *The Story of Evolution in Biblical Style*, E. Theodore Agard and Charles D. Howe)

A proper philosophical base is needed for the investigation of the world and the universe. The doctrine of creation provides that base, and the associated presuppositions are formed around that base. The created universe was expected to have:

Design - intelligence

Order - plan

Purpose

An alternate philosophical base –

Universe not created – it evolved.

Product of basic material (time and chance)

No intelligence

Irrational operation (why specific laws?)

A Problem for Christians - Long Ages

Basis for Long Ages

The process of evolution needed long ages. Gradual changes that were to eventually produce new species needed time to accomplish the process. In spite of the fact that no intermediate fossil forms have ever been found, there was always hope that some would eventually be found.

Age of Rocks

By assuming that the earth was old, geologists began assigning dates to rock strata. The deep layers of sedimentary rock are filled with fossil forms of plants, fish, amphibians and animals. Certain index fossils were used to provide age to rocks in areas where strata sequences were not well defined. From these early studies the sequence chart known as the geologic column was made. It is in a variety of forms found in many science textbooks.

Dating of Rocks and Fossils

The age of the earth is considered by many to be 4.5 billion years. This number appears in science textbooks and in science news articles, but few people are aware of how it was derived. Dating techniques for geological formations have

been changing over the past several hundred years as new techniques are developed.

Dating Techniques

Earlier dating was accomplished by such processes as measuring the accumulation of minerals and salts in the ocean, counting the annual deposits in the deltas at the mouths of rivers, measuring the erosion rate of waterfalls, measuring the accumulation of meteorite dust or measuring the decay of the earth's magnetic field. Most dates derived from these processes were in the range from several thousand to several hundred million years. The accuracy of the results depends heavily on the assumptions used. The same is true of the 4.5 billion year date. People in general are not aware of the assumptions used for these dates. It was the discovery of radiometric dating and its application to earth crystalline rock that resulted in a large increase in the assumed age of the earth.

Not all rocks are dated by the same methods. The geologic column and the assumed ages of fossil bearing strata were derived before radiometric dating was developed. Sedimentary strata are not dated by their vertical sequence, their mineral content or their physical characteristics. They are primarily dated by fossil content. Index fossils, such as trilobites and dinosaurs, have been assigned to certain time periods based on evolutionary theory.

Radiometric dating techniques are used on crystalline rocks such as granites and basalt. Small radioactive inclusions are found distributed within the rock. Radioactive decay is a natural process by which an unstable Parent isotope* decays into a stable Daughter isotope by a specific sequence of radioactive emissions. By measuring the amounts of the Parent and Daughter isotopes and knowing the decay rate, a series of calculations can provide a "radiometric age" for a rock sample. This may or may not be the true age of the rock. The assumptions are pivotal in arriving at radiometric dates. Most assumptions are not proven or are not provable.

The main assumptions of the testing methods for the uranium-lead or rubidium-strontium decay series are:

1. The rock system must be closed. There must have been no gain or loss of either Parent or Daughter isotope during the life of the rock.

2. Initial Daughter isotope can be determined accurately.
3. The decay process is known and is constant.
4. The measurement of the isotopes is accurate.

There are several problems with these assumptions. It is doubtful that there are completely closed systems over long periods of time. Initial conditions can only be estimated. Decay rates are known for current conditions, but factors such as the change in the speed of light can have a direct effect on the decay rate. Measurement accuracies may depend on the skills of the operators. The sample may not be indicative of the whole rock formation.

Potassium-argon dating of rocks had been common although there have been questions of its accuracy. Recent studies in its decay process by Dr. Edward Boudreaux has revealed that there are two decay rates for potassium, one much faster than the other.** By using the longer decay rate for making calculations, the over abundance of Daughter isotopes produces an extremely old age for the sample.

- *Isotopes are atoms of the same element having the same number of protons but different numbers of neutrons.
- ** Boudreaux, Edward, and Baxter, Eric, A computational model for nuclear Binding and isotope decay Energies, Common Sense Science, 2000

Long Ages in Astronomy?

Distance to Stars

Large distances to stars, galaxies and quasars and the size of the universe are used to indicate long ages. How is distance measured?

There is no way to directly measure the distance to most stars and galaxies. Distance to a limited number of close stars has been measured by parallax, taking angular measurements at different times of the year and using trigonometry to calculate the distance.

The determination of the billions of light years for distant stars and galaxies is based on two factors, light intensity or brightness and the red shift of light received from the galaxies. It was assumed that the red shift of light was a Doppler effect produced by the recession velocity of the galaxy or star

in question. This was a reasonable assumption, and although it was questioned, no other mechanism was offered to explain the observed effect, until the last 20 years. The brightness, red shift relationship has been formulated into the "Hubble Law" which is not a law since it has never been verified.

As larger telescopes have been built and more sophisticated recording devices have been designed, it has been possible to detect very faint stars and galaxies. The general assumption was that these faint objects were very far away, and because they generally exhibited greater red shift than the brighter galaxies, it was further assumed that they were moving away from us at very high speed.

There are some basic problems with this concept. First, there is no justification for assuming that all faint galaxies are far away just because they are faint. Star density in a given galaxy does not have to be the same as other galaxies nor does galaxy size have to be similar to other galaxies. Galaxies appear to occur in pairs or in larger groups. The red shift of light from galaxy pairs is usually different, indicating from the Hubble relationship that they are moving at different velocities relative to the earth. However, over the years no apparent change in their relative positions has been observed.

Red Shift

If the red shift of light from the galaxies is not an indication of relative velocity, then some other explanation must be given.

When a series of studies of Quasars (quasi-stellar objects) was started it was found that their red shifts were larger than the faint galaxies. They were first assumed to be even farther away than the galaxies, but as data were accumulated it became evident to some astronomers that the quasars were associated with galaxies and showed distinct violation of the red shift-distance relationship. Reports of these findings were not accepted by the astronomy journals since the implications of such data were contrary to the Big-Bang hypothesis.

Astronomers were comfortable with the Big-Bang cosmology, and anyone upsetting it was not welcome in their midst.

A large body of evidence exists showing that galaxies and quasars can violate the red shift-distance relationship. Quasars are not the most distant objects in the universe, but

are associated in space with relatively nearby galaxies. (Arp)

Documentation of the red shift problem is found in *Quasars, Redshifts and Controversies* and *Seeing Red* by author and astronomer Dr. Halton Arp.

Quasars enormous red shifts are not from Doppler effects of an expanding universe. Red shifts are intrinsic properties of the quasars and galaxies related to their magnetic field strength. (Ref. Bergman, David, **Origin of the Redshift**, Common Sense Science, 2001)

Quasars and galaxies have origins different from the standard Big Bang model of the universe. Quasars and small galaxies appear to be generated from large galaxies. (Not proven)

A static universe, one that is neither contracting nor expanding, could be a reality. This is not a popular concept with most astronomers and astrophysicists.

We don't know how far away most of the stars and galaxies are or how they are changing, but evidence is quite clear, God didn't use the Big Bang to create the universe.

Conclusions logically drawn from factual data are no more valid than the assumptions on which they are based

British astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle made the following statement:

"I have little hesitation in saying that a sickly pall hangs over the Big Bang theory. When a pattern of facts becomes set against a theory, experience shows that the theory rarely recovers." **The Big Bang under Attack**, Science Digest, V. 92 May 1984 p. 84

Factors Supporting a Young Universe

1. Supernova remnants should number in the thousands if the universe is old, but there are only 205 detected. This is 65 less than expected by astronomers even assuming the universe is 7,000 years old. (Ref. Davies, Keith, **Distribution of Supernova Remnants in the Galaxy**, Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Creationism, pp. 175-182, 1994)
2. Deep Space Galaxies appear much the same as other galaxies, indicating that galaxies have not evolved but were created much as we see them today. (Ref. Goldsmith,

D., Digging Deeply in Galaxies Pasts, Science 271, 1996)

3. Red dwarfs are assumed to be faint old stars that should number in the thousands if the universe is billions of years old. However, astronomers have reluctantly admitted that the limited number found fits a biblically young universe of 10,000 years or less. (Ref. Davies, Keith, Interview in 'This Week in Bible Prophecy' No. 191)

Christians Reaction to Long Ages

Many Christian scholars began to accommodate long ages into their interpretation of Genesis. The long age ideas did not initially find acceptance in most churches. But as some seminaries began teaching future pastors the new ideas, the long age concepts began to invade the churches. Bible commentaries and reference Bibles carried the message of long ages. The **Scofield Reference Edition**, because of its wide distribution and support of long ages, was instrumental in leading people into the mindset of long ages. While many remained true to the literal interpretation of Scripture, large numbers of Christians accepted the idea of long ages without understanding the full implication of their action. The accuracy of the Genesis record was being questioned, and more liberal interpretations were being made in other portions of Scripture.

“Creation not only serves as a good basis for science, but for all of life. It brings meaning to the totality of existence.” (Chittick)

Robert Helfinstine is a retired professional electrical engineer having spent 40 years working for Honeywell in the field of control systems for aircraft, spacecraft, and missiles. He worked for two years in Europe (Germany/Sweden).

Helfinstine has been on the board of directors of the Twin Cities Creation Science Association since 1976, serving as secretary, treasurer and president. His main area of study in the creation science field was post-flood catastrophes and their correlation with Scripture. He has also participated in excavation activities for dinosaur and human tracks in Texas and dinosaur bones in Wyoming. The book *Texas Tracks and Artifacts* was written to document some of the work done in Texas.

THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS: THE TRUTH BEHIND THE HYPE

By Steve Lagoon

The headlines were splashed across the media in early April of this year (2006) announcing the finding of a new gospel called the “*Gospel of Judas*.” For example, one headline read “Just-Revealed Scroll Tests Usual View of Judas.”ⁱ All the hype about the discovery was very well orchestrated by the National Geographic Society, which was heavily involved in the restoration of the *Gospel of Judas*. One report stated “Religious scholars consider it to be the most important theological discovery in the last 60 years.”ⁱⁱ With all the attention being paid to it, and the grandiose claims being made about its importance, we at Religion Analysis Service felt it would be helpful to examine the significance of this “*Gospel of Judas*.”

Dating the Gospel of Judas

The *Gospel of Judas* is dated by most scholars to the middle of the second century and stands in the Gnostic tradition. Darrel Bock states: “This gospel is likely from the mid- to late second century because of the description of Creation that reflects developed Gnosticism.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The dating is fairly certain since this “gospel” was referred to by the great church father, Irenaeus, in about the year 180, and so must have been written prior to that. Marvin Meyer states, “Probably around the middle of the second century. This date becomes more secure on the basis of a statement by Irenaeus of Lyon, who referred to a Gospel of Judas in his work *Against Heresies*, written around 180.”^{iv}

Though the gospel was originally written about the middle of the second century, (likely in Greek), the recently found manuscript is from the fourth century,^v and “is written in Coptic, an Egyptian text.”^{vi} Rockwell tells us that the Gospel of Judas “was discovered buried along the Nile River near the city of El Minya, about 100 miles south of Cairo, in the 1970s and languished on the black market until 2000 when the preservation and translation process began.”^{vii}

Gnostic Background

It is essential to understand the Gnostic background of the *Gospel of Judas*. Gnostics in general held to a platonic dualism which viewed the material universe as the creation of the demiurge, an inferior spiritual being. Gnostics believed that this demiurge was the “god” of the Old Testament, but was not the true and highest God. Since the world is the creation of this inferior god, Gnostics view matter as evil, and our human bodies are likened to prison houses of the soul.

In Gnosticism, salvation comes through knowledge. Mayer states it well: “In the Gospel of Judas, as in other Gnostic gospels, Jesus is primarily a teacher and revealer of wisdom and knowledge, not a savior who dies for the sins of the world. For Gnostics, the fundamental problem in human life is not sin but ignorance”^{viii} What humans are ignorant of is explained in various ways by Gnostic groups, but they generally involve discovering the divine element or spark within us. Whereas, the demiurge seeks to keep man trapped in ignorance in this material world, Jesus helps us to know who we really are. With this knowledge, we are “saved” and set on a course to unity with the ultimate.

For Gnostics, Jesus, like others was trapped in the prison house of the material body. In the *Gospel of Judas*, Jesus gives Judas special insight into Jesus’ need to escape from his body. Judas “helps” Jesus by “betraying” Jesus to the authorities knowing that they will indeed kill Jesus, setting his soul free from the body. The *Gospel of Judas* has Jesus saying to Judas: “But you will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me.”^{ix}

In the *Gospel of Judas*, Jesus warns Judas that he will be rejected and hated by many, but that God will greatly reward him for his great act of faithfulness (the Betrayal): “You will be cursed by the other generations—and you will come to rule over them.”^x The *Gospel of Judas* even gives Judas his own transfiguration experience, “Judas lifted up his eyes and saw the luminous cloud, and he entered it. Those standing on the ground heard a voice coming from the cloud.”^{xi}

This certainly does turn the truth of the biblical witness on its head. I am reminded of the powerful words of the prophet Isaiah who said “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isaiah

5:20). The biblical assessment of Judas' betrayal is clear: "Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born" (Mark 14:21).

The Sethian and Cainites Gnostic Sects

Darrell Bock gives important background information about the specific Gnostic group that produced the Gospel of Judas: "It belongs to the Gnostic sect of the Cainites, who consistently rehabilitated individuals the Bible had rejected, figures such as Cain, the Sodomites, Esau, and Korah. This is a subset of Sethian Gnosticism."^{xii}

Since the Cainites believed that the 'god' of the Old Testament was essentially evil, anyone who was perceived to be an enemy of that god was actually good. Hence their positive outlook on such notorious Old Testament failures as the Sodomites and Korah. Furthermore, the *Gospel of Judas* teaches that the twelve disciples still worshipped the evil 'god' of the Old Testament, which eventually led them to condemn Judas. But the *Gospel of Judas* reveals that it is Judas alone who understands the truth, and to whom Jesus taught the mysteries of the universe; "Knowing that Judas was reflecting upon something that was exalted, Jesus said to him, 'Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the Kingdom.'^{xiii} This rehabilitation, if not exaltation, of Judas, is perfectly consistent with these Sethian and Cainite Gnostics.

Marvin Mayer adds: "The Gospel of Judas makes mention of Seth, well known from the biblical book of Genesis, and concludes that human beings with the knowledge of God belong to the generation of Seth. This particular form of Gnostic thought is often described by scholars as Sethian. In . . . Genesis, Seth, third son of Adam and Eve, was born after the tragic violence in the dysfunctional first family, which left Abel dead and Cain banished. Seth, it is suggested, represents a new beginning for humanity. That is the good news of salvation in Sethian texts like the Gospel of Judas."^{xiv}

The *Gospel of Judas*, then, has a Jesus that will teach knowledge about the mysteries of the universe, and those who partake of this knowledge will be a part of a "new humanity" and a "new beginning" for those who have found this "salvation."

A Bad Ending!

The translators note at the closing of the *Gospel of Judas*

state: “The conclusion of the Gospel of Judas is presented in subtle and understated terms, and there is no account of the actual crucifixion of Jesus”^{xv} What is amazing is that the translators in their note do not mention that Jesus’ resurrection is also left out of the *Gospel of Judas*. Bart Ehrman’s comments are insightful; “It will strike many readers as odd that the Gospel of Judas ends where it does, with the so-called betrayal. But it makes perfect sense given the views [of the Sethian Gnostics] . . . There will be no resurrection. This is perhaps the key point of all. Jesus will not be raised from the dead in this book. Why would he be? The entire point of [Gnostic] salvation is to escape this material world. . . A resurrection of the body is the very last thing that Jesus, or any of his true followers would want.”^{xvi}

Now, a gospel that does not include the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a gospel without the gospel! In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, the apostle Paul defined the biblical gospel: “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” In the same chapter, Paul declared that the bodily resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of Christianity; “And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1 Corinthians 15:14). Since the *Gospel of Judas* does not contain the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, it is indeed a false gospel!

What Does This All Mean to Christians?

It is crucial for Christians to understand the danger that is looming in the Church regarding the debate over the origins of Christianity. Reaction to the discovery and publication of the *Gospel of Judas* is a microcosm of the battle that is being waged in academia concerning the origins of the Christian Church.

Traditional View of Christian Origins

Conservative Christian scholars hold to traditional ideas concerning the origins of Christianity. The biblical gospels convey an accurate account of the life of Jesus Christ, including his death, burial, and resurrection, which are true historical events. The Bible was written under the guidance and authority of Jesus’ apostles and was completed by the end of the first century. Christians in the generations after the close of the apostolic period collected these writings and formed the canon

of the New Testament. These same Christians faced challenges from false teachers, and reacted with ever-increasing-precise doctrinal statements, culminating in the great creeds of the fourth and fifth centuries. These creedal statements did not add new teachings, but merely refined the basic teachings that Christians had believed from the beginning.

New School of Christian Origins

But this traditional understanding of the origins of Christianity is under attack from a new group of New Testament scholars and church historians who have come to be known as “the new school.” Some of these scholars are well known and prolific authors such as Elaine Pagels, Bart Ehrman, Karen King, and Richard Valantasis. It is the views of this “new school” that are prominently featured in the novel *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown and the movie of same name. Therefore, it is important that we understand the new school’s claims and how to respond to them.

Whereas the traditional understanding held that there was overwhelming consensus and unity on the fundamental teachings of the church, the new school advocates claim that rather than unity, there was great diversity in the early church. Yes, there were many of what we might today call evangelicals, yet at the same time, there were many Christian movements that held views that today would be viewed as heretical. The “new school” says that it is unfair to suggest that one of these groups deserves to be considered the true church and all the others false. Rather, they advocate that all these early groups should be viewed as valid and diverse expressions of Christianity.

What About the New School’s Claims?

For the New School, then, the Gnostic writings like the *Gospel of Judas*, should be viewed as equal expressions of true Christianity alongside of the biblical gospels, and not as heresy. Is this a fair reading of history? Certainly not! Speaking of such Gnostic gospels as those found at Nag Hammadi, the great Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown said that they were “rubbish of the second century . . . it’s still rubbish today.”^{xvii}

Another way of looking at this is to imagine if someone buried several of our grocery store tabloid magazines, and they were discovered 1500 years later. Does the fact that they were

buried for 1500 years add any credibility to their bizarre claims? Of course not! Consider headlines like “Adam and Eve Found Living Under the Atlantic Ocean” or “President Bush Having an Affair with Space Alien” or “Several ‘Bigfoots’ Attend Billy Graham Crusade.” Such stories may make for a good laugh, but no current observer takes them serious, and no historian examining them in 1500 years should take them serious either. The *Gospel of Judas* pales in comparison to the biblical gospels in the same way a light bulb compares to the sun.

The biblical gospels were produced under the authority of Jesus’ own apostles and contemporaries did not challenge the sober history they recorded. History provides strong evidence to support the traditional understanding of the apostolic authority behind the Gospels (Matthew and John being apostles themselves; Peter behind Mark and Paul behind Luke).

On the other hand, there is no evidence to support claims of apostolic authority behind the Gnostic gospels, including the *Gospel of Judas*. They are clearly pseudonymous (“An author who attempts to pass off his own writing as that of some other well-known person”^{xviii}) writings that the evidence shows were products, not of apostolic times, but of the second or third centuries and beyond. Bock summarizes the evidence: “Pagels is right that scholars debate these points about authorship, but the case that the Gospels are rooted in apostolic connections is far greater for the four Gospels than for any of the other alternative gospels, a point the new school often leaves unmentioned.”^{xix} After noting the apostolic authority behind the biblical Gospels Bock declares, “No such potentially plausible claim has ever been made for the alternative texts.”^{xx}

Irenaeus’ Contributions

Irenaeus (ca.130-202), made the same points over 1800 years ago as described by Pagels: “Orthodox leaders, including Irenaeus, accused the Gnostics of fraud . . . the heretics were trying to pass off as ‘apostolic’ what they themselves had invented.”^{xxi} Pagels then quotes Irenaeus accusing the Gnostics of “putting forth their own compositions . . . They really have no gospel that is not full of blasphemy. For what they have published . . . is totally unlike what has been handed down to us from the apostles.”^{xxii} Pagels sums up Irenaeus’ view, “What proves the validity of the four Gospels, Irenaeus

says, is that they actually were written by Jesus' own disciples and their followers, who personally witnessed the events they described."^{xxiii} On the other hand, Irenaeus says that false teachers, "introduce an indescribable number of secret and illegitimate writings which they themselves have forged, to bewilder the minds of foolish people, who are ignorant of the true scriptures. He quotes some of their writings . . . and he refers to many others including . . . even a Gospel of Judas."^{xxiv}

These are powerful arguments from an authority such as Irenaeus, who was in a far better position to judge the situation than the new school critics are today. Indeed, Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp, who in turn was a student of the apostle John himself.^{xxv}

Further, Irenaeus stated, "I have made a collection of their [the Sethian Cainites] writings"^{xxvi} which he described as, "Wicked and indigested doctrines."^{xxvii} One of these writings was the *Gospel of Judas* about which Irenaeus added: "They produce a fictitious history of this kind, which they style the Gospel of Judas."^{xxviii} Irenaeus described this "fictitious history", "They declare that Judas the traitor was thoroughly acquainted with these things [Sethian Cainite doctrines], and that he alone, knowing the truth as no others did, accomplished the mystery of the betrayal."^{xxix}

Irenaeus was thoroughly acquainted with this Gnostic material, including the *Gospel of Judas* itself, and strongly rejected it as being inconsistent with the teachings of the apostles as they had been faithfully handed down in the Scriptures and the teachings of the church universal. We do well to follow Irenaeus' example, rejecting satanic imitations like the *Gospel of Judas*, and placing our faith and confidence in God's inspired and infallible word.

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QUESTION FROM READERS

By Steve Lagoon

I have a friend who is in the *Church of God, Holiness* denomination. Are there any problems with their beliefs that I should be aware of?

The Wikipedia website states that:

“The **Church of God (Holiness)** is an association of autonomous holiness Christian congregations. The *Church of God (Holiness)* began in 1886 with the founding of a church in Centralia, Missouri. The movement grew out of disaffected Methodists that had been participating in the *Southwestern Holiness Association*. The leading cause of their departure from the Methodist Church was their zealous propagation of the doctrine of entire sanctification, and Methodist opposition to the Church of God interpretation of that doctrine.”¹

Elmer Clark reported that:

“The Church of God, Holiness, was formed by . . . K.H. Burrus . . . He began by preaching entire sanctification to eight people, and his group is a typical holiness body.”¹¹
Frank Mead reported (in the 1987 edition of his book) that “The Church reports 25,600 members and 32 churches”¹¹¹

The Wikipedia website offers further helpful background information:

“The *Church of God (Holiness)* has about 120 congregations in the United States, with the majority in Missouri and Kansas. Additionally they have ten congregations among the Navajo Indians and 11 Spanish-speaking congregations. Ministry departments of the church include Home Missions, World Missions, Harmony Hill Youth Ministries, and the Herald and Banner Press. The headquarters are located in Overland Park, Kansas. A general church conference is held annually. World missions works are found in Bolivia, the British West Indies, the Virgin Islands, Nigeria, and the Ukraine.”^{1V}

Frank Mead offers an overview of the teachings of the *Church of God, Holiness*:

“All doctrine within this group is tested strictly by New Testament standards; the Scriptures are accepted as inspired . . . The churches believe in the Trinity, in justification, entire sanctification, and regeneration; and that the gift of the Holy Spirit is an act subsequent to conversion. Perfection is both present and ultimate. One must believe in divine healing to be acceptable as a member, but medicines and doctors . . . are approved for those who desire them. Two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are observed.”^v

Our research, including a review of their doctrinal statement,^{vi} shows that the *Church of God, Holiness* affirms the essential teachings of historic and biblical Christianity, and should not be classified as a cult.

However, there are some doctrinal distinctives that are noteworthy. One that has already been alluded to is their commitment to *perfectionism* or *entire sanctification*. The *Church of God, Holiness* defines this doctrine as follows:

“Entire Sanctification - The Holy Scriptures clearly affirm the necessity of entire sanctification. This work of divine grace was provided as part of the atonement in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It includes the deliverance from inbred sin (the inherited continuing affects of the original sin), the complete moral purification from this nature of depravity, the complete renewal of the human nature in holiness (an inner inclination toward godliness), empowerment for Christian service, a perfect love for God and a holy love toward mankind. This gracious act of moral purification is accomplished instantaneously for the believer when he confesses the need, consecrates his all, and with faith in God requests the cleansing of his nature. This work of God’s grace takes place subsequent to, the believer’s regeneration, being preceded by a definite conviction of remaining inbred sin. (Luke 1:73-75; John 17:17; 1 Thess 4:3; 5:23-24; Heb 10:14-15)”^{vii}

We understand that there are high ideals that motivate this doctrine, and that many biblical passages would seem to suggest it (Matthew 5:48 and others cited above). Clark records that one of the great revivalists and advocates of

perfectionism, Charles G. Finney, once stated:

“So far, as I could see, I was in a state in which I did not sin.”^{viii}

My hunch is that his wife did not “see” it the way he did! There is no doubt that God calls us to live holy lives. Our goal should always be, to be increasingly conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).

Yet, the witness of Scripture seems to be, that we will not attain perfection this side of glory. In the Romans 7:7-25, the apostle Paul describes his own continuing battle with sin. It would seem to be a bit presumptuous to think we are going to exceed the apostle Paul in holiness. I always say, “If it was a struggle for Paul, it will be a struggle for us all.”

Let us not forget that it was the apostle John who said to Christian believers: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

Another concern about the *Church of God, Holiness* is that it requires belief in divine healing in order to be a member, as Frank Mead noted.

Also, F. E Meyer raises another issue of concern. He notes that:

“Like the other bodies bearing this name, hold that ‘the body of believers in any one place is the church in that place, for on account of the unity of Christ there can be but one church in a particular place, though there may be several meeting places.’^{ix}

In conclusion, we have no doubt that there are sincere brothers in Christ among the membership of the *Church of God, Holiness*. Yet, we must also be aware of some of their distinct beliefs of concern.

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QUIZ - THEOLOGY AND PRACTICES OF THE CULTS

1. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that non-Jehovah's Witnesses will be
 - a. purged and then reconciled with God.
 - b. forever suffer in hell.
 - c. annihilated or extinguished.
 - d. exist in a secondary compartment in Paradise.
2. Mormons believe that God
 - a. has a physical body.
 - b. is eternal and never changing.
 - c. is revealed only through the Bible.
 - d. includes all people in His redemptive work.
3. Christian Science espouses teaching similar to
 - a. Kabbalah.
 - b. the Unification Church.
 - c. Theosophy.
 - d. Freemasonry.
4. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus died on a
 - a. cross.
 - b. stake.
 - c. gallows.
 - d. Roman altar.
5. Numerology, scences, and palmistry are elements of
 - a. Bahatism.
 - b. Occultism.
 - c. Transcendental Meditation.
 - d. Armstrongism.
6. The so-called science of Dianetics is a part of
 - a. Scientology.
 - b. Christian Science.
 - c. Jehovah's Witnesses.
 - d. Transcendental Meditation.

7. The Mormons term the status of bliss in the future life as
 - a. paradise.
 - b. celestial.
 - c. nirvana.
 - d. happy hunting grounds.

8. What controversial teaching does Armstrongism accept?
 - a. Sin is an illusion.
 - b. British Israelism.
 - c. Polytheism.
 - d. Reincarnation.

9. The worldview of New Age and Buddhism is
 - a. Apocalyptic.
 - b. Cyclical.
 - c. Lineal.
 - d. Meaningless chaos.

10. The use of mantras is common to
 - a. Mormons.
 - b. Christian Science.
 - c. Scientology.
 - d. Hare Krishna.

Answers: 1. (c); 2. (a); 3. (c); 4. (b); 5. (b); 6 (a); 7. (b); 8. (b); 9. (b); 10. (d).

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