

The Heresy Series - Gnosticism

Opening Prayer - Saint Michael Prayer

"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

What is Heresy? It is not Schism or Apostasy.

St. Thomas definition of heresy: "a species of infidelity in men who, having professed the faith of Christ (baptized person), corrupt its dogmas. The right Christian faith consists in giving one's voluntary assent to Christ in all that truly belongs to His teaching."

Christianity's greater threat has always been from within. Remember it was God's own people, the Israelites, that wanted to crucify Jesus.

Movements that have split off from or been influenced by Christianity, but that DO NOT practice baptism (or valid baptism), are not heresies, but separate religions.

Examples: Muslims, who do not practice baptism, and Jehovah's Witnesses and Oneness Pentecostals, who do not practice valid baptism.

There are two ways of deviating from Christianity: the one by refusing to believe in Christ Himself, which is the way of infidelity common to Pagans and Jews; (**Apostasy**) The other by restricting belief to certain points of Christ's doctrine selected and fashioned at pleasure, which is the way of **heretics**.

The subject-matter of both faith and heresy is, therefore, the deposit of the faith, that is, the sum total of truths revealed in Scripture and Tradition as proposed to our belief by the Church. The **believer** accepts the whole deposit as proposed by the Church; the heretic accepts only such parts of it as commend themselves to his own approval. (**Heresy**)

Schismatics, says St. Thomas, in the strict sense, are they who of their own will and intention separate themselves from the unity of the Church. The unity of the Church consists in the connection of its members with each other and of all the members with the head. Now this head is Christ whose representative in the Church is the supreme pontiff. And therefore, the name of schismatics is given to those who will not submit to the supreme pontiff nor communicate with the members of the Church subject to him.

Reference- <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/heresy#i-connotation-and-definition>

Gnosticism Heresy

Time of heresy: It is unclear when it began, it seems clear that the apostles contended with it, but also being taught around the 2nd and 3rd century.

Many Church Fathers thought Gnosticism was founded by Simon Magus, the Samaritan sorcerer who converted to Christianity (Acts 8:9-24). Some contemporary scholars think Gnosticism started a few centuries before Christianity and then invaded it from the outside through the conversion to Christianity of Jewish and Gentile Gnostics. Other scholars believe Gnosticism started as a Christian heresy.

It seems clear, though, that the apostles themselves had to contend with a form of Gnosticism (Col 2:8, 18; 1 Jn 4:1-3; Rv 2:6, 15). Paul said, "Avoid profane babbling and the absurdities of so-called knowledge [*gnosis*]. By professing it some people have deviated from the faith" (1 Tm 6:20-21).

What is the Gnosticism heresy or (System of heresies)

It gets its name from the Greek word *gnosis* ("knowledge"). Gnostics viewed themselves as "those who know." Special knowledge of the way things really are. The knowledge that the world as we see it, the material world, is kind of a fallen world, yet in it are sparks of a spiritual reality. This special knowledge can help release or escape from the material. Dualistic world. There is a small group that gets it and has the insight, but the majority live in ignorance. There are Gnostic gospels.

Their heretical teachings varied from group to group and can't be pinned down with specificity, but common gnostic beliefs include the following:

1. Christ appears to be human and his humanity was merely an illusion.
2. Christ appeared to die, but did not really die. The Crucifixion was really a *crucifixion*.
3. Christ was not truly God, the second Person of the Trinity. He was merely a created being who was the lowest of the *aeons*, a group of semi-divine beings between God and man. Each lower *aeon* was given power by a higher *aeon*. Christ, the *aeon* furthest removed from God, created the world because God was too pure to dirty himself with matter.
4. Matter is evil, so one can do anything one wants with one's body, including killing it to release the soul from its imprisonment.
5. The God of the Old Testament is evil, as evidenced by the fact that he created the material universe. He is not the same as the God of the New Testament, who is the God of Love, as Jesus and his apostles taught (1 Jn 4:8, 16).
6. People are saved by acquiring secret knowledge (*gnosis*), which is imparted only to the initiated and or through contemplation.

Material reality is Evil and we should escape it and Spiritualism is Good. There is an Evil creator God in the material world that prevents Adam and Eve from the Spiritual knowledge or Gnosis and the Good God is a spiritual God. Jesus was not divine because God could not become a human being. Reject the Old Testament as being associated with the evil creator God.

Reference- <https://www.catholic.com/qa/whats-gnosticism>

Docetism heresy is in conjunction with Gnosticism - God only appears to be human, desire to protect the divinity from the material world. Jesus only appeared to suffer. Negates the death of Christ in the flesh and they negate the truth of the Eucharist.

Which Early Church Father opposed Gnosticism?

St. Irenaeus of Lyons opposed Gnosticism born 140 AD and died around 202 AD.

Reference - <https://www.nationalshrine.org/blog/the-man-who-defeated-gnosticism-st-irenaeus/>

What council touched on it? The 2nd ecumenical council of Constantinople in 381 AD.

What is TRUE about the teaching? God is a Spirit; the Truth is inside of me.

What is FALSE about the teaching? The material world and the flesh are evil and that God didn't become human and therefore didn't actually suffer death on a cross. The God that created the world isn't a lesser God. They see Jesus as a Gnostic teacher to teach a program on how to escape the body and the body is not resurrected. Only insiders or elect can obtain secret knowledge.

This is false, because the flesh of the human body is created by God and is very good and we are made in the image and likeness of God. The Earth and all of creation in the material world was created by God and is good, according to Genesis. God doesn't want us to escape from our body, but saves the whole person (body and soul) and our bodies who are resurrected. The Church, which is the body of Christ is both made up of people with Jesus as its head (human and divine).

What happens if we don't see value in our bodies or the material world?

From the treatise Against Heresies by Saint Irenaeus, bishop

The eucharist, pledge of our resurrection

If our flesh is not saved, then the Lord has not redeemed us with his blood, the eucharistic chalice does not make us sharers in his blood, and the bread we break does not make us sharers in his body. There can be no blood without veins, flesh and the rest of the human substance, and this the Word of God actually became: it was with his own blood that he redeemed us. **As the Apostle say** (He points out they don't follow the teachings of the Apostles): *In him, through his blood, we have been redeemed, our sins have been forgiven.*

We are his members and we are nourished by creation, which is his gift to us, for it is he who causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall. He declared that the chalice, which comes from his creation, was his blood, and he makes it the nourishment of our blood. He affirmed that the bread, which comes from his creation, was his body, and he makes it the nourishment of our body. When the chalice we mix and the bread we bake receive the word of God, the eucharistic elements become the body and blood of Christ, by which our bodies live and grow. How then can it be said that flesh belonging to the Lord's own body and nourished by his body and blood is incapable of receiving God's gift of eternal life? Saint Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians that *we are members of his body, of his flesh and bones*. He is not speaking of some spiritual and incorporeal kind of man, *for spirits do not have flesh and bones*. He is speaking of a real human body composed of flesh, sinews and bones, nourished by the chalice of Christ's blood and receiving growth from the bread which is his body.

The slip of a vine planted in the ground bears fruit at the proper time. The grain of wheat falls into the ground and decays only to be raised up again and multiplied by the Spirit of God who sustains all things. The Wisdom of God places these things at the service of man and when they receive God's word, they become the eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ. In the same way our bodies, which have been nourished by the eucharist, will be buried in the earth and will decay, but they will rise again at the appointed time, for the Word of God will raise them up to the glory of God the Father. Then the Father will clothe our mortal nature in immortality and freely endow our corruptible nature with incorruptibility, for God's power is shown most perfectly in weakness.

Biblical Resources to oppose Gnosticism

Psalm 8, 104, 148, - These psalms praise creation.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20- Body is the temple of the Holy Spirit

Ezekiel 37:1-14 - prophesy where God makes dry bones and flesh come back to life. (Looks forward to our eternal life with God in heaven).