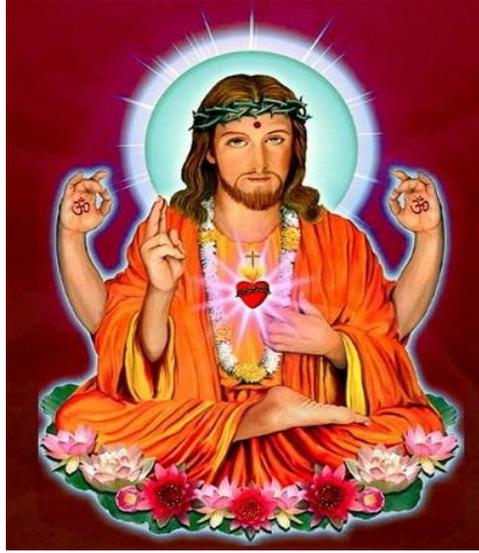




## 17. GNOSIS AND GNOSTICISM

In ancient Greek, gnosis (γνῶσις, read gnòsis) meant the knowledge reached through the initiation path of the Mysteries. The word is related to the *saṃskṛta* term *jñāna* both in etymology and purport. Therefore, it was synonymous with sophia (σοφία, read *sofīa*), wisdom or sapience. However, gnosis also had the sense of the intellectual and discriminative method used to attain wisdom and, in this sense, it can be well rendered in *saṃskṛta* as *Brahmavidyā*. Therefore, the Gnostes (γνώστης, read *gnòstes*, sskr *jñāni*) was a man who, having been prepared theoretically by philosophy and after having been initiated into the Mysteries, had attained real knowledge through intellectual inquiry (*jñānaśakti vicara*), rather than through sacrificial rituals or devotion.

The cognitive approach of the Gnostes proceeded by synthesis, that is to say, they transcended the analytical knowledge of the multiplicity, considered false knowledge. However, with the decadence of the ancient Greek religion and its initiation paths (*sāadhanā mārga*) of Mysteries, and because of a new coexistence with non-Greek cultures and traditions, in the period of Hellenism, they confused the synthesis with syncretism.



### 1. Example of modern syncretism<sup>1</sup>

Syncretism means the identification of heterogeneous symbols and doctrines which are only apparently similar, creating a confusion that has only the appearance of intellectuality. This deviant tendency is known as Gnosticism. Therefore Gnosticism should not be confused with true Gnosis<sup>2</sup>, although in the Hellenistic period, often the boundary between them was difficult to define. And some of the last neo-Platonists were polluted by the syncretistic influence of Gnosticism.

The Jewish communities scattered throughout the Roman Empire had lost the knowledge of their language and at last spoke only Greek. For this reason, in the third century BC they decided to translate the Bible into Greek. From that moment the influence of Greek thought on Jewish communities sprang up. Gnosticism arose from this cultural influence. The most ancient Gnosticism was born in Egypt on the edge of the Jewish religion, in the community of “Therapists”. These were a Jewish community

<sup>1</sup> “Jesus *caturbhuja*”, fraudulent overlap of *hindū* and christian symbols made by missionaries in order to convince Indian people on the divinity of Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup> With “Gnostes” we indicate here those who aspired to the Gnosis or who had reached it, while with “Gnostics” we mean the followers of Gnosticism.



certainly derived from the esoteric order of the Essenes<sup>3</sup>; we will discuss about them later while describing the Jewish religion and the birth of Christianity. It does not seem, however, that the Therapists were a true *sampradāya* neither that they had *gurus*, *paramparās* nor any initiatic method (*prakriyā*). They lived in poverty in the desert, men and women together, devoting themselves to asceticism and night prayers until dawn. Strongly influenced by Egyptian religion, these Jews devoted themselves to cultivating a medical science, from which the name by which they are known comes. It seems that this medical science was very similar to the Neoplatonic Theurgy. It is from this community that Philo Judæus (20 BC - 45 AD) drew his basic Gnostic notions. However, in his native Alexandria he had studied the Greek philosophy by which he has been profoundly influenced. His Gnostic syncretism consisted in mixing Greek philosophy (mostly the Platonic one) with the revealed biblical text. He has been the first to argue that "pagan" philosophers could be useful to explain the deeper meaning of the Hebrew Bible. In this way he mixed inextricably Greek thought (including the Mystic one) to a Semitic Religion, so different and often incompatible with the Hellenic mentality. In fact, both the exterior philosophy and the initiatic doctrines of the Greeks were open to comparisons with any sapiential doctrine proceeding from other civilizations. On the contrary, through Philo, the Semitic exclusivism used Greek and Hellenistic wisdom to confirm the belief that Judaism was the only true Religion in the world and that its God had chosen only the Jews as "elected people" among all the nations of the earth<sup>4</sup>. Some centuries later, Christian theologians followed the example of Philo using Greek wisdom to give depth and meaning to the Old Testament and to the Gospel.



## 2. The two creators: God and Satan

Jewish Gnosticism was not a homogeneous movement: each community took different doctrinal positions, often in competition with each other. Early Christianity itself was certainly born under a Gnostic influence, as it can be mostly read in the Gospel of St. John or in the Epistles of St. Paul. After the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, many divisions of the newborn church were produced, with more or less

<sup>3</sup> One of the initiation paths of Judaism that later will be called *Qabbalah*.

<sup>4</sup> Their exclusivism in this case was only one-sided, because neither the Greeks nor the Romans ever took seriously these Jewish claims of divine predilection. On the contrary, it has been typically within the Semitic peoples and religions that irreconcilable conflicts were triggered due to mutual exclusivity. This explains the many centuries aggressiveness and hatred between Jews, Christians and Muslims that lasts until today.



profoundly gnostic tendencies. Thus, even before Christianity emerged from Judaism as a new separate religion, it has been involved in doctrinal disputes with its Gnostic members. Let us briefly see which are the common features of the Judeo-Christian Gnosticism, at least what we can know from the few documents arrived up to us. As already explained in the first articles of this series, Western Traditions, including Semitic Religions, had in common the bipartite structure in esotericism and esotericism. The esotericism is the domain of initiation (*dīkṣā*) and the exotericism is the exterior religion for the profane non initiated people (*adīkṣita*). It is necessary to remember this characteristic, unknown in Hinduism, if one wants to understand well the traditions of the West and the reasons for their corruption. Gnosticism arose from the confusion between these two domains. Teachings reserved to knowers (*jñāni*) were divulged among people lacking any intellectual qualifications (*anadhikāri*). Rituals of meditation and repetition of *mantras* were distributed without any preliminary initiation. Social and moral issues were interpreted as metaphysical secrets. Among the latter ones, stands out the problem of “good and evil” which still troubles Western minds. From a merely behavioral problem concerning the action producing *pāpa* and *puṇya*, in the semitic monotheistic religions the problem of “good and evil” has been raised to the level of “pseudo-metaphysics”. This because, in fact, God and Satan are rival entities. It is true that God created Satan as an angel and that the latter rebelled against him. But, for these religions what is created is considered eternal. Eternal, but having a beginning. Therefore, the evil produced by Satan directly or indirectly is eternal. Even hell is eternal, and the created soul that does evil ends down in hell, will remain there eternally, suffering for ever.



### 3. Abrasák, the superior God

As we can easily recognize, all monotheisms in reality, are dualist. The Gnosticism, as was produced in Judaism and Christianity by a misunderstood influence of Greek thought, made dogmatic the dualism, coming to affirm that God, called Abrasák<sup>5</sup>, created spiritual things, while the Demiurge, often identified with Satan, created material things. Thus Satan cooperates with God in the creation of the world. God creates souls, Satan bodies. God is the shining Satan before the rebellion and Satan is the dark God of this manifested world. Many Gnostics considered the Biblical God to be the Demiurge i.e. Satan, and his human projection on the earth was Jesus. Thus, instead of transcending the problem of good and evil, it is solved by mixing good with evil, truth with error, light with darkness. So you can

<sup>5</sup> Abrasák (ἀβρααῶξ in Greek) is a meaningless term. The numerical value of its letters is 365, so perhaps its meaning is "year".



reach God with the help of the devil, you can get merit by making only demerits. "*Pecca fortiter*" ("sin hard", in Latin) if you want to get the Gnosis! So, all the violence against the neighbour, all the sexual woes, all the most dangerous spells, all the sacrileges against religion, can become the most sublime prayers. The explanation of these aberrant behaviours is provided by means of secrets, mysterious revelations, muddled symbolism, self-contradictory doctrines. And behind all this, the presence of the ass-headed God of Atlantean origin sometimes reappears.



#### 4. Gnostic interpretation of the Jesus Christ's projection in the womb of the virgin Mary

Therefore the Gnostic literature that has reached us is difficult to evaluate: sometimes it reproduces authentic Pythagorean, Platonic and Biblical teachings; sometimes it is a jumble of symbols difficult to interpret that makes you think that you don't have the access key, even if often there is not access to anything; or, finally, it deals sometimes with evil magic and diabolic sorcery.

The different Gnostic currents were structured in Churches with their bishops, priests and patriarchs and lasted for few centuries until the other Christian Churches completely destroyed them as heretical.

Nowadays playing on the equivocal and in perfect bad faith the propagandists of the different Christian Churches accuse all the initiatory paths based on knowledge (*jñāna mārgas*) to be Gnostics. In this way they spread about the other religions with which they declare to "dialogue". Instead, it is their hostility towards knowledge and intellectuality that should make reflect everybody on their underlying sincerity.

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