



CHRISTIAN IN SOCIETY

LIFE IN THE CHURCH AND WORLD

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CULTURE: RECENT EVOLUTION

THEN 1994 – NOW 2021

- THEN permissiveness about extra-marital sex and pressure to legitimize homosexuality.
- NOW same sex marriage has given way to bisexuality, transgenderism and the negation of one's body. Gender has no relationship to one's biological makeup.
- THEN discrimination according to biological sex in bathrooms, lockers, showers, prisons, sports, and other public places.
- NOW progressive loss of sexual distinctions in public places on the basis only of biological male and female distinctions.



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- THEN we advanced *multiculturalism* – the understanding that all values, mores, and societal standards are of equal validity, and are to be respected by everyone.
- NOW we have absolutized political speech, identity politics, and globalism.
- NOW diversity of race (tribalism) and gender have taken over as a substitutes for diversity of cultures. These are articulated with language that is meta-narrative and trans-cultural.
- You cannot be or discover your true self and be racist or affirming biological gender identity, or exclusive heterosexual marriage.



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THEN 1994 – NOW 2021

- THEN the local newspaper, network news, and the shopping mall were how information was transmitted and the corporate world served the world through chain stores.
- NOW information and goods now largely controlled globally by internet-based corporate giants (e.g. Facebook, Google, Twitter, Alphabet, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon)
- NOW language construction, deconstruction, and information dissemination (and control) is in the hands of social media giants and information providers.



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THEN 1994 – NOW 2021

- THEN Western culture served as a beacon influencing the vision of where third world cultures ought to evolve.
- NOW elements to Western nihilism, existentialism, and a resurgence of Gnosticism have taken over the Post-modern agendas of construction and deconstruction in the Western world. (More on this up the way)
- NOW there is considerable push-back among African, Middle Eastern, and Asian cultures especially concerning matters of gender, marriage, family, and the important place of religion.



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Excursus on NOW: The Resurgence of Gnosticism

- OLD GNOSTICISM

- Due to the action of an unfaithful goddess, the realm of good spirits became entrapped in matter (material world, bodies, etc.)
- Humans are pure spirits imprisoned in the physical evil body.
 - Physical death is final salvific release from the prison.
- Understandings of this dualism (spirit = good, matter = evil) is the underlying assumption in both Stoicism and Epicureanism (Hedonism)
- Gnosticism invaded the Church as its first pervasive heresy from Greek influence.



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- OLD GNOSTICISM
 - The abiding and pervasive sense that the realm of pure spirit is of greater value and the essence of godliness and spirituality has afflicted the Church through the ages to the present.
 - Gnostic Accents that invaded the Church:
 - Platonism = material is an illusory shadow – just negative reflections of what is the real in world of eternal concepts and ideas.



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- OLD GNOSTICISM
 - Monasticism – The world and the material elements of life are evil obstacles to spiritual virtues and internal spiritual communion with God. They are to be minimized or eliminated with a regimen of ascetic, separated lives of spiritual exercises and devotion.
 - Radical Reformation/Pietism – monasticism without cloisters – communes and readers around the table
 - all seek meaning within and for the self, juxtaposed against a hostile or indifferent external world.



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- NEW GNOSTICISM
 - Atheistic Darwinism is foundational to this understanding. Since the human body is simply the product of senseless, purposeless, impersonal evolutionary forces, it holds no value or significance and therefore cannot be a part of the *real me*.
 - Existentialism and Gnosticism affirms the *self*, not the soul. Both involve within our culture the necessity for personal discovery of the identity of the *self*.
 - The *soul* (Christianity) has connection with higher realities (God), however, this understanding of the *self* does not.



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- NEW GNOSTICISM

- The self is the avenue to seek personal meaning over against the conviction of an empty meaningless physical world. Being authentic has replaced being pious.
- Gnosticism is the road to self-affirmation and fulfillment in the face of accepted nihilism.
- Gnosticism seeks to fill the vacuum of empty nothingness.
- Gnosticism is the reconstruction of the conclusion of nothingness concerning all material reality.



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- NEW GNOSTICISM
 - Nihilism makes the case against the Christian world-view arguing a conclusion of empty human meaninglessness; but nihilism is not the final conclusion.
 - Nihilism is just the wrecking ball of the influence of a Christian understanding about us, life, culture, social order, and our future.
 - Gnosticism seeks some positive meaning within the self.
 - This is a religion where self-becoming is the road to salvation; choice is the sacrament; and preference is the guiding light.



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- NEW GNOSTICISM

- Christianity = we have being as a unity of body and soul.
- In existentialism, we have choice to become *by*, and become *as* we choose to exist.
- How we so choose defines the self. This is modern Gnosticism.
- The stark objective reality of material nature fights against the self.
- Gnosticism is rebellion and seeks release from the perceived oppression of Nature which is seen ultimately as meaninglessness.



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- NEW GNOSTICISM
 - Today's Gnosticism, influenced by nihilism, sees nature as meaningless and random (neo-Darwinian impact). Nature has form but lacks meaning or purpose.
 - Gnosticism rebels against all categories, concepts, and understandings that impose form arising out of some understanding derived from the essence of nature (e.g. God's good creation and its order).
 - Today's word affirming belief in essential meaningless = *whatever!*



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Excursus on NOW: The Resurgence of Gnosticism

- NEW GNOSTICISM
 - The base value of the self is freedom which defines what the self is and what it can become (freed from the shackles of nature, past life, and past culture).
 - In our upbringing we receive our understanding of who we are shaped by family, country and church – and these three shaped by assumptions in the Christian worldview.
 - To actualize the true self, one must make choices on what/who we are and how we will live.
 - Gnosticism's process of salvation is internal.



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- NEW GNOSTICISM
 - The *Self* is the replacement of the soul. The latter is related to divinity, the former replaces divinity.
 - Christianity = process of salvation is external thru Christ and Church.
 - Gnosticism's ultimate rejection is God becoming flesh.
 - Christianity = ultimate reality is personal, created the body, and then became embodied in Jesus.
 - Reality, meaning, and purpose flow from who He is and what he has done for us and our salvation.
 - Meaning and purpose exist in matter *not* in spite of it.



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- NEW GNOSTICISM
 - Positive meaning and purpose must be discovered apart from, in opposition to, and in rejection of whatever can be ascribed to exist within matter.
 - The biggest evil of matter is individualism, particularity, disparate entities. For G all good is spirit and spirit is one.
 - *Particularity* of gender is especially abhorred (s/b bisexual and unisexual).
 - The use of bitter irony and satire are the deconstructive levelers of all institutions and conventions that claim to have in reality positive meaning of anything physical.



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Excursus on NOW: The Resurgence of Gnosticism

- NEW GNOSTICISM
 - Rejection of *Logos* = rejection that language is a fit vessel to house or convey reality and truth (especially nouns that reflect disparate and particular beings or things). The self is the only locus of truth and meaning.
 - Christianity = knowledge comes to us from the outside, *extra nos*. It is mediated by observing the outside or by some external language source (teacher, books, etc.)
 - Rejection of Gnosticism includes rejection of irrationality (one is *not* two, A is *not* B). The essence of reality is particularity and distinction among the many.



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Excursus on NOW: The Resurgence of Gnosticism

- NEW GNOSTICISM
 - Morality reflected in the 10 Commandments reflects the sanctity of me and what is mine (and you and yours).
 - My person includes my body, sexuality, spouse, property/possessions, reputation. These are mine and are to be hallowed and protected.
 - God gave us our natures, human rights, command over history, and ultimate meaning including the end of everyone and everything.



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- NEW GNOSTICISM
 - If God is dead, only the self remains and is in need of meaning and purpose in the face of all that is physical, including the physical “me” from a purposeless universe.
 - Gnosticism provides another level of self and spirit where non-logical, non-rational solutions can be posited without any objective foundation that provides the self with any objective meaning or value.
 - The forces of Gnostic influence form the drift today toward a strictly personal spirituality that negates all external realities.



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- NEW GNOSTICISM

- Globalism = within the whole world there is just my truth and everyone else's the world over.
- Values have replaced morality (morality is objective, values are subjective).
- Morality presents a set of duties and obligations toward that which is good.
- Values are reflections of chosen demand (economic) or interests.
- The good is what lies outside the self, but values are a reflection of what the self chooses or prefers.
- Without choice, values disappear.



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THE POST-MODERN CREED

I am an absolutely free Self born, randomly in the body I have. My body – which is my possession but is not essentially me – places me in a given situation in which I inherit certain values from my parents, from the church I grew up in, from my country, and from my culture. As I get older, I begin to break free from these values, and, either I begin to discover who I really am, or I decide to create who I will be. I may have a crisis of identity at some point during this period, but I eventually must be me. This I do by making my own choices of what I will be, choosing my own politics, my own religion, my own styles, my own music, my own sexuality, even my own gender, etc. Whatever it is that defines who I am, such things must be freely chosen by ME. I understand life as a journey whose paths are Self-chosen. If there is some “out there” divine entity guiding me as I choose my path, it will communicate with me internally, personally. Along this journey, I may be assisted by certain gurus, both human or not so human. Or not. (Burfeind, Gnostic America, 124-25)



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CULTURE WARS: THE BATTLE OVER SOCIAL DISCOURSE

THE GOALS

- To remove the influence of the Christian worldview and use of its language from our culture.
- To replace the language we use to express the significant things we believe and do that identify and bind us together with language shaped by Nihilism, Socialism, Communism, Critical Race Theory, Wokism, etc.
- To remove from social discourse all language that expresses or presumes Christian absolutes.
- The process involves strategies that employ *deconstruction, marginalization, and identification.*



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CULTURE WARS: THE BATTLE OVER SOCIAL DISCOURSE

THE STRATEGY

DECONSTRUCTION

- Associate language you want removed from social convention by describing and associating it with categories, terms, and values that are culturally repugnant and have very negative connotations.
- Examples – racist, bigoted, phobic, hate speech, offensive, sexist, unscientific, etc.
- Can you think of key words and terms that are being deconstructed in today's culture?