

O.K. thanks R.C.. I think you're right that you're taking advantage of me. I came in here yesterday as a representative of the Institute and I'd heard a lot about R.C., and I was in here about five minutes and we were going at it hammer and tong, so I guess he figured he had to get back at me and put me in front of here talking about something I hadn't really prepared, but I'm grateful all the same for the opportunity for sharing some of the things I've worked on with you people, and I hope that you will feel free to interact with me as I talk. What I have here is just a couple of notes that I got together before breakfast, so if you seem to lose the structure of what I'm saying it's probably not your fault. Well R.C. has pretty well said who I am and what I'm doing right now is going from campus to campus across the country telling students about the Institute for Christian Studies, and trying to encourage them to come there for their graduate studies. So if later on if you would like to ask me come questions about that, please do.

I'd like to begin by making this general comment I think that fits into what I'm going to say, and into the context of what R.C. been giving, and that is this: The Importance of seeing, the influence which Greek, and that is to say, pagan thought forms have had on the development of Christian thinking. I think it's pretty difficult to under estimate the effect which Greek philosophy has had on Christian thinking. Now I will not go as far as some people in that and say, that all Christian theology and doctrine is, is just a Greek sized version of the Bible. I think that especially the orthodox tradition has managed to avoid a great many pitfalls, but at the same time I think that our understanding of many of the Christian doctrines, cannot be very clear, unless we see the polemical situation in which they arose, very often, which was often a situation pretty well determined by Greek categories, Greek ways of thinking. Now, I want to talk to you about Gnosticism and about the origin of Gnosticism.

I wrote a paper at the Free Universtiy for one of my professors on a comparison between Gnosticism and Neopalationism and I came up with a few ideas that I would like to share with you, especially on the origins of Gnosticism, and I would like to just sketch for you very summarily, the question of the origins of Gnosticism, which is quite a hotly debated point in modern scholarship. I think that you could basically say that there are bascially four positions that's been taken: one has been the traditional one which has said that Gnosticism is basically a Christian heresy, that is to say, that it arose with Christianity and was kind of sycretinism which took various Greek mythological concepts, and merged them, fused them, with particular biblical givens, and came up with a very distorted form of Christianity, in fact so distorted that it's probably not wise to speak of it as being any kind of Christianity at all. That is more of less the traditional view

which goes back to the church fathers themselves. I should say here that Gnosticism in the early centuries of the Church was the arch enemy of Christianity, and the Orthodox Church Fathers fought it tooth and nail, I mean they realized—I agree with them—they realized that Gnosticism was the primary foe, I mean it was the worst foe than Greek philosophy itself, or many of the traditions which they themselves came. So I think we should realize that Gnosticism from the beginning was as terrible danger for the Christian faith. So, that's the traditional view which goes back to the Church fathers themselves. Gnosticism is basically a Christian heresy. This view pretty well held supreme until the end of the 19th Century, perhaps the beginning of the 20th Century, until a fellow by the name of Adolf Von Harnack, arose I don't know if you people have heard his name, R.C. has probably mentioned him . . . Adolf Von Harnack, he was a church historian, a historian of dogma, he was a liberal Christian and he had a tremendous influence on 20th century thought, and his view of Gnosticism was this; he says the difference between Gnosticism and Orthodox Christianity is this, that Gnosticism is the acute Hellenization of Christianity, whereas Orthodox Christianity, or Orthodox Doctrine, is the gradual Hellenization of Christianity, so that his view what that, Greek thought pretty well took over Christian thinking, but that in the case of Gnosticism it just did it particularly fast, whereas in the case of Orthodoxy it took a couple of centuries to accomplish itself. Now that theory had great influence, so that's a second theory.

A third theory, which has had very great influence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and which is very important to know, I think, is the one which is espoused by Bultmann, Rudolf Bultmann, we've all heard of him. I should tell you story that goes with that. Bultmann taught at Marburg, a place in Germany, and a fellow teacher of his at Marburg, was Heidegger, the famous existentialistic philosopher. And he had a student, Bultmann did, who was also a student in philosophy under Heidegger, whose name was Hans Jonas, Jonas, and this Jonas wrote a book on Gnosticism and late antiquity in which he came to the following theses, on the basis of his working from the existentialist Heidegger. He said what Gnosticism basically is, is a wide spread feeling in late antiquity of estrangement with the world. He talked about it in terms of existentialism, and as you know existentialism talks very much about man feeling a stranger in the world, the world becomes absurd it is meaningless, and we as man feel ourselves lost, just thrown at random into this world so that we don't feel at home in this world, and Jonas said that it is a similar experience to what in the 20<sup>th</sup> century give rise to existentialism, in the early centuries of the Christian era, and which gave rise to Gnosticism. He has a long explanation of that, the old Hellenistic polis, where everyone was tightly knit into a group, sociologically felt at home, now they'd had the cosmopolitan

breakdown of the polis, were sociologically men were lost in their feeling in the cosmos, there had been a lot of scientific discoveries that the stars which people had formerly thought as personal beings, but now it was becoming known that they were impersonal. So that generally speaking there was a widespread feeling, experience, in the first century of the Christian era, that man was a stranger in this world, and the result of it was, says Jonas, that man thought of the world as essentially bad, and man in his essence, being a stranger there who had to get out of this world, he used the word a-cosmism to describe this, a negation of the cosmos.

All right, so this Hans Jonas wrote this book in which he described Gnosticism in this way, as a general existentialistic feeling of estrangement with the world, and it should be noted that he took gnosticism in a very broad sense. He didn't define it only as it had traditionally been defined, as a series of half-Christian sects, which had their heyday in the 20<sup>th</sup> century after Christ, but he said it was a wide movement all over the near-East and Roman Empire, which began in fact before Christianity, that there was a pre-Christian Gnosticism.

Now, this idea of Jonas' was picked up by his teacher Bultmann, in fact Bultmann wrote introduction to the book in which Jonas published in which he said, "from no other book have I learned as much as from this book from my pupil Jonas, and just as an aside, it's interesting that this book appeared in 1933 which was when Hitler took over, and Jonas was a Jew so he was forced to flee Hitlerism and when the book appeared it was something of an act of courage for Bultmann to have his name appear in the front of a book in which he gives such a sounding endorsement of this book by a Jewish scholar, so this should be said to Bultmann's credit, that he didn't shy away from that. At the same time, it should be said; this is another little anecdote, that Heidegger in that same year gave his famous rectoral oration at The University of Freiburg in which he endorsed Nazism, and for at time at least went along with Hitler's programs, and it's an interesting fact that later on, Jonas, in fact just a few years ago at a conference that was held in the States with theologians of the new hermeneutic which largely utilizes Heidegger' philosophy for modern hermeneutical theology, Jonas was there and Jonas—who is not a Christian, told these Christian theologians, he says that if you people don't see that what Heidegger is saying—is basically anti-Christian—and you can't use him in your theology—then you're blind," that's just an aside.

O.K., so that's the third way of looking at Gnosticism, and I should say this as well, that Bultmann, on the basis of a mistaken interpretation of a sect in Iran called

the Medians, which people had falsely chronologically fixed as starting before Christianity, came to the conclusion that this general Gnostic movement that Jonas had told them about, had begun with the Medians in the first century before Christ, and had influenced Christianity and Bultmann wrote a commentary on the gospel of John, in which everywhere, he points out what he called a Gnostic influence. So, the view of Gnosticism has had a great influence on New Testament scholarship, because Bultmann of course was not only a great theologian, and philosopher, but he's also a very influential biblical exegete.

All right, so that's the third theory about the origins of Gnosticism, which has been perhaps probably the most prevalent one in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Now there was a fourth one, which has been largely fathered by an American by the name of Grant. I think he's from The University of Chicago, or he was until recently, and his theory goes like this. He says that Gnosticism was basically a Jewish phenomenon arising out of disillusionment with their God, Jehovah, and he dates its rise with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. He says that what Gnosticism basically is, is a feeling of the Jews after Jerusalem was sacked, you people know the story of the fall of Jerusalem. In 70 A.D., this was one of the gruesome that has happened in the world. The Roman troops had besieged Jerusalem and it finally fell, and everyone to a man was crucified, It was, well, Christ had predicted it in the gospels that this was going to happen. It destroyed their cult and the whole Jewish faith was terribly shaken up because they could no longer worship in Jerusalem, this was one of the problems of Jewish theology, how can we still have the Jewish faith without the temple in Jerusalem, and the cult there with the sacrifices and so on. Anyhow, Grant said what happened was that the people had depended on the promises of Jehovah, and now, found the complete opposite had happened, from what they expected, God had promised them, and instead of saying that Jehovah was the good God who was the author of all mercies, said that Jehovah was the bad god, they said Jehovah was the person who had let them down. They didn't reject the idea that there was Jehovah God but they said he is the evil god, that he was evil, O.K., so that's the fourth basic interpretation with which has gained some ground in the last decade or so.

Now I'd like to say what my view of the matter is, which is nothing very original, except that it is, perhaps somewhat original in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I go pretty well back to what the Church Fathers had said, that Gnosticism is basically a Christian heresy. And I think that you can say that the rise of Gnosticism, or that the beginning of Gnosticism, which is very much a debated question, is in fact describe to us in the Bible, in Acts 8, in the story of Simeon Magus. I am basing myself here on a number of sources from the Church Fathers, chiefly: Justin

Martyr. Irenaeus and Hypolitus, who all lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century I think, they are all 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D. I think that you are all familiar with the story of Simeon Magus in Acts 8. I'll just recount it briefly.

Jesus had said before he ascended that the disciples were to go and preach the gospel, to Jerusalem, to Samaria, to the ends of the world, after the initial days after Pentecost, this is exactly what people did in the first stage on their missionary journey was to Samaria. Philip went to Samaria, and there he met with a man who called himself Simeon, who was a magician. Now I think I should stress that this was not, this Simeon, and this magician, was not simply a charlatan, or a fake, he was a real magician, You know I think magic is real, it was not until the rise of Positivism that people have begun to believe that magic is not real. All the church fathers believed it was real, and in the Bible, in many places, magic is taken very seriously. Simeon was a real magician he could do fantastic feats of magic and he made a terrific impression on the populace of Samaria. He heard the word of God preached by Philip, now we should just think for a moment about the context of this. Philip had just come from Jerusalem and he had in fresh memory, not only Pentecost, but the resurrection, the crucifixion, all the basic events of salvation history were fresh in memory. I mean he could speak as an eyewitness, now he knew all kinds of people who had been there too, who had witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who had witnessed Christ resurrected, many of the disciplines who had been there, who had seen him arise on the mount of Olives. So that he came with a very vivid account of what had happened. I mean he was all excited about it, and he could talk about it with great authority about what had happened, and he could tell them in great detail, in terms that they were familiar with, of what had happened, in great detail, of what had happened, who this Jesus was, what happened to him, what happened after he had ascended to heaven.. And it says in Acts that Simeon believed, and he was baptized. Simeon believed what Philip said to him about Jesus Christ, that this was the Messiah, that he had died for our sins, that he had ascended into heaven, and that his Spirit had come at Pentecost, he believed that and it says that he listened very carefully with the other believers in Samaria, to Philip as he talked. But then the apostles from Jerusalem came down for the laying on of hands, and for the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Peter and John came down and laid their hands on the believers there and they received the Holy Spirit, they were filled with Joy, and everything that goes with the receiving of the Holy Spirit, everybody that is except Simeon. Simeon looked on, and he thought, it was a magical trick this laying on of hands, that people just, it says literally, it says though the laying on of hands they received the Holy Spirit. And he said, this is something fantastic, this you know, this, this is the kind of thing I want to find out

about, and that is where the fact that although he believed, through some Satanic force, he would not receive the Holy Spirit, he looked upon it as a magical trick, and he said to Peter, he said, you know—HOW MUCH, you know how much money do you want for me to receive that gift, and then Peter just turns on him and lets him have it. You know he says in Philips' translation, "to Hell with you and your money." And he lays upon him the Deuteronomic curse, which was familiar to every Jew, you know where God had said there are two ways for you, the way of life and the way of death, and if you go the way of life you will be blessed, and if you go the way of death you will have nothing but curse. And he laid that curse upon Simeon, and that's where the story pretty well ends. Although Simeon says to him, "oh, please don't do that, please pray to God that his curse that you've put upon me will not have effect". And it doesn't say in Acts, what happened to Simeon, and what his reaction was, but we do know from Justin Martyr, who was also from Samaria, and whose writings, his two apologies in which he talks about this, I think they are about eighty years later, so it's quite likely that he'd heard from his hometown from his grandfather, or something, this story, so that's why he knows about it. Justin Martyr tells us, that this is not the end of the story, but that Simeon Magus became a rabid anti-Christian polemicist, and that he followed the apostles around, preaching an anti-Christian doctrine. I think we have to realize the heinousness of what Simeon did. He believed what Philip said, he did not receive the Holy Spirit, and then after that, he said, Jesus of Judea, who died on the cross—THAT'S ME—and the Holy Spirit that these people are talking about, you know who comes through this laying on of hands and stuff like that, that's me to. He went and followed Peter who had laid this curse upon him, all the way to Rome, where he kept saying, look you people keep talking about Jesus, I know about Jesus, you know I accept that there is such a thing as Jesus, you just don't have the whole picture. You have to realize that Jesus didn't really die on the cross, but that it's me—that I am sort of the incarnation of Jesus, and he was a magician. And I think R.C. mentioned to you, he was telling me yesterday, I haven't read the book myself about the Silver Chalice was it, either that or, in which the story is told, which is based on based on ancient records, that among the tricks, the magical feats which Simeon could do, and did, was levitation., you know he could fly, defy the law of gravity, and one of the ancient stories is that that was his downfall, literally.

O.K., now I should say something, I've touched on a few things about what his doctrines, but I'll just sketch briefly what we know from Irenaeus and several other sources, and oh I should mention one other thing, backtrack a minute. He went to Rome, and we also have recorded in Justin Martyr that he had so impressed with his feats, the populace of Rome, that he was taken to the Senate

and he preformed before the Senate, the Roman Senate, and that the Senate was so impressed that they erected a statue to him, as one of their gods, on the little island on the Tiber, that's in the middle of Rome, and it's curious that the pedestal of this statue, with the inscription, to Simeon Magus, has been dug up, and is now in the Vatican Museum in Rome.

O.K., now as to his doctrine, which contains the basic elements of all Gnosticism, I think? You should realize that Gnosticism is a very broad covering a whole hosts of sects, the time of flourishing was the second century after Christ and they all had variations on a basic theme, which I think you could already find in what Irenaeus and Justin Martyr tell us about Simon Magus. Basically, the scheme is this, it's a kind of evolutionary scheme, it goes from a simple god, who devolves out of himself, and then there's a long cosmic history, and then reintegrates himself into the simplicity of his original being. That's the basic scheme, it a kind of a cyclical theory of God, who disintegrates via a cosmic process, reintegrates himself, and the history of the world is the process of God's reintegration.

O.K., this is the way it goes, there is this God, spiritual God, non-material God, who through a process of devolution, evolves downward out of himself a number of entities which are generally called by the Gnostics ions, which in turn evolve different entities out of themselves, they'd invented some fantastic mythological names for these things, often taken from the Old Testament, until you get to a figure which is fairly constant in all their mythologies called, Sophia, Wisdom, and this Sophia, and here we come to a critical point, this Sophia gives birth to an evil entity, and this evil entity creates the world. And the name of this evil entity, this evil ion in most of the mythologies of Gnosticism, is, know it well—Jehovah. See this is the Satanic thing about Gnosticism, they accept the Old Testament in the sense and say right, what the Old Testament talks about, that really refers to something that happened, except you don't have the whole picture. When the Bible talks about Jehovah creating the world, you have to realize that this is actually already the fall and descent, that Jehovah is an evil God, and that the world, which he created, being material, is evil. That the whole creation, you see this is the kernel I think this is the kernel of the Gnostic heresy, is that creation is basically evil.

O.K., that's one side of the mythology, another side of the mythology is that parts of the pure substance of that original God, somehow, are various ways in which this is explained, mythologically, is somehow caught up in this evil material world and this divine spark, this element from this prime substance is known as *Penuma*, which is the Greek term for spirit, so that we have a divine spark

captured, caught, in the evil world. This ties in with their anthropology, their general view of man, which goes like this. They take the basic Greek scheme of men being soul and body, the body being the material side, the soul being his vitality, but all this belongs to the evil world. Above and beyond that, way down in the center of man's being, is this spirit, this divine spark, and salvation for them means for that spirit, that divine spark to get out of the evil world, back to reintegration with the original simple God. The basic thing about Gnosticism is that you have to realize that you're not just soul and body as the Greeks had traditionally taught, but the most important part of you, the real you, is your spirit, which most people don't even realize they have, and in fact, the Gnostics taught that there were many, they talked about spiritual men, and psychical/soulish, or soulish men, who didn't even have a spark, that there were only an elect few who came to the knowledge, the Gnosis, this is where the word Gnosticism comes from, who come to the knowledge, that they had a spirit, this divine spark, and were thus able to rise up back up to the original Godhead . . .

(a short Q&A Section)

. . . So my basic point is this, I think the basic Gnostic heresy is this what Jonas called this a-cosmism, which comes down to this is to say the creation is in and of itself, evil, and that man's salvation is to get out of that evil world, to flee from that evil world, and I'd like to say that this particular doctrine, although not always in such virulent forms has had a tremendous influence on Christian thinking. The whole idea which came up with Anabaptism in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century particularly, but which had large influence in Orthodox Churches, a world flight, that the Christian is a stranger in this world, which it's true it's a biblical given that men are strangers in the world, BUT, we are strangers to the degree that it is territory that is occupied by Satan. We are not strangers in the world to the degree that it is our Fathers' world. So we must not escape from this world, but we must defeat the occupying force, Satan. So I think one of the basic effects of Gnosticism on Christian thinking has been together with a number of forces, I mean we can't reduce it all to this one influence, this one factor, but one of the basic bad things that have resulted Gnosticism is the idea that the world, the creation, it all its fullness, is not open to Christian activity, that what a Christian has to do is just withdraw himself into some kind of spiritual haven within himself, and just sort of sit tight and hang on, until he dies, or until Christ returns, and let the world—go to hell.

A variation of this Gnostic doctrine of the essential devaluation of the cosmos that you will find in neo-orthodoxy, in Barth, where creation is not viewed as something positive. I'd like to say that what an orthodox view of creation is, is this, that creation in principle fell with Adam in sin, and in that sense is evil so there is some sense and point into saying that we are strangers in this world, but that in Christ, and the power of his resurrection, the goodness of the creation has in principle been restored. Salvation means the restoration of Creation. Jehovah is a Good God, what he creates is good, what it says in the first chapters of Genesis, about God seeing everything is good, that is true, it IS good. It's only because of man's sin that it has become warped, but in Christ, EVERYTHING, is good and acceptable. I forget what's the text exactly R.C. in Paul, in one of the pastorals about everything in creation is Good?

Anyhow, there is a place somewhere in the pastorals where Paul makes that point about this kind of thinking, aesthetic kinds of things people say, some of the creational givens, like: marriage, or eating are bad in themselves, and Paul says no that is wrong because everything created, is in itself Good.

I'd like to make just this one more point yet, about Bultmann and his view of the New Testament, it goes like this. The Mandaens, this sect in Iran on which he had based, which had been chronologically fixed in the first century before Christ, as its bases its origins, and which had been the bases for Bultmann to come to the conclusion that the New Testament, basically has Gnostic elements in it; this theory of the Mandaens has recently, in the last five years or so, been refuted, by an expert in the Mandaen sect, the Mandaens have existed to this day by the way, they have a long tradition going. A fellow by the name of Rudolf, has written a two volume German work called de Mandaia, which he finally and definitively explodes, the theory that there was as pre-Christian gnosticism, at least among the Mandaens, and that therefore the whole interpretation of Bultmann's interpretation of the gospel of John, lacks a historical bases, so that here we have one more scientific hypothesis which has been refuted, but which has, nevertheless, in biblical studies, slain its thousands. That's pretty well what I had to say about Gnosticism, perhaps I can by way of transition, to the next lecture in which I would like to deal with neo-Platonism a bit, tie in neo-Platonism with Gnosticism.

I was telling you about the theory that Gnosticism was not just a Christian heresy, but was a broad cultural movement coming from the East and covering the whole Hellenic world at that time, the basic theme of which was this a-cosmism, this devaluation of the cosmos. Well, he works that out by saying that neo-Platonism

is actually, simply, an outworking, an outcropping of one of the effects of this broad cultural movement. He says that neo-Platonism, and specifically Plotinus who is the guy who pretty well created neo-Platonism—he says that neo-Platonism is a version of Gnosticism, and he can make a fairly good point in this because, as most of you probably know, a typical, or characteristic mark of neo-Platonism is the idea of an original Godhead, which devolves, by emanation out of himself, various lower realities until you come to a critical point where evil enters in and you have matter, and then man's salvation, the meaning of man's life is to get the non-material part of him, in the case of neo-Platonism called his soul, out of matter and back into mystical union with that original godhead, so that there is a basic similarity in the structure, the mythological if you'd like, the logical structure of Gnosticism and neo-Platonism. And I think there's something to be said for Jonas' theory that neo-Platonism is a version of Gnosticism, although it should be said at the same time that there is a treatise in which Plotinus wrote, directed against the Gnostics, and there's good reason to believe that he did not distinguish between Gnosticism, this heretical form of Christianity, and orthodox Christianity, so that treatise is actually a treatise against Christianity, perhaps I should go into that during the next lecture.