

**THE HERETICS AND HERESIES OF THE SO-CALLED LOST GOSPELS
AND LOST CHRISTIANITIES**
2Th.2:10-14; Gal.1:6-9
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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Time Magazine, Dec.22,2003,Vol.,162, No.25, pp.54-61, Article: “The Lost Gospels,” claimed, or speaks or tries to sort out:
 - a. What some are calling the dozens of once abandoned views of Christianity, which are now being revived by many who are looking for another way of being Christian.
 - b. They say, “Dozens of Christian Scriptures were Holy Writ, then heresy, then forgotten.”
 - (1) Fact: They were never “Christian Scriptures.”
 - (2) Fact: They were never “Holy Writ.”
 - (3) Fact: They really have never been “forgotten.”
 - c. The article claims these “gospels”, some of which are named in the article, languished in ignominy, more or less forgotten, until now.
 - d. The article claims you might think of them as “lost Christianities” if you are a religious liberal or as early heresies if you are a conservative.
 - (1) Fact: If you know what the so-called “lost Gospels” teach, you know them to be heresy, always have been recognized as heresy, denying not only plain Bible doctrine, but both the deity and the humanity of Jesus and the true nature of God as revealed in the Bible.
 - (2) Fact: They were never Christianity or of Christ in the first place. There were always heretical in nature.
 - (3) Fact: No true Bible-believer has ever or ever will think of them as “lost Christianities.”
 - e. The article says the recent resurrection of these “lost Gospels” fills a perceived need for alternative views of the Christ story on the part of New Age seekers and of mainline believers uncomfortable with some of their faith’s theological restrictions. This yearning is transforming the once obscure texts into objects of popular discourse.
 - f. The article says more and more people are turning to ancient Christian texts to develop their own religious rites.

- (1) Fact: No matter how ancient, they to which they are turning is not Christian texts, but to heretics and their heresies.
 - (2) Fact: They are turning from truth to error and falsehood; from God's word to man's.
 - g. The article further says, "There is a lot of interest in early Christian diversity because many people who have left the church – and some who are still in it – are looking for another way of being Christian."
 - (1) Fact: It was never early Christian diversity, but early heresy – men turning from the truth of Christianity.
 - (2) Fact: Most, if not all, of the people to whom this article refers are those leaving Catholicism and or Denominationalism, etc., and thus were never in the Lord's church and true Christianity.
 - h. The article says scholars have begun suggesting that early Christianity may have been far more diverse than was previously acknowledged.
 - (1) Fact: True Christianity has never been diverse as suggested
 - (2) Fact: What they are suggesting as diverse Christianity was all along the work of heretics and their heresies, which the N.T. has exposed from the beginning as heresy, not Christianity.
 - (3) Fact: There is nothing about true Christianity that has ever been secret or lost.
- 2. The Time article continues:
 - a. This perceived need and yearning for alternative views of the Christ story on the part of New Age seekers and of mainline believers uncomfortable with some their faith's theological restrictions is transforming these "lost Gospels" and "lost Christianities" into objects of popular discourse.
 - b. Their rising culture can be seen in *The Da Vinci Code*. A key plot point in Don Brown's best-selling modern-day novel, is that the Roman Catholic Church suppressed 80 alternative Gospels, several describing a physical relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene.
 - c. The current flurry of popular interest in the subject can be traced to Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. A rowdy carnival barker of a thriller, it accuses the Roman Catholic Church of concealing the

“true” sexual relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene by suppressing early alternative Scriptures.

- d. Presumably, this sentiment will gain a yet wider audience when Ron Howard delivers his film *The Da Vinci Code*, scheduled for release in 2005.
- e. The thriller’s claim that the once ignored Scriptures formed part of secret understandings that the painter (i.e., Da Vinci) later passed on via drawings like Vitruvian Man...has sent readers running to translations of texts like the Gospel of Mary (Magdalene) and the Gospel of Philip.

II. DISCUSSION

A. NOW TO A LIST OF THE SO-CALLED LOST GOSPELS NAMED IN THE TIME MAGAZINE ARTICLE.

- 1. The “Gospel of Peter”
- 2. The “Gospel of Mary (Magdalene)”
- 3. The “Acts of John”
- 4. The “Homilies of Clement”
- 5. The “Gospel of Truth”
- 6. The “Gospel of Thomas”
- 7. The “Gospel of Philip”

B. Named In The Time Magazine Article Are Several Groups Which The Article Claimed As Having represented Early Christianity, Or Those So-Called Lost Christianities, Each Offering A Different Vision Of Christ And Christians; Such As: Gnostics, Ebionites, Marcionites, And Thomasines, Or Gnosticism, Ebionism and Marcionism, Which We Shall Now Identify And Discuss.

- 1. When one comes to know what false doctrines and erroneous practices these and other early groups stood for, taught and practiced, one will then know they were recognized as heretics teaching heresy from the beginning and never were of Christ or N.T. Christianity.
- 2. The Gnostics:
 - a. As to their spiritual doctrines they believed and taught:
 - (1) That our troubled world and deteriorating bodies were created by an inferior (they would add malign) deity.

- (2) That at the last instant a higher, better God inserted in each of us a spark of his divinity.
- (3) That if we could attain enough knowledge (gnosis in Greek), to conquer our delusional attachment to material reality, we could free our spiritual selves to join our real Father in a better place.
- (4) That they were the only persons who had the true **knowledge** of Christianity. Accordingly, they looked on all other Christians as simple, ignorant, and barbarous persons, who explained and interpreted the sacred writings in a low, literal, and un-edifying signification. In fact, they were elitist – most of them felt that only a few of humans were capable of their kind of salvation.
- (5) Though they differed among themselves as to circumstances yet all agreed in some common principles. They corrupted the doctrine of the gospel by a profane mixture of the tenets of the oriental philosophy, concerning the origin of evil and the creation of the world, with its divine truths.
- (6) That the creation of the world was by one or more inferior beings of an evil or imperfect nature. This led them to deny the authority of the books of the O.T., which contradicted their idle fiction, and filled them with an abhorrence of Moses and the religion he taught; alleging, that he was actuated by the malignant author of this world, who consulted to his own glory and authority, and not the real advantage of men.
- (7) They believed that evil resided in matter (all matter; all material things) as its center and source. This made them treat the body with contempt, discourage marriage, and reject the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and its reunion with the immortal spirit.
- (8) They believed that malevolent genii presided in nature, and occasioned diseases and calamities, wars and desolations, which induced them to apply themselves to the study of magic, in order to weaken the powers, or suspend the influence of these malignant agents.
- (9) They believed Jesus Christ was the Son of God, but inferior to the Father. That he came into the world for the rescue

and happiness of miserable mortals, oppressed by matter and evil beings.

(10) They rejected Jesus Christ's humanity on the principle that every thing corporeal (material, as distinct from spiritual) is essentially and intrinsically evil; and therefore the greatest part of them denied the reality of his sufferings.

(11) They divided all nature into three kinds of being, viz:

(a) *Hylic*, or material.

(b) *Psychic*, or animal.

(c) *Pneumatic*, or spiritual.

(12) On the like principle, they also distinguished three sorts of men: *material, animal, and spiritual*.

(a) The first, the hylic, who were material, and incapable of knowledge, inevitably perished, both soul and body.

(b) The third, the pneumatic or spiritual, such as the Gnostics themselves pretended to be, were all saved.

(c) The second, the psychic, or animal, who were the middle between the other two, were capable either of being saved or doomed, according to their good or evil actions.

b. As to their moral doctrines and conduct they were much divided:

(1) The greatest part of the sect adopted very austere rules of life, recommended rigorous abstinence, and prescribed severe bodily mortifications, with a view of purifying and exalting the mind.

(2) However, some maintained that there was no more difference in human actions; and thus confounding right with wrong, they gave a loose rein to all the passions, and asserted the innocence of following blindly all their motions, and of living by their tumultuous dictates.

3. The Ebionites:

a. Generally formed themselves into a sect denying the divinity of Jesus Christ; that he was a mere man.

b. Joined to what N.T. doctrine they accepted the ceremonies of the Jewish law, together with the traditions of the Pharisees.

c. Rejected all the prophets, and held the very names of David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, in abhorrence. They received nothing of the O.T. but the Pentateuch.

- d. They rejected all of Paul's Epistles.
- e. Dr. Schaff, Church History:
 - (1) Sharply distinguishes Ebionism from Gnosticism as follows:
 - (a) Ebionism is a Judaizing, pseudo-Petrine Christianity, or a Christianizing Judaism;
 - (b) Gnosticism is a pagainizing or pseudo-Pauline Christianity, or a pseudo-Christian heathenism.
 - (c) The former is a particularistic contraction of the Christian religion.
 - (d) The latter a vague expansion of it.
 - (e) Thus the one takes from it; the other adds to it! (ejd); or to think of it another way; they both add to it!
 - (2) The characteristic marks of Ebonism in all its forms are, degradation of Christianity to the level of Judaism the principle of the universal and perpetual validity of the Mosaic Law, and enmity to the apostle Paul.
- f. Dr. Schaff, Church History, comments further: "But, as there were different sects in Judaism itself, we have also to distinguish at least two branches of Ebionism, related to each other, as Pharisaism and Essenism."
 - (1) The common Ebionites, who were by far the more numerous, embodied the Pharisaic spirit, and were the proper successors of the Judaizers opposed in the epistle to the Galatians. Their doctrine may be reduced to the following propositions:
 - (a) Jesus is, indeed, the promised Messiah, the son of David, and the supreme lawgiver, yet a mere man, like Moses and David, sprung by natural generation from Joseph and Mary, The sense of his Messianic calling first arose in him at his baptism by John, when a higher spirit joined itself t him.
 - (b) Circumcision and the observance of the whole ritual law of Moses are necessary to salvation for all men.
 - (c) Paul is n apostate and heretic, and all his epistles are to be discarded. The sect considered him to be a native heathen, who came over to Judaism in later life from impure motives.

- (d) Christ is soon to come again to introduce the glorious millennial reign of the Messiah, with the earthly Jerusalem as its seat.
 - (2) The second class of Ebionites, starting with Essenic notions, gave their Judaism a speculative or theosophic stamp, like the errorists of the Epistle to the Colossians. They form the stepping-stone to Gnosticism. (“Theosophy” – any of various philosophies professing to achieve a knowledge of God by spiritual ecstasy, direct intuition, or special individual relations...”)
 - g. Ebionism has reappeared, since the Reformation, in Socinianism, and in other forms of what is called Unitarianism. Some Unitarian writers have undertaken to show that Ebonism was the original form of Christian doctrine, and that the church doctrine as to the person of Christ was a later development.
4. The Marcionites:
- a. According to Buck’s Theological Dictionary, 1830, and M’Clintock And Strong, Biblical, Theological And Ecclesiastical cyclopaedia, Vol, V,1891:
 - (1) Were a very ancient and popular sect of heretics, who were thus denominated from their author Marcion.
 - (2) Marcion laid down two principles, the one good, the other evil; between these he imagined an intermediate kind of Deity, of a mixed nature, who was the Creator of this inferior world, and the god and legislator of the Jewish nations.
 - (3) The other nations who worshipped a variety of gods, were supposed to be under the empire of the evil principle.
 - (4) These two conflicting powers exercised oppressions upon rational and immortal souls; and therefore the supreme God, to deliver them from bondage, sent to the Jews a Being more like unto himself, even his Son Jesus Christ, clothed with a shadowy resemblance of a body.
 - (5) The fundamental point of Marcion’s heresy was a supposed irreconcilable opposition between the Creator and the God of the Christians, or, in other words, between the two religious systems, the Law and the Gospel.
 - (6) He recognized three first principles, one supreme, ineffable, and invisible, whom he calls good; secondly, the Creator, thirdly, the devil, or perhaps matter, source of evil. Thus he

admitted three, the good God, the Creator, matter, and evil which governs matter, i.e., the devil.

- (7) He believed in the eternity of matter.
 - (8) He made the Creator, the god of the O.T., the author of evil, i.e. of suffering, not moral evil.
 - (9) The old dispensation was the reign of the Creator, who chose the Jews for his own special people, and promised them a Messiah.
 - (10) Christ was not this Messiah, but is the Son of the invisible, good God, and appeared upon the earth in human form (being, perhaps, but a phantom), to free the soul and overthrow the dominion of the Creator.
 - (11) He looked upon the O.T. as a revelation of the Creator to the Jews, his chosen people, which not only differed from, but was entirely opposed to Christianity.
 - (12) To make the Scriptures agree with his views, he rejected a large portion of the N.T.
 - (13) He carefully omitted all the passages in which Christ acknowledged the Creator as his Father.
 - (14) He rejected the law and the prophets.
 - (15) He denies the real birth, incarnation, and passion of Jesus Christ, and held them to be apparent only.
 - (16) He denied the resurrection of the body.
 - (17) The rule of manners which he prescribed to his followers was excessively austere, containing an express prohibition of wedlock, wine, flesh, and all the external comforts of life.
 - (18) He did not admit married persons to baptism, considering it wrong to propagate a race subject to the cruel dominion of the Creator.
 - (19) He rejected the law and the prophets.
 - (20) He pretended the Gospel had been corrupted by false prophets, and accepted only Luke's Gospel, which he altered in many places, as well as the epistles of Paul, a great many things in which he threw out.
- b. According to the Time article:
- (1) Marcion, like other theologians, struggled with the existence of suffering and death in the world. He decided that the world and its complaints had been created by a bad God, and harsh Jewish deity who imposed a death sentence

on humanity when it could not meet his law's impossibly high standards.

- (2) The "God of Jesus," meanwhile, was a totally unrelated and unanticipated figure. This loving deity appeared one day from heaven and sacrificed himself to free humanity from his vengeful predecessor.
- (3) By neatly separating the two Gods, Marcion, says Ehrman, professor, U.N.C., managed to emphasize what many in the Roman Empire found most enchanting about Christianity – love, grace, opposition to this harsh world and salvation from it – while getting rid of its less appealing aspects – law, guilt, judgment, eternal punishment...

5. The Gospel of Thomas:

- a. Princeton professor, Elaine Pagels, in her book, "The Gnostic Gospels", says Thomas: "Encourages the hearer not so much to believe in Jesus, as to (try) to know God through one's own, divinely given capacity."
- b. She quotes an American-born Zen priest as joking, "Had I known the *Gospel of Thomas*, I wouldn't have had to become a Buddhist."
- c. Suggests that sinners could gain salvation through esoteric knowledge and internal quest rather than straight forward belief in Jesus' divinity and atoning sacrifice.

("Esoteric" = "1. intelligence only to those with special knowledge, 2. (of a belief, etc) intended only for the initiated.")

6. The Cerinthians:

- a. Were ancient heretics who denied the deity of Jesus Christ; so named from Cerinthus.
- b. Believed Jesus as a mere man, the son of Joseph and Mary; but that in his baptism a celestial virtue descended on him in the form of a dove; by means whereof he was consecrated by the Holy Spirit.
- c. They believed this was the Christ that descended on him and took up a dwelling in him. But, that, as he received this from heaven only at his baptism, it left him before his passion, and returned to the place where it came.
- d. Therefore, Jesus, whom they called a *pure man*, really died, and rose again; but that Christ, who was distinguished from Jesus, the man, did not suffer at all.

- e. They received the Gospel of Matthew, to countenance their doctrine of circumcision; but they omitted the genealogy.
- f. They discarded the Epistles of Paul, because he had circumcision abolished.

III. CONCLUSION

1. On the basis of this evidence, no true believer in Jesus Christ, one with a thorough knowledge of the Bible, rightly divided, both O.T. and N.T., can ever think of any of these ancient document reference in this Time article as “Lost Gospels” or “Lost Christianities”, or as proving that N.T. Christianity was a diverse Christianity.
2. The N.T., as the complete Holy Spirit revealed faith of Jesus Christ – revealed by the Holy Spirit to and through the chosen Apostles of Jesus Christ, as promised to them by Jesus Christ during his personal ministry on earth – clearly marks all such so-called Gospels as heresies, the work of heretics of the ancient past.
3. Those so-called “lost Gospels” are only popular with those of our time who seek to develop their own religious rites, or are looking for another way of being Christian, or who feel a need for an alternative view of the Christ story, or to put it another way: who don’t really believe the Bible, or are ignorant of what the Bible teaches.
4. Cf. Gal.1:6-9; Prov.14:12.

(Source: The Time Magazine Article
Buck’s Theological Dictionary, 1930
M’Clintock And Strong, 1891