

Robert Temple: *A Word In Your Ear...*

Gospels For Our Times

Every issue, renowned author and lecturer, Robert Temple, will be bringing us his social commentary in the *Word In Your Ear* column. Robert is the author of a number of critically acclaimed books including, *The Sirius Mystery*, *The Crystal Sun*, *The Genius of China*, *Open to Suggestion*, *He Who Saw Everything* (a verse translation of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which was performed at the Royal National Theatre in London), *Aesop: The Complete Fables* (with his wife, Olivia Temple) and his new book, *Netherworld*. Two further books are scheduled for release in 2003 and 2004.



BEFORE THE BODY of Jesus was even cold, the Christian movement split into two. The first half was that of the grey men (the 'suits'), who advocated organised churches with clerical hierarchies and domination of the congregations, the 'sheep' by an organisation which could boss them around, make money out of them, and create institutions, such as the confessional, which could be run by people who get a kick out of power. The second, that of the more enlightened followers, was later given the name of 'the Gnostic movement'. The Greek word *gnosis* means 'knowledge'. The Gnostics believed that the way to salvation lay through knowledge and understanding of the truth. But this was not good enough for the organisation men; they insisted that the way to salvation lay through unreasoning faith. In other words: do what we tell you without question (what they call *faith*), or you will go to hell. The Gnostic path was one of peace and reason, the clerical path was one of spiritual tyranny; its ultimate weapons were 'mortal sin' and, later, the terrifying fate of 'excommunication'.

With the discovery in the 1940s of a large body of Gnostic scriptures at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, many of the writings of the Gnostics were recovered after 1,500 years. The Roman Church had attempted

to destroy all copies, and to eradicate all trace of the Gnostics. But archaeology came to the rescue. It is these texts, including several rediscovered early gospels, which I believe constitute 'gospels for our time'. For they advocate an attitude

towards religion which is based upon self-reliance, knowledge, understanding, and a freedom from spiritual tyranny and domination by churches and clerical hierarchies.

We are said to be entering 'the Age of Aquarius', although there is very little sign of it at the moment. But if it means anything, surely it means that it is time that humanity grew up. Do we really need to continue to be spoon-fed religion like babies? What about taking some initiative for ourselves? Can we earn it, or do we insist on being given it for free?

Those who are feeble and lazy will not agree with this. They prefer second-hand thinking. They want a book stuck into their hands, to be called the Sacred Text, and they want it to contain *all* the answers. Such a person might as well be inanimate, since all power to think has been abdicated. Those same people, if it comes to a matter of money, will go shopping round for the best rate of interest at all the banks, and if it comes to a car, will go testing all the brands and models. But when it comes to their eternal fate, they

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want pre-digested answers which require no exertion of any kind.

We thus have much which we can learn from the Gnostic writings. Although some of them are very obscure, there are several which are as clear as day.

The Gospel Of Thomas

The most interesting is the *Gospel of Thomas*. No one is certain of its date, but it was definitely written before the *Gospel of John*, and probably before *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*. It consists entirely of sayings of Jesus, with no stories of his life at all, except that it states that Jesus had several brothers. It also says that Peter, a great hater of women, wanted Mary Magdalene to be thrown out of the group, but Jesus refused. Many of the sayings recorded in this Gnostic gospel are similar to ones recorded in *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, but none are identical. There are many 'new' ones, but even the familiar ones often have a different interpretation than we are used to. There seem to have been even earlier collections of the sayings of Jesus which were drawn upon both by *Thomas* and the Biblical gospels. In fact, the second saying preserved in *Thomas* is quoted by the early church father Clement of Alexandria, who said it came from an early lost gospel (thought to have been the first ever written) called *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*, from which the compiler of *Thomas* presumably also took it. It is a pity that it was not also found at Nag Hammadi.

The Jesus who appears in *The Gospel of Thomas* is an earlier Jesus than the one portrayed in what has come to be called the New Testament, and is in many ways a different figure. This Jesus is a passionate Gnostic, who denounces mere faith and insists upon the need for knowledge of the truth. His message is preoccupied with the need to understand that the material world is an illusory one. He insists that all of us existed before we were born, and that we have entered this material world as spirits who have left heaven to incarnate into matter, and that we must understand this, or we can be ensnared by material illusions. Here is his philosophy:

'Whoever has come to understand the world has found only a corpse, and whoever has found a corpse is superior to the world.'
(translation of Thomas Lamdin)

He has a special terminology which he used for his ideas. The realm which we call 'heaven' was called by him 'the Aeon'. In it, individuals are known as 'images', whereas when incarnated into matter, these spirits



As soon as Christ died, his inheritance was divided into two starkly contrasting factions

cease to be 'images' and become instead 'likenesses'. When we die, we re-enter the Aeon, step into the light, and if we have not been ruined by material obsessions and evil, we resume our status as 'images' again. The shedding of the body at death is likened to the shedding of clothes, hence his frequent references to 'nakedness' (freedom from the body), stripping off of one's clothes, and 'take no care for what you put on', meaning that the body is only temporary and will soon be worn out, and it is not really very important. Here is how he describes the way in which a Gnostic should be prepared to die:

'When you disrobe without being ashamed and take up your garments and place them under your feet like little children and tread on them, then will you see the Son of the Living One, and you will not be afraid.'

Jesus is very ferocious in his criticism of the Pharisees and the Scribes. He says they are like a dog who lies in the manger of the cattle, and that it does not eat but neither does it allow the cattle to eat. They also have taken the keys of knowledge and not entered, but neither will they allow others to enter. These sentiments are also preserved in the canonical Bible.

The Gospel Of Philip

ANOTHER FASCINATING Gnostic text is *The Gospel of Philip*, a later document thought to have been written in the second half of the third century AD, by which time the Gnostics had split up into many separate schools, this document coming

apparently from a group called the Valentinians. This gospel tells us that Jesus went everywhere accompanied by his mother and sister (both called Mary), and Mary Magdalene, who was called his 'companion' and whom he used to kiss frequently on her mouth, to the great consternation of his disciples. The Jesus of this gospel is very explicit in saying that the material world was ruled by what he called 'the powers' (i.e., evil powers, who in some texts are called Archons), and that the being worshipped by the Jews as 'God' (Jehovah) was really a sinister demon at the head of 'the powers', or the Chief Archon. The Gnostics did not believe that God was the wrathful god depicted in the Old Testament (Torah) at all; they thought that that being was really the Chief Archon, whom we would normally call today by the name of Satan. The Gnostics believed that the Jews had been hoodwinked into accepting the wrathful world-demon as their god. The Jesus of the Gnostic texts says that prayers should not be said to this monstrous being, so that his rejection of Rabbinical Judaism (as opposed to the Gnostic form of Judaism known as Cabalism, which had not been taken over by the hated Jerusalem rabbis and perverted into Jehovahism) was far more extreme than is clear from the Bible. The true god was the Holy Spirit who presided over the Aeon, that different dimension of reality from which we have come and to which we shall return. The Great Satan known as Jehovah was arrogant and stupid, believing himself to be the real god because of his insanity and cosmic megalomania. In another of the Gnostic documents, ►

called *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, we are told of him, the chief of the evil powers of the world: 'Their chief is blind, because of his Power and his ignorance, and in his arrogance he said, with his Power: 'It is I who am God; there is none apart from me.' When he said this he sinned against the Entirety [i.e., the Holy Spirit]. And this speech got up to In-corrupibility [the Holy Spirit]; then there was a voice that came forth from In-corrupibility saying:

'You are mistaken, Samael!' – which [i.e., Samael] means 'god of the blind'. (translation by Bentley Layton with minor alterations)

According to *The Gospel of Philip*, 'the powers' of the material world are blind to the spiritual realm:

'The powers do not see those who are clothed in the perfect light, and consequently are not able to detain them.'

In *The Gospel of Philip*, crucial importance is given to the Cabalistic science of 'gematria', especially as regards sacred names. The Jews and the Greeks had no numerals,

so they used the letters of their alphabets in a double sense to serve as numbers. (In Greek, *alpha* is the number one; in Hebrew, *aleph* is the number one, etc.) This gave the scholars the opportunity to practice 'gematria', which was the encoding of numbers within the texts by taking advantage of the double meanings of the letters as numerals. The most common way in which this was done was by the use of sacred names which had specific numerical values. When translated, these names lost their values, and hence the greatest care was taken to insist upon using only certain sacred names in their native languages. The *Gospel of Philip* is most insistent upon this, and says:

'Jesus' is a hidden name. 'Christ' [Christos] is a revealed name. For this reason 'Jesus' does not exist in any other language [than Hebrew], but his name is always 'Jesus', as he is called. 'Christ' is also his name: in Syriac [a now extinct language of the Near East] it is 'Messiah', in Greek it is 'Christ' [i.e., Christos]. Certainly all the others have it according to their own language. 'The Nazarene' is he who reveals what is hidden.' (translation by

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Wesley Isenberg) As for the last point, the Gnostics insisted that Jesus was not 'Jesus of Nazareth', as some thought, that being a misunderstanding. He had no connection with the town of Nazareth. He was called 'the Nazarene', referring to his revealing of the truth, which is *Nazara* in Hebrew. People who were not initiated into the secrets of the new faith assumed the name must refer to the town. But as this gospel says, the name really had a religious meaning.

'The apostles who were before us had these names for him: 'Jesus, the Nazorean, Messiah', that is, 'Jesus, the Nazorean, the Christ'. The last name is 'Christ', the first name is 'Jesus', that in the middle is 'the Nazarene'. 'Messiah' has two meanings, both 'the Christ' and 'the measured'. 'Jesus' in Hebrew is 'the redemption'. 'Nazara' is 'the truth'. 'The Nazarene', then, is 'the truth'. 'Christ' has been measured. 'The Nazarene' and 'Jesus' are they who have been measured.'

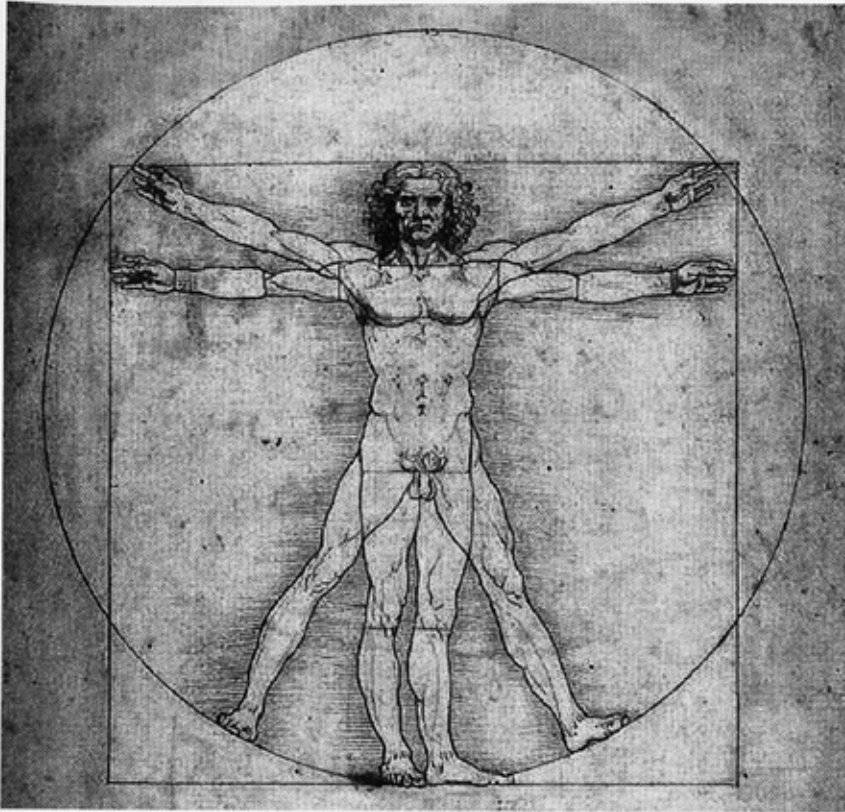
666 And All That

The 'measured' numerical value of the name Christos in Greek letters/numerals is 1,480. It cannot preserve this numerical value if translated into any other language. I do not know the numerical value of Jesus in Hebrew or Messiah in Syriac, but it would be interesting to find out, as they must have some symbolical importance. But what is the significance of the number 1,480? As William Stirling points out in his book *The Canon*:

'The numerical value of the name CHRISTOS is 1,480, and the mystery of this number appears to be that it supplies the measure of God's body extending crosswise throughout the whole universe. The wisdom of the number 666 conveys the same theological secret, for 666 is the diameter of a circle



The sacred number 1,480 inherent in the word Christos seems to signify God's body extending crosswise throughout the whole universe...



Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, a representation of the 'sacred man' who was the measure of the divine cosmos?

having a circumference of 2,093. ... (and) a circle inscribed within the square 2,093 exactly contains a square whose sides are 1,480; and this circle will be assumed to be the sphere of the zodiac or firmament.'

The number 1,480 gives the symbolical and cosmic explanation for the crucifixion, for as Stirling also says:

'And when the Microcosm or Logos is stretched crosswise in a circle, drawn within the Holy Oblation, the sides of the square surrounding his body measure 1,480 diameters of the sun [according to the 'mystical' number of the sun's diameter accepted in these calculations] ... by counting the number 666 we may discover the number of God. The term 'counting' might very properly be used here to describe the process of finding the circumference of a circle 666 in diameter, that is, 2,093 — the diagonal of a square whose sides are 1,480, the numerical equivalent of Christos, the name of God.' And also: '... the sphere of the fixed stars ... was supposed by the old philosophers to contain the vital essence of all existing things, and was symbolized by the Christians in the name Christos, 1,480, who was supposed to be extended crosswise within this sphere.'

Such sacred geometry is fundamental to the esoteric traditions buried within the sacred texts. This geometry not only

measured the ideal cosmos, thus bringing one symbolically closer to God, but it was also connected with the concept of cosmic harmony. The Greek word *Harmonia* has a numerical value of 272, which is the diameter of a circle having a circumference of 854, which is the width of a Vesica Piscis 1,480 long. 'It may be therefore supposed that the word *harmonia* implies the number

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1,480.' (Stirling)

As is well known, all the mediaeval cathedrals of Europe incorporate sacred Vesica Piscis designs. And according to the symbolical cosmography of the ancients, 1,480 also represented the distance of the sun from the earth (Stirling). We cannot go into any more of this sacred geometry here, but the Jewish Cabalistic scholars had all the sacred numbers and symbolical cosmic dimensions in their heads. And when the early Christians (who, we must remember, were all Jews) had to come up with a Greek name for Jesus, they fabricated the Greek name *Christos* in order to obtain the correct secret numerical value to express one of their central secrets. According to this tradition, the crucifixion may never really have happened as a physical event, since the Christos standing with his arms outstretched in a surrounding circle represented the 'sacred man' who was the measure of the divine cosmos. (One needs only to think of the designs of Leonardo da Vinci of such figures to get the idea.) From this point of view, 'true' Christianity as preached by the original Gnostic Jesus, is a profoundly philosophical religion of liberty and light, based upon the sacred right of the individual to use his own judgement and to be free of clerical coercion and bullying. It is the ideal basis for a religion of the coming Era. In its lack of a 'command structure', it resembles the Quakers, but unlike the Quakers, it features a guided programme of learning, rather akin to modern 'further education', and exhortations to treat fellow seekers as brothers and sisters, as all struggle together to comprehend the ineffable and to see through the veil where the light is shining beyond.

If we are ever to grow up as a species, leave infancy behind, and enter primary school, then we must learn to use that under-utilized organ, the brain. We must begin to think about the meaning of things, not just suck on a straw stuck into the Bible, the Torah, the Koran, the Vedas, or any other single book for which ultimate perfection is claimed by the clergy. There is no such thing as a perfect book. And even if there were, we would still need to think about it! So let us in the millennia which are to come, try to do a little thinking, and not just let a bottle with a rubber teat be thrust into our mouths. In this pursuit, that of trying to figure out what life is all about, I recommend the Gnostic writings as being full of challenging and stimulating ideas.

As Jesus repeatedly said, in both the Gnostic gospels and the canonical gospels:

Those who have ears to hear, let them hear. ■