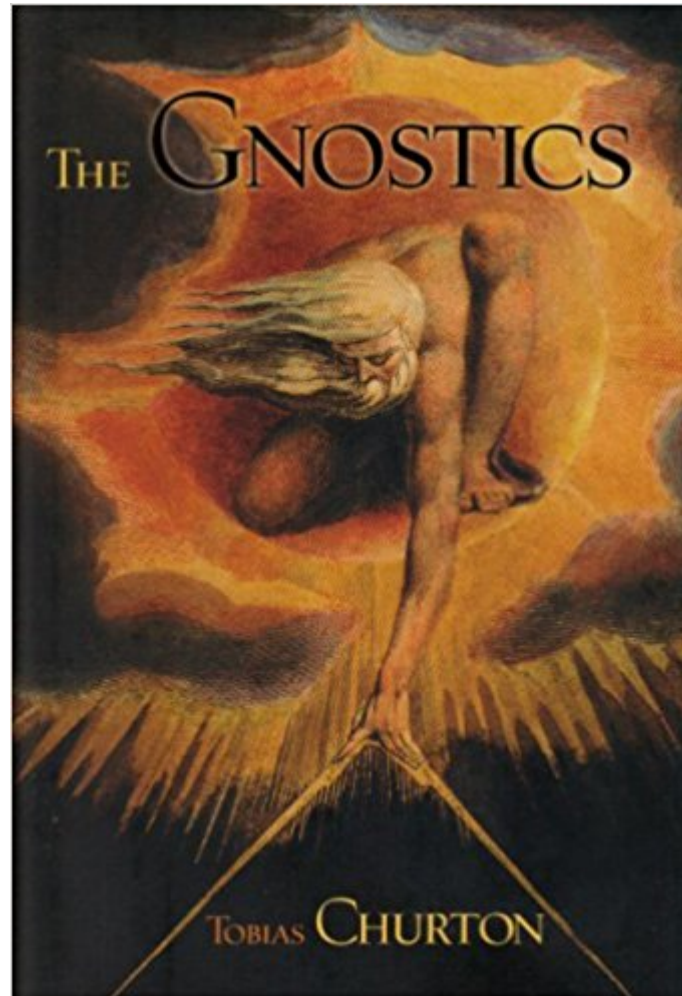




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# The Gnostics



## Synopsis

story of the predecessors of Christians

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## Customer Reviews

story of the predecessors of Christians

LOVED THIS BOOK! This was my first introduction to the Gnostics and I thank Tobias Churton for writing this book. It explained so much and brought to light so many historical facts I had been unaware of. This is a must read for those not yet aware of who these peace loving people were and are still today...Great job, Tobias!!

I read and study into Astrotheology and research into Gnostic knowledge is helpful, very helpful. I am thankful for this book. Jameel Rawls

The first chapter of this book was pretty good though it was not as comprehensive of an account of the beginnings of gnosticism as I would have liked -- I don't expect a complete account in this sort of book, of course, but it basically seemed to start in the mid-second century when the worldview at least has origins a century or two beforehand. However, the book then became a major trudge, though I give it a few points for adding vignettes about gnosticism after the Roman Era that don't get as much play. But, the writing gets very hard to plow thru. Nonetheless, there is a very good

appendix summarizing gnostic writings.

"Gnosis is one of the great alternatives in looking at the whole scheme of things and our place in it ... The very fact that the Gnostics probably were the first who saw the theme of the stranger in the world. That makes them, the Gnostics, a world historical event. That theme never disappeared again. It can then re-emerge again and again ..." Hans Jonas

**Coptic Gnostic Codices:** Tobias Churton started his story in Tabinnisi at a Pachomian monastic community, with Abbot Theodore reading Athanasius Festal letter of 367, when the canon of the New Testament was sealed for the first time. Extra curricular, speculative apocrypha books were banned, and should have been probably disposed of in nearby cemetery, to be found 16 centuries later. While Tobias gave a vivid account of the discovery, smuggling, and recovery of those amazing codices, he did not fail to point at the heroic effort of the two Coptic Curators, Togo Mina and Pahor Labib with Egyptian Coptologists Victor Girgis, and Yassa Abdel-Masih. He gives them credit to restore their own national cultural treasures seeking help from their fellow French, Dutch, and German colleagues.

**Gnostic Founding Fathers:** The Gnostic higher reason starts with Valentinus, who claimed to have been instructed by a direct disciple of one of Jesus' apostles, and Plotinus, the Egyptian founder of Neoplatonism, born in 204 C.E. in upper Egypt. Plotinus developed a complex spiritual cosmology involving three hypostases: the One, the Intelligence, and the Soul. It is from the productive unity of these three Beings that all existence emanates. Plotinus is not a strict pantheist, yet his system cosmology, developed a unique theory of sense-perception and knowledge. It is a question of some interest about the course of Christian doctrine might have been, had Valentinus been elected to the office of bishop of Rome. During the dark and hopeless years of World War II, the inspiration, and comfort derived from Valentinus writings were instrumental in turning Quispel, into a sympathetic and devoted scholar of Gnosticism.

**Salvation by Gnosis:** From earliest times Messengers of the Light have come forth from the True God in order to assist humans in their quest for Gnosis. Only a few of these salvific figures are mentioned in Gnostic scripture; some of the most important are Seth (the third Son of Adam), Jesus, and the Prophet Mani. The Gnostic concept of salvation, may easily be mistaken for an unmediated individual experience. On the one hand, Gnostic salvation is a sort of personal spiritual experience, Like most of other concepts, is a subtle one. Gnostics hold that the potential for Gnosis, and thus, of salvation is present in every man and woman, and that salvation is not vicarious but individual. At the same time, they also acknowledge that Gnosis and salvation can be stimulated and facilitated in order to effectively arise within consciousness. The majority of Gnostics looked to Jesus as the Cosmic savior (Pan Soter). Gnosis

and Theognosis:Gnostics do not look to salvation from sin, but rather from the ignorance of which sin is a consequence. Ignorance; whereby is meant ignorance of spiritual realities, is expelled only by Gnosis, and the decisive revelation of Gnosis is brought by the Messengers of Light, especially by Christ, the Logos of the True God. It is not by His suffering and death but by His life of teaching and His establishing of mysteries that Christ has performed His work of salvation, strikingly, the established way of salvation of the Orthodox Church of Alexandria. Clement and Origen, who lead the most strong attack on Gnostic thought, defined and taught Salvation as knowing God, Theognosis, rather than Gnosis (Jn 17:3)

**The Connecting Thread:**In Part II the author lays out the thin thread which connects the resurrected Gnosis with its metamorphic esoteric philosophies and traditions starting with twelve century Cathars, taking the reader in a mystery tour in south France where the crusades and inquisition started.Part III connecting the thread of the imaginative and real, starts with Hermes coming to Florence, explaining the enthusiasm for the 'return to the One' as the corollary to rebirth. Followed by Pico della Mirandola, one of the pioneer Renaissance humanists. Through him together with Giordano Bruno he continues the development of the neo-Gnosis.

**Count of Mirandola, 1463-94:**In the era of the Renaissance, Italian philosopher and humanist Giovanni Pico was the ideal example, whose physical appearance was reflection of his inner harmony. In 1484 he went to Florence where he soon became one of the most active members of the 'Medici's Florentine Platonic Academy and Neoplatonism chief exponent in Italy. His studies led to the composition of his celebrated reconciliation of Christianity with Platonic philosophy, in 900 theses. In 1487 he was forced to recant, and his clash with Pope Innocent VIII led to his arrest (1488) at Lyons. Although attacked by the church, Pico's theses were an important symbol of the Renaissance blending of Christian and Greek ideas. Lorenzo de Medici, challenged the Pope inviting Pico back to Florence, where he remained until his death, becoming a supporter of Savonarola. In his Oration on the Dignity of Man, he proclaimed that individuals face no limits, other than own self-imposed, to their development. His other works include Heptaplus, a mystical account of the creation; and an unfinished attack on astrology.

**Giordano Bruno:**Filippo Bruno was born near Naples, and acquired the name Giordano upon entering the Dominican order, in a monastery in Naples. Bruno was instructed in Aristotelian philosophy, under the influence of G. Della Porta. Bruno was attracted to new streams of thought, among which were the works of Plato and Hermes Trismegistus, both resurrected in Florence by M. Ficino in the late fifteenth century. Because of his heterodox tendencies, Bruno came to the attention of the Inquisition and in 1576 he deserted Naples to escape prosecution. He lived in France for 7 years, lecturing on various issues that attracted the attention of influential patrons. He published his books; *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, & *On the*

Infinite Universe and Worlds, in 1583 to 85. He was arrested by the Inquisition in Venice and tried. Bruno was sent to Rome, he was kept imprisoned and interrogated periodically for eight years. When he refused to recant, he was declared a heretic and burned at the stake.

G. Bruno's Universe: Concluding in his last two beautiful chapters, Churton takes you from the muddy waters to the river of life in a tour of G. Bruno's divine Universe of outer gnostic perception that will develop into William Blake's inner world. At last 'Thou also dwellest in eternity,' preaching to the reader the wonder and clarity of Rosicrucian apologetic thought, transcending time leaving us here in the 21st century. Marvelous!

Your Esoteric Tour Guide: Tobias Churton, the modern scholar par excellence of Gnosticism, is a filmmaker and the founding editor of the magazine *Freemasonry Today*. He studied theology at Oxford University and created British TV award-winning documentary series and its accompanying book *The Gnostics*. He wrote many books on Gnosticism, Free Masonry, as well as several other films on Christianity, mysticism, and magical folklore. He lives in England.

If you are a layman looking for a decent introduction to Gnostic beliefs, history, and historical or philosophical significance, look elsewhere. The first two-thirds of this book are all right, but the last third abandons all pretense of objectivity and diverges into Gnostic apologetics and pseudo-historical mysticism. Churton's enthusiasm for his subject is commendable, but this book is apologetics masquerading as history. There are several more specific problems. The Rosicrucians, a mythical secret society akin to a 17th-century Illuminati, get more space than the Cathars, who a) actually existed, and b) played a significant role in the histories of France and the Catholic Church. The writing is choppy and veers back and forth between historical events and historical technique (e.g., zigzagging unpredictably between the circumstances in which the Nag Hammadi texts were written and hidden and their 1945 discovery). Spelling of Middle Eastern proper names may be ethnically correct, but it is rather difficult for a non-Arabic-speaking reader to make his or her way through their surrounding haze of diacritical marks, which include a double vertical bar and a sideways horseshoe (in the same name, no less) among other more recognizable notations. How the horseshoe mark is supposed to be pronounced is never specified. On the whole, I recommend looking to other books for historical or philosophical discussion of the Gnostics.

My first book on the subject of gnosticism and I truly enjoyed every page of this book by Churton. He has an excellent writing style and the read was interesting, informative and quite enjoyable. I highly recommend this book to anyone looking for an introduction into the subject of gnosticism. I plan to buy more books by Churton.

If you enjoy extremely biased books which intend to mislead rather than inform, this one ought to please you. Its approach is propagandistic, seeking to give the appearance of scholarship without the substance. His credentials seem non-existent. Nonetheless he is the author of such strange books as "The Mysteries of John the Baptist: His Legacy in Gnosticism, Paganism and Freemasonry." Need I say more? If you want to learn about the gnostics, by all means seek another source.

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