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BOOK REVIEWS

GNOSTICISM IN CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS: SOME TERMINOLOGICAL AND PARADIGMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

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The widespread use of the term 'gnostic' in the description of contemporary religious phenomena is rarely accompanied by a proper look at just what the defining characteristics of this term are or should be. In this article, three aspects of classical Gnosticism are examined in order to establish how the term could be usefully applied to modern religious movements. It is concluded that only an emphasis on a non-rational type of knowledge can serve as a yardstick for such an application of this term and that the presence of Gnostic metaphysical, mythical and ethical motifs are not in themselves sufficient to warrant the use of the term. Three religious and one cultural phenomenon are examined in the light of these findings. Finally, it is argued that the historically negative connotations of the term negate its usefulness, and that the term 'jnanic' would be a more value-neutral, and therefore more appropriate typology.

Introduction

Recently, the term 'Gnosticism' has been widely used to describe various cultic and otherwise religiously deviant movements. The assumption seems to be that the activities of certain religious groups of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, only a few remnants of which have survived in their classical form into the present day (Hendry 1971: 2), constitute a satisfactory paradigm for the typological description of some modern developments. Thus Moellering (1983: 229–32) describes Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Scientology and certain forms of Satanism as being gnostic in character. Peters (1983: 261) states that

> (The) new age religiosity I call 'Perennial Gnosticism'. It is not identical to the Gnosticism of ancient Rome, of course. Nothing could be.

Weber (1983: 31–43) describes the Divine Light Mission, the Unification Church and the Church of Scientology as modern gnostic movements. On a more philosophical level, Jonas (1969: 347 ff) explores the similarities between Gnosticism, existentialism and nihilism.

Nor is this necessarily an appellation which has been imposed on such movements by outsiders: in a report to the South African Parliament, the South African branch of the Church of Scientology describes itself as being threatened by communism and states that

> . . . other *Gnostic* religions are also marked for their dangerous doctrines: Christian Science; Mormonism (Church of Jesus Christ of latter-day Saints); Theosophy; Anthropology [sic]; Rosicrucianism; Buddhism.
>
> (*Church of Scientology*, s.a.: 36. Emphasis in original)

Presumably, by 'Anthropology' the Church intended to refer to 'Anthroposophy'. The interesting point here is that the Church is placing itself in a group which it describes as 'gnostic'.

A movement need not be overtly religious to be labelled as gnostic. Halperin (1983a: 257–66) discusses the gnostic influence on Science Fiction, while Galbreath (1981: 20, 36) traces gnostic influences on three well-known authors, Hermann Hesse, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Doris Lessing. Goodger (1982: 333–44), using terminology originated by Wilson, describes British Judo as a gnostic sect, while Sabom (1985: 243–54) even suggests that there are parallels between Gnosticism and Anorexia Nervosa. Ellwood (1973: 116) suggests that 'All cults, virtually by definition, contain a strong element of (gnosticism).'

But what, exactly, do we mean when we describe a group or activity as being 'Gnostic' in character? Does it refer to an ethical stance, a particular type of cosmological myth, a deviant soteriology, or to something else again? Is it even desirable, in the Science of Religion, to use this term at all? It is to these questions that we shall turn our attention. My chief argument will be that various writers have used this term far too loosely, without paying sufficient attention to an acceptable definition of the term, and that a more detailed look at the possible relationships between classical Gnosticism and modern religious and cultural movements reputed to be 'gnostic' in character will show that only one defining characteristic – the stress on 'knowledge' as the prime method of achieving salvation – can be used fruitfully to categorize the modern movements. Furthermore, I will argue that the term 'gnosticism' carries a historical connotation of religious dissent and charges of heresy that largely compromises its value as a value-neutral category, and will suggest an alternative terminology.

Gnosticism – the two meanings

Let us commence by making an operational distinction between 'Gnosticism' and 'gnosticism'. Here, we will use 'Gnosticism' to describe a specific religious phenomenon which can be studied by the Historian of Religion in much the same way that one could study, say, Hinayana Buddhism or Iranian Zoroastrianism. On the other hand, we will use the term 'gnosticism' to describe and examine those trends in modern religious and cultural life which are supposedly derived from or related to the Gnostic religion. This is not an unusual distinction (although it puts the onus on the writer not to start a sentence with the word 'gnostic'), but is, to the contrary, quite common, as when we distinguish between 'economics' (the process) and 'Economics' (the academic study of the same process). In this way, we can avoid concocting uneuphonious jargon like 'gnosticoid' (van Buuren in Galbreath 1981: 21).

Method

The way in which I propose to examine the supposed gnostic influences on modern religious and cultural movements is, firstly, to establish what were the defining characteristics of Gnosticism, and secondly, to consider whether any one of these characteristics are necessary and sufficient defining attributes of modern gnosticism. I will then examine three modern religious movements, namely Scientology, the Divine Light Mission and the Unification Church, and a cultural phenomenon, Science Fiction, to determine whether they accord with the criteria laid down in the preceding sections. Why these four? In this I am largely following and responding to the relevant articles in Halperin's (1983b) book on contemporary religious developments, which will be identified in their respective sections. These articles specifically identify these movements as being 'gnostic' in character. Thus, while this essay is not formally a review article on Halperin's book, it can be viewed as a reaction to a thesis developed in parts of it. Lastly, I will consider whether 'gnosticism' is a sufficiently precise term to be retained for typological use in Science of Religion.

Characteristics of classical Gnosticism

The literature on Gnosticism seems to point to three possible defining characteristics of this religious movement:

1. The importance of knowledge (gnosis).
2. The Gnostic cosmology.
3. The Gnostic ethics.

In terms of Ellwood's (1973: 31–6) 'Forms of religious expression', 1 and 2

above refer to his 'theoretical expression' while 3 is involved with his 'practical expression'. The 'sociological expression' of Gnosticism (or gnosticism) will not be dealt with here, since as Ellwood (1973: 49) himself puts it, 'What sort of cultic and social life Gnosticism had is not clear'. For reasons which will become clear as the thesis of this essay is developed, I intend to deal with the above three topics in reverse order.

Ethical considerations

The classical forms of Gnosticism did not appear to have a consistent ethical code. Some groups participated in antinomian behaviour, while others practiced asceticism. Thus, for instance, the Albigensian Cathars practiced sexual denial (Schneidman & Levine-Schneidman 1983: 50) at least among the elite or Perfect Ones, while Grant (1959: 7) notes that '. . . certain Simonians, called Entychites (were so named) from their promiscuity'. Although it could be argued that these two cannot be directly compared, since they are a thousand-odd years apart, such a comparison is not my main intention. In fact, it strengthens the case I shall put forward below, that the term 'gnostic' is insufficiently precise for use in contemporary typological use in Science of Religion. Moreover, Grant's assertion need not be accepted uncritically, since this kind of invective was common currency in the Late Roman Empire and early Middle Ages and was also used by pagans against the Christian church (Cohn 1975: 1–15).

But perceptions are as important as facts if we wish to extrapolate ancient terminology to the contemporary situation. Thus, let us provisionally accept that the difference in ethical positions did exist, if only in the eyes of the non-Gnostic beholders. While argument and counter-argument could be posed in the matter (one explanation of such disparate ethical stances on the theoretical level is to view both as reactions to the then-current norms), it will be recalled that our prime objective in this essay is not to produce historical evidence for or against Grant's assertion, nor to investigate the possible reasons for such a confused ethical situation, if indeed it did exist. Instead, we are seeking a defining characteristic of Gnosticism that might be useful in arriving at a satisfactory definition of gnosticism.

When viewed in this way, the ethical dimension of Gnosticism does not seem to be a promising field in our investigation of gnosticism. If we cannot lay down a rule that 'a religious group which preached and/or practised such-and-such a form of ethical conduct was Gnostic', then this aspect of human religiosity must be rejected as a defining characteristic of modern gnosticism. Let us therefore proceed to the two other characteristics.

Cosmological and mythical considerations.

The cosmological and metaphysical characteristics of Gnosticism show a distinctly Zoroastrian tone. The main theme appears to be one of dualism (Jonas 1969: 59f) but this must be qualified, since many Gnostic groups seem to have entertained a monotheistic or even monistic vision underlying the more obvious dualistic aspect. Grant, for instance, describes the 'strong ethical dualism in Late Judaism' and states that 'Though the dualism is often more stringent in Gnosticism, many Gnostics still hold that both good and evil are ultimately derived from the unknown Father.' (1959: 112). Hendry (1971: 6–7) differentiates between the Syro-Egyptian and the Iranising types of Gnosticism, with the latter more thoroughly dualist, a distinction also made by Weber (1983: 32). Since we are here looking for a common denominator of gnosticism, I propose to accept the more radically dualist 'Iranising' trend as typifying Gnosticism as a distinct metaphysical viewpoint. In this, I am making a typological, rather than a historical, judgement; in no way do I imply that the Iranisers were politically or numerically dominant over the Syro-Egyptians. Rather I am giving preference to the former in order to methodologically highlight the characteristics of Gnosticism as opposed to other religious traditions of the time, and to provide a sound base for generalising to the supposedly gnostic movements of our own day.

Another common theme was the image of Man as a fallen being, ignorant of his celestial origins, and destined to transmigrate through time until released from his physical being by Gnostic techniques (Weber 1983: 33; Jonas 1969: 61f). Again, we may speculate as to the origins of such a belief. The transmigration of souls was a well-developed theory in both India and in Pythagorean philosophy, while the image of Man as a creature fallen from a previous state of grace may well have been of Judaic or Zoroastrian origin (viz. Yamauchi 1973) although the Gnostics tended to elevate the primordial state to a level that would have struck the Jews as hubristic. (See, for instance, the 'Hymn of the Pearl' quoted in Weber 1983: 34 and also the translation and discussion in Jonas 1969: 128–47.)

While there were other, more specialized themes in Gnostic mythology, such as the symbol of the tree examined by Gilhus (1987) or the de-emphasising of the saviour's historicity mentioned by Pagels (1973: 11, 13), the themes mentioned in the above paragraphs are the most immediately relevant to our discussion. Let us, therefore, consider whether either of these two themes can be said to constitute a necessary and sufficient defining characteristic of gnosticism. In order to do this, we must consider whether such themes were also expressed by non-Gnostics, for non-Gnostical reasons.

Today, dualism is not a very popular metaphysical theory, but this was not always the case. Christianity, while always willing to engage in lengthy debates on the difference between dualism and monotheism, has in practice stressed the immense distance between the Creator and his creation. Much the same could be said about Islam. One could, of course, attribute this to a hidden Gnostic influence, but, especially in the case of Christianity, we are dealing with a religious institution that would vehemently renounce the appellation of 'gnostic'. Furthermore, what are we to make of dualistic systems which evolved out of ostensibly non-religious factors, such as Platonic or Cartesian philosophy? To use the term for every strain of thought that happens to contain a dualistic element is to degrade its usefulness. Let us rather stick to the accepted terminology such as 'monistic', 'dualistic' and so forth to describe the metaphysical stance of movements.

The other common Gnostical theme, that of Man as a fallen creature whose origins lie on a higher spiritual and metaphysical plane, fares no better in our search for a common denominator of modern gnosticism. It is simply too much part of the general stock of religious trade to be considered as such. Consider, for example, the Judeo-Christian anthropology of Man as having been expelled from the Garden of Eden for disobeying the Divine command, or the Hindu division of time into aeons, of which our own, the kali-yuga, is the last and worst before the dissolution and recreation of the world. Granted, the Gnostic conception of primordial, pre-fallen Man was far more grandiose, but this is a difference in degree, rather than one of kind.

To summarize, then, it is simply not sufficient for a modern movement to echo certain Gnostic cosmological or mythical themes for us to refer to it as being a gnostic movement. On some occasions there may be other links between a modern movement and Gnosticism, which may be fortuitously linked with the occurrence of such themes. Such a linkage would strengthen our labelling the movement 'gnostic', as we shall see in the case of Scientology, but, on its own, the presence of mythical themes cannot be regarded as indicative of gnosticism. At best, we may regard them as corollary preconditions for gnosticism.

Soteriological considerations

We now arrive at the aspect of Gnosticism from which it derives its name; the importance of saving knowledge (gnosis). This alone should inform us just what it was about Gnosticism that was considered as most typifying the movement in its heyday. As Grant (1959: 7) puts it, after describing the variations between Gnostic movements:

> Yet there was something about all these systems which has made it possible for writers ancient and modern to treat them together, to call them Gnostic. The very word *gnosis* shows that the Gnostic *knows*,. He does not know because he has gradually learned; he knows because revelation has been given him. He does not believe, for faith is inferior to gnosis . . . Gnostics know 'who we were and what we have become; where we were or where we had been made to fall; whether we are hastening, whence we are being redeemed; what birth is and what rebirth is'. (cf. Jonas 1969: 46–7; 1974: 264)

The Gnostics opted out of the 'faith or works' debate that has bedevilled Christianity (and so many other religions) since its beginnings by positing that salvation came about through gnosis. This should not be regarded as knowledge in the ordinary sense of the word. Gnosis is not so much knowledge in the sense that I might know how to work a word processor or how a rainbow is formed by the refraction of light through raindrops. Gnosis should rather be understood as a non-intellectual mystical awareness of the true nature of the self and the universe. Or, as Jonas (1969: 49) puts it, it was pre-eminently knowledge of God. In this, it is the equivalent of Indian religious terms such as jnana, vidya and prajna.

It is this, I would propose, that, constituting the defining characteristic of classical Gnosticism, provides us with the most adequate yardstick with which to judge its modern equivalents. Let us therefore lay down the following rule: A modern religious movement may be called gnostic if, and only if, it emphasizes a non-intellectual type of knowledge as being necessary and sufficient for salvation. If other Gnostic characteristics (dualism and the occurrence of Gnostic mythical motifs) are found, this would strengthen our case and might lead us to consider looking for direct Gnostic influence on the movement's founders, but they are not sufficient, by themselves, to justify the label of 'gnostic'.

Supposedly gnostic movements: the Divine Light Mission.

This modern religious movement does seem to meet the criterion laid down above for a gnostic group. As Weber (1983: 41), among others, points out, its main thrust is on receiving 'the Knowledge' (cf. Bromley & Shupe 1981: 43). Detractors of the movement might point out that this knowledge is produced by fairly crude physical techniques – for instance, 'seeing the Divine Light' is produced by pinching the optic nerve – but for the purposes of this essay, such criticisms are irrelevant. What matters to us is that the movement's soteriolo-

gical self-definition is couched in terms of knowledge rather than that of faith or works.

The Divine Light Mission does not seem to have produced a substantial body of mythical literature, and its fundamental metaphysical structure is monistic rather than dualistic (Bromley & Shupe 1981: 43). This, as we have implied above, means that there is no compelling reason for us to suspect a direct historical influence upon it from classical Gnosticism. Considering the Indian heritage of its founder may supply us with more useful information. When we do this, we can see that the DLM is in the tradition of jnana yoga, the path of knowledge, which has been an influential trend in Hinduism since Upanishadic times. Nevertheless, if, as established above, we insist on using the term 'gnostic' to describe any religious movement which emphasizes knowledge as the means to salvation, then the DLM must be categorized as a gnostic movement. Interestingly, Moellering (1983: 224) has performed a comparative study of Guru Maharaj Ji and Mani, one of the founders of Gnosticism.

Scientology

Of the three movements that we will discuss here, Scientology is the most clearly gnostic. Consider its most fundamental myth: humans are really Thetans (the Scientological equivalent of the word 'soul') which, despite being innately perfect and immortal, have become enmeshed in MEST (matter, energy, space and time); the function of Scientological 'auditing' is to re-awaken the scientologist to the realization of his true stature (Weber 1983: 42; Bromley & Shupe 1981: 50). Flinn (1983: 102) states that

> Scientology defines itself as a 'knowing how to know'. 'Knowingness' or 'self-determined knowledge' is a comprehensive concept embracing what outsiders would distinguish as matters of faith and matters of knowledge.

In other words, the knowledge of Scientology is of something other than a purely intellectual quality; precisely the type of knowledge posited by the Gnostics.

Here, then, we have an emphasis on knowledge as being necessary for salvation, a dualistic division between spiritual entities and the material universe, and a central myth which stresses the perfection of the human state before its descent into material being. Together, these add up to a near-perfect copy of our required and corollary attributes of a gnostic movement. As we have seen above, Scientology itself recognizes this. The only qualification one would like to make is that, as Flinn (1983: 103) puts it, 'Scientology . . . does

not use the term "salvation", but "survival" '. This, however, is perhaps no more than a matter of semantic differences; to the degree that 'survival' acts as the eschatological goal in the Scientological system, it has the same functional status as 'salvation' in other religions. The important point is that Scientology regards knowledge as the means of attaining what it regards as the Summum Bonum.

The Unification Church

Is the Unification Church a gnostic movement? Weber (1983: 42–3) seems to believe that it is. Her justification for this assertion, however, relies entirely on the fact that the UC posits a dualistic cosmology, in which the event of Man's fall from grace is highly prominent in the mythical structure. As we have seen above, this in itself is not sufficient for us to apply the 'gnostic' label. Furthermore, the UC's dualism is far from unqualified. Robertson (1979: 64) and Barker (1984: 74) have commented that the UC's dualism more closely resembles the 'complementarity of opposites' found in classical Taoism. This would make it a kind of monism in disguise, a position closer to the Syro-Egyptian than to the Iranizing strains of Gnosticism discussed above.

When we look at the UC's soteriology, it becomes evident that knowledge does not feature very prominently. The primary task of the Unificationist is to raise a 'perfect family' after having become spiritually purified (Bromley & Shupe 1979: 134–5, 204). There is very little evidence of mystical 'gnostic' experience in the UC unless one counts the feeling of well-being which can be found among the newly-converted, a common-enough phenomenon among a wide range of religions, and a usage which tends to reduce the term to uselessness.

On the evidence above, while we may be justified in calling the Unification Church a dualistic religion, we are not justified in calling it gnostic. While it satisfies the corollary requirements, it does not meet the prime precondition of gnosticism, namely an emphasis on knowledge as being the prime prerequisite to salvation.

Science fiction

Halperin (1983a: 257–66) discusses what he regards as gnostic influence in Science Fiction. If, however, we accept the above discussion on the requirements for a gnostic movement, his article becomes widely open to criticism.

First of all, although it is not immediately relevant, one should point out that Halperin's definition of Science Fiction is unusually wide. To be more precise, he does not distinguish between Science Fiction and Fantasy, as when he includes H. P. Lovecraft in his discussion. While it is true that works by authors

such as Ursula LeGuin have narrowed the gap between the two genres, the distinction remains a useful one.

The chief criticism to be levelled against Halperin's thesis is that he bases his examination of the supposed gnostic content of Science Fiction entirely on what have above been described as the corollary requirements of gnosticism. Furthermore, he does not point so much to a fundamentally dualistic cosmology as to smaller Gnostic sub-themes such as the descent of the angelic being to the Earthly realm (Halperin 1983a: 262).

I do find myself in agreement with Halperin that gnostic tendencies may be found in some Science Fiction works, but would disagree with him on which ones they are. For instance, he mentions the book *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (Halperin 1983a: 264) mainly to demonstrate how 'The needs that express themselves in the arrival of a transcendent alien race may also express themselves in fantasies of the creation of a transcendent religious order', and just barely mentions that the purpose of this order is to preserve the saving technological knowledge predating the nuclear holocaust. Similarly, Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy (to which, incidentally, a fourth and fifth book have since been added) is barely mentioned, despite it being a veritable paean to the saving power of knowledge (Halperin 1983a: 264–5), albeit in this case a highly intellectual, technocratic form of knowledge.

Statements like 'Darth Vader (in the motion picture "The Empire Strikes Back") is the oedipally destructive father' and '. . . science fiction deals with the older adolescent's fear of separation from the familiar world of childhood and his confrontation with the unknown and alien world of adults' (Halperin 1983a: 265) reveal that Halperin's main intention is to provide us with a neo-Freudian literary interpretation rather than a religio-scientific typology for the classification of religious and quasi-religious phenomena. In itself this is unobjectionable, but it does tend to confuse the issue if his findings are accepted and used in ways which they were never intended to be.

Further considerations

The notion of a gnostic approach in religious and cultural phenomena can easily be extended to mainstream religions. The most immediately obvious example is Buddhism, in which the cultivation of a non-intellectual form of knowledge is considered to be the way to salvation. I am here thinking of mainstream Theravada and Hua-Yen/Zen Buddhism, of course, rather than the Pure Land variety, in which devotion to Amitabha Buddha is the central focus, or Tibetan Buddhism, which encompasses a highly varied spectrum of religious practices.

In this regard, it is interesting to observe that the Church of Scientology, in particular, regards itself as closely allied to Buddhism:

> This affinity is part of Scientology's self-understanding: 'A Scientologist is a first cousin to the Buddhist'. (Flinn 1983: 93)

Flinn (1983) goes so far as to assert that Scientology is, in fact, a kind of 'technological Buddhism'. It is also interesting to note that Klimkeit (1977) has explored the possible connections between Gnosticism and early Mahayana Buddhism, based on confessional formulas found in certain Turfan manuscripts.

Summary and critical evaluation

As we have seen, the term 'gnosticism' may be most fruitfully employed to describe those religious movements which stress the saving power of non-intellectual knowledge for soteriological purposes. The question which remains to be asked, though, is whether this is the most appropriate terminology for religio-scientific use.

Here I would like to point out that in the milieu in which classical Gnosticism arose, it was more commonly referred to as 'the Gnostic Heresy', a form of usage which still persists (Sabom 1985: 243). I would contend that the pejorative connotations of the term diminish its usefulness in the supposedly value-free (or at least value-bracketed) domain of the scientific study of religion.

Is there an alternative schema which carries no emotional connotations, and which duplicates the tripartite soteriological division into faith, works and knowledge? Indeed there is, namely the Hindu system of bhaktiyoga, karmayoga and jnanayoga (Schmidt 1980: 237–42; Crawford 1982: 123–9). While this system, in its finer details, becomes more complicated than is required for our purposes, one will find that in its most basic form, as stated above, it will prove to be an eminently useful typological schema for the classification of religions on the basis of their soteriological methodologies. I claim no great originality for this proposal – various scholars have borrowed terminology from this schema, although one gets the impression that the focus is generally on bhaktiyoga rather than on jnana.

It might be argued at this point that adopting this system would not really solve the problem, and that Hindu scholars might raise exactly the same objections to the universalization of their terminology that I have here raised

against the indiscriminate use of the term 'gnosticism'. There are two reasons why I believe this to be unlikely.

Firstly, the scientific study of religion is still by and large a western-oriented enterprise. This situation is much to be regretted, but it is the case, and there is a much greater need to purge value-loaded western terms from our technical vocabulary than there is a need to avoid oriental ones: consider how Buddhologists have only rarely attempted to translate Sanskrit terminology like 'Dharmakaya' or 'Nirvana'. The only real alternative would be to manufacture a completely new terminology of our own, in which 'gnostic' would be replaced by something like 'knowledge-based'. The question then would be whether a firmly secular term like 'knowledge' would convey the full religious impact of the religious understanding of gnosis or jnana, which, as we have seen above, both includes and transcends the narrow intellectual meaning commonly associated with 'knowledge'.

Secondly, the Hindu system does not assign any pejorative connotations to any of the three main soteriological methods, though individual Hindu sects and gurus might favour one method over another, and there would therefore be far fewer emotional influences involved in the typological description of a given religious tradition, be it an ancient or a brand-new one.

For much the same reasons as those given above, I would take issue with van Baaren's (1973: 54) assertion that

> A term derived from our own culture is in case of need preferable to a term derived from a foreign culture. In the second case we operate with two unknown quantities, in the first case only one.

For instance, he follows Brain-Pollock in suggesting that we replace 'taboo' with 'injunction emblem'.

I have two objections to van Baaren's thesis. Firstly, the reference to 'our' culture presupposes that the occidental nature of science of religion is fixed and unchangeable – a rigid, neocolonialist attitude which will hardly commend itself to scholars in the rest of the world. How much of 'our own' (presumably West European) culture's terminology is originally Greek or Hebraic in nature? (To return briefly to the example above, 'injunction' is Latin in origin, 'emblem' Greek.) And if we could borrow from them, why should this process of cultural and linguistic exchange suddenly have to cease? Some clarification on what is or is not a 'foreign culture' is required here.

Secondly, if the need to avoid 'unknown quantities' is really that pressing, the logical solution is to use nonsense syllables spewed out at random by a

computer. Needless to say, this is not how language works – not even academic jargon. Overgeneralisation (van Baaren's main objection to the importation of terminology cf. pp.52–3) is the constant risk taken by all academics; it will not cease if we timidly stick to the terms we think we know. To the contrary, we should investigate the words we do use and find alternatives if required.

On balance, then, I would suggest that we drop the term 'gnostic' as a description of a religious movement, and that we rather use the term 'jnanic', and that, simultaneously, we adopt the terms 'bhaktic' and 'dharmic' to describe religious traditions which stress either faith and devotion or the pursuance of an ethical life-style as the prime means of attaining what the traditions in question regard as the supreme goal. In this way, it is possible to describe a movement's fundamental method of attaining what it considers to be salvation without getting entangled into questions of orthodoxy and heresy. In this way, we can be assured of applying a balanced, non-partisan approach to our field.

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