

NEW GNOSTIC GOSPELS

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Science Fiction writer Philip K. Dick's quest for God becomes a binding theme in many of his works, including *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion*, two of his final three novels. Together, these two novels, combined with his *Exegesis*, are Dick's attempts to gain true knowledge and reconcile humanity with the divine. *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion* each chronicle a Gnostic quest for knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. Individually, these novels tell the stories of characters whom, whether willingly or not, have been chosen to participate in God's plans. Together, they express and explore Philip K. Dick's drive for knowledge and spiritual enlightenment, and his journey toward Gnostic revelation. Accordingly, *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion* can not only be understood as works of Science Fiction in which Gnostic thought is deliberately explored and expressed, but also as Gnostic gospels in which the writer has explained and evaluated his own spiritual evolution for both the salvation of himself and humanity.

NEW GNOSTIC GOSPELS

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New Gnostic Gospels

That the narratives of Philip K. Dick contain within them Gnostic elements is not a new idea. The subject has been broached in various forms by several scholars in the last four decades, most notably Robert Abernathy (“...*A Visionary Among the Charlatans*,” 1975), Douglas A. Mackey (“Science Fiction and Gnosticism,” 1984), and Peter Fitting (“Reality as Ideological Construct,” 1983). Their works were closely succeeded by George Slusser and others in “Between Faith and Melancholy” (Dumont & Slusser, 1988) and “How Dickian is the New French Science Fiction?” (Chatelain & Slusser, 1988). Roger J. Stilling (“Mystical Healing,” 1991) and Gregg Rickman (“The Nature of Dick’s Fantasies,” 1992) also wrote prolifically about Dick’s Science Fiction during this time. Yet, aside from F. Scott Walter’s “The Final Trilogy of Philip K. Dick” (1997) and Lorenzo DiTommaso’s “Gnosticism and Dualism in the Early Fiction of Philip K. Dick” (2001), little substantial scholarship on Gnostic elements in Dick’s novels exists between the early nineteen-nineties and present day. Moreover, what does exist tends to revisit the works of Mackey, Fitting, and the like, and concentrates almost exclusively upon Dick’s use of dualism in either his earliest works or in *VALIS*.

On equal grounds, works by Dick are now being regularly included in college curriculums, particularly those focusing on post-modern American literature, dystopian literature, and, of course, Science Fiction. Motion pictures based on his novels and short stories, including *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall*, *The Minority Report*, and *A Scanner Darkly*, are being shown in courses on Film Studies. Most of his writings have been translated into major European and Asian languages, and several French and German post-modern scholars have included Dick in their evaluations of New French Science Fiction. On all counts, the illusory nature of reality present in Dick’s works has been the single element most vastly explored.

The tumultuous state of Dick’s personal life is also well-known and has been a subject of interest for many scholars, the most famous of which is likely Lawrence Sutin, who in 1995 wrote *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*, one of the most comprehensive biographies of Dick’s life and authorship to date. For a number of scholars, the main point of focus has

been on Dick's heavy drug use, his diagnosed psychological disorders, and the series of visions of a Vast Active Living Intelligence System (VALIS) Dick experienced in 1974 (Sutin 36-40). These elements have been further incorporated into many scholars' understanding of Dick's views on and literary presentation of the dualistic nature of human existence and the human psyche's dependence upon illusion.

Such attention in scholarship leaves exploring Dick's works *as* Gnostic in a unique position, one in which Dick's use of Gnostic thought is well-substantiated, but in which Dick's position as a Gnostic writer is vastly unexplored. While Dick is certainly known for the unique worlds and alternate realities of his most famous works, especially *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *The Man in the High Castle*, Dick's quest for God becomes a binding theme in many of his later novels, particularly *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion*. Along with his *Exegesis*, they are Dick's attempts to gain true knowledge and reconcile humanity with the divine. *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion* each chronicle a Gnostic quest for knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. Individually, these novels tell the stories of characters who, whether willingly or not, have been chosen to participate in God's plans. Together, they express and explore Philip K. Dick's drive for gnosis and his journey toward Gnostic revelation. Accordingly, *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion* can not only be understood as works of fiction in which Gnostic thought is deliberately explored and expressed, but also as Gnostic gospels in which the writer has explained and evaluated his own spiritual evolution for both the salvation of himself and humanity.

Wisdom of the Ancients

One of the prerequisites for discussing Dick's works as Gnostic gospels is marking out a definition of or set of criteria for Gnosticism, both in its classical and modern forms. Luckily, despite the diversity present in the teachings and traditions of many Gnostic sects, Gnostics share certain fundamental beliefs and principles that can be used to define "Gnosticism" or "gnosis." Chief among these is rejection of the temporal world as flawed and hostile and the positing of a higher world from which the human spirit comes and to which the spirit will return. This cosmological view is, in turn, closely related to and dependent upon an understanding of dualism as the fundamental nature of

existence, and gnosis – true knowledge – as the only means by which the human being can achieve wholeness and attain salvation.

In this, the soul-spirit distinction of Gnostics, analogous to the body-mind distinction of Platonists, marks a clear transcendentalist attitude toward temporal existence in general, one in which gnosis becomes the only means by which the true Self can be liberated and the human being saved (Jonas 329-336). What leads to such a philosophical or psychological view is, as Plato described it, the inevitable realization that the human being cannot reach its full potential while remaining held to the laws of temporal existence.¹ True knowledge does not rest in empirical observation but in esoteric forms relating to the spirit or consciousness. The Gnostic solution to this problem of existence has similarly distinctive theological tendencies, the final results of which culminate into the broad belief that true knowledge – gnosis – is not bound to the constraints of time and space, but eternal. In this, Gnostics build upon the work of Platonists, taking it as given that interpretation, or hermeneutics, does not bring human beings to a direct knowledge of *the meaning of things* but rather to an understanding of *how things appear* before them. Empirical knowledge, then, is a distinctly historical method of understanding existence. Knowledge is not of immutable or eternal things in themselves but of how such things are revealed within the process of gnosis – of coming to know. In this sense, time and history can be understood as provinces of the human mind and gnosis as a concrete and self-salvific endeavor for the individual Self and for the human race.²

It is at this point that Gnostic thought departs from its philosophical roots and the Gnostic “revisionary critique of the Hebrew Scriptures begins” (Jonas 328). Unlike the Hebrew Scriptures, which recount the creation of the world by the God of Abraham in a positive light, Gnostic texts, by and large, cite the creation of the material world as being the result of a primordial error on the part of *Sophia* (Greek *Σοφία*, “Wisdom”), sometimes called the *Logos* (Greek *Λόγος*, “Word”), the final emanation of

¹ A recurring theme in Plato’s dialogues and in *The Republic*, but perhaps most notably in Plato’s *Theaetetus* dialogue where Socrates and Theaetetus discuss the nature of knowledge.

² Jonas 328-330; the Interpretation of Knowledge 14-16

the divine hierarchy, whose innate desire to know the transcendent God leads to the existence of a subordinate and ignorant being called the *Demiurge* (Greek *Δημιουργός*, “Craftsman”).³ Though responsible for the creation of the material world, the Demiurge is ignorant of his place in the divine hierarchy, and unaware that his material creation is an imperfect imitation of the *Pleroma* (Greek *Πλήρωμα*, commonly translated as “All” or “Fullness” in a Gnostic setting), at the head of which resides the supreme God, the One beyond Being. Instead, the Demiurge falsely declares himself the one true god and wrongfully imposes his law onto humanity.⁴

The Christian Scriptures had an equally deep impact on the Gnostics, especially the idea that God sent Christ, his only Son, to suffer and die as payment for the sins of all humankind, and a revision of this salvation story takes precedent in many Gnostic writings.⁵ Since even the Pleroma is not exempt from desire and passion, as seen in Sophia’s inherent actions (and the consequences of them), a salvific event *must* occur in order to facilitate a return of the human spirit to the Fullness of God. This process of reintegration with the transcendent God is central to the Gnostic myth in terms of positing an initial split from the Godhead in which “sparks” of the Pleroma have been imprisoned in the temporal world in the form of human beings. It is also central in terms of proposing gnosis as the salvation from such imposed dualism, whereby the Pleroma is fully united (Apocryphon of John II.9.25). Gnostic expositions on the Christian Scriptures, in this sense, not only inform the Gnostic belief that all emanations of the Pleroma are the “roots and springs” of the transcendent God (Tripartite Tractate 68:10) but also that human salvation is possible through spiritual transcendence.⁶

³ Gospel of Truth 12-15; Apocryphon of John II.1.4-11; the *Secundus Tomos Pisteos Sofias* (43-181); A Valentinian Exposition 1-7, 12-13; Exegesis on the Soul 1-5, 14-17; and the entirety of the Untitled text found at Nag Hammadi, sometimes given the title “On the Origin of the World”

⁴ Gospel of Truth 1-11, 12-16; Apocryphon of John II.1.4-6, 14-15, 21-22; Gospel of Philip 1-7, 36-37, 88; *Secundus Tomos Pisteos Sofias* (43-181) of the Askew Codex; Pistis Sophia of the Berlin Codex; A Valentinian Exposition 1-7, 12-13; Exegesis on the Soul 1-5, 14-17; “On the Origin of the World”

⁵ In the collection of Gnostic writings discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945, only a handful present the possibility of having originated in a pre-Christian context. The majority of the texts found at Nag Hammadi are Christian Gnostic writings, traditionally dated between the early second and late third-centuries B.C.E.

⁶ Gospel of Truth 1-11, 12-16; Apocryphon of John II.1.4-6, 14-15, 21-22; II.9.20-30; Gospel of Philip 1-7, 36-37, 88; A Valentinian Exposition 1-7, 12-13

The future course of humanity, then, comes to be one of the primary concerns of the Gnostic exegesis, and it “colors and directs all attempts at coming to terms, not only with the Hebrew [and Christian] Scriptures, which serve as the main text of Gnostic interpretation, but also with existence in general” (Jonas 328). Gnostics not only believe that the temporal world was created by an inferior and ignorant being claiming to be the only god, but that the biblical Scriptures are the written revelation of this inferior creator god. These Scriptures are filled with lies intended to prevent human beings from realizing that they are naturally spiritual beings who have been enslaved within a material cosmos.⁷ In this sense, the underlying goal of Gnosticism lies in thwarting the temporal mode of existence, and the main vehicle through which this is accomplished is expounding upon the errors of the biblical Scriptures. Interestingly, what leads Gnostics to conclude that the Scriptures contain errors is the Judeo-Christian idea of divine revelation. Gnosis is the result of a rupture between the realms of experience and being brought about by *direct* revelation, either in the form of a “call” or a “vision” or, perhaps to a lesser extent, through philosophical exploration.⁸ This “gnosis,” of course, is that the human being is alien to the temporal world, which in turn circles back to Gnostic mythology.

In asserting that gnosis is a result of revelation, Gnostics claim all true knowledge for themselves. Any philosophical, psychological, or theological pursuit of the Self, while perhaps helpful, cannot lead to gnosis in and of itself. In this sense, Gnosticism mirrors (though not perfectly) the teachings of the canonical Gospels and letters of St. Paul in which faith is necessary for salvation.⁹ That said, any interpretation of biblical texts for Gnostics is “post-revelation” and not for the purpose of receiving revelation but for the purpose of explaining the nature of existence to others. Christ, for example, as the *giver* of revelation, taught his followers how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven *while still alive* as opposed

⁷ Several Gnostic philosophers, most notably Valentinus, identify the Demiurge as Yahweh, the God of the Tanakh, and as the enemy to the God of the New Testament (The Gospel of Truth).

⁸ Not all Gnostics believe that gnosis is an “all or nothing” endeavor. The Valentinians, in particular, believed in stages of gnosis. Some were more spiritually attuned than others, a few considered truly enlightened. Given this, philosophical exploration could lead to a kind of gnosis.

⁹ Mark 16.16; John 3.18,36; Romans 1.16-17, 3.20, 28, 4.2, 13, 5.1; Galatians 2.16, 3.11-12; and Ephesians 2.8-9 (NRSV)

to exclusively promising true knowledge of the afterlife. Gnostics gravitated toward these teachings – as evidenced in the entirety of the Gospel of Thomas – and easily viewed Christ as the Logos, an agent of the transcendent God. In this sense Christ, Sophia, and others who have been identified as the Logos are the direct means by which gnosis is received.¹⁰

Of course, Jesus warned that in delivering his messages he would “bring not peace but a sword” (NRSV Matt 10.34), and Gnostics have taken this understanding to heart.¹¹ Since the material cosmos is contrary to the immaterial spirit, gnosis is not intended to integrate the human being into the cosmic whole, as doing so would still leave the human being subject to compliance with its laws. Instead, gnosis is a necessary part of the human being’s alienation from the world, a state that must be “deepened and brought to a head” in order for the true and transcendent Self to emerge (Jonas 329). Such an approach to the nature of gnosis – coming to know – treats the past as something already overcome yet still “present,” insofar as human beings still labor under the old law (328-329). Some Gnostics, in fact, believe that their lives stretch over the course of what appears to be thousands of years and, through gnosis, they can come to know their spiritual and historical origins (Jonas 332-334). According to Gnostics, the real, secret Christian Church still exists, with Christ – the Logos – at its head. This Christian Church, true knowledge having been revealed to its members, has passed from the delusional prison of the temporal cosmos and will continue to exist through the cycle of time until all spirits are reunited with the Pleroma (Jonas 342).

The continuation of gnosis, then, is quite important to Gnostics, who see both coming to know and spreading their message as tools in the fight against the illusions of the Demiurge. Naturally, Gnostic thought has carried forward from its classical roots into present day, and modern and post-modern forms of Gnosticism have developed in line with the underlying messages of ancient Gnostic thinking. The Cathars of eleventh and twelfth-century France and Northern Italy are probably the most well-known

¹⁰ Often in Gnostic texts, though not always, Sophia and Christ are portrayed as a primordial pair who must work together in order to bring about gnosis and the salvation of humanity. The *Secundus Tomos Pisteos Sofias* (43-181) of the Askew Codex and the Pistis Sophia fragment of the Berlin Codex are primary examples.

¹¹ The Gospel of Truth, in particular, discusses the pains and struggles associated with coming to know (1-11, 12-27) as well as the Tripartite Tractate (67:7-10).

Gnostic group outside of Antiquity. Though they were driven mostly underground and the majority of their writings were destroyed, the Cathars enjoyed some small measure of popularity until the Inquisition finally snuffed them out in the thirteenth century (Lambert 41). The Rosicrucians of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, while not “Gnostic” in a strict sense, drew many of their beliefs and teachings from Gnosticism (Lindgren 141-148). Additionally, a number of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets had Gnostic leanings, such as George Herbert and Henry Vaughan who, while decidedly Christian, focused on the mystical and emotional elements of experiencing God directly that are common in Gnosticism (*The Temple; Silex Scintillans*).

William Blake is probably the most noteworthy Gnostic thinker of the nineteenth century, and his criticisms of the Christian Church in works such as *Songs of Experience* have clear Gnostic underpinnings, especially Blake’s assertion that knowledge, not faith, leads to Christ (“The Garden of Love”) and that both good and evil are creations of God (“The Tyger”). Among early twentieth-century thinkers, Carl Jung and Jean-Paul Sartre seem the most influenced by Gnostic thought. Sartre’s work in *Being and Nothingness* hinges on a recognition of a dualistic system of existence, one in which the external world and the human consciousness are understood as independent and polarized constructs. In order to achieve self-actualization and avoid “bad faith,” people must recognize that they are simply beings who exist in the world and that what constitutes the Self is not any role a person might play within the construct of temporal existence (particularly human society) but instead the transcendent human consciousness. Jung had similar theoretical leanings and dedicated several volumes of work – most notably *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* and *Psychology and Religion: West and East* – to Gnosticism in part or in whole. Moreover, he based key aspects of his theories on psychoanalysis in Gnostic thought concerning the nature of the true and transcendent Self. He not only developed his theory of Archetypes through studying Gnosticism, but also determined that failure to recognize the dualistic nature of human existence is the root of all psychosis.¹²

¹² “Answer to Job” (Campbell 519-650); *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (Lacan 152-153)

The discovery and translation of the Nag Hammadi codices had a huge impact on Gnostic thought after World War II. Several self-identified Gnostic ecclesiastical bodies and spiritual groups were founded soon after, including the Society of Novus Spiritus, Ecclesia Gnostica, the Thomasine Church, the Apostolic Johannite Church, the Alexandrian Gnostic Church, and the North American College of Gnostic Bishops. These groups each subscribe to the Gnostic teachings and writings of antiquity to varying degrees, and their basic beliefs as a whole can be funneled into those of earlier Gnostic forms. There are also a few Gnostic Orders still in operation, like the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica and the Ordo Templi Orientis. Gnosticism has also enjoyed a great deal of scholastic and literary attention since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, most prominently in the works of philosopher Hans Jonas, literary scholar Harold Bloom, poet Allen Ginsberg, and novelist Philip K. Dick who, next to Jung, was arguably the most prolific Gnostic writer of the twentieth century. Of the 44 novels and 121 short stories Dick published during his career, at least half of them are Gnostic in content on some level; and *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion*, two of Dick's final three novels, are the most explicit of his Gnostic narratives.

The Gnostic Quest

VALIS opens with the protagonist, Horselover Fat, in the beginning throws of a nervous breakdown that is triggered and then exacerbated by his friend Gloria's attempted, and then successfully executed, suicide. These opening events have a severe impact on Fat's psyche and character development. Eventually, they result in his psychological crisis and death, and the emergence and dominance of Phil Dick as a main character. While it is true that Fat experiences many traumatic and mind-altering events throughout the novel, including drug abuse, attempted suicide, and failed relationships, his life permanently changes in 1974 when he comes in contact with a pink beam of light that overloads his mind with a sea of data.

Much of *VALIS* contains excerpts from Dick's *Exegesis* – an 8,000-plus-page philosophical work in which Dick tries to understand gnosis – which not only is informed and influenced by his personal revelations, but also is intended to supplement the philosophical undercurrents of Horselover Fat's and

Phil Dick's literary story. Throughout the novel, Dick draws on these excerpts and mixes them with various plot points and character dialogue in order to set up situations for philosophical and theological debate. Each of Dick's characters stands as an almost archetypal representation of differing world-views, such as David's faith-oriented but moderate outlook on the world, or Kevin's measured skepticism, or Sherri's blind faith and wholehearted dependence upon it. In the mix are Fat and Phil Dick, whose enthusiasm, charisma, and slipping sanity draw the group deeper into their quest to help Fat (and, by proxy, Phil Dick) understand the truth Fat has glimpsed.

Dick encases the entire story of *VALIS* within the Gnostic mythos and the pervading Gnostic belief that the material cosmos is flawed, hostile, and not at all akin to the human spirit. According to Fat, the primary mode for which such knowledge comes to light in the novel, the world is insane, made at the hands of an insane creator – Yaldabaoth, the Demiurge of the Gnostics – who, ignorant of his own insanity and the true nature of his existence, has trapped the human spirit within the material cosmos (*VALIS* 86, 91-93). The only hope for humanity lies in the salvation of Sophia, the Logos, the very being whose primordial desire to know the Godhead initiated the split of the Pleroma and the emergence of the Demiurge. She has taken many forms throughout history – Wisdom, Buddha, Christ – in order to liberate humanity from the clutches of the Demiurge and reunite the human spirit with the Pleroma (*VALIS* 36-37, 41, 47, 65, and 72). Fat's encounter in 1974 with an intelligence that floods his mind with a sea of data is nothing short of an encounter with God, one in which, Fat believes, he is given divine revelation, the pure experience of gnosis, and the knowledge that, through Sophia, he can become whole.

This world-view, however, is not spontaneous. For Fat, a multitude of information is delivered to him in an instant with such mind-shattering force that he is unable to process it all immediately. He dedicates an immense amount of time to trying to solve the mystery of his encounter in 1974, reading everything from Plato to the Judeo-Christian Scriptures to Jung, all the while endlessly scribbling in his exegesis. He starts with what he knows – that this vast intelligence has given him knowledge he has no other way of knowing. It leads him both to identifying his son's rare illness and the cure (22). It enables

him to communicate in a language he does not recognize but which others identify as *Koine* Greek, the language of the New Testament (31-32). It shows him images of the Roman Empire superimposed over monuments of present-day America and the walls of a Black Iron Prison trapping all within them in an illusory cycle of time (48, 60). The Gnostic Scriptures, which Fat studies closely, inform his understanding of the revelations that have been thrust upon him. Fat clearly gets his cosmological paradigm from writings like the Gospel of Truth, the Apocryphon of John, and other codices in the Nag Hammadi collection that concentrate heavily on the myth of Sophia and the Demiurge and posit the existence of a higher world from which the human spirit has descended and to which the human spirit will return.¹³ Moreover, Fat does not see himself as unique in being touched by the divine and gaining such knowledge: every human being is VALIS in seed form. Most, like David, Kevin, Phil, and Sherri, are "occluded," or ignorant, of their true Selves and under the sway of the forces of "astral determinism" (47-48, 121). Sherri cannot see beyond her unwavering faith in Christian dogma to the truth of her physical and spiritual condition. She claims to believe that having cancer marks her as one of God's chosen and that by giving her cancer, God has healed her spiritually. However, the truth is that Sherri is extremely bitter about her existence, and she lives her life as though she is on a preset timer (72-80). Her body is dying, and so is her spirit because she refuses to open herself up to knowledge or take part in her own salvation. Kevin, like Sherri, is extreme in his views and cannot move beyond pondering the death of his cat to deeper areas of philosophical thinking. To him, the death of his cat represents everything he thinks is wrong with the world, and he is unable to understand that both good and evil are necessary (203). David and Phil, while perhaps more open-minded than Kevin and Sherri, are nonetheless pre-occupied with mundane aspects of life. Yet for each of them, hope lies in gnosis (47-48, 121).

The process of searching for knowledge is given emphasis in Gnostic traditions and nowhere in *VALIS* is this more evident than in the Rhipidon Society's quest to find the Savior. For much of the novel, Fat is alone in his musings. His friends David, Kevin, and Phil know that he believes he has been touched

¹³ Gospel of Truth 1-11, 12-16; Apocryphon of John II.1.4-6, 14-15, 21-22; Gospel of Philip 1-7, 36-37, 88; A Valentinian Exposition 1-7, 12-13

by God, and they worry about his physical and mental well-being as he struggles to work through what has happened to him. They try to help him come to terms with the events of his life and the nature of his experience with VALIS by talking to him about his theories and his developing theology, but none of them truly believe Fat's claims until they see the film *Valis* and note the similarities between it and Fat's visions (137-139). Kevin typifies this transformation by completely reversing his skepticism and disbelief in Fat's story to full and unwavering faith in Fat and the truth of his vision, a development that, narratively, indicates the Gnostic transition from unbelief to belief. The group members are so invested in Fat's vision that they form the Rhipidon Society and decide to locate the film's producers in hopes that speaking with them will help them solve the mystery of Fat's encounter with the divine (139-157). They may not experience VALIS as acutely as Fat, but seeing the film *Valis* fills them each with a near equal drive to know the truth of their existence. Though shaken by the film and its similarities to Fat's claims, they each look forward to resolution, even David, who presses on despite glimpsing some truths that go against his faith in the Judeo-Christian God. It is this need to know, to achieve gnosis, that leads the group to Sophia, who in an instant repairs Phil Dick's shattered psyche and then commissions the Rhipidon Society to spread the message that man is God and man is holy (198).

In this, Dick draws directly from the Gnostic myth in which Sophia is "the feminine principle involved in the manifestation of and life of the cosmos and man. She is the helper and inspirer of all Gnosis" (226). It is Sophia who appears to Fat in the form of a pink light at the beginning of the novel (11-12). It is Sophia who saves Fat from suicide (10-11, 192-193, 195, 197-201) and inspires Kevin to see the film *Valis* (138). It is Sophia who destroys Fat and heals Dick's divided psyche (190). At every step, Sophia guides them along their intended course; she has chosen them as the recipients of her wisdom and her salvation. This falls in line with the Gnostic belief that all knowledge belongs to the Gnostics. Fat knows the truth of things because he was touched by God; he received divine revelation which, according to Gnostics, is the only means by which true knowledge can be attained.¹⁴ Kevin, David, and Phil receive

¹⁴ Gospel of Truth 1-11, 12-16; Apocryphon of John II.1.4-6, 14-15, 21-22; Gospel of Philip 1-7, 36-37, 88

true knowledge through direct contact with Sophia. What they come to know, of course, is that the nature of the world is such that all imprisoned within it – including the Demiurge – are occluded, and the Hebrew Scriptures promote this occlusion; they are the lies of the Demiurge, intended to confuse human beings and prevent them from achieving gnosis.¹⁵ Only through direct contact with the true and transcendent God can the human spirit be liberated from this state of being, and Sophia is the salvific vehicle through which this is accomplished for Fat, Phil, David, Kevin, and the rest of humanity.

Moreover, Sophia's message that God dwells inside every human being plays a crucial role in Dick's understanding of Gnostic dualism, the core of which in *VALIS* rests in the relationship between Phil Dick and Horselover Fat, who are not only handled in the bulk of the novel as two personas of the same being but also as separate entities all-together. On one hand, Phil Dick begins the novel by claiming that he has had to separate himself from Fat in order to gain "much-needed objectivity," and interpretation of events surrounding Fat should be understood as Phil Dick speaking about himself in the third person (11). This is reinforced by Dick's tendency throughout the first chapters to slip into the first person, only to catch himself in the act and be forced to reiterate the intentional distance he has set between himself and Fat (*VALIS* 11, 12, 15, 17, 39). By the climax of the novel, Dick even proclaims that Fat is "alive in [him]," and comes to understand that the events of Fat's life are really the events of his own life (190-193). On the other hand, Phil Dick is not the only character to treat Fat and Dick as separate beings, and Dick's confusing interactions with Fat are not limited to the inner workings of Phil Dick's narrative voice. When in the presence of other characters, for example, they are numerically counted as two individuals. They each freely interact with one another and with other characters and engage in dialogue independently. By the end of the novel, Fat leaves California to travel the world and sends postcards to Phil, David, and Kevin from the exotic locations he has visited in his search for the new savior (220-221).

¹⁵ Gospel of Truth 1-11, 12-16; Apocryphon of John II.1.4-6, 14-15, 21-22; A Valentinian Exposition 1-7, 12-13

Of course, Horselover Fat is Phil Dick,¹⁶ and the overarching concern in *VALIS* is Phil Dick's quest for gnosis. In terms of plot momentum, all events are tied to the process of healing Phil Dick's fractured Self. Just as Gloria's death and Dick's encounter with VALIS lead to the emergence of Horselover Fat, meeting Sophia leads to the destruction of Horselover Fat and the psychological healing of Phil Dick. The truth of both Horselover Fat and Phil Dick is that neither is complete and some resolution must take place whereby their personalities are made whole. However, this resolution does not result in Phil Dick and Horselover Fat being reintegrated into the being known as Phil Dick prior to the events of 1974. It instead results in the destruction of Horselover Fat all-together. These events fall in line with Gnostic soul-spirit dualism, in which the salvation of humanity lies not in the full integration of every force in existence, but in the complete shedding of the physical in order to allow the transcendent human spirit (the sparks from the Pleroma released in Sophia's act) to reintegrate into the Fullness of God.¹⁷

Hence, the more in touch with the Gnostic message Fat becomes, the more prominent Phil Dick's character becomes. Where in the beginning pages of the novel Dick is the narrative voice exclusively, he very quickly becomes a character in his own story. He and Fat spend a lot of time together, driving around town and visiting friends and talking about Fat's encounter with a vast intelligence in the form of a pink light (21). Yet, the more convinced Fat becomes that he has come in contact with God, and the more engrossed he becomes in Gnostic thought, the more convinced Fat and Dick become of Fat's insanity. The problem is that they must both come to see Fat as sane. Dick must accept what Fat has already accepted, that his true spirit is not a part of this world, in order to become whole. Phil Dick's resistance to accepting this truth comes to represent the part of the human consciousness that is trapped within the Black Iron Prison, completely occluded to the true nature of the Self and the world. Fat, then,

¹⁶ Horselover Fat is actually a pseudonym for Philip Dick: "Philip" meaning "horselover" in Greek, and "Dick" meaning "fat" in German (*VALIS* 168).

¹⁷ The Gospel of Thomas 37.4; Hymn of the Pearl; Gospel of Truth 31.1-12; Treatise on Resurrection 49.9-16; Apocryphon of John II.31.4

who by the climax of the novel believes that he is a timeless consciousness named Thomas, an early Christian Gnostic, represents the embodiment of the Gnostic message.

In turn, the melding of Phil Dick and Horselover Fat parallels Fat's visions of the superimposition of 70 C.E. onto present-day America. The Black Iron Prison, in this sense, is analogous to the temporal world, the realm and creation of the Demiurge, and comes to represent the constraints of space and time by which all of humanity is enslaved. The time period of 70 C.E. comes to represent the origin of true knowledge and the salvation of humanity. Fat's connection to the early Christian origins of Gnostic thought through Thomas sets true time at 70 C.E., and the realm of the Demiurge comes to be seen as "an unfolding narrative" that "tells about the death of a woman . . . who died long ago . . . one of the primordial twins . . . one half of the divine syzygy" (28). The Gnostics, tuned in to this truth, have transcended time. The emergence of Horselover Fat is nothing more than Phil Dick's coping mechanism for dealing with his visions, mentally transforming them into manageable form – Horselover Fat and Thomas. The path to wholeness and truth is presented to Dick through Fat and Thomas in terms that Dick can easily comprehend, such as Fat's "viewing a double exposure of two realities superimposed" and Thomas' ability to assert control over Fat and think and feel for him (100). Such events are significant in the novel because they demonstrate that, just as the Demiurge creates the ever unfolding narrative of human history, Sophia – the Logos, the transcendent spark of the divine in all humanity – edits it.¹⁸ She is, as Fat aptly writes, "half of the divine syzygy" (*VALIS* 28; Tripartite Tractate 67:7-10) and informs the unfolding narrative of humanity in order to guide all beings to salvation.

The climactic moment of *VALIS* occurs when Sophia destroys Fat and, in so doing, reintegrates Dick's consciousness into a transcendent whole. Yet, the moment Dick learns of Sophia's death (215-216), Fat and Dick are re-severed, and it can be argued that Sophia did not actually heal anyone or anything. From this perspective, the purpose in separating Phil Dick and Horselover Fat in the final pages

¹⁸ Some Gnostic texts, particularly the Gospel of Truth, speak of each human being having a divine counterpart, one "unfallen" from the Pleroma, who can awaken them. This divine counterpart is the authentic Self. With some stretching, this could be applied to Dick's presentation of Thomas, whom Fat understands as his original and true Self.

of the novel is little more than a unifying device. At the beginning, Phil has a psychological schism which worsens in the course of the narrative and then at the climax is cured (with qualifications); whereby, he returns to his former psychological state – almost. While Phil certainly is neither whole nor sane, his “more sane than Fat” frame of mind seems to round out the archetypal monomythic pattern in which the hero “returns to his starting point but is not quite the same person as he was” (Walters 227). However, while this may be true, it seems the more important purpose in re-separating Phil Dick and Horselover Fat into distinct characters is to juxtapose their experiential differences which are the result of Phil Dick staying in California and Horselover Fat traveling the world. In this, their geographic separation and their reversal of roles seem symbolic of the perpetual quest for gnosis.

At the opening of the book, Dick is the one who is in charge of the situation, the even-headed character who, while perhaps not a full-believer in Fat’s vision, is optimistic that the answer Fat needs is out there and that his friend can be cured. Fat, despite being touched directly by the divine, is suicidal, misdirected, and hopeless right up until the Rhipidon Society meets Sophia. After their re-separation, though, Fat is in charge of the situation and continues his search for salvation optimistically while Dick not only loses all hope in finding salvation but also his handle on reality (217-20). Why Sophia’s death and the split in Phil Dick’s psyche are allowed to occur is never fully explained in the novel. One possibility is that Sophia feels that Dick is not yet ready to fully reintegrate himself, reserving catharsis for a future time. Kevin’s statement to Phil that he is starting to wake up (180) supports the possibility that he, though on the path to salvation, is not quite ready for full embodiment.¹⁹ As Fat points out in the beginning of the novel, God “keeps us perpetually occluded” (2), and it seems appropriate both literarily and theologically to end at the beginning. In this sense, gnosis is not a one-time event; it is a process, one that results in spiritual unity but involves many trials and tribulations along the way.

¹⁹ Philip K. Dick himself, in an interview with George Cain and Dana Longo, confirms that at the end of the novel Fat “still needs an answer” (Cain n.p.).

Dick's view of the cosmos is continued and refined in *The Divine Invasion* through Dick's conception of the fragmented nature of the Godhead. The material cosmos is depicted as the creation and dominion of Belial, the Demiurge, who misguidedly proclaims that he is the one true god and exiles Yah from his domain. His experiment with Christ having been a failure, Yah once again incarnates himself and returns to Earth, this time as a brain-damaged child named Emmanuel, who must reunite with his primordial female partner, Zina, in order to gain the power to triumph over the Demiurge and save humanity. Like most Gnostics, Dick attributes the fall of humanity to the fall of God. Evil has come into existence through a split in the Godhead, and while the transcendent part of God remains absolute, Emmanuel, Zina, Yah, and Belial represent fragmented aspects of the deity that have fallen into the relative world. In this, Dick is illustrating the Gnostic belief that all beings, including the Demiurge, are a part of the Pleroma, the Fullness of God. Everyone must become aware of the lies of the Demiurge – including the Demiurge – in order to achieve spiritual transcendence. One of the chief modes for doing this, for Gnostics, is in revising and re-visioning the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and Dick's employment of such exposition in *The Divine Invasion* is most clear in the Herb and Emmanuel plotlines, which mirror aspects of Exodus and the canonical Gospels.

Both *The Divine Invasion* and Exodus begin with a theophany, a direct in-breaking of God into the temporal world and involvement in human history. In Exodus, *Yahweh* (Hebrew *יהוה*, "he causes to be" or "he creates") frees the people of Israel from the bondage of the Egyptians, and in turn binds them to a divine Covenant (NRSV Ex 19.3-9). Moses serves both as God's active agent and the passive medium through which God performs his works. In *The Divine Invasion*, Yah, the mountain dwelling deity of the remote planet CY30-CY30B, plans to enact a similar deliverance for the people of Earth, and uses, among others, Herb Asher as his agent in the world. Initially, Herb is portrayed as selfish and aloof. He prefers the isolation of "dome life" where he is forced to endure only the occasional human encounter and free to dedicate his time to recording and broadcasting the music of his favorite vocalist, Linda Fox (*The Divine Invasion* 22). He is not at all pleased to find Yah speaking to him through his control panels or to find

himself leaving the comfort of his dome to save Rybys' life (22). Nonetheless, he accepts his mission to escort Rybys to Earth and, in so doing, save Yah's people.

The parallels between Herb and Moses are not hard to identify. Both are commissioned by a mountain deity in the form of fire to deliver his people. Both are reluctant to obey God's command: Herb insisting that Yah must not have the right person (34) and Moses insisting people will not believe him (NRSV Ex 4.1-7). Both are convinced to leave God's mountain and carry out his plans only after inciting his anger (NRSV Ex 4.1-7; *The Divine Invasion* 34). In many ways, however, Herb represents not just Moses but Israel as it is portrayed in Exodus – a nation constantly breaching the laws of Yahweh and forsaking his Covenant. Rather than acknowledging that he freed them “from the burdens of the Egyptians,” the people of Israel erect a golden calf and worship it as their God of deliverance (NRSV Ex 32.1-5). In the same way, Herb, instead of following the dictates of both interplanetary law and Yah's command, tries to ignore Rybys, a fellow “dome in distress” (*The Divine Invasion* 19) and prays that she will never “enter [his] dome again” (33). In both Dick's and the biblical account, God's anger is so great that Moses has to bargain with God in order to prevent the destruction of the people of Israel (NRSV Ex 32.11-14) and Herb has to leave his dome to save his beloved Linda Fox recordings (*The Divine Invasion* 31-34).

To Dick, the hostile actions of the God of Israel are selfish and arrogant, and his modeling of Herb's character and the events of *The Divine Invasion* on Moses and the Exodus story goes deeper than a simple re-telling of God's deliverance; it is a re-evaluation of the relationship between human beings and the divine. In calling attention to the actions and attitudes of the God of Israel through Herb's interactions with Yah, Dick asserts an interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures in which the God of Israel is seen as a god of violence and irrationality whose actions ensure a permanent separation between humans and the divine. In Exodus, Moses is only able to speak to Yahweh through an intermediary – a burning bush (NRSV Ex 24.18). Herb has a similar experience with Yah, who does not come before Herb face-to-face but speaks to him through his digital equipment (*The Divine Invasion* 31-34). Yah's contact with Herb,

Rybys, and Elijah may be none other than divine immanence; whereby, God becomes personally involved in human history, as he did in contacting Moses and leading the Hebrews out of slavery (*NRSV Ex 3.13-14*). However, it is also a situation in which none of them have any choice but to obey, knowing that doing so will be their doom. When Herb questions Elijah about why, if Yah is intervening to save humanity, he will not also heal Rybys and relieve her from her suffering, Rybys replies that Yah is a “volcanic deity,” one who only enters history periodically to help human beings (*The Divine Invasion 31*). She believes that, though her body is failing, Yah is healing her spiritually; there is something she must come to know, and the journey Yah has set before her is the way to learn it (31). Just as Yahweh did not emancipate the Hebrews solely to ease their suffering, Yah has chosen not to relieve her suffering for a greater purpose (20-31). In the same token, when posed with a similar question by Moses, Yahweh explains that he will be “gracious to whom [he] will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom [he] will show mercy” (*NRSV Ex 33.19*). Just as Rybys faces certain death and Herb the absolute destruction of his coveted recordings if they refuse to honor their agreements with Yah, Yahweh regularly threatens to revoke his Covenant with the people of Israel for breaking his laws. In drawing the comparison between these two deities, Dick characterizes the God of the Hebrew Scriptures as a cat playing with mice, who both despises mice and does not “wish to see an end of [them]” (*The Divine Invasion 46*). Such a relationship between God and humanity is based in hatred and fear. From this view-point, human beings are inherently unholy and unworthy of approaching God directly.

Such a view of the human-divine relationship as represented in Exodus is not in line with Gnostic thought, and in revealing that Rybys “will give birth to a son, Emmanuel,” Dick’s allegorical shift mirrors the progression of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures (22). As the plot of the novel moves forward toward hope in Emmanuel’s salvation, Dick’s exploration and explanation of the divine revelation to humankind becomes more complete. This process mainly occurs in the education of Emmanuel by Zina, who for the bulk of the novel engages Emmanuel in forms of philosophical and theological debate. On one hand, Zina’s purpose in the novel seems to be to serve as Emmanuel’s foil. On the other, her purpose seems to

be to guide Emmanuel toward self-awareness and knowledge in order to enable him to rethink both the content and the method of his salvific mission. Dick sets these encounters in a reality outside of time, one which exerts a profound influence on the rest of existence (50-51). It is here that Zina first challenges Emmanuel to look inward and establish a sense of Self. Like Christ, Emmanuel is the embodiment of the divine Logos, but unlike Christ, he is not made aware of his nature. He must instead work through the process of unlocking his memories and resolving his feelings of uncertainty. The climax of this moment occurs when Emmanuel, faced “the pain of isolation,” causes the universe to disappear by imagining that he is alone. It is only by remembering his place as Yah’s son and his role as the liberator of humanity that he is able to return the universe into being. Yet, even after rediscovering his divine nature and his salvific purpose, Emmanuel remains bitter that he has been sent to fix Christ’s failed mission (55) and often denigrates human behavior, such as Herb’s decision to lie “dreaming of a phantom life with Linda Fox, while [his] mother struggled to survive” (123). In such thinking, Emmanuel taps into both the Gnostic transition from the Hebrew to the Christian Scriptures and the Gnostic belief that only the transcendent God can maintain true and pure knowledge of all things at all times. Emmanuel must learn this so that he can come to understand that his role as the savior of humanity supersedes his role as the judge of humanity.

As the embodiment of Gnostic Wisdom, then, Zina’s primary role in the novel becomes convincing Emmanuel of humanity’s worth. She performs this task through manipulating time and spinning illusion. She targets Emmanuel’s ideas of good and evil, and her playful lessons are aimed at revealing his desires and perceptions. When Emmanuel and Zina decide to communicate through a cat to avoid detection, for example, Emmanuel immediately says that he wants to be the cat even though he knows that doing so will kill the animal (46). When Zina challenges him to consider the consequences of such an action, Emmanuel replies, “Let the cat die...They were created for that” (46). In these words he reveals himself as both ignorant and callous. He believes that death (specifically the death of the Demiurge) is the only means by which human beings can be redeemed, and Zina must intervene in order

to move Emmanuel away from such absolute notions. She entreats him to trust her and to trust in the mercy of his salvific mission, and to allow her to help him recognize the true depth of humanity's suffering and their need for salvation.

According to Zina, growth is the ultimate goal of the transcendent God, not destruction or stagnation. She describes the role of the *Paraclete* (Greek *Πάρακλητος*, "Comforter," "Advocate," or "Helper") in the New Testament Gospels.²⁰ Zina calls this advocate the "Bedside-Helper" – an "amicus curiae ... [who] advises the court...that the case before it constitutes an exception" (128). In Zina's paradigm of salvation, every being should be given an opportunity to accept the advocacy of the Bedside-Helper, regardless of whichever of Yah's laws may have broken. Her purpose in reminding Emmanuel of the Holy Spirit's aid to God's people is to dissuade him from embracing Yah's view of justice and salvation.²¹ In this, Dick once again engages in a Gnostic re-vision of the Hebrew Scriptures. Emmanuel's role in the salvation of humanity, much like Christ's role, is not to uphold the system of universal rewards and punishments that characterizes the old Law, but to usher in a new system of justice that allows for exceptions to be made on behalf of each individual. Just as Emmanuel needs Zina's help in order to come to know the truth of his existence and his purpose, humanity needs help in shedding the lies of the Demiurge and joining the Fullness of God.

Through Zina's intervention, Emmanuel begins to see that humans "are...accustomed to death ... as if death, too, were natural" and wonders "how long has it been since they knew the Garden?" (121). He starts to understand that redemption lies in an acknowledgement of the fragmented Godhead and asks Zina where he can "find for [humans] that place again" (121). He sees himself as part of God's primordial design, lamenting that he is his mother and "the dying dog and the suffering people" and even "that bright morning start too...even Belial" (78), and this epiphany helps to create pathos for humanity in his mind. He begins to realize that he is called to enlighten humanity and create a system in which both individual

²⁰ Gospel of Matthew 5.4 ; Gospel of John (14.16,26; 15.26; 16.7)

²¹ It is only in 1 John 2.1 that the word "Paraclete" is used to describe the salvific and intercessory role of Christ.

freedom and unity with the Godhead are possible for all beings, even Belial. He allows Zina to use his power to create “The Secret Commonwealth” (121), a new Garden of Eden, and permits Belial’s access to this reality and its inhabitants in order to test Zina’s assertion that, given an opportunity, human beings will strive for knowledge and truth and choose to accept the aid of a Bedside-Helper.

Emmanuel’s choice to spare Belial, then, represents the hope that order can emerge from chaos – that good can arise from evil. This hope is present in Gnosticism, Christianity, and Judaism, and it is played out in the novel in the new life of Herb, now living in the reality of The Secret Commonwealth created by Emmanuel and Zina. This new reality has been tainted by the release of Belial, and Herb cannot remember his former life on the planet CY30-CY30B or his longing to meet his once beloved Linda Fox. Yet through an unusual series of seeming coincidences, Herb is brought into contact with Linda and, upon seeing her, becomes acutely aware that this new world is a “simulation” and that “something living and intelligent and sympathetic [wants] him to know” (174). He experiences a “flash of memory” about Linda’s future success and rededicates himself to supporting her musical career (159). He wants nothing more than to make her happy and to let the whole world feel the exuberant joy of her voice (159). However, like the rest of humanity, Herb is faced with the manipulations of a divine adversary, Belial, who believes that all of creation is “a wretched thing to be despised” (228) and tries to prevent Herb and Linda from sharing their lives and dreams.

Belial’s first act against Emmanuel and Zina’s new reality begins with attempting to destroy Herb’s admiration and love for Linda by degrading her physical beauty. Deeply imbedded in Herb’s mind is an image of Linda’s physical perfection. If Herb rejects this new image of Linda in favor of the illusion he created in his mind from the past experience of listening to Linda Fox recordings on CY30-CY30B, then Belial’s attempts to corrupt humanity succeed. However, as Zina predicts, when Herb finally meets Linda in The Secret Commonwealth, he is inspired to help her career despite her dwindling physical appeal (184). He encourages her with his memory that her voice will be carried to the stars (203). The fact that Linda is no longer beautiful and that her voice is not “well-known in this world” does not

compromise his drive to help her career or destroy his admiration of her inner beauty and musical talent (209). Spurred by this failure, Belial sends a police officer – a symbol of his authority – to arrest Herb and prevent him from seeing Linda again. Fortunately, Herb is able to convince the officer both that the world is secretly ruled by the “Evil One” and that he should be freed from prison to be with Linda (210). His success here, however, causes Belial to become truly desperate, and in one final attempt to prevent Herb’s union with Linda he takes the form of a goat and kidnaps Herb. Yet, when Linda finds them and reaches out to the goat affectionately, it melts away, and the Demiurge’s destructive urges and hate for humanity no longer hold power over Linda and Herb. In this action, Linda reveals that she is Herb’s Bedside-Helper, and Herb is saved because he accepts her offer of advocacy.

The Divine Invasion takes the Gnostic stance that “when the primordial fall took place, the Godhead split into a transcendent part separated from the world” and a “female immanent part, [that] remained with the fallen world” (199). Dick’s choice to work his revision of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures into the plot of the novel and the interactions of his male and female characters coincides with Gnostic writings such as the Gospel of Truth, which describes the fragmentation of the Godhead as “a great disturbance” among jars containing God’s substance (*The Divine Invasion* 41; *The Gospel of Truth* 17-18). By becoming aware of multiple levels of reality and their significance, Herb is able to understand his past as Yah’s agent and move beyond the spiritual reward-punishment paradigm his initial role in the novel implies. Through a similar process of gnosis, Emmanuel comes to know the fragmented nature of the Godhead, and, in so doing, is able to thwart Yah’s damaging wrath. Together, all the characters in *The Divine Invasion* work to fulfill the novel’s opening promise that “the time you have waited for has come. The work is complete; the final world is here” (5), and Herb’s decision to accept Linda’s aid in the final pages of the novel is the culmination of this promise. The true will of the transcendent God is growth, hope, and salvation. As emanations and agents of God, Emmanuel and Zina bring about these things through the creation of a new reality, not through the destruction of Belial. All beings suffer from the fragmentation of the Godhead, and by observing the events of Herb’s life in *The Secret Commonwealth*,

Emmanuel comes to realize that “mutual protection” is “the real law of life” for all beings (235), not death. All beings must work together in order to dispel the forgetfulness caused by the incomprehensible nature of the transcendent God.

The Divine Invasion, in the spirit of its Gnostic predecessors, asserts that “there are invisible portions of the Torah” that will be revealed “in the Messianic Age that is to come” (99). In this age, “the Torah will again rearrange itself out of its jumbled matrix,” and God’s plan will be fully revealed and perfected (99). Dick uses the process of searching for knowledge and salvation to transform those events in the novel that are perceived as tragic or “evil,” such as Rybys’ debilitating illness, Emmanuel’s accident and subsequent brain trauma, Herb’s aloof and selfish tendencies, and even Belial’s manipulations, into steps that reveal the truth of existence and initiate reintegration of all beings into the Fullness of God. Herb’s pilgrimage toward such gnosis parallels that of Emmanuel, and together their journeys toward truth and redemption represent the union of all beings. It is this process of reunion that Zina, as the emanation of God’s wisdom, initiates. It is this process to which all beings are called to participate. The “divine invasion” is an invasion of the mind, a direct in-breaking of God into the consciousness of every being. As Sophia tells the Rhipidon Society in *VALIS*, “Man is holy, and the true god, the living god, is man himself” (198). It is through coming to fully understand this truth that all beings are saved.

The Gospel According to Philip

As it is crucial to identify a set of criteria for both Gnosticism and the Gnostic elements in Dick’s work in order to discuss *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion* as Gnostic gospels, it is equally necessary to settle on a definition of or category for “gospel.” Often times, it is easiest to begin at the most basic level. The word “gospel” is derived from the Greek verb *euangelizo* (εὐαγγελίζω, “to bring” or “announce good news”) and its noun form *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον, “message” or “proclamation”).²² According to

²² When Romanized, the Greek double-gamma is written and pronounced as “ng.”

some scholars, William Horbury in particular, its etymological development is due to the transition from the Old Testament concept of a “messenger of good news” to the New Testament concept of the “good news of God’s reign” (12). For Jewish Christians living in the first and second-centuries, written gospels were, in the broadest sense, a continuation of the Old Testament message of God’s “redemption and reign on earth” (Diehl 173). For Christians, this message came to be uniquely expressed “in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus” (173). A distinction between “the gospel of Jesus” and the “gospel about Jesus” arose, whereby gospels *of* Jesus were chronicles of Jesus’ life and ministry and gospels *about* Jesus were “the ‘good news’ preached by the early Christian Church” (Snodgrass 31).

However, not all early gospel readers and writers were uniquely or exclusively Christian, and the canonical Gospels of the New Testament are not the only gospels that emerged from the ancient world. In this, what constitutes a “gospel” becomes more than an ecclesiastical distinction; genre is of equal import. Luckily, several New Testament scholars have dedicated their research to this exploration and have attempted to draw a parallel between the canonical Gospels and other types of “gospel” literature. Robert Guelich, for example, argues that the writers of the New Testament Gospels drew from other forms of Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. The discovery of other non-biblical documents, such as the codices unearthed at Nag Hammadi, many of which have been named “gospels,” has aided such research in the gospel genre. Likewise, Clyde Votaw argues that gospel writers, drawing from their roots in Greek biography narratives, were not involved in historical chronicling but rather in “dramatic productions” that were meant to “eulogize their subjects,” teach righteousness and goodness by example, and sway political, social, and theological opinion (5). Votaw’s theory is further corroborated by Rudolf Bultmann, who claims that the New Testament Gospels reflect the fact that early Christians had discarded their present world in hopes of a better world in the future. They are not intended as historical accounts (37). Rather, they are, as C.H. Dodd points out, a part of the unified, early Christian message in “apostolic preaching” found in other biblical works such as Acts and the letters of Paul.

Scholars like N.T. Wright assert that this unified message branched into other material written in the period in the form of “sayings material,” exegetical tractates, and narrative commentaries. Many of these works, such as the Gospel of Thomas, emerged from Hellenistic and Gnostic communities living in the region and marked a “radical translation...of first-century Christianity” as a unifying theme (445). The existence of such extra-canonical documents makes it clear that limiting the definition of “gospel” in scholarship to the four canonical Gospels is too narrow of a view (Diehl 173-175). A variety of gospel literature about Jesus circulated around Asia, Africa, and Palestine during the first and second centuries C.E., and even the Gospel of Luke alludes to this by saying that “many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among [them], just as they were handed on to [them] by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word” (NRSV Lk 1.1-2).

Bernard, Guelich, and other post-modern scholars are not the first to adopt such broad definitions of gospel literature and the gospel genre. Five of the codices discovered at Nag Hammadi bear the name “gospel,” as do the Passion Gospels, the Infancy Gospels, and fragments from the Gospel of Ebionites, the Gospel of Egyptians, the Gospel of the Hebrews, and the Gospel of the Nazoreans (Funk 5). In other words, the term “gospel” has broadened in more recent scholarship to include works beyond the canonical Gospels. While current scholarship is far from complete, the trend in thinking seems to focus on determining whether or not all gospels *must* be alike in terms of origin and content in order to warrant the label “gospel.” In this endeavor, scholars have explored and heavily debated both the similarities and differences between the canonical and apocryphal gospels.

Evans suggests that the one critical difference between the New Testament Gospels and apocryphal gospels is that the canonical Gospels record and retell the resurrection event, whereas other gospels do not. The resurrection of Jesus is critical to the story in the Gospel of Mark, for example, and the events are retold and expanded in the later three canonical Gospels (Evans 145). The resurrection became a central factor of faith in the early Christian Church, as it served a central purpose in the New Testament Gospel accounts. While there are those scholars who suggest that we can never know an

author's true intent, it is fairly clear that the canonical Gospels were not written to reveal "secret knowledge" or strictly for the preservation of information. They were written for the purpose of persuading people to believe in the veracity of the message of the resurrection, and to believe in the person – Christ – behind the message (Evans 145-150). With regard to purpose and effect, the deciding difference in determining which gospels to include in the Christian Canon came down to the presence of the resurrection story (145). Otherwise, most gospel texts known to exist, both canonical and otherwise, share a similar mission – to spread the "good news" of Christ's message. Most gospels explore the truths and errors of the Hebrew Scriptures and other Judeo-Christian texts in circulation. There seems to be a mix of narrative style. Some works are traditional narratives, in both poetry and prose. Some are "sayings writings." Still others are philosophical and theological tractates. All are concerned with spiritual awakening. It makes little sense to use the unique resurrection content of four gospels to determine the necessary criteria for the genre of "gospel" in its entirety, especially when the absence of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is characteristic of many gospels and openly criticized and denied in most Gnostic gospels.

Early Christians and Gnostics were "seekers." They believed that it was far more important to seek God through all kinds of knowledge rather than to rely on the teachings of institutionalized religion or on faith. Gnostics believe that Christ's message, while salvific, does not contain all the answers – gnosis is an on-going process for all; no being but the transcendent God can know everything. For Gnostics, the answer to further revelation is introspection. The place to find God is within the Self, not in the external, objective world. The process of gnosis is bound in a cycle of time that will not be broken until all beings have awakened to the truth of their existence. Gnostics see their own teachings and writings as part of continuing divine revelation. Unlike Jewish and Christian Scriptures, which have been set apart into canons and verified through ecclesiastical processes as containing all that is needed for salvation, Gnostic scriptures remain open to new revelations and new writings. The spirit of Gnosticism, in fact, lies in subverting such systems of static belief in order to bring about true knowledge and the

reintegration of all into the Pleroma, the Fullness of God. Dick himself notes this as an element of his Gnostic writings to which he closely adheres. "I'm totally against organized religion...I believe you have a direct relation with the divine or you have no relation with the divine. It has nothing to do with faith or dogmatic creeds" (Cain n.p.).

Philip K. Dick saw himself as being a part of this process of reintegration with God. It is important to remember that Dick himself was a self-identified Gnostic²³ and a deeply contemplative man, one who recognized that his profession as a Science Fiction writer was incidental to his true Self. It is equally important to note that in *VALIS* Gnostic thought is primarily expressed on a *personal level* through the development of the characters Horselover Fat and Phil Dick, and the movement in the novel from dualism to monism back to dualism that plays out in the separation, then union, then re-separation of these two personas of the author Philip K. Dick. That both Horselover Fat and Phil Dick are, together, Philip K. Dick, is made evident in *VALIS*. In establishing that Horselover Fat and Phil Dick are the same character, Dick also establishes himself as the narrator of his own story. Phil Dick describes his experiences as an author, both mentioning that he is a Science Fiction writer by trade (12) and that he has enjoyed a margin of success in both his published works and upcoming movie deals (106-110). Phil further discusses how many of his novels, such as *Ubik* and *A Scanner Darkly*, are also extensions of his spiritual explorations. Later, he winds up having to use his influence as a Science Fiction writer to further along the Rhipidon Society's quest (144-149). These and other similarities and events that unfold for Fat and Phil Dick are none other than those that occurred in Philip K. Dick's life. Though in circumstances names and places have been changed, in many they have not. Horselover Fat's son, for example, bears the same name as Philip K. Dick's son, Christopher (*VALIS* 21; Sutin 24). Like Horselover Fat, Philip K. Dick experiences a psychotic breakdown due to a close friend's suicide in 1971 (*VALIS* 11; Sutin 23). Like Phil Dick, Philip K. Dick had dental surgery and ordered prescription medication to be delivered to

²³ "Confessions Of A SF Artist." An interview with Philip K. Dick by George Cain and Dana Longo. *Denver Clarion*, October 23, 1980.

his home (*VALIS* 45; Sutin 36). He also noticed the delivery girl's Christian fish symbol necklace and experienced the first in a series of visions from a living intelligence system in the form of a pink light in 1974 (*VALIS* 45; 36-40). We know these things not only from various biographies on Philip K. Dick but also from Dick himself in his *Exegesis* and in interviews, such as his interview with George Cain and Dana Longo in which he states that *VALIS* is "very autobiographical" (Cain n.p.). The relationship between Philip K. Dick, Horselover Fat, and Phil Dick, then, seems to relate to the Gnostic idea that the divided state of the Pleroma is in itself representative of the divide in human existence (and the human mind). In this, Philip K. Dick seems to be attempting to come to terms with both himself and God. Both the plot of *VALIS* and the excerpts from Dick's *Exegesis* contained within it reveal Dick's yearning for psychological wholeness and sanity, and he believes that he can achieve these things through understanding the knowledge revealed to him in his direct experiences with God.

The same is true for Dick's purpose in writing *The Divine Invasion*, only instead of focusing upon healing his fractured Self, he fleshes out his developing theology in the form of a biblical narrative in order to come to terms with the cosmological understanding he has gained through his experiences with *VALIS*. Re-visioning the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures is a practice that dates back to some of the earliest Gnostic writings, and the Gnostic exegesis is, at its most basic level, steeped in this practice (Jonas 325). Narrative allegory is often the approach, and Dick's Gnostic exposition on Hebrew and Christian texts in *The Divine Invasion* is most clear. Moreover, in writing his narrative vision, Dick also revisits many features of Gnostic thought that he touched upon in *VALIS*, such as the radical dualism of spirit and matter, the fragmentation of the transcendent Godhead, and the creation of the cosmos by lesser powers. Dick narratively retells the biblical events of Exodus and the New Testament Gospels and frames them within traditional Gnostic cosmology. He works through the Gnostic process of receiving true gnosis through divine revelation in *VALIS* and continues to search for enlightenment through revising the Scriptures in *The Divine Invasion*.

In both novels, Dick makes use of his understanding of Gnosticism as a means of coming to terms not only with the state of his existence but also his direct experience with an intelligence he comes to understand as God. *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion* are not simply stories of fiction²⁴ but the narrative chronicling of Philip K. Dick's process of gnosis, an approach not only identified in modern scholarship as integral to the Gnostic exegesis but also widely practiced in ancient Gnostic writings.²⁵ From these events until his death, Dick chronicled his spiritual awakening in his fictional works. Dick's novel *Ubik* and his work in his *Exegesis* signal a shift in Dick's interests as a writer (Sutin 54). Before *Ubik*, Dick's central focus as a writer seemed to be entropy and withdrawal. *Ubik*, however, focuses heavily on renewal and redemption as do many of his works published thereafter (Sutin 55). Since 1974, Dick's novels have been a kind of shorthand for his journey to salvation. In this way, Dick's career then "comes to resemble the layout of T.S. Eliot's modernist masterpiece, *The Waste Land*, wherein Eliot first catalogs the numerous ways the landscape has been made lifeless, dull, and dead, before ending with a meditation on rejuvenation through love and empathy" (Sutin 73). In other words, for Dick, writing novels after his experience with God in 1974 became more than just sharing a story or peddling prose for sale; Dick was trying to spread the "good news" that he had been given.

Of course, many would argue that because Dick was a paranoid schizophrenic, his visions were likely not genuine. However, Dick's psychological health is irrelevant in terms of determining whether or not his work is Gnostic. All that matters is that *Dick* believed what he saw was real – and he did. His religious experiences not only became the subject of many of his literary works but also the focus of many of his interviews, and he continually defended the authenticity of his visions. In an interview with Daniel DePerez, for example, Dick is quoted as saying that he has "experienced very powerful religious experiences...that do not fit the doctrines of the Church, particularly. Yet [he] will stick by them as

²⁴ It seems important to note that the only criteria for which I claim that *VALIS* is Science Fiction is by virtue of the fact that Dick is, by trade, a Science Fiction writer and most of his works are categorized as such. Many scholars would disagree with such a categorization based on a variety of criteria used to determine what Science Fiction is, but my purpose is not to delve into these matters, only to set Dick's work apart from literary works of a similar type.

²⁵ Out of the codices recovered at Nag Hammadi, for example, only a handful of them are "sayings" writings (like the Gospel of Thomas) or exclusively philosophical expositions.

authentic” (DePerez n.p.). In an interview with George Cain and Dana Longo, he expressed similar sentiments, claiming that he was “contacted by supernatural beings who...told [him] about [the] savior” (Cain n.p.). Still, whether or not Dick really glimpsed something ineffable in 1974 changes little in interpreting his works as Gnostic gospels.²⁶ After all, in terms of empirical means, there is no way of knowing whether or not the divinely revealed visions *any* of those who claim to have had them are genuine; believing in the truth of such visions is a matter of faith. Dick intended for these novels to be “gospels” – his Gnostic gospels – and believed in his authority to do so as a Gnostic who had seen the truth of things.

Further Exploration

If Gnostics believe anything, it is that there is always more to learn, and a close reading of Dick’s final novel, *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*, is well suited for further exploration into Dick’s Gnosticism. Told from the perspective of Angel Archer, Dick’s only female protagonist, it details the pilgrimage of her father-in-law, Bishop Timothy Archer, to the Dead Sea desert to find out whether or not the people of the Qumran community had been given secret knowledge. In the novel, much of Dick’s Gnosticism is revealed through Timothy Archer’s speculations on Christ’s role as the savior of humanity and his investigations into the possibilities of facilitating gnosis through the use of psychedelic and hallucinogenic drugs (such as amanitas mushrooms). This is not the first of Dick’s investigations into Gnostic mysticism. In *The Man in the High Castle*, for example, art is portrayed a catalyst for gnosis, and in *Ubik* the mysterious Ubik spray is a mode to truth and can initiate an encounter with God for those who believe it can.

Additional research into the implications of categorizing Dick’s Gnostic works as Science Fiction could enrich the intellectual space that exists between the literary worlds of religious literature and Science Fiction. This could be carried further into exploring the historical and philosophical co-evolution

²⁶ Admittedly, this does not invalidate religious or scholastic inquiry into whether or not Dick’s visions were actually real or if he was genuinely touched by God. It only means that viewing *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion* as religious literature is not dependent upon Dick’s visions being real.

of Science Fiction, religion, and human intellect. The works of Philip K. Dick and other Gnostic thinkers might prove useful in this endeavor. Dick's worlds and stories are full of fun Sci-Fi explorations into the realms of knowledge and belief. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* stands out as a prime example. One of the chief issues explored in the novel concerns what it means to be human. For the characters in Dick's story, singling out the attributes that define and separate human beings from other life-forms becomes the means by which their beliefs are tested. The consciousness of the android initiates a novel-long conversation about what significance, if any, such defining and separating has in the human understanding of humanity. Mercerism, an amalgamation of Gnosticism and Christianity, emerges as the singular religion in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and supports the widely accepted belief that only human beings value living things. The idea that the capacity for genuine empathy – not intelligence or logic – is what separates human from non-human prevails in the minds of many of the novel's characters through their adherence to Mercerism, despite evidence to the contrary. Yet, in the same token, Mercerism does tap into a fundamental truth – that all beings are connected – and its main tenants concerning the shared experience of pain, suffering, death, and rebirth prove necessary in the salvation of the novel's protagonist.

Dick's tendency to use advances in technology, such as androids, cryogenic sleep, miracle drugs, and satellites in outer space as springboards for philosophical and theological inquiry could present further implications for areas of interest in religious studies, such as exploring the religious implications of human life extension and related medical and technological advances. Herb Asher, for example, spends the bulk of *The Divine Invasion* in a type of cryonic suspension, physically dead but able to access his memories. Joe Chip, the protagonist of *Ubik*, is also dead but is kept in "cold-pac" and is able to communicate with the living and actively participate in the novel's plot. *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* is based in a world where hallucinogenic drugs can be used to induce virtual realities and allow characters to build themselves up into godlike figures that are able to transcend death. *Eye in the Sky* uses a malfunctioning particle accelerator to launch the novel into an exploration of the twisted realities of its

unconscious main characters and a discussion of the religious, social, and political views each character seems to represent.

Dick's novels and short stories offer many of the qualities and virtues found in other works of literary value. From the vantage point of scientifically advanced futures and alternate realities, both Dick and his readers are able to explore ideas and issues relevant to the present in settings removed from the present which, in turn, frees them from social and cultural restraints. Dick's works often act as a forum for nearly all venues of social commentary and provide places for dialogue about the evolution of humanity – the past, present, and future – reflected in our actions today. The truth is that science and technology have become crucial to human evolution and have been an inseparable part of the modern and post-modern human experience. Science and technology will likely continue to be a part of the human experience. Yet, religion and religiosity among the human population have been a present force throughout the world since the advent of human societies, and religious belief is likely going to continue influencing and impacting human beings for a long time to come. Dick's works represent a melding of the two and will continue to prove useful in understanding and evaluating the condition of the modern human. There is a wealth of knowledge waiting for those open to pursuing it – as Dick knew well.

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