

Ethan Goss

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Gnosticism, an early heretical sect of Christianity, believed that the material world was created through either ignorance or malice, and that humans were divine souls trapped within cages of flesh. Their name derives from *gnosis*, or knowledge, due to the saving power that the knowledge of reality's true form gave the believer. Christ, for the Gnostics, delivered the secret knowledge, providing the opportunity for the few believers to save themselves.

While Gnosticism has all but died out, the trend of raising the spiritual above the material has continued as a trend in Christian theology from St. Augustine of Hippo onward. Even today, commonly held beliefs on the afterlife and the death and resurrection of Christ come not from Biblical sources, but from neo-Gnostic theology. By demonizing the physical, material world, Gnostic theology removes the call for social justice and environmental stewardship so key to authentic biblical Christianity.

Theories on the origins and theology of the Gnostics, as proposed by leading experts in the field of Gnostic Christianity, are synthesized and combined with an original exploration of the potential harm caused by neo-Gnostic thought within modern Christian theology.