

Ancient Gnosticism

Introduction

The historical perspectives pre-empt on the dual existence of the Western Culture. These twin beliefs include the Greek rationality and the biblical faith from the Hebrew culture. The Greeks traditions were embedded on the individual rationality of the mind mainly from scientific research (Goodrick-Clarke, 2008, p. 27). The Hebrew traditions, on the other hand, inclined to the authoritative divine revelations as enshrined in the biblical scriptures. Therefore, the two traditions in the ancient period provided the benchmarks for the cultural development. Thus, there were selected groups of people who firmly believed on Faith while some based their cultural beliefs and practice on reason.

However, in the wake of the first centuries to date, a third component of the Western Culture has emerged. The third current of the Western Culture is unique to its kind. It contradicts both the doctrinal faith and the pure rationality of mind (Rüpke, 2011, p. 47). The new wave tradition is based on the two pillars of Gnosticism and Hermeticism. The culture stresses on the benefits of inner enlightenment (Gnosis) and the perspective of God. In the antiquity, the new wave tradition is explained in the beliefs of the Gnostics and Hermetists, Christian sects of the ancient religion.

The preceding discussions delve on the in-depth study of the Ancient Gnosticism and Hermeticism beliefs. The historical perspective of the beliefs and teachings of the pre-Christian era represent the genesis of the study. Specifically, Gnostic and Hermetic Sects from the antiquity would be the basis for the discussion.

Ancient Gnosticism

The revolution of ancient religion faced a myriad of challenges. The religious beliefs and practices encountered contradictions about Deity. Moreover, several heresies and teachings emerged to dispel religious myths that threatened the stability of the ancient Church (Goodrick-Clarke, 2008, p. 22-56). Gnosticism that portrays a religious and philosophical movement commenced in the early Christian period.

Specifically, the teaching focuses on Gnosis. The latter is a Greek word referring to knowledge (Pearson, 2007, p. 39). Therefore, Gnosticism as a movement denotes not only relational but also experiential knowledge about God. In addition to this, the teachings in the sect account for the Divine nature of Deity and spiritual attachment to humankind. The believers of the Gnosticism are known as Gnostics.

The Gnostics considers their belief to God as unique. The sect argues that they have secret knowledge of Deity, humanity, and the whole universe which populations from other unknown beliefs. In the first Centaury, Gnosticism has emerged as one of the three top religious belief systems in the pre-Christian era. Contrary to other religious beliefs and practices, Gnosticism embraced four major values (Pearson, 2007, p. 46). The religion had unusual beliefs about Gods, Bible, as well as the universe that differ from the other two religious beliefs. Gnosticism embraces religious tolerance of faiths both inside and outside the religion. Moreover, they acknowledged the equality of both the male and female gender and therefore did not discriminate on women. Ultimately, Gnostics believed in salvation, and that one achieves the latter in the process of acquiring experiential and rational knowledge.

Ancient Gnosticism is based on two themes. The first topic explores the dualism providing divisions of the world into conflicting aspects of right and wrong. Gnosticism holds

negative views concerning the world and God as the creator. Accordingly, the traditions of the belief argue that the world and the creator are evil. However, the faith provides hope to humanity by acknowledging the presence of another god other than the creator considered evil. The True God as reiterated by the faith planted a divine spark to save humankind through Gnosis.

The second theme of Ancient Gnosticism explores the process of Gnosis. It denotes the direct as well as mystical knowledge of Deity within the self (Lewis, 2013, p. 76). Briefly, the argument accounts that an individual achieves Gnosis in a personal effort and not by intermediaries such as scriptures, sacrament, or priest craft. Salvation is therefore born by the individual, not by the support of religious leaders as other beliefs purport it.

Gnosticism is associated closely with the sect of the late Roman Empire. Moreover, the belief extends from Rome passing through Egypt and final lands to the Middle East. These sects are remembered through their increasing efforts of criticizing the Church heresiologists and theologians (Lewis, 2013, p. 109). Furthermore, the teachings of Gnosis are considered to increase the gap of social alienation, the breakdown of the kinship system, and the dominance of large empires over the ethnic minority groups. Economic deprivation and the burden to state religion emerge as some of the concerns raised about the sect.

Gnosis has faced serious allegations and controversies regarding its teachings and beliefs. Therefore, it has met oppositions not only from other religious denominations but also from the political front. The Catholic heresy missionaries and the Roman Army challenged the teachings and beliefs of the movement by the end of the fifth century. However, the belief of the faith currently experiences a gradual renaissance in Egypt. One of the Gnostic confidence in the modern era is the *Novus Spirits*. The faith has extended its roots from Egypt and currently runs churches in San Jose and Las Vegas. *Novus Spirit* is the modern Gnosis. The belief started its

existence in the 1940s, and then continued to grow up to date. The belief has also encountered gradual changes and growth across various generational periods (Rüpke, 2011, p. 81). In April 1986, Sylvia Browne founded the Gnostic Christian Church. As the first church service of the faith was held on 12th July 1986, the faith has been in existence over the past 7200 years.

The Faith holds on various beliefs. First, the Church holds values on the reincarnations. The Church also believes in the dual existence of God as both masculine and feminine. Furthermore, the faith explains the tenets by which people can devote their souls to God as they live in the universe considered evil. Peculiar to other Christian beliefs, the Gnostic sect does not believe in sin or the existence of hell. Surprisingly, Gnostic churches do not recognize incarnation and the belief that Jesus Christ suffered for the redemption of man from sins. Indeed, Gnostic sect considers Jesus as human Messiah and that His living lays the foundation of an example that humankind should practice (Lewis, 2013, p. 136). The belief of the sect members is the existence of an all-merciful and benevolent God who manifests to the man through the prayer. In addition to this, Gnostics illustrates that the Holy Spirit is a God presented to humanity in order to enhance the spiritual conditions while evil spirits distract. Hence, the spirit of a righteous man who abides by the commandments of God enjoys an eternal life.

Hermeticism

As opposed to Gnosticism, Hermeticism sect does not have numerous controversies. Hermeticism denotes to the belief of the writings of Hermes Trismegistus of the ancient Egypt (Tilton, 2009, p. 108). Therefore, followers of the Hermeticism are known as Hermeticists.

Hermes Trismegistus is considered to be one of the ancient wisest and holiest men. His position equates to Moses or Plato. Hermetic literary work is vast and includes theology, cosmology, magic, as well as mysticism. Ancient Scholars, therefore, embraced Hermeticism

and appreciated its antiquity (Paganini, 2010, p. 17). What is more, Hermetic writings of the second and third centuries have inspired a lot to the renaissance of ancient theologians.

In 1610, Isaac Causabon, who was a Spanish scholar, was considered the first person to criticize the works of Hermes. In his view, the literary works of Hermes were from Greek and not Egypt as it was engraved in his books. Moreover, Causabon argued that Hermeticism belief was the development of both the intellectual and spiritual values of the Gnosticism (Hammer & Stuckrad, 2007, p. 61). The perspective of Causabon demeaned the works of Hermes and therefore Hermetic Philosophy disappeared from the public belief.

The renaissance of the late 15th Century uncovered the Hermetic Philosophy. It spread in the entire Europe up to the period of 16th and middle of 17th Century when it was accepted for the practice. The Hermeticist tradition explores the context of belief in the aspect of miracles and magical beliefs. Moreover, alchemy has also dominated the Hermeticism. The illustrations in the book explore the prophetic myths and the alchemical transformations together with the extraordinary nature of their occurrences (Hancock & Bauval, 2011, p. 71). Hermes asserts that the mystical phenomenon of the universe and the creatures have been found in the world. His works coincided to those of the Christian teachings and the alchemical changes in the world that lacked religious explanations. Hermes, therefore, is considered as the father of all the Theologians, Alchemists, and Magicians (Hammer & Stuckrad, 2007, p. 83). Hermeticism is the backbone of the modern theology, magic, and alchemy as it dispels the myths behind the occurrences of various events. The works of Hermes are believed to be similar to those of the Old Testament prophets who foresaw the events. According to Hermes, magic arises when the Spirit of God merges with that of man. The unity is achieved in the belief of God through His Son Jesus Christ who is the master of all magic in the Gospel.

Hermes is also considered to be the legendary inventor of all the arts and science. However, the illusion of the invention is symbolic of his unity of all the philosophical and mythical thoughts of the universe (Paganini, 2010, p. 30). Besides, Hermeticism is rooted in the symbolic unity of the Deity, human and the world.

The spread of the Hermetic philosophy has led to the development of the Western Esotericism. The latter was premised on the organic perspective of the world and the relationship between the spiritual and material components present in the universe. It, therefore, has assessed the scientific mechanization and the doctrinal beliefs that have led to the Reformation of the ancient Church.

In the 18th Century, the Counter-Reformation of the Old Church made a strong emphasis on the teachings of the Hermetic Philosophy. Specifically, associations of the lessons with magic, alchemy, and astrology created confusion between the religion and the science (Tilton, 2009, p. 109). The rationality in thought as occasioned by Enlightenment meant that scientific activities were considered backward and religious practices suspected.

Despite all the claims associated with Hermetic philosophy between the religion and the science, Hermeticism thrived and persisted in the current practices through Rosicrucianism and the Christian theosophy (Paganini, 2010, p. 74). Likewise, Hermeticism philosophy and practices occur in the secret religious sects such as the Freemasonry.

Conclusion

The different aspect of the humanity and universe has created disappointments. With the enlightenment, humanity is at crossroads on whether to follow the traditional religion or adopt the rationalism of the scientific studies. Conversely, the Gnosticism and the Hermeticism teachings dispel the myth to us. The study provides a reflection of man's traditional practices and

compares them with the current teachings to develop the New Age Thinking. The cultural and religious practices suspected at that time are therefore assessed on the literary works of scholars (Hancock & Bauval, 2011, p. 153). Therefore, the Gnosticism and Hermeticism studies provide a link between the Christian theology and the Enlightenment rationality of the current world. Nonetheless, the historical teachings are anticipated to solve the battle between the doctrinal teachings and the scientific enlightenment that commenced two decades ago.