

19. Freke, Timothy and Peter Gandy, *Jesus and the Lost Goddess: The Secret Teachings of the Original Christians* (Three Rivers Press 2001)

NOTE: these paragraphs are a version of what is on the main page on this topic, it was another attempt at digesting this book. Since this book is what touched off the inferno causing me to read all the others listed here again or for the first time, there is no sense listing references to the other reviewed books in this list here, but in the other reviews I do occasional refer back to Freke and Gandy, which means either or both items # 18 and # 19.

It hit me when reading this book that what had been just irritating in their previous book was now really offending me: and that is the absolute insistence that the life of Jesus Christ was invented to re-tell and illustrate in detail a Gnostic myth that had ben told and was being told in many places and times using many different mythic characters' lives. The detailing of contradictions in the Gospels was illuminating, I never knew there were that many serious contradictions, but to me these things did not mean there never was a Jesus, they simply meant that the accounts were not reliable in terms of details. They were life stories written for specific purposes and audiences.

I was quite willing to accept that the anti-Pharisee Jesus of the New testament was a later development, and was intrigued by the idea that Jesus was a Pharisee. I was quite intrigued also by the idea that Paul was a Gnostic. This idea was not original with these authors, but has been given fresh impetus and insight by their startling (to me) re-translations of sections taken from the Pauline letters.

Did I believe then, that Paul the Gnostic invented Christianity, and that the original Christians were in fact the

Gnostics whose Gospels we now have in English translation? No, not at all. I think that case is quite selectively and self-servingly made and is simply not how it was at all. But I did enjoy re-reading the Gnostic materials cited and used to make their case for Christian spirituality being something very different from what is taught in modern, normative Christianity. I am a Gnostic at heart, so I tend to see value in the matters brought to our attention by Freke and Gandy, even though I don't agree with everything I read in the Gnostics' writings.

I was again offended, over and over, by the idea that the literalist Christians were the bad guys who persecuted and killed the good guys, the Gnostics, who were the true pious Christians who lived for the spirit. If it had just not come to pass this way the world would now be a better place and humanity would be spiritually much more mature. There was persecution of Gnostics by Christians, but not at the time of interest which is the first hundred years after the death of Christ. As to the human race having been robbed of a spirituality it badly needed, this is 'what if' type speculation and though I generally like and identify with some of the Gnostics' teachings, it is poppycock, in my opinion. Gnosticism with its demands on individual intellectual and spiritual prowess would never be able to be the religion to enthuse and enlighten the masses. It is a faith that will always be the faith of the few.

If there is a bell-curve distribution of degree of spiritual and intellectual hunger in the human race, it is in the tails of that distribution, meaning a minority, that those are found who seriously seek after the type of knowledge being taught by the Gnostics and their spiritual and philosophical compatriots. The very fact that Freke and Gandy need to make what is historically fuzzy and debatable into concrete fact shows what it takes to make the Gnostic mish-mash of ideas into

something palatable to the masses. The very fact they need to cherry-pick through Gnostic ideas to formulate a new, self-consistent spirituality in the name of the original, pure Christian religion again illustrates this same point. The vast majority of humans will not be attracted to a religion that is void of a solid historical setting and tells a simple, straightforward, internally consistent truth that can be both readily understood and accepted. Freke and Gandy are doing what they shrewdly and correctly observe the writers of the Gospels doing, they are revising history to sell a new spiritual tradition.

So, after I got done being offended by the absolute certainty of there never having been a Jesus, and by the certainty of the Gnostics having been the original Christians in the beginning chapters of the book, why did I go on and read the whole thing? Because that original set of offenses was written in a way that made me want to read on, these authors write very, very well! And then I also began to become delighted with the main thrust of the book: outlining and teaching a new Christian spirituality. Is it really a restoration of the original Christian spirituality? No. But that doesn't mean I don't like it or think it has no value. I liked it and found it valuable to read and contemplate the materials presented even though I rejected the historical structures into which it was cast.