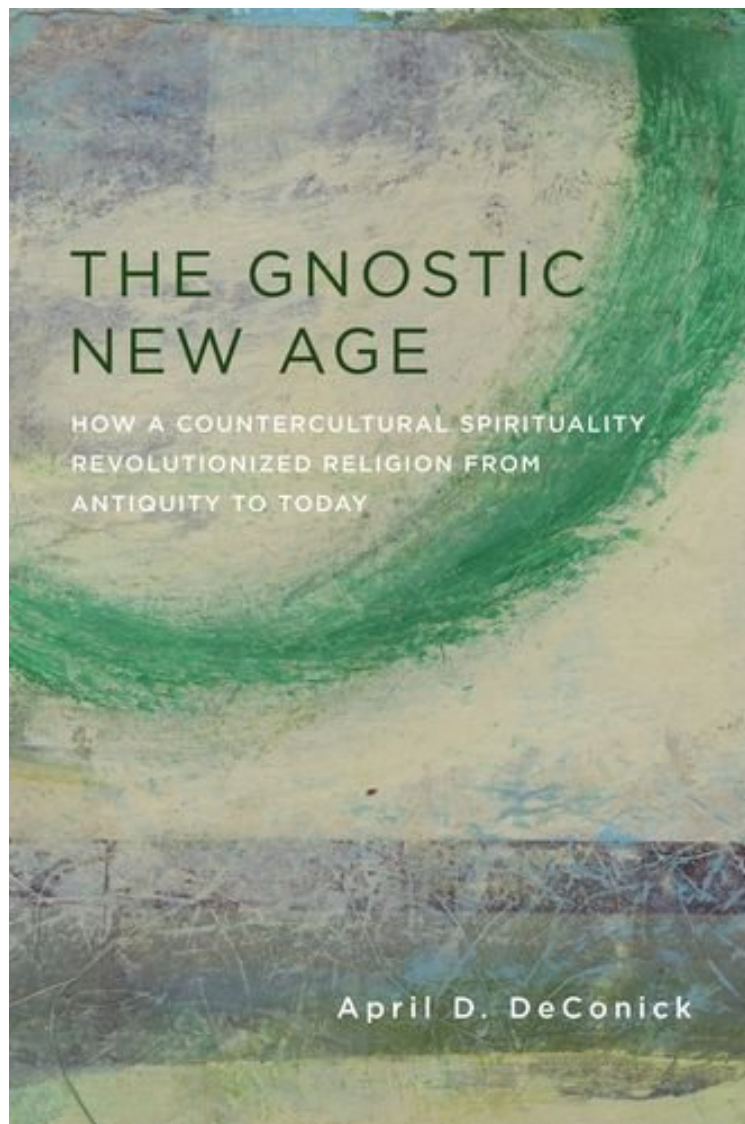


(Download) The Gnostic New Age: How a Countercultural Spirituality Revolutionized Religion from Antiquity to Today

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April DeConick

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April DeConick : The Gnostic New Age: How a Countercultural Spirituality Revolutionized Religion from Antiquity to Today before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Gnostic New Age: How a Countercultural Spirituality Revolutionized Religion from Antiquity to Today:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Experience and Its Interpretation By Rafi Simonton I agree with the academic reviewer L.O. that Gnostic studies no longer approach the subject assuming that it is simply Christian heresy. Gone are the days when the epithet "Manichaeism" was used to dismiss the writing of other scholars with whom one disagreed. I also agree that Gnostic interpretations present a hermeneutic challenge; no longer can traditional religious definitions be assumed as automatically authoritative. And yes, many of us who have waded through the shallowness of much New Age writing cringe at the term. But notice the qualifier is Gnostic, that the deeper end of the New Age pool starts with experience and backs that up with extensive research, in particular reading accounts of the Gnostic gospels. Which DeConick discusses in detail as a growing postmodern phenomenon. Where I disagree is with L.O.'s remark that "Gnosis is a perennial tradition." Perennialism is the assumption that all religions are just different paths to the same eternal truth. Maybe. But you'd have to be there already to judge for sure. Besides, DeConick says on p. 351 "Rather than indulging in the perennialist view that all religions are expressions of the same God, which leaves us with no ability to assess the truth claims of various religions, the transtheistic Gnostic experience encourages critique of religions as human constructions." By definition, this is something new. Per DeConick, it was unprecedented in the ancient world, and while its current forms draw on antecedents, they are creative expressions of contemporary culture. That critique business gets difficult when it's your own beliefs and prejudices. The reviewer J.W. brings in "evidence" based on the dubious claims of one archeologist (yes, I've read him.) But I've also read hundreds of books, both academic and popular, on the Gnostics, the history of western esotericism, the occult, kabbalah, Hermeticism, etc. The usual countercultural stuff. Plus I've also read detailed histories of early Christianity, the Ecumenical Councils, the doctrines of the Roman Catholic church and those of the Eastern Orthodox church, the writings of mystical Christians, etc. Not all of that is propaganda. As for the hypothetical connection between initiations of the ancient mystery religions and psychedelics, maybe. I say that as someone who is not merely some academic brain. I have had intense mystical and gnostic experiences for more than 50 years and therefore speak directly from them. I have also done several psychedelics and I do think these operate to shut down that Huxleyan reducing valve so as to allow glimpses of alternate realities. I agree with DeConick that the Gnostic viewpoint is we have potentials within. But whatever the source or trigger, it takes effort to live out the experiences and to develop the vocabulary make them comprehensible to others. Academic writing is the disciplined approach for making sense of the raw data of spiritual experience. They can stand back and observe what we caught up in what DeConick calls "rapture" cannot see objectively. Sure, I certainly agree with J.W. that there is a real need for how-to's, for writing about how to access alternative spaces. However, that's up to us who have been there. Whatever we can use to understand and to interpret the territory is valuable. Which is why I totally recommend reading DeConick. A final point. One that demonstrates how reading can reshape one's own ideas. In this book, DeConick is implicitly debating with other academics who write about Gnosticism. I have in mind Karen King's book, What Is Gnosticism? King argues, persuasively I'd say, that the term "Gnostic" should be dropped because it was not used by those so described and because it refers to such widely diverse groups that it becomes meaningless. The main source for it in academia was its traditional use as a blanket pejorative. But DeConick wants us to rethink this issue. It's rather like how we use the term "fundamentalism." Which describes a certain frame of mind found across religions, but not limited to any one of them. Nor, for that matter, all there is to any of them. Similarly, she insists, "Gnostic" is an outlook that cannot be restricted to ancient Alexandrian Jews, or Hermeticists, or Christians, or Mesopotamian origins. In fact, it is a mind set that is on the increase currently and the term "Gnostic" is an appropriate way to describe this. I'm convinced. Guess this makes me a postmodern Gnostic Christian. One quite sympathetic to the increasing numbers of millennial SNRs, "spiritual but not religious."

Rafi Simonton 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The book DeConick fans had been waiting for By D. R. Fernandez Finally, the great book April DeConick kept us waiting for. Written for the lay public, it succeeds when it ends every chapter explaining a film where gnostic ideas have been used, perhaps unknowingly to their participants, and it also succeeds in explaining why Gnosticism can be considered an approximation to religion, the one most opposed to fanaticism, and why the trend in scholarship against the term Gnosticism is wrong in her opinion. The book explains how the ideas of gnosticism show their influence in today's America, for example in our growing preference for spirituality outside organized churches, uses psychology accessible to everyone to explain gnostic rites, and shows the author's view that even books in the Bible, like the gospel of John, contain gnostic elements and 1 John was written to combat those views. If you like to read about Gnosticism and have already read some books about it, this one is definitely worth it.

3 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A solid hit but hardly a home run By James A. Woolsey When I heard April DeConick interviewed on Aeon Bytes gnostic podcast, Abraxas (Miguel Conner) was so excited to have her on the show. So I bought the book at once, ever hoping for some new nugget of information. Alas, this is yet another book within the academic stable, but it does stake out the ground that we have been mistaken to define Gnosticism by what its enemies (Catholicism as the new emerging retooled Roman religion) had to say, or to even assume it was a form of Christianity. Academics box themselves in by agreeing to only use what is discoverable as texts. Thus they can read again and again the Gnostics had some methodology of entering visionary states of worlds other than, or above this one (the prisons of human cultural constructs for the most part), but because the methods were concealed from the non-initiate, all we get out of academia

is more words which cannot decode the terminology of the initiate, nor lead us into understanding by experience of it. This may please academics who play their little Scrabble game of laying down one more square, one more letter, but that letter is a lifeless symbol that cannot ever convey what the Sacred Meal tasted like. Academics are like people looking through the plate glass windows at diners within a restaurant, discussing what the diners within must be tasting, even though such is NON-VERBAL, and all the books and tomes in all the libraries of men in their abstractions and mentalizations can never decode!! Can you tell someone who has never had sugar what sweet means. So if you want to know by experience what the F** these gnostics were after, what they wanted to know in themselves, you will have to make a leap of faith by inference. I find it ironic that Deconick sees the connection between Gnostics who stepped outside of tradition, and the New Age spiritual movement, saying on p. 17 "Religious seekers in both time periods use whatever resources are at hand to construct their ideas and practices, including scriptures, philosophy, magic, astrology, science, and references to alien or multiworlds." But she entirely leaves out the KEY importance of the use of psychedelic drugs which are what engendered the insights and experiences that drove those new "epoptae" to try and find explanations or analogies in Deconick's edited list. Could she really be that blind? On p. 312 she compares Mani to Joseph Smith. Does she understand that Smith like his father was an herbalist taught by native Indians, and that his church got off the ground because it attracted people eager to have direct experience of God just like the prophets did (and no one today does); and Smith provided psychoactive drink? (this led to some messy scenes which upset the "straight" public, who encouraged Smith and his group to move on!). The ancient world was awash in the use of psychedelics and drugs such as opium, and Mystery Schools employed them. But more than that, Athenian culture was developed in the drinking parties called Symposiums, where men laying about on couches were served what they called mixed wine, watered down 10 to 1 or more (see works of Carl Ruck classics scholar). They even said drinking the wine neat could kill you. Now who today thinks reasonably that wine diluted with this much water can get a buzz on? Ridiculous. The Greeks added herbs, psychoactive plants known well of from the Dionysian old countryside wisdom, mixes that could drive the Maenad followers of Dionysus into ecstasy, or if too much, oops!, frenzies. In the Symposium the game was to get your high on to the point of sparkling wit, the unbinding of categorical thinking, what M. Hoffman at egodeath.com calls loose cog, a state of poetic reverie where new insights and connections are intuited, and then put into rational language. Grecian culture was constructed on both entheogenic initiation at Eleusis, and in the loose-cog Symposium, where the wisdom of the gods was channeled, to use a term academics find anathema to their dependence on texts that can only reify the non-verbal gnosis. After Alexander united the ancient world in an earlier incarnation of the Internet (network allowing all cultures to interchange data), there was an exploration and blending of cultural memes in think tanks such as Alexandria. And from such confluences sprung Mystery Schools 2.0, Hermeticism, a restatement of the common threads, but with the intention make it fresh, and real to experience. Speaking of relying on texts, the reader is encouraged to visit John Bartrams Origins of Christianity site. For here we find that the actual amount of texts are few, many are later forgeries by Christian Roman monks inventing their own backstory. There is no evidence of Jesus, Christ, Christianity or Christians until after the end of the Western Roman Empire. The whole, claimed history for Christianity is late, first appearing - according to the accepted dates - in the 6th century, though the actual date may be as late as the 8th century (in response to the Arab Conquests). The original New Testament (codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus) is not Christian - it makes no mention of Jesus or Christ, and one of its books - The Shepherd of Hermas - was later removed. "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Chrest." (Mark 8:29, Codex Sinaiticus) But what we do find is reference to the good man or chrest a term going back centuries before. In the syncretism that Alexander brought on, Hellenistic streams from Greek Mystery Schools (Eleusinian rebirth rites of Demeter) mixed with Egyptian rebirth rites of Osiris, in the time of Cleopatra, she of Grecian Ptolemaic lineage who embraced also the Egyptian Mysteries. Plus other cultural versions of the rebirthing god. This was presented as an updated Heros Journey, the story of the Good Shepherd who is a chrestos. Upper crust Romans no longer bought into the old stories of their gods, and when Cleopatra joined forces with Julius Caesar, they spread this new synthesis among the Roman elite to tie them together as a cult and secret society; but also as their own internal urge to find something real; and, a naturally for the elite, for their own person apotheosis rising above the masses to become gods. Hence thereafter, you find Rome leaving the Republic, Caesar being deified, and his adopted son Augustus moving the Republic into the new era of Empire. Their title of Pontifex Maximus being later adopted by the Pope. The deification of Julius Caesar and its rites became the Catholic Stations of the Cross (which do not appear in the Bible!) According to Bartram, there is NO textual evidence of a Jesus for centuries, but rather references to one Chrestos, or his symbol IS. Roman Christian scholars chose to (preferentially to their cause) interpret this as Christ, as a version of the Chi Rho, but Chi Rho was used much earlier also, and is part of this earlier hermetic stream. Just in the same way they pretend Gnostics are deviant Christians. We all know that Chrest is often meant as 'Good', or something useful; but it became associated in sacred texts with the Chi-Rho, itself derivative of the Ankh and thus Ancient Egyptian, magical resurrection; Chrest appears in the New Testament as a title for IS, known later as Jesus, and then is altered to read Christ, understood as messiah. This is one more nail in the coffin of the idea that Gnostics are a form of Christianity, because said Christianity cannot be shown to have even existed, if you confine yourself to the scraps of text that survive. Another recent book from Academia is Brown Browns The Psychedelic

Gospels
The Psychedelic Gospels: The Secret History of Hallucinogens in Christianity which at least makes a substantive case for the use of the psychedelic Communion Cup showing many of the illustrations of mushrooms in early Christianity. If the reader wants to go beyond a leap of faith as I and many other magic Christians have, then go beyond listening to the dead-letter interpretations of priests who insert themselves as gatekeepers between you and direct experience. Seek out the mixed wine that reveals that heaven is not some realm beyond this life, but is a greater reality we are embedded in, even now. Not only are we enveloped in the Plenum Field of the All [G*D the Good] but we are fruits on that Tree, a product of the confluence of the Union of the Upper and Lower worlds, and thus as fruits we contain the Seeds of the UR-light. We are a fractally produced microcosm of the Process, and said Seed of Light within can be watered with devotion, feed with Sacred Meals (you fill in the blanks), and this still small Voice will be amplified until we hear the Self within, which is in resonance with the Great Self without speaking to us. We surrender to the Flow because we are an eddy within the Flow, and why be alienated from the Source of our life? The feeling of Flow is pleasure, and the feeling of high Flow is bliss.

Gnosticism is a countercultural spirituality that forever changed the practice of Christianity. Before it emerged in the second century, passage to the afterlife required obedience to God and king. Gnosticism proposed that human beings were manifestations of the divine, unsettling the hierarchical foundations of the ancient world. Subversive and revolutionary, Gnostics taught that prayer and mediation could bring human beings into an ecstatic spiritual union with a transcendent deity. This mystical strain affected not just Christianity but many other religions, and it characterizes our understanding of the purpose and meaning of religion today. In *The Gnostic New Age*, April D. DeConick recovers this vibrant underground history to prove that Gnosticism was not suppressed or defeated by the Catholic Church long ago, nor was the movement a fabrication to justify the violent repression of alternative forms of Christianity. Gnosticism alleviated human suffering, soothing feelings of existential brokenness and alienation through the promise of renewal as God. DeConick begins in ancient Egypt and follows with the rise of Gnosticism in the Middle Ages, the advent of theosophy and other occult movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and contemporary New Age spiritual philosophies. As these theories find expression in science-fiction and fantasy films, DeConick sees evidence of Gnosticism's next incarnation. Her work emphasizes the universal, countercultural appeal of a movement that embodies much more than a simple challenge to religious authority.

A paradigm shift in our understanding of religion, breaking new ground in scholarship on Gnosticism. (Birger A. Pearson, author of *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature*) Anyone interested in New Age spirituality in all its diversity and fullness will savor the pages of DeConick's latest masterpiece. Her portraits of ancient 'Gnostic' movements are provocative and compelling; finding connections between these ancient worldviews and our own through popular culture and movies is a stroke of absolute genius. (Nicola Denzey Lewis, author of *Introduction to Gnosticism: Hidden Voices, Ancient Worlds*) DeConick has produced a fascinating, provocative, and readable interpretation of the Gnostic and Gnosticism. She emphasizes the transgressive nature of Gnostic spirituality, which confronted typical ancient spiritualities that made human beings subservient to the gods. Her book is a brave new salvo in the ongoing Gnostic Wars. (Brent Landau, author of *Revelation of the Magi: The Lost Tale of the Wise Men's Journey to Bethlehem*) Scholarship on the histories of Gnosticism, esotericism, and mysticism has long glowed at the radioactive core of the comparative study of religion. April D. DeConick's work shines in this lineage. She demonstrates in rich detail how a new spiritual orientation that looks to a transcendent hidden God and engages in a radical criticism of ecclesial religion was first articulated in the ancient period and then resonated through the centuries to the present day, where it can best be seen in contemporary popular culture, film, and New Age thought, revelation, and experience. Enter the Gnostic New Age. (Jeffrey J. Kripal, author of *The Serpent's Gift: Gnostic Reflections on the Study of Religion*) DeConick offers a valuable corrective to the recent reluctance of many scholars to use the term Gnosticism. For her, Gnosticism is not so much an identifiable religion as it is a form of late-antique spirituality, an attempt to consciously realize that the essential human self is nothing less than the supreme divinity's very own life essence lying dormant and unrecognized within the core human self, waiting to be awakened and reunite with its divine source. DeConick illustrates this spirituality as analogous to various modern New Age movements reflected in contemporary literature and cinema. (John D. Turner, coauthor of *Plato's Parmenides and Its Heritage*, vol. 1: *History and Interpretation from the Old Academy to Later Platonism and Gnosticism*) DeConick has forcefully and elegantly thrown herself into the current scholarly debate on the Gnostics. In a book that is both rich in historical detail and passionate for deeper understanding, she argues that Gnostic spirituality not only provided a transformative and liberating experience for ancient devotees but it can also, even more, challenge and subvert the views of religious questers of the present, illuminating the modern search for spiritual truth. (Bart Ehrman, author of *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior*) A readable and engaging overview of ancient Gnostic beliefs and practices (in all their wild diversity) and a clear, meaningful guide for making sense of the often-chaotic source materials. . . . [The Gnostic New Age] is sure to become a reference point for scholarly debate. (Choice) DeConick's work is carefully researched, convincingly argued, and refreshingly

accessible. (Reading Religion)About the AuthorApril D. DeConick is Isla Carroll and Percy E. Turner Professor of Biblical Studies and chair of the Department of Religion at Rice University. She is the author of *Holy Misogyny: Why the Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter* (2013) and *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* (2009). She starred in the CNN special series *Finding Jesus* (2015).