

6. Christianity Today, *The New Testament in Four Versions: King James, Revised Standard, Phillips Modern English, New English Bible* (Christianity Today, Inc. 1965)

I consulted this book to see how some of the interpretations and translations of words attributed to Paul in Freke and Gandy's book compared with the four translations given here.

Freke and Gandy, in their *Jesus and the Lost Goddess* say the following to make the case for Paul being a Gnostic (all of the citations are from pages 28 and 29):

Paul was such an important figure in the Christian community that at the end of the second century the newly emerging school of Christian Literalism could not simply reject him as a misguided heretic but felt compelled to reshape him as a literalist. They forged in his name the [now thoroughly discredited] 'Pastoral Letters', in which Paul is made to spout anti-Gnostic propaganda.

One of the sources for this statement is page 161 of Pagels' 1975 book *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia 1975). I did not review this source. On page 15 of the Pagels book I did review *The Gnostic Gospels* (see item # 31), she makes the point that Paul wrote about having a secret tradition he divulged only to the spiritually mature, which made him look quite Gnostic. The famous Christian Gnostic Valentinus, says Pagels, ascribed some of his earlier insights to the secret tradition taught by Paul.

It is not new knowledge that some of the Pauline epistles are thought to be forgeries, and that some of the specific

passages in the accepted letters are thought to be interpolations by copyists. But this is hotly objected to by believing Christians (see Kane, item # 23, for a more literalist view of the Bible as an inspired book).

However this all may be, let's get back to Freke and Gandy:

Throughout his genuine letters, however, Paul uses characteristically Gnostic language and gives Gnostic teachings, a fact that is deliberately obscured by Literalist translators.

Like later Christian Gnostics, Paul addresses his teaching to two levels of Christian initiates, called *psychics* and *pneumatics*, describing the latter as 'having Gnosis'. Of himself he writes, 'I may not be much of a speaker, but I have Gnosis.'

The two references given for the use of the word Gnosis here are translated as follows in the four popular New Testament translations given in the book under whose title we are having this discussion. The abbreviations below indicate the King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the Phillips Modern English version, and the New English Bible:

1 Cor. 2:14

KJV: But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, for they are spiritually discerned.

RSV: The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Phillips: But the unspiritual man simply cannot accept the matters which the spirit deals with—they just don't make

sense to him, for, after all, you must be spiritual to see spiritual things.

NEB: A man who is unspiritual refuses what belongs to the Spirit of God; it is folly to him; he cannot grasp it, because it needs to be judged in the light of the spirit.

So, in the above does Paul say that *pneumatics*, those moved by the Spirit, have 'Gnosis'? Judge for yourself. In my judgement it simply says what it says and Freke and Gandy distort things by giving the generic word gnosis, which is simply 'knowing' or 'knowledge', a capital G.

In fact if you are looking for a smoking gnostic gun, you should go to verse 16 which the Phillips translation has as:

Incredible as it may sound, we who are spiritual have the very thoughts of Christ!

The other three translations all have that we either 'have' or 'possess' "the mind of Christ." Having the mind or the very thoughts of Christ is much more of a Gnostic idea than simply saying that only the spiritual can discern what can only be known spiritually.

2 Cor. 11:6.

KJV: But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest in you in all things.

RSV: Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

Phillips: Perhaps I am not a polished speaker, but I do know

what I am talking about, and both what I am and what I say is pretty familiar to you.

NEB: I may be no speaker, but knowledge I have; at all times we have made known to you the full truth.

This is again a case of taking a generic word and putting a capital letter on it to make it seem a word with a special meaning. This quote, in fact, can be used to suggest the opposite of Paul having a secret tradition divulged only to the few who are mature in the faith.

Freke and Gandy quote Paul again to suggest he was an internationalist who believed in one ineffable God for the entire world, and who wanted to separate Christianity from the Jewish Law. I think the letters of Paul are clear on that point.

They also suggest that Paul was an Essene because his vision on the road to Damascus used a code word for the Essene stronghold at Qumran, which was Damascus. This seems just so much speculation. Surely they were not suggesting that Essenes were Gnostics?

They don't say, but they do say that the Ebionites (related to the Essenes as shown in several of the books reviewed on this list) were in fact: "The other school of early first-century Christian Gnosticism". . . . Paul's school of Christian Gnosticism was at war with this Gnostic school because of their insistence that the Law still applied.

If you read some of the quotes taken from Ebionite writings in the item by Van Luik (# 36) you can see perhaps why the idea of a Gnostic strain in Ebionite or even Essene thought might be plausible. But it is really a stretch to declare them Gnostics. It might in fact indicate why the new religion was

so attractive to Gnostics. But the earliest Christians were believing Jews, not Gnostics.

How do Freke and Gandy handle the obvious fact that James, 'the brother of the Lord' (all four translations have Gal. 1:19 as "James, the Lord's brother") was a leader in this other Gnostic school? Simple, on page 30 they say that among Gnostics the term 'brother' did not have a biological connotation (just like among Mormons and some other Christian sects today). But give me a break, the context here is not amenable to such a generalization at all! In Gal. 1:18 Paul mentions "Cephas," commonly interpreted to mean Peter, Jesus' friend and disciple/apostle. Of course Freke and Gandy have to also dismiss him as a figment of Gnostic creativity.

In the section of Freke and Gandy's book devoted to proving Paul was a Gnostic, they fail to make a convincing case, in my opinion. They also completely lose historical credibility by making the Ebionites into a 'Gnostic school'. Give me a break!