

MEMO FROM: _____

J. Michael Lennon
Vice President for Academic Affairs

7/13/95

Dear Norman, 9th Origin of Satan

Pogels' book may be too close to some of your own ideas for you to consult it, but you should at least know about it. I read her volume The Gnostic Gospels and was very, very impressed. She presents a Christ who has not been desecrated by St. Paul; he reminds me more of Kierkegaard.



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than Christ. Indeed, her Christ (as revealed in the lost, found and unsanctured gnostic gospels) is in many ways closer to your Christ than the traditional Christ.

Anyway, I think you may want to consider reading her book.

All Best,
Mike



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Mr. Norman Marler
627 Commercial St.
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July 3, 1995

Dear Norman,

Well here goes on "The Gospel According to the Son." I'll start, by way of warm-up, with some small points, well, some of them not so small.

The prefiguring of the Holocaust on 303 is troubling. The ~~deep~~ ^{has clearly been} complicity of the Jews in Christ's death ~~is~~ ^{is} made obvious. Suggesting that Hitler is intentionally linked to ~~the~~ a persecution 2,000 years before is hard to accept or sustain. The Jews will be upset enough; why add insult to injury? If you are going to make the connection, I'd suggest that you really spell out the connection — show God's/Devil's intentionality.

Page 157: More people than you realize will recognize the notion that sentiments ~~are~~ do not reveal the presence of the Lord, but actions. The idea of "faith in the legs" is also difficult to construe; ~~through~~ it is awkward. Faith in the heart, according to Luther and Calvin, is what is necessary, nay, a sine qua non, for salvation. Faith in the legs is Catholic, the equivalent of good works as the justification for salvation. The good works / faith debate led to the Reformation. Do you want your old Lottist idea constrained in this way?

Page ~~256~~ ²⁵⁶: "Repetition kills the soul." I agree that it is okay and fun to make such insinuations.

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but again, you are getting into doctrinal issues: Prayer involves repetition; what ^{are} the rosary? prayer wheels, ejaculations? Many saints distinguished themselves by learning to say a prayer almost automatically. Having said this, I must confess that such repetition always offended me.

Page 228: the Son as the salvation of the Father gave me a jolt. The Father saves; how can the source of salvation be saved? Truly if the power of the Father is ^{severely} qualified, as you have asserted for more than 40 years. Ourselves are fate, as Melville said. Still, still, to say the Son is the Salvation of the Father is a stretch. The Son is a help, a tool, an answer as you say, but God is the anchor. I also ~~know~~ ^{know} that you suggest God's all-powerful nature several times earlier. By p. 228 we have a vision of God as a sort of Napoleon, a great flawed, angry general, simultaneously noble ~~by~~ but weak in some ways but endowed with an heroic conception of ^{his} destiny.

Page 283: you use the word "mission" to describe Christ's task. I don't think the word was in use when the King James Bible was written - not in this way. It ~~is~~ is a WWII word, a N.A.S.A. word. NOTE: earliest use in your sense: 1691 (A.E.D.)

Page 321: "I believe I can recall." At the beginning, you say that you remember every hour. Surely this would be remembered. Why tudge things Rev?

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Page 272: eating of flesh, drinking of blood:
 The former made me think of Walt Whitman; the latter a system of Albanian cisterns. You are attempting to improve on the greatest Christian metaphor: transubstantiation. The bread tastes like bread, looks like bread, smells like bread, but is flesh, Christ's flesh. That is the mystery, a noble one. To undercut it by undergirding it with the nitrogen cycle and some sort of Galilean hydraulics is to make Christ over-simplify and trivialize the central mystery of Christianity. The "Sorrow of the grapes" didn't strike me with much merit either.

Throughout: It seems that you repeat the thought of Christ that he is feeling the power of God more strongly than ever before several times. Economy of gesture needed here. I must say that the economy of miracle-making, the drain of healing power is a strong trope, very convincing.

Camel/Needle metaphor, p. 188 and elsewhere:

I'm certain that the mistranslation of this word has been determined. You could have gone far with this, i.e., Christ could note that he knew it had been mistranslated but comments that the error was more efficacious than the correct word. As I said on the phone, this novel is to the poor what Ancient Evonima ^{is} ~~was~~ to the rich: an anatomy

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using the word the way Burton did in his 17th century classic, Anatomy of Melancholy.

Page 189: the good grapes / small passions metaphor or simile is strained and opaque.

Page 186: ~~penney~~ penny: Wherefrom penny? Are we in merry old England or dusty old Gaeal? Why not coin?

Page 194 furlong: isn't this English as well? Culbits and measures like f are okay, but furlong is Anglo-Saxon. It is $\frac{1}{8}$ of a mile, according to my O.E.D., but ~~this~~ was once a measure of ~~the~~ the Roman "stadium" which was one-eighth of a Roman mile. So maybe it's okay. The word on Christ's lips troubles me, makes him sound like King Alfred or Robin Hood.

Page 193: something missing or garbled right lines from bottom

page 118 Men loved darkness more: This has great implications. It would suggest that we are not made in God's image, but Satan's, and that ~~the~~ ^{he} was preordained to win his struggle with God. It contradicts your ~~the~~ suggestion in "The White Negro" that men are more good than evil. It sounds more like Marion Faye than Christ. It undercuts everything. You have always been biased doubt on ~~the~~ the question of who won the cosmic battle. This will be seen as the pessimism of old age. Forgive me blindness.

Overused words: maybe, whoredom

Peter and Judas are the ^{1st} ~~last~~ drawn apostles. Thomas, doubting Thomas, could be given more space & description.

John the Baptist is brilliantly and
unforgettably depicted. His brown skin, his

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desert retreats, his simplicity and oracular powers. A thought: could Christ commune with him while he waits for Salome's executioners in Herod's prison?

A line I loved, worthy of Christ: "Communion of every ~~other~~ ^{creature} is felt in the physician." p. 145
 And: "No heart is so hard as the cautious heart."
 Jesus is, by your portrait, existential.

I savored the notion, undergirded by Christ at ten points, that sinners are closer to God, and by extension, the Devil's powers are not alien to, or complimentary to God's. I note also that Christ, like Maier, excoriates self-pity. He is remarkably without it; indeed, it is the ~~base~~ ^{armature} of his personality, yet he does succumb to it at least twice, succumb by his utterances that is: once in Gethsemane and once ^{on} the cross. Do you recall Eliot's line about Gethsemane? The torchlight on frightened faces, The shouts and cries reverberating over the stony hills.

Throughout, the language and literary metaphors, especially of word and the arts of the carpenter, are the novel's chief strength. It sounds like Christ. (I note in passing here that you have ^{again} ~~repeated~~ enlarged the definition of the word "novelist" — the gospel as novel). So the psychology of Christ, the language, the characters, the limitations of God, Christ's double nature — these are the chief glories.

Provenance of the tale. How do we

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get this gospel? What is its historicity (to use the correct term of biblical scholarship)?

Was the manuscript found in the Temple in Jerusalem? Mailed to the N.Y. Times? From whence does it issue? Your ^{vague} suggestions at the beginning do not help. Clearly, it is written much later than the ^{four} gospels. In your final pages you speak of how the Gentiles have become as greedy as the Jews, suggesting great passage of time. And on 303, you mention two millenia.

So when did this ms. surface? If you are going to write in the first person, it seems incumbent on you (Christ) to deliver the gospel after penning it.

You say that it is presumptuous to write in the omniscient. Yet you are presumptuous enough to write as Christ!! I'd say that there is no difference ⁱⁿ what person you describe Christ's thoughts from, 1st or 3rd. AND the third removes you from any obligation to deliver the ms. The omniscient author is Godlike (and one needs to be to enter the mind of the second person of the Trinity). The voice of the narrator of the Trecentos Song would work beautifully.

Regarding the Holy Ghost: It is a great mystery of Christianity, often defined as the mutual love + true between the Father + the Son. You never really say

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much about it.

Well, I hope these suggestions are of some use. I will be eager to hear how this tour de force progresses and thank you for the privilege of heading it.

Love to All,

Will

P.S. ~~Four~~ more suggestions:

- 1) cut back on the Old Testament stuff a bit, esp. Ezekial
- 2) research the units of measurement used in Christ's time
- 3) Have Christ say that he will intentionally use the language of the Bible, sound like we expect him to sound (which reminds me of the redneck Southern legislator who, when speaking in favor of a bill making English the official state language, said, "If it was good enough for Jesus Christ, it is good enough for the people of Alabama").
- 4) There seems to be no humor in Christ's makeup. A bit would help.

P.P.S. Did you look at the book I sent, Testamentary Acts by Michael Millgate?