

# Sympathy for the Devil

By Dr. Brian Matson

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In Darren Aronofsky's new star-gilt silver screen epic, *Noah*, Adam and Eve are luminescent and fleshless, right up until the moment they eat the forbidden fruit.

Such a notion isn't found in the Bible, of course. This, among the multitude of Aronofsky's other imaginative details like giant Lava Monsters, has caused many a reviewer's head to be scratched. Conservative-minded evangelicals write off the film because of the "liberties" taken with the text of Genesis, while a more liberal-minded group stands in favor of cutting the director some slack. After all, we shouldn't expect a professed atheist to have the same ideas of "respecting" sacred texts the way a Bible-believer would.

Both groups have missed the mark entirely. Aronofsky hasn't "taken liberties" with anything.

*The Bible is not his text.*

In his defense, I suppose, the film wasn't advertised as such. Nowhere is it said that this movie is an adaptation of Genesis. It was never advertised as "*The Bible's Noah*," or "*The Biblical Story of Noah*." In our day and age we are so living in the leftover atmosphere of Christendom that when somebody says they want to do "Noah," everybody *assumes* they mean a rendition of the *Bible* story. That isn't what Aronofsky had in mind at all. I'm sure he was only too happy to let his studio go right on assuming that, since if they knew what he was really up to they never would have allowed him to make the movie.

Let's go back to our luminescent first parents. I recognized the motif instantly as one common to the ancient religion of Gnosticism. Here's a 2nd century A.D. description about what a sect called the Ophites believed:

"Adam and Eve formerly had light, luminous, and so to speak spiritual bodies, as they had been fashioned. But when they came here, the bodies became dark, fat, and idle." –Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, I, 30.9

It occurred to me that a mystical tradition more closely related to Judaism, called *Kabbalah* (which the singer Madonna made popular a decade ago or so), surely would have held a similar view, since it is essentially a form of *Jewish* Gnosticism. I dusted off (No, really: I had to dust it) my copy of Adolphe Franck's 19th century work, *The Kabbalah*, and quickly confirmed my suspicions:

"Before they were beguiled by the subtleness of the serpent, Adam and Eve were not only exempt from the need of a body, but did not even have a body—that is to say, they were not of the earth."

Franck quotes from the *Zohar*, one of *Kabbalah's* sacred texts:

"When our forefather Adam inhabited the Garden of Eden, he was clothed, as all are in heaven, with a garment made of the higher light. When he was driven from the Garden of Eden and was compelled to submit to the needs of this world, what happened? God, the Scriptures tell us, made Adam and his wife tunics of skin and clothed them; for before this they had tunics of light, of that higher light used in Eden..."

Obscure stuff, I know. But curiosity overtook me and I dove right down the rabbit hole.

I discovered what Darren Aronofsky's first feature film was: *Pi*. Want to know its subject matter? Do you? Are you sure?

*Kabbalah*.

If you think that's a coincidence, you may want a loved one to schedule you a brain scan.

Have I got your attention? Good.

The world of Aronofsky's *Noah* is a thoroughly Gnostic one: a graded universe ...

To read this article in its entirety, go to:

<http://drbrianmattson.com/journal/2014/3/31/sympathy-for-the-devil>

# The Real Issue

By Dr. Brian Matson

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I had no particular interest in seeing the movie, *Noah*. I never originally planned to. I saw it because I needed to prep for a segment on my Web TV show with [Brian Godawa](#) (see it by [clicking here](#)) and I wanted to speak intelligently about it. I saw it, came home, wrote a review that I figured might get a decent viewership. There's no way I expected a 2,300 word blog post to attract a ton of attention. But it's now a lightning rod in a rather massive cultural controversy.

[By the way, please read [Brian Godawa's post today](#). It's really good.]

Let me back up and recap a few things.

I saw a movie loaded with imagery and themes drawn from a variety of monistic, esoteric, mystical, and speculative religions that have their source in Neoplatonism. Among them, *Kabbalah* and Gnostic sects.

My critics openly admit that Aronofsky drew on a variety of these sources.

But, they seem to insist, his reliance on these sources is relatively harmless to the film, and these themes can be interpreted in healthy directions.

That's interesting and all (and I'll say more about it in a minute), but it isn't the primary issue in this controversy.

The issue is this: should Christian leaders have *endorsed* this movie, either outright or being used as part of a Hollywood promotional machine?

Given the fact that Aronofsky drew from these types of sources, and given the themes and imagery of his final product, I say the answer is *no way*. Others, obviously, do not share that conclusion. I say let Aronofsky and Paramount gin up their own clientele. To me, it seems perverse for them to lean on the *Christian* community for it, which they did, holding private screenings for leaders and people of influence.

That, friends, is the issue. I'm not condemning or shaming anybody for seeing the film, talking about the film, debating the film, or even *enjoying* the film. I'm concerned that certain Christian leaders were basically asked to "vet" the film for their constituents, and they came to conclusions that simply missed the themes I've highlighted. I find that to be a bit of theological malpractice. Not enough to "lose your license," be kicked out the kingdom, ostracized or condemned as a pagan or "enemy of the faith," or anything of the sort. But enough to warrant a censure, and to be encouraged to beef up theologically and do better next time.

Now, if you want to go on to debate ways to interpret all of these themes and imagery, that's fine. That's partly why seeing and talking about movies is fun in the first place! Just so long as we're clear that the Director did *not* get these ideas from the Bible; he got them from esoteric, mystical traditions that have as their *purpose* to subvert the original story.

[By the way, many people failed to grasp the rhetoric of *hyperbole* in my claim that it has "nothing" to do with the Bible. Obviously, all mystical re-interpretations of Noah have Genesis as their foundational source text. It's the very thing they're trying to subvert. I didn't think that needed to be said. I was wrong.]

So, with my view of the major issue clear, feel free to find ways of interpreting the monistic/Gnostic/*Kabbalic* imagery any way you please (that's one of the attractive features of these religions in the first place). But I'll just note an irony: It is not *me* who is stretching for fancy interpretations here. That was what I expected at first with my movie review: "Boy, this guy's really stretching. He's *crazy!*" The fact that my critics are the ones searching for ways to interpret the symbolism of the texts and motifs they *admit Aronofsky used* means that it is not they who are on the solid ground.

But, as I say, those are all less important issues, in my view.

One final thing to clear up on ...

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<http://drbrianmattson.com/journal/2014/4/1/just-once-more>