

**CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES
THE GNOSTIC CENTRE
DECISION MADE ON 16 December 2009**

APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION OF THE GNOSTIC CENTRE

Issues before the Commission

- 1 The Commission considered an application by The Gnostic Centre for registration as a charity. If The Gnostic Centre is established as a charity it should be registered in the Register of Charities in accordance with section 3A (1) of the Charities Act 1993.

Decision

- 2 The Commission having considered:
 - the case that had been put to it on behalf of The Gnostic Centre including its governing document, submissions and supporting evidence; and
 - the relevant lawconcluded that it is not established for exclusively charitable purposes for public benefit and cannot be entered onto the Register of Charities.
- 3 The decision was made under the Commission's review procedures by Andrew Purkis and John Wood as Members of the Commission's Board ('the Board Members') under delegated authority, and ratified by the Board at its meeting on 16 December 2009.
- 4 In making this decision the Board Members reviewed the information submitted in support of the application and had the benefit of a telephone discussion with the applicant, representing The Gnostic Centre.

Background to the Decision

The objects of The Gnostic Centre

- 5 The Trust Deed executed on 1 August 2005 established The Gnostic Centre with the following object ('the founding object'):

To promote and advance and research on Gnosticism, both ancient and modern. This will be achieved by organising courses, seminars, events, workshops and publications involving anybody in the public wishing to improve their inner life. Our research methods can be scholastic, involving research on source documents and the like, as well as spiritual, involving meditation and other spiritual disciplines.

The object of The Gnostic Centre was amended on 22 November 2006 as follows:

To advance the Gnostic religion for the benefit of the public in accordance with the statement of beliefs/articles of faith as set out in the schedule. Most important in this endeavour will be the celebration of our religious rituals, such as the Gnostic Mass, to which all members of the public will be invited to attend. Also there will be courses seminars, events, workshops and publications involving anybody in the public wishing to improve their inner life and learn about our religion. Our research methods can be scholastic, involving research on source documents and the like, as well as spiritual involving meditation and other spiritual disciplines.

The activities

- 6 The information provided in support of the application to register The Gnostic Centre pursuant to the Trust Deed of 1 August 2005 indicated that the activities of The Gnostic Centre are principally:
- Providing courses, seminars, events and workshops on Gnosticism;
 - Providing information on Gnosticism;
 - Performing rituals and practices associated with Gnosticism including meditation;
 - Holding of Gnostic mass; and
 - Maintenance of a website.
7. The Gnostic Centre also provided further details of its beliefs, practices, and activities and provided a Schedule of Beliefs (Annex 1) in support of the application to register pursuant to the amended objects.

The framework for the issues considered by the Board Members in their review of the decision

8. To be a charity, an organisation has to be established for charitable purposes only. A charitable purpose is one that falls within the descriptions of purposes in section 2 (2) of the Charities Act 2006 ('the 2006 Act') and is for the public benefit (s.2 (1) (b)).
9. The approach adopted by the Commission in deciding if an organisation's aims are charitable for the public benefit is set out in Part D of *Charities and Public Benefit* and Part 4 of *The Analysis of the law underpinning Charities and Public Benefit*. To make a determination it is necessary to :
- (a) clarify what the aims are;
 - (b) decide whether those aims are charitable i.e. fall within, or are analogous to one or more of the descriptions of charitable purposes; and
 - (c) ensure that each of the aims are, will or may be carried out for the public benefit;
10. Generally, in determining whether The Gnostic Centre was established for exclusively charitable purposes, the Board members considered the following charitable purposes:
- advancing education for the public benefit;
 - advancing religion for the public benefit; and
 - promoting the moral or spiritual welfare or improvement of the community for the benefit of the public.

11. The Board members considered the relevance of and the need to comply with its duties as a public authority under s.6 Human Rights Act 1998 and otherwise in relation to the decision, in particular the relevant articles of the European Convention of Human Rights as set out in Annex 2.

Advancing education for public benefit

12. The advancement of education is a charitable purpose within 2(b) of section 2 of the 2006 Act. The Board Members reviewed the summary of the law and guidance set out in

its publication *The Advancement of Education for the Public Benefit* and the *Analysis of the law underpinning*¹ this, and applied the principles and approach in their consideration.

13. The Board Members considered material submitted by The Gnostic Centre in support of their application including a syllabus of lectures and practices and various papers. The topics covered by the courses are the principles and practices of Gnosticism. The courses combine lectures and spiritual practices to include meditation. The teachings followed by The Gnostic Centre, as identified on its website, are from variety of sources including: Samael Aun Weor, C. G. Jung, Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, Dion Fortune, Rudolf Steiner, and Arnold Krumm-Heller. The focus of the teaching undertaken by The Gnostic Centre is aimed at developing the spiritual consciousness of participants.
14. The Board Members considered that the subject area of study in the practices and principles of Gnosticism is capable of having educational merit or value. They noted that the Gnostic Institute of Anthropology is a registered charity with objects *to advance education and research for the public benefit in ancient knowledge, in particular the English culture through the promotion and dissemination of the Gnostic Anthropology as taught by Samael Aun Weor and Litelantes.*
15. The founding object of The Gnostic Centre is not expressed to be for the advancement of education but includes the promotion of modern Gnosticism. The objects include *research on Gnosticism ... Our research methods can be scholastic, involving research on source documents and the like, as well as spiritual involving meditation and other spiritual disciplines* the methods of which include *spiritual involving meditation and other spiritual disciplines*. The Board Members queried what the term 'spiritual research' meant in this context and expressed doubt that such research could be educational in charity law.
16. The scope of education in charity law includes personal development. *Education is also about personal development. The development of an individual's intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual capabilities are of fundamental value to both the individual and to the health and well being of the society around them. Education is about equipping people with the capacity to understand and operate successfully in society.*²
17. To be charitable, education does not have to be value free and completely neutral. It can be based on broad values that are uncontroversial which would be generally supported by objective and informed opinion. It should also allow those being educated to make up their own minds on the issue. If, however, the purpose of providing information or education is to persuade people to form specific conclusions, or accept specific beliefs, then this is not education, but rather promoting a specific point of view. This may be a way of promoting another charitable aim, but it is not education.³
18. The Board Members considered that helping individuals to develop their spiritual capabilities could fall within the broad scope of education as it is understood in charity law. However, the Board Members concluded that The Gnostic Centre is not advancing education as it is understood in charity law. The Gnostic Centre encourages people to adopt a particular viewpoint based upon the teachings and beliefs of Gnosticism. The promotion and advancement of modern Gnostic beliefs is part of the objects. It is not advancing education based on broad values that are uncontroversial, which would generally be supported by objective and informed opinion.

¹ Available on the Commission's website

² Section D2 of *The Advancement of Education for the Public Benefit*

³ Paragraphs 1.16 - 1.23 of *Analysis of the law underpinning The Advancement of Education for the Public Benefit*, Re Bushnell [1975] 1 WLR 1596; Re Hopkinson [1949] 1 All ER 346

Advancing religion for the public benefit

19. The Board Members noted that it was not obvious which description or descriptions of purposes in section 2 of the 2006 Act might be most relevant to the object '*To promote and advance and research on Gnosticism, both ancient and modern*'.
20. The Board Members noted the amended object was expressed to be for the advancement of the Gnostic religion. The advancement of religion falls within one of the descriptions of purposes in section 2 of the 2006 Act and an issue for consideration is whether the beliefs and practices of Gnosticism are capable of advancing religion for the public benefit as it is understood in charity law. The law has changed since the introduction of the 2006 Act to clarify the definition of a religion.
21. The advancement of religion falls under section 2(2) (c) of the descriptions of purposes in the 2006 Act. The word *religion* in the Charities Act 2006 section 2 (3) (a) includes :
1. *a religion which involves belief in more than one god, and*
 2. *a religion which does not involve belief in a god*
22. The Board Members reviewed the summary of the law and guidance in *The Advancement of Religion for the Public Benefit* and the *Analysis of the law underpinning this*, and applied the principles and approach in their consideration.
23. It is considered that the characteristics of a religion for the purposes of charity law are⁴:
- a. *belief in a god (or gods) or goddess (or goddesses), or supreme being, or divine or transcendental being or entity or spiritual principle, which is the object or focus of the religion (referred to ... as 'supreme being or entity');*
 - b. *a relationship between the believer and the supreme being or entity by showing worship of, reverence for or veneration of the supreme being or entity;*
 - c. *a degree of cogency, cohesion, seriousness and importance;*
 - d. *an identifiable positive, beneficial, moral or ethical framework.*

Consideration of the various characteristics of a religion:

- **Belief in a supreme being or entity**

24. The Board Members recognised that different religions have different understandings of what is meant by the term 'supreme being'. Further, the nature of that being and the extent to which differing religions exhibit a developed theology also varies. The law does not enquire into the nature, worth or value of religious beliefs, or concern itself with the truth of those religious beliefs. It is sufficient for the purposes of charity law that the organisation professes a belief in a supreme being or entity. However, this must be more than simply inculcation of a spiritual way of life or promoting admirable ethical standards or a supernatural principle.
25. The beliefs of The Gnostic Centre are set out in the Schedule of Beliefs which includes the following statements: '*We believe in a Supreme Being. We believe in the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. ..We believe in the feminine aspect of God, an aspect of the Holy Spirit that goes by many names....We believe in the White Lodge, a set of High Spiritual Beings whose objective is the spiritual guidance of Humanity.*'

⁴ Section C2 and Annex A of *The Advancement of Religion for the Public Benefit*

26. The Board Members clarified with the applicants their understanding of the Trinity which has some resonance with Christian beliefs but there are differences. In particular, Gnosticism does not have dogmas. It is an interior process which draws on many sources for its inspiration.

27. The applicants confirmed to the Board Members that the core beliefs of Gnostics are that the world was created by a lesser God and the true God is a higher being. Each person has a divine spark within them and individuals are able to free themselves from anxieties, appetites and ties to the world if they can get in touch with the true God (**'the core belief'**). All of the teachings and practices of The Gnostic Centre are concerned with attempting to be in touch with the true God.

28. The Board Members concluded that The Gnostic Centre does profess a belief in a supreme being which is the focus of its activities.

- **Worship of, reverence for or veneration of a supreme being**

29. The Board Members considered whether there was a relationship which has some or all of the qualities of deep respect, homage, adoration, devotion, obeisance, submission, prayer and meditation. They recognised that the relationship with the supreme being may be spiritual in nature.

30. The Schedule of Beliefs states: *'We believe in the sacraments of the Church, in particular the Holy Unction (the material bread becomes spiritual substance) and the Baptism.....Our rituals have been established by the Gnostic Church, and are indeed celebrated in the Spiritual World. Jesus the Christ often celebrates the Gnostic Mass.'*

31. The applicants confirmed their belief that the consciousness has to be awakened before one can receive the Spirit. This is awakened through training, including meditative practices. Believers strive for conjunction between the conscious and unconscious or inner Christ. They look for an inner personal emanation of the Father (the true God). The teachings, courses, meditation and rituals are all regarded as a way of getting in contact, or preparing to get in contact, with the supreme being. Gnosticism is not a church as such but The Gnostic Centre provides a place of worship in Leeds called a Lumisial where Gnostics can celebrate mass. Gnostic rituals include prayer and baptism.

32. The Board Members acknowledged that the teaching, courses, meditation, ceremonies and rituals are concerned with an individual's relationship with a supreme being. Individuals strive to achieve access to a supreme being through acquiring knowledge and use of techniques such as meditation. The Board members considered that the relationship with the supreme being is a spiritual one which is characterised by feelings of connectedness or unity.⁵

33. The Board Members concluded that The Gnostic Centre does engage in worship of, reverence for or veneration of a supreme being.

- **Cogency, cohesion, seriousness and importance in the belief system**

⁵Annex A of *The Advancement of Religion for the Public Benefit* states: *'This relationship with the supreme being or entity is usually spiritual in nature, characterised by feelings of connectedness or unity with a force or power that is greater than the self, which is apart from the self but which may also exist within. It is this feeling of connectedness or unity that followers or adherents regard as sacred and revered.'*

34. The Board Members noted that *'a religion must be a sincere belief system of substance or significance, capable of benefiting society, having a certain level of cogency, coherence, seriousness and importance; as opposed to a self-promoting organisation set up to promote one or two persons, or a trivial system set up for, perhaps, frivolous reasons'*. They also noted the definition of *'belief'* in human rights case law which has defined *'beliefs'* as *'more than just mere opinions or deeply held feelings' which involve 'a holding of spiritual or philosophical convictions which have an identifiable formal content'*.⁶
35. The Board Members considered whether there is an organised or integrated system of belief amongst Gnostics or common characteristics shared between the diverse beliefs and practices to enable a single religion and religious practice to be recognised.
36. There was no evidence of a clear single authoritative code which sets out the beliefs and practices of Gnosticism and no clear doctrine or theology, although it was recognised that this is not present in all religions.
37. The applicants stated that the Gnostic religion as understood by The Gnostic Centre has a large following in Salvador where approximately 25% of the population follow Gnosticism. It also has a large following in Spain, Quebec and Latin America and has followers in USA and Canada.
38. The applicants explained that the teachings of the Gnostic Centre are drawn from a wide variety of sources with the aim of assisting individuals to raise their level of consciousness. They use any source that enables them to do so. The different parts to a person's being are assisted by different teachings, for example the intellectual aspect is assisted by psychological teachings. There is no particular set of authoritative principles as Gnosticism involves an intuitive process and individual self-searching.
39. The applicants accepted that there may be some divergence amongst Gnostic groups and the approaches adopted may differ where they are being drawn from a number of different teachings. Despite this, the core belief is fundamental to all Gnostics.
40. The Board Members accepted that despite the diversity and differences between Gnostic groups, the applicants appeared to be able to demonstrate a core set of beliefs for all Gnostics, as summarised in paragraph 27 above.
41. The Board Members questioned whether the statement of beliefs accurately reflected the core belief of The Gnostic Centre and whether it sets out the beliefs with sufficient clarity and certainty. The applicants accepted that the statement of beliefs may be better expressed to reflect and clarify the core belief of The Gnostic Centre.
42. The Board Members accepted that the core belief of Gnostics, if adequately expressed, may be sufficient to demonstrate the cogency, cohesion, seriousness and importance of the beliefs but The Gnostic Centre's Statement of Beliefs may require amendment to ensure it accurately reflects and clarifies the beliefs of the organisation.
- **An identifiable positive, beneficial, moral or ethical framework promoted by the belief system**
43. The Board Members noted that Gnosticism is experiential, focusing on an individual's spirituality. To be a religion in charity law, there must also be a positive, beneficial, moral

⁶ Annex A of *The Advancement of Religion for the Public Benefit*

or ethical framework promoted, since a spiritually improving effect on its own is insufficient.

44. The applicants made claims that:

- Gnostic teachings follow the Christian teachings promoting codes of behaviour such as love thy neighbour and help the poor, although there was no evidence of consistent promotion of such codes on their website or in the literature made available to the Commission;
- They pray for humanity; and
- They stress the inner work on undesirable traits of individuals so that people learn to have control over their passions and actions.

45. The applicants liken Gnosticism to Buddhism in its practice of meditation and the advancement of spirituality. The Board Members accepted that both are concerned with spiritual awareness but noted that Buddhism promotes a clear and identifiable moral and ethical framework within its teachings. However, there was no evidence of a clear and identifiable moral or ethical code or framework within Gnosticism.

46. The Board Members noted that the only evidence presented by the applicants as to the positive, beneficial moral and ethical framework promoted by the belief system was anecdotal. The applicants stated that as individuals become more spiritually aware then it follows that they will exhibit positive behaviours for the benefit of society. Board members noted that such statements of belief, however completely sincere, if unsupported by evidence other than anecdote, are not sufficient to satisfy the requirements of evidence as laid down by the courts. The Board Members noted that benefits have to be described and evidenced a way that a court could evaluate⁷

47. Having viewed all of the information presented by the applicants in support of the application to include the website and publications of The Gnostic Centre and those referred to by the applicants, the Board Members concluded that there was no expression of a moral or ethical code or evidence of the types of behaviour promoted by The Gnostic Centre, other than spiritual benefits to the individual. To the extent that Gnosticism may encourage individuals to look at their undesirable traits and promote individual integrity, it appears that individuals are free to develop their own guidelines within that. There was no evidence of shared morals or ethics amongst followers or the promotion of these by The Gnostic Centre.

48. The Board Members concluded there was on the evidence before them no identifiable, positive, beneficial, moral or ethical framework capable of having a beneficial impact on society.

Summary of consideration of the various characteristics of a religion

49. Although Gnosticism, as advanced by The Gnostic Centre, satisfies a number of the essential characteristics of a religion for the purposes of charity law, it was not demonstrated that all of the necessary characteristics of a religion were met, given that they had not identified a positive, beneficial, moral or ethical framework being promoted. Consequently, the Board Members concluded that it has not been demonstrated that The Gnostic Centre is established for the advancement of religion, as that is understood in

⁷ Paragraph 3.2 of *Analysis of the law underpinning The Advancement of Religion for the Public Benefit* states: 'The court must decide whether or not there is a benefit to the community in light of evidence of a kind cognisable by the court' *Gilmour v Coats* [1948] Ch 340 C.A.

charity law. The Board Members therefore considered whether the aims of the Gnostic Centre advance another charitable purpose.

Promoting the moral or spiritual welfare or improvement of the community for public benefit

50. The Board Members considered whether the aims of The Gnostic Centre are established for the promotion of the moral or spiritual welfare or improvement of the community for public benefit which is recognised as, or analogous to, charitable purposes under existing charity law under section 2 (2) (m) of the 2006 Act.⁸
51. To be established for this purpose it is necessary to show that the beliefs and practices of The Gnostic Centre are accessible to the public and capable of being applied by the public in accordance with personal judgement or choice in such a way that the moral or spiritual welfare or improvement of the community is advanced.
52. Consistent with the approach in *Public Benefit and the Advancement of Religion*, for the advancement of moral or spiritual welfare or improvement of the community to be advanced in a way that is charitable for the public benefit there must be an ethical or moral code which is being promoted which can be shown by evidence to be for the benefit of the public. It is not sufficient to advance spirituality or spiritual beliefs on their own.

*‘Charities promoting non-religious philosophical beliefs will usually have to demonstrate social impact by reference to welfare or improvement. It is, however, unlikely that purely ‘spiritual’ benefits, not having a moral content, could be demonstrated by evidence cognizable by the Court. Certainly, the belief evidenced by an organisation’s teachings that any given practices are of spiritual efficacy is insufficient to establish that as a fact. Further any alleged spiritual benefit arising from the edification by the example given to the public by followers of any particular teachings is similarly insufficient to establish public benefit. The court has established that the existence of a benefit of the necessary public character must be shown to exist by proof of matters ‘having a demonstrable impact on the community or a section of it’.*⁹

53. Although the applicants state that, as a result of following the teachings and practices promoted by The Gnostic Centre, there is a presumption that individuals will behave in a way that impacts beneficially on society, the Board Members considered that this statement alone is insufficient to show a demonstrable impact. The applicants did not present any evidence to show that the moral or spiritual welfare or improvement of the community is necessarily advanced. The Board Members took into account all of the information presented and the publications referred to by the applicants but found no evidence to demonstrate the impact upon the public.
54. The applicants suggested that the Commission has accepted the beneficial impact of meditation on the community for the public benefit by registering other charities concerned with meditation. The Board Members acknowledged that some registered charities were undertaking meditation as an activity in furtherance of charitable purposes

⁸ In doing so they considered the *Analysis of the law underpinning Public Benefit and the Advancement of Moral or Ethical Belief Systems*, which informed the Charity Commission’s public consultation in 2008 on draft guidance on that issue. Although, following consultation, the Commission decided not to proceed with the draft guidance, the analysis of the relevant legal cases was still helpful in informing the Board Members’ consideration in this case.

⁹ Para 4.2 *Analysis of the law underpinning Public Benefit and the Advancement of Moral or Ethical Belief Systems*

for public benefit. The charitable purposes that may in some cases be furthered by meditation include: the advancement of religion; the promotion of moral or spiritual welfare or improvement of the community for public benefit; advancement of health. Some registered charities may advance education in the practices and techniques of meditation where they are not promoting a particular view.

55. The Board Members noted that the registered charity Enlightennext has objects '*to advance moral or spiritual welfare or improvement for the benefit of the public in the area of benefit by promoting education concerning spiritual enlightenment and self realisation including but not limited to education in the teachings of Andrew Cohen concerning such matters*'. Its activities, as set out within its yearly accounts, include the promotion of a moral framework. The Board Members considered that it was distinguished from The Gnostic Centre on the basis that it is concerned with seeking a change in behaviour within society generally.
56. The Board Members acknowledged that although organisations may appear to be very similar, the approach of the Commission is that all applications for registration as a charity are considered on their individual merits and all charities need to show public benefit. Just as some organisations undertaking meditation have been judged to be advancing a charitable purpose for the public benefit over the years, so others have been judged not to do so.
57. The Board Members decided that, without reasonable proof and evidence that it was capable of having a beneficial impact, they were unable to conclude that The Gnostic Centre was promoting the moral or spiritual welfare or improvement of the community for public benefit. The considerations and conclusions set out in paragraphs 46 to 48 were relevant to the Board Members' conclusion on this issue.

Public benefit

58. The Board Members noted that the law has changed since the introduction of the 2006 Act to remove the presumption of the public benefit requirement for charities established for the advancement of religion. All charities now need to provide evidence of public benefit. The two principles of public benefit as explained in the Commission's statutory guidance on Public Benefit¹⁰ are:
- Principle 1: There must be an identifiable benefit or benefits
- Principle 2: Benefit must be to the public, or a section of the public

Benefit

59. The Board Members considered the law and principles set out in its public benefit guidance including the legal underpinning. As already explained in the analysis of different charitable purposes above, the Board Members were not satisfied that the aims were charitable. If they had been satisfied that the aims were charitable, they considered that The Gnostic Centre had not shown by means of evidence that there is a beneficial impact upon the public flowing from its core beliefs so as to meet the public benefit requirement.
60. It is the existence of an identifiable, positive, beneficial moral or ethical framework that is promoted by a religion which demonstrates that the religion is capable of impacting and does impact on society in a beneficial way.

¹⁰ Charities and Public Benefit, available on the Commission's website

61. For the advancement of moral or spiritual welfare or improvement of the community to be advanced in a way that is charitable for the public benefit there must be an ethical or moral code which is being promoted which can be shown by evidence to be for the benefit of the public.
62. The benefits to the public should be capable of being recognised, identified, defined or described but the Commission recognises that not all benefits are capable of being quantified and non-quantifiable benefits will be taken into consideration, provided it is clear what the benefits are. It is a requirement for all charities that public benefit must be capable of being demonstrated. It is not sufficient for an organisation to show that it is established solely for the benefit of its followers.
63. The applicants did not sufficiently demonstrate that there is an identifiable positive, beneficial, moral or ethical framework promoted by the belief system, that this is being promoted to the public and is capable of impacting upon the public in a beneficial way. There was insufficient evidence to show that The Gnostic Centre encourages its followers to conduct themselves in a socially responsible or beneficial way in the wider community.

Public

64. The Board Members noted that although the courses, seminars and workshops are open to all to attend; only a small number of people were currently able to attend the Lumisal. The actual number of people who can benefit at any one time can be small as long as anyone who could qualify for the benefit is eligible.¹¹ They explored the process for progressing through the teachings and practices of The Gnostic Centre and were advised that not everyone who attends Gnostic Centre activities such as meditation wished to become further involved. They were also advised that the Chair of The Gnostic Centre, made the decision as to whether or not to allow someone to progress to the higher or second chamber but it was not totally clear to the Board Members what the basis of this test was and whether the public did in fact have access to some of the services. As a result they were not fully satisfied that even were The Gnostic Centre able to demonstrate benefit, and on the facts they had concluded this was not demonstrated, that it had been demonstrated that the benefit was to the public or a sufficient section of the public as the law requires.
65. The Board Members emphasised that their role and intention was not to judge the inherent worth of The Gnostic Centre, but the narrower question of whether it passed the test laid down in law for registration as a charity.

Conclusion

66. The Board members concluded that The Gnostic Centre is not established for exclusively charitable purposes for public benefit.

¹¹ Analysis of the law underpinning the Commission's statutory guidance on the Advancement of Religion para 3.21 onwards (and the cases referred to in that analysis)

ANNEX 1

THE GNOSTIC CENTRE SCHEDULE OF BELIEFS

1. We believe in a Supreme Being. We believe in the Trinity of Father. Son and Holy Spirit.
2. We have a special spiritual affinity with the Son, the Christ, the Saviour of the World, and with His incarnation as Jesus the Christ.
3. We believe in the feminine aspect of God, an aspect of the Holy Spirit, that goes by many names, Sophia, Mary, Kindling...
4. We believe in the White Lodge, a set of High Spiritual Beings whose objective is the spiritual guidance of Humanity.
5. We believe in a superior, transcendent, Church, known as the Gnostic Church. established in the Spiritual Worlds by the White Lodge, and to which we all belong.
6. We believe in the Sacraments of the Church, in particular in the Holy Unction (the material Bread becomes spiritual substance) and the Baptism, which accomplishes the miracle of making us human.
7. Our rituals have been established by the Gnostic Church, and are indeed celebrated in the Spiritual World. Jesus the Christ often celebrates the Gnostic Mass.
8. Our Being has many components; some of these are of particular importance to our religious activities.
9. We believe that the Great Cosmic Forces, Father, Son and Mother, have sent emanations into our own spiritual self, so parts or components of our own Being are our Inner Father (the Father who is in Secret), Inner Christ, Inner Mother. There is also a component of our Being corresponding to the cosmic Masculine aspect of the Holy Spirit.
10. There is a component of our Being of great importance, the Higher Being, Higher Self, Atman, Intimate - it is known by those and other names. It guides our path of Initiation, it helps us to follow the Gnostic Path. In this sense, every person is a star, with an inner fire, the Higher Being, which guides the star into a spiritual path or trajectory, the Gnostic Path.

11. The Gnostic Path:

Having made a transcendental synthesis of much long and hard work, we would say: First the Essence has to be liberated so that the light may shine inside us; then it has to be fused with ATMAN (the Being), to liberate ourselves from the mind; afterwards it has to be given to the ANCIENT MAN OF THE DAYS (the Father that is in Secret, the Monad), to become perfect and resurrected Masters. Finally the Essence has to be definitely absorbed in ISHVARA, the LOGOS, first emanation of the supreme PARABRAHAMAN (the great Ocean of the Universal Spirit of Life).

Samael Aun Weor, The Mystery of the Golden Blossom, Ch. 4

We have here a perfect description of the Gnostic Path. We start by trying to get rid of our imperfections, our egos, and then we try to build the Philosopher's Stone; mastership is achieved when the Intimate, Inner Being, Atman, is unified, conjoined with the Consciousness, the Conscious Will. This new entity may get together with the Divine; wholeness is then achieved, another name for Total Awakening, and for having built the Stone.

The Gnostic Path consists therefore of two main steps: first a conjunction of the postulant with his/hers own Inner Being, and then a conjunction of the new entity thus formed with God.

12. We believe strongly in the personal development of the individual, this strong

belief being reflected in our teaching. It emphasises experience rather than the simple acceptance of the word of the teachers and authors. One does not know, comprehend a subject, until experiencing it in one's heart.

Our main interest is to help our students in awakening their consciousness. We strongly feel, therefore, that what we do at the Centre is merely to facilitate this process, to give the students the tools and abilities to be able to hear and follow their own message from the Being. This has consequences in the way we give our teaching. It is necessary to give some factual material, as a kind of temporary framework on which the students can build and interpret their experiences. But this framework has to be, as the students awaken, rediscovered and made to become part of their gnostic knowledge.

13. We believe that our stay in this world - with all its difficulties - has as one of its main objectives our spiritual progress. Successive lives - involving return, or reincarnation - will bring successive spells of progress. Eventually, we join the spiritual world as a spiritual being.

ANNEX 2

Article 1 of the First Protocol provides that every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his or her possessions. As with some of the other Articles this general right can be interfered with in certain circumstances, where it is deemed necessary to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest or to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties. Property in this context is widely interpreted and might include status as a registered charity which confers fiscal benefits and may increase accessibility to funding.

Article 9 (1) provides that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change ones religion or belief and freedom to manifest ones religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance. Any limitation on manifesting one's religion must be justified on the grounds set out in Article 9(2) which provides that: *'Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights or freedoms of others.'* and

Article 14 the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms in the ECHR shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status. This is not a freestanding right to non-discrimination but may be used in conjunction with another Article. The other Article relied upon does not have to be breached by a discriminatory act but has to fall within the scope of a right protected by ECHR.

The effect of these Articles on applications for charitable status was considered in the context of the Commissioners' decision of Church of Scientology (UK).¹²

The Board Members recognised that a decision to refuse to register an organisation as a charity might possibly be argued as a limitation on the right to manifest one's religion in Article 9 (1). It is possible that the financial benefits which result from being a charity might

¹² This decision is available on the Commission's website

be relevant to an organisation's ability to teach and pass on its beliefs and its ability to manifest these beliefs through its teaching and other activities. However, any limitation of Article 9 rights can be justified on the basis of Article 9 (2). The Board Members noted that the Commission's power to register charities is prescribed by law. The Board Members noted that the members of the Gnostic Centre had been manifesting their beliefs despite not having charitable status in the past, and the lack of charitable status of itself did not prevent the manifestation of their beliefs.

The Board Members acknowledged that a refusal to register an organisation may be an interference with rights protected by Article 1 of the First Protocol as being a charity brings with it an entitlement to tax reliefs. The Board Members considered whether any possible interference may be justified. They considered that the integrity of charity law and the maintenance of an accurate register of charities to promote public trust and confidence in charities are legitimate aims. In determining charitable status of organisations the Commission applies legal principles consistently for all organisations seeking registration as charities. The requirement of all charities to have purposes that meet the test in Part 1 of the Charities Act 2006 is prescribed by law, is within the margin of appreciation allowed to member states and the Commission has produced statutory guidance to clarify the public benefit requirement

The Board Members noted that any alleged discrimination will not be in breach of Article 14 if it has an objective and reasonable justification i.e. where it is made in pursuant of a legitimate aim; or there is a reasonable relationship of proportionality between the means employed and the aims sought to be realised. The Board Members considered that there was objective and reasonable justification for the reasons listed under consideration of Article 1 above.