

DAVINCI CODE: FACT OR FICTION

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WHY IT MATTERS:

- 40 million copies sold, translated into more than 40 languages. Paperback printed 6 million copies (Harry Potter only printed 2 million).
- At one point, all 4 of Dan Brown's books were near the top of the NYT bestseller list.
- There are scores of sites/books/blogs/articles out there on cracking, breaking, decoding, busting, debunking.
- Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia, has an article on it
- There's a video game out now based on it
- It's everywhere! So much so that Time magazine named Dan Brown one of the 100 most influential people on the planet.

BUT ISN'T IT JUST FICTION?

- Well, yes...and no. Brown was interviewed on a nationwide program in the States back in 2004-2005. On it he stated that although the storyline is fictional, it is laid upon a bedrock of fact. On another program he was asked what he would change if he was to write a non-fiction book covering the same topics. Nothing, he said. [Although, in fairness, he has backed down a bit from this on his website in recent days].
- Brown is an evangelist. Here's what he said on yet another news interview...*"I began as a skeptic. As I started researching the Da Vinci Code, I really thought I would disprove a lot of this theory about Mary Magdalene and Holy Blood and all that. I became a believer"* [BDVC, p. 4].
- Further, Christianity is rooted in history. It is falsifiable. That is, it makes claims about people and places in time and space that can be verified. To question the history of Christianity is to call into question Christianity itself. You don't have to be afraid of something to want to answer its claims.
- I certainly don't fear the DaVinci code or Dan Brown. But the fact is, it is calling into question the story of Christianity. And that deserves interaction and critique. That's why this isn't a Protestant/Catholic issue. Rather it's an issue of dealing appropriately with historical data.
- Finally, it's important because what Dan Brown has done is to take a topic that was, in the past, confined to the ivory tower of academia and thrust it into the mainstream, everyday world. That academic discussion is one that most people are not familiar with. So, to present only one side of that discussion is inappropriate. As Darrell Bock says,
"The scope of what it claims as fact, the impression it leaves making those claims under the 'cover' of fiction, and the fact that it addresses a significant subject for our culture's own self understanding make it important that its claims be assessed and/or appreciated. This is especially true when the area it addresses is largely unknown territory for readers of the novel. One needs a guide for the terrain. For the issues of faith and relationship to God are too important to be left to the confusing category of "historical" fiction where the claim is that despite being a novel the history is fact" [BDVC, p. 6].

THE PLAN FOR THE EVENING:

- So, that's what we're going to do. We're going to look at the other side of the Da Vinci debate by looking at some of the claims made by this camp. What we need to do in order to do this well is to go back to some of the people actually engaged in this same debate in the 2nd and 3rd century. Incidentally, this is precisely what Dan Brown and others fail to appreciate...that this same debate was going on well before the council of Nicea in 325. We can go back to the 1st-3rd centuries to see what they thought. I'm going to show you some texts that you've probably never seen before, and introduce you to some guys you've probably never heard of.

- We're going to have to paint with some broad strokes because we really don't have all night, but I'm happy to stay all night if you want to chat privately about some things. I'll do the best I can. I've borrowed tonight from many sources, but mainly from a book one of my seminary professors, Dr. Darrell Bock, did called *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*. I have some more thorough outlines available on our website under our Bible Resource Page. Feel free to go there and download them.
- We're going to center our discussion tonight on 4 main areas, although we won't be able to devote the same amount of time to each. If you've ever been to the A&E, you know what triage is. If you've got a little cut, you know you're going to be there waiting all night long because little cuts aren't as important as broken bones. Well, we're going to do triage tonight. We'll spend a little time on some cuts but more time on some broken bones.
- Here's the 4 areas: 1) Mary Magdalene – was she married to Jesus, 2) The Gnostics and their works – were they merely another expression of Christianity, 3) The Divinity of Jesus – was it invented by the Church in the 4th century, 4) The development of the New Testament – was it decided at Nicea. All of these represent claims made in the Da Vinci Code and by other academics in the same camp.
- We're going to do about 45 minutes, then we'll take about 5 minutes to stretch, then we'll do another 45 minutes, take about 5 to stretch. Then we'll come back to tie up any loose ends, conclude, and hopefully have some q and a.

MAIN CLAIM OF THE BOOK AND ACADEMICS IN THE SAME CAMP...

- Again, this isn't a new discussion. It's been going on since 1945 when the Gnostic texts were discovered in the Egyptian desert at Nag Hammadi. Brown just brought from the academic realm to the everyday world. Here's the main point: "Christianity needs a new story because the old one was bad history in which the suppressed losers were denied a hearing...this injustice needs correcting" [BDVC, p. 131].
- Here's how Harvard's Karen King puts it: "One consequence of the triumph of Nicene orthodoxy was that the viewpoints of other Christians were largely lost, serving only in documents denouncing them. Until now, the clearest contribution of the recent discoveries is in providing a wealth of primary works that illustrate the plural character of early Christianity and offer alternative voices. They disclose a much more diverse Christianity than we ever suspected; for the later story presents only two kinds of Christians: true Christians (the orthodox) and false Christians (the heretics)" [*Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, p. 128-29. quoted in BDVC, p. 160-61].
- So again, the ultimate claim is that the true truth needs to be told, and it is represented by the Gnostics. Or is it?
- Listen to another statement by Karen King: "Moreover, the use of terms like "orthodoxy" and "heresy" immediately designates who were the winners and losers, but in practice "heresy" can only be identified by hindsight, instituting the norms of a later age as the standard for an earlier period. Hence the logic is circular; the New Testament and the Nicene Creed define orthodox Christianity, not only in the fourth century and beyond, but anachronistically in the previous centuries as well" [ibid.]. With all respect to Karen King, that statement completely ignores documentation and data that we have from the 1st through the 3rd centuries (before Nicea supposedly defined the New Testament and Christian Orthodoxy). 1st-3rd century evidence from both Christians and non-Christians. So, in my view, this camp's assertion that the story needs to be changed because other expressions of Christianity were ignored and suppressed is built on a faulty premise: that being that the New Testament and Christian orthodoxy were invented in 325 AD at Nicea. That premise ignores 300 years of historical evidence that points to a quite different reality. Let's look at it.

WHO WAS MARY MAGDALENE? WAS SHE JESUS' WIFE? WAS JESUS MARRIED?

- The claim of the DVC is that MM was the wife of Jesus and the mother of His child. Her womb, as it represented the royal bloodline of Jesus, is the Holy Grail. The Church has suppressed this

fact since Nicea and its revelation today would utterly destroy the Church. Therefore, the Church has, for centuries, tried to silence those who knew the secret by any means necessary.

- This case is built on 3 things, both in the book and the movie. 1) the supposed presence of Mary Magdalene sitting next to Jesus in Da Vinci's Last Supper (even though no art historian thinks that figure is anyone other than the Apostle John (who was often portrayed in art as effeminate because of his youthful age)), 2) a text from the Gnostic Gospel of Philip, and 3) a text from a Gnostic Gospel of Mary. [In the book and in the movie, Leigh Teabing goes to these as "prooftexts" for his position.](#) The claims of DVC merely assume the accuracy of these texts. And here's the irony. Some people raise doubts about the historical accuracy of the 4 Gospel accounts because they regard them as prejudicial (that they were written by the "winners" to propagate their propaganda so we can't trust them). Authors writing more than 100 years later from, at best, the fringe of accepted Christianity, however, are treated as if they speak truth – no questions asked. Teabing states that these Gnostic texts "[Clearly confirm](#)" that the modern Bible is a fabrication (p. 234), and that they represent "[the earliest Christian records](#)" (p. 245).
- So who was Mary Magdalene? We don't know much...here's what we know from the NT.
 - There are 7 Marys mentioned in the New Testament.
 - Mary, the mother of Jesus (**Luke 1:30-31**)
 - Mary of Bethany (**John 11:1**) – Connected with Lazarus and Martha in **John 11**. Also connected with the woman who anointed Jesus with perfume in **John 12**, and, perhaps (incorrectly in my view), with the prostitute who anointed Jesus with oil in **Luke 7**.
 - Mary, the mother of James, not Jesus' brother (**Matthew 27:56**)
 - Mary the wife of Clopas (**John 19:25**)
 - Mary the mother of John Mark (**Acts 12:12**)
 - An Unidentified Mary (**Romans 16:6**)
 - Mary Magdalene whose hometown was Magdala (**Luke 8:1-3**) – NB, in almost every case, each of these women were identified by their connection with men. This was not only common, but was the cultural norm in that day, Note also the reference to Mary Magdalene not as connected to a particular male, but to her hometown. More later.
 - There are 4 sets of New Testament passages that discuss Mary Magdalene
 - She was a disciple (learner) who was the beneficiary of an exorcism by Jesus and traveled with other women (not entirely uncommon) in order to support and help Jesus and the Apostles (**Luke 8:1-3**)
 - She was present at the Cross, also, along with other women (**Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; John 19:25**). Note that the text is silent on her connection with a male, especially Jesus (and this would be a prime spot to mention it). Note also that she is always mentioned in connection with other women.
 - She was at the cross at or after Jesus was laid to rest (**Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:40**). Once again, note that she is not alone, but with other women.
 - She is witness to the resurrection (**Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1, 9; Luke 8; 24:10**). Again, note the entourage. In fact, this account in **John 20:11-18** is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus and Mary are alone together. She reacts with joyful surprise (understandable) upon seeing Jesus, and she hugs Him. Jesus responds by telling her to let Him go (except for the holy kiss greeting in **Romans 16:16**, public displays of affection were not culturally acceptable). In this instance, she was an apostle – not in the technical sense of the 12 – but in the normal sense of the word. She was a messenger, sent by Jesus to tell the 11 that He had risen. Incidentally, this is the more common usage of the term. THAT'S IT. 12 passages in total, 11 if **Mark 16:9** is omitted.
 - **CHARACTER SKETCH FROM NT:** She was a disciple and traveling supporter of Jesus as part of a larger group of women. She is never related in any other sense. She is not connected to any male relatives as other women typically are. She was a witness to the cross, burial, and resurrection.
- Here's what we have from outside the New Testament

- **Hippolytus** (3rd century Church Father) in his highly allegorical *Commentary on the Song of Songs 24-26* referred to the women at the tomb as “**the apostles to the apostles.**” That is, they were the messengers (which is what the word apostle means in its normal usage) of Jesus’ resurrection to the 12 (apostle as used in the more technical sense). Allegorically, this is a reference to the Church as witnesses of Christ’s resurrection to the world. In the middle ages, a translation of Hippolytus began to surface that used the singular “**apostle to the Apostles.**” A Lady named Ann Graham Brock in her book, *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle*, uses this later, erroneous translation to infer that this apostle was Mary Magdalene and that this confirms that Mary had a special place among the Apostles.
- A text in *the Gospel of Philip* (written around 250 AD) is used to argue that Mary was married to Jesus. It is quoted in the novel in this way... “**And the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, ‘Why do you love her more than all of us?’” (p. 246-7).** In actuality, however, the manuscript that we have is broken in several places. These gaps have been filled in by translators. Here’s what the actual manuscript we have says, “**And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [...]loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [...].”**
 - It’s argued in the novel and the book that the word for “companion” would have been understood in that day to mean spouse. That’s not entirely true. It was a word used for spouse, but it was also used for other things as well...participant, fellow laborer, etc.
 - Further, even scholars like Karen King admit that in a previous reference to kissing in the *Gospel of Philip*, it is not a kiss of marriage but of fellowship. So it makes sense that this reference to kissing could also be a kiss of fellowship...again, assuming for the sake of argument that this is a historical account and to be taken literally (which is highly doubtful – most Gnostic texts were not literal but to be taken as symbolic)...but, assuming it’s literal, we still don’t know where He kissed her.
- Finally, a text in *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* from the 2nd century is used to note that Jesus held MM in higher regard than the other Apostles.

“**But Andrew answered and said to the brethren, ‘Say what you (wish to) say about what she has said. I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas.’ Peter answered and spoke concerning these same things. He questioned them about the Savior: ‘Did He really speak with a woman without our knowledge and not openly? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did He prefer her to us?’ Then Mary wept and said to Peter, ‘My brother, Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I have thought this up myself in my heart, or that I am lying about the Savior?’ Levi answered and said to Peter, ‘Peter you have always been hot tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. That is why He loved her more than us. Rather let us be ashamed and put on the perfect Man, and separate as He commanded us and preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said.’”**

 - Again, this text is probably best interpreted as representing symbolically the struggle between the orthodox, apostolic teaching (Peter) and the Gnostic writers (As were often represented by their patron saint, MM).
 - The claim is that Mary received special revelation from Jesus and was, therefore, favored by Him. The implication is that Jesus knew her well enough to know she was worthy of this special revelation. But even if this is true, there is no appeal to any special family status.

- These come from the Gnostics themselves and there's never any mention of marriage. Isn't it possible that the reason there isn't is because they knew that there was no marriage? I think it's not only possible, but likely.
- What of the claim that she was a prostitute? This is purportedly how the Church sought to cover it up, by defaming her through calling her a prostitute. [DVC p. 244](#). on Mary Magdalene's soiled reputation: [Teabing said, "Magdalene was no such thing. That unfortunate misconception is the legacy of a smear campaign launched by the early Church. The Church needed to defame Mary Magdalene in order to cover up her dangerous secret – her role as the Holy Grail."](#)
 - The problem with this is that it would mean that the Church knew the truth and that those who had gone before them knew the truth. And that people who were not even related to the Church would know the truth. If that were true, everyone would know already.
 - No text anywhere claims this.
 - First mention of this is in a sermon by Pope Gregory the Great in 591AD, probably as a result of confusing the passages in the NT.
 - Virtually all scholars agree that Mary Magdalene is introduced in **Luke 8:1-3** as a new character. Luke doesn't connect her with any previous material although it would be easy to do if she was related to the immoral woman in **chapter 7:36-51**.
 - So, the Church didn't believe this until the end of the 6th century...not at Nicea! The Eastern Orthodox Church never believed it.
- ***THAT'S IT!!!: That's all we know about Mary from Magdala.*** There is NO clear text inside or outside the Bible to indicate that Jesus was married or that Mary Magdalene was His wife. It is ultimately conjecture. Mary was a faithful disciple: a witness to the cross and resurrection – not a prostitute. There is no evidence of marriage to Jesus. Here's how Bock concludes his chapter on this...["the reason there is no trace is that Mary was not married to Jesus. In my office there are thirty-eight volumes of early church documents, each of several hundred, double columns, in small print. The fact that out of all this material, only two texts can be brought forward as even ancient candidates for the theory shows how unlikely it is"](#) [BDVC, p. 27].
- ***Further, there's no text anywhere that states that Jesus was married or that He was widowed,*** even though there are plenty of places where it would have been easy and even helpful to mention a wife. How about at the Cross? MM was there. Why did Jesus tell John to take care of His mother and not His wife? Was He a jerk? I don't think so.
 - It is the opinion of all but a very few conspiracy theorists that Jesus was single. These are not dopes, either, but top scholars in the field of ancient history and biblical studies. In fact, Jesus' singleness is one of the very few things that both conservative and liberal biblical scholars nearly unanimously agree on. Try to appreciate how rare that is.
 - There is no mention anywhere at any point in Jesus' earthly ministry of the presence of a wife. This is not an argument from silence in the traditional negative sense. There were plenty of opportunities to mention a marriage, but where there actually is no marriage there can only be silence.
 - The claim is also made that Jesus would have to be married as a good Jew because it was culturally unacceptable to be single and Jewish. We don't have time to explore this, get the outlines, though, and there are some quotes from Jewish and Roman historians about pious Jews that were respected within Judaism who remained celibate. So Jesus could still be single and fit the mold of a pious Jew. Marriage was not a necessary step in order for Him to be culturally accepted.

DO THE SECRET, Gnostic GOSPELS HELP US UNDERSTAND JESUS?

- **DVC p. 231** – Sir Leigh Teabing (the historical “expert” of the book) says that there were “**more than 80 gospels**” considered for the NT. This is perhaps the most misleading statement of “fact” in the book.
- There were not more than 80 gospel documents. Here are several of the definitive listings of Gnostic texts.
 - o *The Nag Hammadi Library* was a jar of texts discovered in an Egyptian cave in 1945 by Muhammad Ali. Before this discovery, we only knew of the Gnostic writers through the writings of the Church Fathers. With this discovery, however, we could now actually read their own words. *Nag Hammadi* (published in English in 1977) contained 45 titles – not all were gospels. In fact it names only 5 – *Gospel of Truth, Thomas, Philip, Egyptians, and Mary*.
 - o *The Gnostic Scriptures* by Bentley Layton lists just shy of 40 titles, only 3 of which are gospels and overlap with the 5 above.
 - o Helmut Koester’s *Introduction to the New Testament* lists 60 works. Again, most of these were not gospels.
- The Church Fathers (particularly Irenaeus (2nd cent.), Hippolytus (2nd-3rd cent.), and Tertullian (2nd-3rd cent.)) were very critical of the Gnostics, insisting that their teachings were at odds with Apostolic teachings. Again, before Nag Hammadi, all we knew of the Gnostics was from secondary sources.
- Here are some titles of some Gnostic texts: *Gospel of Thomas; Philip; Mary; Acts of John; Testimony of Truth; Wisdom of Jesus Christ*. The dates range from the 2nd to 3rd centuries AD, although a few are alleged to be older (this is a very small minority). Nearly all of the texts are at least several generations removed from Jesus.

We now turn to some specific views that they espoused...

- The 4 main issues center on one fundamental premise. These were the main issues and premise that drove the ancient debate between the Church Fathers and Gnostics. The premise is 1) that all of these texts reveal new mysterious/secret gnosis or knowledge. The four issues that stem from this new knowledge have to do with the following: 2) the way God relates to the created world and who God is in general, 3) the person of Jesus, work on the cross, and salvation, 4) the role of revelation, authority, and spirituality in defining faith, and 5) to a lesser degree, the role of women. Let’s unpack these...
 - o *Central Issue of secret knowledge*: The basic understanding in the Gnostic world was that certain Christians had access to mysterious knowledge. It was secret, only given to the most spiritual people.

“And he [the Savior] said to me [Peter], “Be strong, for you are the one to whom these mysteries have been given. To know them through revelation, that he whom they crucified is first-born, and the home of the demons, and the stoney vessel in which they dwell of Elohim, of the cross which is under the Law. But he who stands near him is the living Savior, the first in him, whom they seized and released, who stands joyfully looking at those who did him violence, while they were divided among themselves. Therefore he laughs at their lack of perception, knowing that they are born blind. So then the one susceptible to suffering shall come, since the body is the substitute. But what they released was my incorporeal body. But I am the intellectual Spirit filled with radiant light. He whom you saw coming to me is our intellectual Pleroma, which unites perfect light with my Holy Spirit.” *Apocalypse of Peter 82:17-83:15 p. 66.*

From this quote we learn that 1) dualism is present as the immaterial *pleroma* is the source of all knowledge. We see 2) a distinction between the Savior’s corporeal body and His immaterial aspect (“**pure light**”) with only the latter being the true Jesus. 3) His entire teaching is a mystery. This differs with true orthodoxy which argues that the Bible is the

revelation of God. It is laid bare for all to see and work to understand. In fact, it is meant to be understood by children. It's not about being an "insider" or somehow attaining to any insider knowledge.

- *Issue 2 on how God relates to this world:* Dualism is a concept which states that everything falls into one of two categories, material and immaterial. The material world is evil while the immaterial is good. The Gnostics argued that God (immaterial and good) was opposed by the "Demiurge." It was the demiurge, being evil, that created the material realm (note *Hypostasis 86:20-87:11* –

[Speaking of the heavenly authorities "Their chief is blind; [because of his] Power and his ignorance [and his] arrogance he said with his [Power], 'It is I who an God; there is none [apart from me].' When he said this, he sinned against [the *Pleroma*]. And this speech got up to Incorruptibility; then there was a voice that came forth from Incorruptibility, saying, 'You are mistaken, Samuel' – which is 'god of the blind.' His thoughts became blind. And, having expelled his Power – that is, the blasphemy he had spoken – he pursued it down to Chaos and the Abyss, his mother, at the instigation of Pistis Sophia (Faith-Wisdom). And she established each of his offspring in conformity with its power – after the pattern of the realms that are above, for by starting from the invisible world the visible world was invented." on p. 69).

According to this text, deity existed in a series of worlds and there was conflict among the numerous heavenly authorities (cf *87:11-26*). Also note this description from the Eastern Orthodox scholar Frederica Mathewes-Green,

"...The problem wasn't the insistence that we can directly experience God. It was that the Gnostics' schemes of how to do this were so *wacky*. Preposterous stories about creation, angels, demons, and spiritual hierarchies multiplied like mushrooms...The version attributed to Valentinus, the best-known Gnostic, is typical. Valentinus supposedly taught a hierarchy of spiritual beings called 'aeons.' One of the lowest aeons, Sophia, fell and gave birth to the Demiurge, the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. This evil Demiurge created the visible world, which was a bad thing, because now we pure spirits are all tangled up in fleshly bodies. Christ was an aeon who took possession of the body of the human Jesus, and came to free us from the prison of materiality" (Bock, p. 71-73).

There is a giant gap between the orthodox understanding of God and that of the Gnostics. Valentinus also believed that God existed as a "dyad." He was both Ineffable, the Depth, and Primal Father; and Grace, Silence, the Womb, and "Mother of the All" (p. 74). This understanding of the "divine feminine" is another distinguishing feature of Gnosticism that differentiates it from Orthodoxy. This is ironic given the fact that they did not necessarily value women (cf *Gospel of Thomas* text)

"Simon Peter said to them [the disciples], 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of Life.' Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her, in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'" p. 75).

To sum up: The Gnostic view of God is that He is too transcendent to bother with creation and humanity. The NT view of God is that He loved humanity so much that He became incarnate and died in order to save it (**Philippians 2:5-9**). That's a big difference.

- *Issue 3 on Jesus:* The Gnostics taught that Jesus was actually 2 beings: the living Lord and Savior Jesus and the human substitute Jesus. In *The Apocalypse of Peter 81:4-24*

"I saw him apparently being seized by them. And I said, 'What am I seeing, O Lord? Is it really you whom they take? And are you holding on to me? And are they hammering the feet and hands of another? Who is this one above the cross, who is glad and laughing?' The Savior said to me, 'He whom you saw being glad and laughing above the cross is the Living Jesus. But he into whose hands and feet they

are driving the nails is his fleshly part, which is the substitute. They put to shame that witch remained in his likeness. And look at him, and [look at] me!” (p. 75-7)

we see that the Savior is spiritual and from the Father (God) and had nothing to do with the flesh. The earthly Jesus only represented the spiritual Jesus...He wasn't actually Him. In the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth 56:6-19*

“It was another...who drank the gall and the vinegar; it was not I. They struck me with the reed; it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder. It was another upon whom they placed the crown of thorns. But I was rejoicing in the height...over their error...And I was laughing at their ignorance.” (p. 77-8)

it was not the spiritual Jesus who died, but the earthly representative. *Acts of John 93*

“I will tell you another glory, brothers, sometimes when I meant to touch him I encountered a material, solid body; but at other times again when I felt him, his substance was immaterial and incorporeal...as if it did not exist at all.” (p. 78)

argues that Jesus' humanity was a phantom. So, the portrait we see of Jesus in the Gnostic literature is more divine and separate from humanity; NOT more human as suggested by the DVC. Consider these biblical passages: **John 20** – Mary clung to a physical Jesus and He showed Thomas the nail prints in His hands; **Luke 24** – Jesus eats a meal with His disciples following His resurrection. Rather, the divine/human Jesus endured death and suffering (**John 1:1-18; Romans 3:21-26; 5:1-11; 1 John 1:1-4; Hebrews 4:14-10:18; Acts 2:16-40; 1 Corinthians 15:3-11; Titus 2:11-14**). This is important because, for Gnostics, salvation does not depend on the substitutionary death of a divine Jesus but on the attainment of special knowledge of the immaterial world – ie, it's up to us.

- *Issue 4 on authority and revelation:* Jesus is merely a conduit to higher knowledge, and no one can challenge anyone who claims to have received some special revelation from God. In other words, there is no authority structure – anything goes when it comes to revelation. This is why the Gnostic literature can even teach contradictory things (perhaps that's why it is so popular in these days?). They believed in direct access to continued divine revelation. This is a classic case of the “haves vs. the have-nots”. Again, the major subject was the inner being, not God, as it tried to connect to the immaterial world. In the *Gospel of Thomas 45:30-33*
“If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you” (p. 83),

spirituality is internal and personal and has nothing to do with Jesus. Contrast that to the NT understanding where spirituality has everything to do with a connection to Jesus. Note the difference between the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of John* from p. 84.

“Now we can see how John's message contrasts with that of Thomas. Thomas's Jesus directs each disciple to discover the light within (“within a person of light there is light”); but John's Jesus declares instead that “I am the light of the world” and that “whoever does not come to me walks in darkness.” In Thomas, Jesus reveals to the disciples that “you are from the kingdom and to it you shall return” and teaches them to say for themselves that “we come from the light”: but John's Jesus speaks as the only one who comes “from above” and so has rightful priority over everyone else: “You are from below; I am from above...The one who comes from above is above all.” – Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The secret Gospel of Thomas*

- *Issue 5 on the place of women:* The Gnostics held that anyone could receive special revelation, even women. In fact they encouraged women to lead in places when they had received such revelation. But, at the same time, other Gnostic texts demeaned women...
“Simon Peter said to them [the disciples], ‘Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of Life.’ Jesus said, ‘I myself shall lead her, in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven’”. *Gospel of Thomas 114*, p. 75).

Remember too, that this is a minor issue in the light of the previous 4!

The Current Appeal to the Gnostics

- Why are the Gnostics making such a comeback?
- Some people would like to suggest that the rediscovery of the Gnostic heritage shows how truly diverse the Christian culture was in the 2nd century. This is only partially true. They definitely considered themselves to be Christian, and they definitely elicited a strong response from orthodox Christians. BUT!!!! Their views were decidedly different from those of orthodox Christianity (that is in keeping with the apostolic tradition). The fact is that each side claimed that the other was not Christian. These were not simply 2 expressions of the same faith...they were 2 different faiths.
- It is important to note that proponents of this view also use the language of “history is written by the winners” to argue that orthodox Christianity merely subverted these otherwise legitimate views of early Christians. Note that people who use this rhetoric always have an agenda behind their words (see Pagels’ quote on p. 86-8,
“The concerns of Gnostic Christians survived only as a suppressed current, like a river driven underground...Now that the Nag Hammadi discoveries give us a new perspective on this process...All the old questions – the original questions, sharply debated at the beginning of Christianity – are being reopened...” [On the Nag Hammadi finds in the 20th century] “Today we read them [the Gnostic texts] with different eyes, not merely as ‘madness or blasphemy’ but as Christians in the first century experienced them – a powerful alternative to what we know as orthodox Christian tradition.”).
- They reject the Christian faith as a historically unified set of core beliefs held over the centuries from the earliest point (which is what we see). They ignore the earliest apostolic tradition which had emerged contrary to the Gnostics (NB the example of Paul. We know that his letters were written within 30 years of Jesus death, many even earlier, and he gives us an orthodox understanding completely contrary to the Gnostics.).
- “Interestingly and ironically perhaps this view is asking for something that neither of the early Christian alternatives in its time would have accepted as a viable option. The lesson of history is that these two approaches to Christianity were so very different from each other as to be incompatible from the view of each school” [Bock, p. 89]
Both groups can’t be Christian in the same way both Christianity and Islam can’t both be Christian. cf Tertullian, *Against Marcion 4:4*, p. 90, “I say that my Gospel is the true one; Marcion, that his is. I affirm that Marcion’s Gospel is adulterated; Marcion, that mine is...”
Tertullian goes on to defend this by claiming that errors only arise from the truth; therefore the Apostolic truth that he possesses is earlier in time than Marcion’s distortions of it.
- That leaves us with 2 key points: 1) each side did not recognize the other as legitimate, and 2) The issue, as far as the orthodox Church Fathers were concerned, had to do with the timing, or age of the Gnostic writings. ie, they were late and non-Apostolic.

Why is this important?

- We are seeing the revision of history on a bad foundation.
- Again, this is fringe Christianity AT BEST. It’s really totally different. We’re not getting the full story from these writers today. Most only pick and choose what they want to consider as it best fits their agendas.

Final Conclusions

- The “secret” refers to the fundamental principle within Gnosticism – the discovery of new revelation, or knowledge, which results in salvation.
- Each side in the ancient debate rejected the other side as an aberration of Christianity. They are not the same thing. As the *Apocalypse of Peter 79:30* declares of orthodoxy in calling them “empty channels” (p. 97). The *Testimony of Truth 34:26* claiming of the traditionalists, “They do not have the Word which gives [life].”

CODE 5: HOW WERE THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPELS ASSEMBLED?

- This and the discussion of the Gnostic Gospels that we just looked at are the most problematic in the book.
- In DVC, Sir Leigh Teabing says the following (DVC, p. 231-35). He states that Constantine “‘commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned”” (p. 234). It’s here that he notes the *Nag Hammadi* texts mentioned earlier and blames the Vatican for their suppression. He then argues that the modern Bible “‘was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda – to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use the influence to solidify their own power base.”” Langdon tries to assuage him by affirming, essentially, that while the men in Rome were liars, they were at least sincere. Teabing then returns with “‘almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false”” (p. 235).
- So, Constantine and the Council of Nicea in AD 325 are held culpable for voting for Jesus’ divinity when “‘until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet”” (p. 233). He continues, “‘Christ as Messiah was critical to the functioning of Church and state. Many scholars claim that the early Church literally *stole* Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power.””
- So, there are 2 FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES TO CONSIDER HERE:
 - o What Christians believed and when they began to believe it, and
 - o What took place before Nicea was held. That is, before Nicea, what did Christians believe and where can we find the evidence?
- First, there are 3 points raised in the DVC that have some validity...
 - o Constantine was a key figure in Church history and his rule was a turning point from suffering and persecution to Imperial support.
 - o The Nicene Creed was an important affirmation in the history of faith and was partly an effort to define what Christians should believe. It was an attempt to codify a set of core beliefs that were regarded as essential.
 - o During this period, a collection of texts that would become the canon of Scripture gained momentum. As a result of this collection, certain other texts became less important and many were destroyed.
- But, and this is the point to remember, the council and the creed represented what a sizable number of Christians had believed for more than two hundred years. Nicea made specific what had always been believed in general terms. Further, the four Gospels highlighted at this council had been solidly established for more than a century before Nicea. So the vote at Nicea, rather than establishing the Church’s beliefs, affirmed and recognized what were already the predominant views in the Church.

Jesus’ Divinity: Vote or Conviction? (What did Christians believe and when did they believe it?)

- *Evidence from the First century: Paul and early traditional materials*
 - o Paul’s writings date from AD 50-68, almost 300 years before Nicea.
 - o Paul used many creeds, confessions, and hymns of the earliest Christians to argue many of his points.
 - **1 Corinthians 8:5-6** – “Lord” being a reference to God as One demanding and deserving of worship.
 - In several places, Jesus is mentioned as the agent of creation (**Colossians 1:16** just to name one).
 - The Gospel as confessional in **1 Corinthians 15:3-5**
 - o He also used many allusions or quotations of Old Testament texts that were originally attributed to God Himself. These could be called “substitution texts,” for they place Jesus in the position of God.

- **Philippians 2:9-11** from **Isaiah 45:23** – Jesus deserves and receives the worship due God.
- This also occurs on numerous occasions outside of Paul. Just one example is **Psalm 102:25-27** in **Hebrews 1:1-13**. Jesus is NOT a mere prophet in these texts. He shares equal glory and honor with God.
- *Evidence from the rest of the New Testament*
 - **Gospel of John**, most likely (although there is debate) written in the last decade of the first century, contains an unambiguous statement of Jesus’ deity (**John 1:1, 2-3, 14**).
 - **Mark, Matthew, and Luke** (probably written in that order before 70 AD (although some liberal scholars would spread them out between the 60s and the 80s)). Whether more conservative or liberal dates are chosen, there is virtually no dispute that these all represent first century documents. They are less overt in their portrayal of Jesus’ divinity, choosing instead to work as a narrative to a climactic final confession of who Jesus is in the resurrection. But, make no mistake, all three ultimately declare that Jesus is God.
 - When Jesus was taken to be crucified, He claimed that God would indicate that Jesus was the Son of Man, One who was seated at the right hand of God and rode the clouds. The title Son of Man was reserved for Messiah, who was seen as divine. And only deity rode on the clouds.
 - Son of man imagery from **Daniel 7:9-13**. He is the one who will be given authority to judge at the end and will be brought into God’s presence. This One will not just visit God in heaven, but will sit in His presence and reign as God.
 - This can be seen in the response of the Jews when Jesus claimed this. They tore their clothes and accused Him of blasphemy for claiming to be God. That’s because they understood the significance of the terms He had used and the claims He was making through them.
- All the evidence of Paul and other New Testament writers is that Jesus was fully human, but also as the One who uniquely bears the full marks and honor of deity. These views were WIDESPREAD almost 300 years before Nicea.
- *What about the age of the view that Jesus was divine? When did the Church begin to believe it?*
 - As we saw, the view of Jesus’ divinity, as in Paul, other New Testament writings, and traditional/confessional statements made by the earliest Church, has clear expression in books written within decades of the time of Jesus.

What about the Canon and making of the New Testament?

- The naming of the books of the New Testament is part of a long process that extended from the time of their writing in the latter half of the first century until they were fully recognized in the middle of the fourth century.
- Athanasius was the first to list the 27 books of the New Testament and the first to use the term “canon” in reference to this collection (“canon” means “standard”). The history of this collection process shows that by the end of the second century, the four Gospels had, because of their roots, content, and usage, surfaced as the primary sources of Jesus’ life and ministry.
- Four forces drove the effort to define which gospel documents bore unique authority for Christians. They were 1) Apostolic roots as the ground for truth, 2) widespread use (AKA “catholicity”), 3) the rise of competing views of faith, and 4) persecution. They are unpacked here...
 - 1, 2, 3 (Apostolic roots, widespread use, and threat of false teaching)...
 - The writings of the 2nd and 3rd century Church Fathers already display the preeminent position of the four Gospels. They do so by appealing to the nature of Apostolic connection and truth in order to combat and deal with the issue of false teaching. Pressure exerted by false groups like the Ebionites (2nd cent), one led by Marcion (140), Montanus (170), and Valentinus (ca. 100-175) (as referred to in the writings of men like Irenaeus

and Tertullian) led to the need to identify core theological beliefs and key documents espousing those beliefs.

- We also have lists of books that the Church received. As new letters appeared that were either written by or attested to by an Apostle, they were spread, copied, and read in the Churches. As time went on, many of these letters began to surface as being more authoritative than others. One of these lists was discovered in 1740 by an Italian historian named Muratori. It is referred to as the *Muratorian Canon*. The copy that was discovered was an eighth century copy. The original is dated as mid-2nd century through references within the document to key figures and the recent writing of *The Shepherd of Hermes*. This is debated, with some arguing for a date in the 4th century. It states that “**the third book of the gospel is that according to Luke.**” It names only four gospels and says this about John: “**The fourth gospel is that of John, one of the disciples.**” It also names two apocalypses, one of John and one from Peter. This would not be expected if the list was from the mid fourth century *after* the Church had solidified its New Testament. So, in my view, here we have a 2nd century document that affirms 4 Gospels only.
- **Irenaeus *Against Heresies* Book 3.11.7 (2nd cent) (p. 112-3):**
“So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these [documents], each one of them endeavors to establish his own peculiar doctrine. For the Ebionites, who use Matthew’s Gospel only, are confuted out of this very same, making false suppositions with regard to the Lord. But Marcion, mutilating that according to Luke, is proved to be a blasphemer of the only existing God, from those[passages] which he still retains. Those, again, separate Jesus from Christ, alleging that Christ remained impassible, but that it was Jesus who suffered, preferring the Gospel by Mark, if they read it with a love of truth, may have their errors rectified. Those, moreover, who follow Valentinus, making copious use of that according to John, to illustrate their conjunctions, shall be proved to be totally in error by means of this very Gospel, as I have shown in the first book. Since, then, our opponents do bear testimony to us, and make use of these [documents], our proof derived from them is firm and true.”

The main point here is two-fold. First is Irenaeus’ understanding of authoritative Gospels known to the Church – four of them which could not be separated – ie, all four were important. Second, is the fact that the heretics knew of them and used them in their own defense. The central debate for Irenaeus is one concerning authority and revelation. He argues that the Apostles have authority and that their writings (or ones they were connected with) are to be given credence far above any “secret” writings.

- **Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho* 103.19 (even earlier in 2nd cent):** referred to the gospels as “**memoirs which I say were drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them.**” He used the phrase “**memoirs of the apostles**” 15 times. These references cite Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In *Dialogue* 106.3, Justin referred to the gospel of Mark as the “**memoir of Peter.**” In *1 Apology* 66.3 he referred to the “**memoirs of the apostles**” and then noted they were also called “**gospels.**”
- It was the belief that other writings like the *Gospel of Thomas* lacked such genuine apostolic connection that caused many Christians to not accept them as reflective of the faith in its earliest form.
- A 2nd century student of Justin Martyr named Tatian (who was later expelled when he began to follow the heretic Valentinus) decided he should combine the 4 Gospel accounts into one. He called it *Diatessaron* (“Through the Four”). The Church never accepted it as valid, presumably because the four gospels were too important.
- Origen (185-254): In his **first homily on Luke 1:1**, he stated that he is aware and has read some of the Gnostic texts (in particular *The Gospel of Thomas* and *The Gospel of Matthias*) and that the Church needs to heed and accept only the four Gospels

“I know a certain gospel which is called “The Gospel According to Thomas” and a “Gospel according to Matthias,” and many others have we read – lest we should in any way be considered ignorant because of those who imagine they possess some knowledge if they are acquainted with these. Nevertheless, among all these we have approved solely what the church has recognized, which is that only the four gospels should be accepted” p. 119-20).

Origen later stated in his *Commentary of the Gospel of Matthew*, “Among the four gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that first was written that according to Matthew” (p. 120). He then went on to name Mark, Luke, and John as the other 3. Again, lived a hundred years before Nicea.

- Some on the other side of the debate in the second and third centuries also began naming books. This meant that in order for the Church to combat men like the Montanists, they had to also begin to name authoritative books for the Church.
- Irenaeus’ full list had 21 books, including the four gospels. In fact, these gospels and the bulk of Paul’s writings were already well-established and circulated by AD 200. After that time, discussion of the canon was really only limited to about a dozen books that were on the fringe of consideration. Note well, though, that the 4 gospels are not on this fringe.
- On 4, persecution...
 - There were many widespread persecutions of Christians which predated Constantine. In some from the second to early fourth centuries the sacred books of the Christians were ordered to be burned or destroyed by Emperor Diocletian (AD 303). In order to follow that order, the authorities needed to know which books to destroy and be able to name them. Further, those who would defy such an order (at the risk of their own lives) needed to know which were worth the ultimate sacrifice

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- Of the four forces that led to the naming of the books and the acceptance of some and not others that followed, the claim of Apostolic connection dominated.
- The books of the New Testament were not so much selected as recognized for their importance to the early Church.
- the recognition of the four gospels *significantly* predates Nicea and Constantine.
- We haven’t even explored the question of whether the “Secret” gospels make claims that are historically true. We really haven’t even needed to because even if we take them at face value, they do not support what those in the “new” school claim for them. Rather, they force a choice: either the Gnostic texts reflect what Jesus was and is, or the four gospels are the best witnesses. You can’t have it both ways.
- Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown reviewed the book, *The Gnostic Gospels* for the *New York Times* in 1979. He stated that what the Christians in the 2nd and 3rd centuries did in rejecting these books and supporting the 4 was to reject “*only the rubbish of the second century,*” and he added, “*it’s still rubbish*” (Bock, p. 123).
- To attribute the selection of the gospels to Constantine and Nicea is to ignore more than 3 centuries of evidence and at least a century of widespread understanding of which books were important for the Church. There was never a time when Church leaders were picking and choosing from dozens of gospels. Rather, the four Gospels were well established before Constantine was ever born.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- The foundational claims of the DVC and others in the same camp have been found wanting.
 - o Mary Magdalene was not the wife of Jesus. Jesus was not married to anyone else. And He could have been single as a pious Jew.
 - o The secret Gnostic gospels don't tell us much about the centuries just after Christ, except that their beliefs regarding God, creation, Jesus, salvation, spirituality and revelation were so distinct from Apostolic Christianity, that the Church Fathers were correct in saying that they were something other than Christian.
 - o It was the presence of these differing views in the writings of the 2nd-4th centuries (along with widespread persecution) that led the Church to naming authoritative books called the Canon.
 - o Jesus' deity was not the result of a 4th century vote, but was the testimony of the Church from the earliest sources. The Four Gospels are rooted in antiquity, and were widely accepted as the only authoritative sources of Jesus' life and ministry by the end of the 2nd century at the latest.
- Again, the main theme of the DVC and the others in the same camp is that the old story of Christianity is not true and needs to be replaced. I think we have exposed that for what it is. As Darrell Bock says in his conclusion...

The Da Vinci Code is not a mere work of fiction dressed in the clothes of quasi nonfiction. It reflects an effort to represent and, in some cases, rewrite history with a selective use of ancient evidence that it ironically claims was the failing of the old story. It reflects an effort to redefine one of the key cultural forces standing at the base of Western Civilization, the Christian Faith. It claims to expose as fact something that is not there. Though there are a few points to be made and appreciated from such study, most of what lies at the base of this mega code lacks substantive historical support. In breaking The Da Vinci Code, we have discovered there is much more going on here than the creation of an entertaining novel – there is a revision of what Christianity was and is. It is virtual reality at work [BDVC, p. 149].
- The DVC, in failing to discuss and deal with texts before Nicea, represents sloppy history at best and outright deception at worst.

WHAT OF THE REAL JESUS?

- Life is a mystery. We don't know how long it will last or where we'll end up... or the twists and turns along the way. It's a roller-coaster of ups and downs and twists and turns.
- Life is a treasure- newborns – but it's also perplexing – death
- And in this life, certain questions spring to the fore...who is Jesus?

This is where MM is Helpful to us

- MM was witness to the greatest event in human history – Jesus' Resurrection.
- Jesus uniquely stands at the center of what God did and does for humanity in history.
- The death and resurrection is the focal point – the breakout event
- What does resurrection mean? It means that...
 - o Life and death collided, and life won.
 - o When we struggle to come to grips with this perplexing life, there is one who struggles with us because He overcame.
 - o Through Him, we can experience what we were meant to experience – fullness of life in Him.
- Why do we need God? Sin - all of us are accountable
- God's Solution: The Cross where payment was made...in full
- How do we respond to Jesus? One of four ways. 1) faith, 2) put it off, 3) try to change Him, 4) outright rejection. Really only 2...yes or no (numbers 2-4 are the same answer)

Ours and MM's Stories Unite – she felt the sting of death...but also the joy of life.