

The Da Vinci Code: Is Christianity True? #3

Introduction:

- A. We are going to continue and conclude this evening our look at some of the claims made by Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code*.
- B. Remember Dan Brown's expressed purpose in writing the book:
 1. The *Chronicle*, interview with Mary Richardson:
 - a. **Dan Brown:** "I like to learn. I've been a student my whole life and I've been a teacher and my dad's a teacher – I like to learn. And for me the most interesting books are the ones that you learn from. And so I wanted to write a book that, you know, while it entertained, at the same time you closed that last page and you go 'Wow! Do you know how much I just learned? That's fascinating.' Now that was really what I set out to do."
 2. As we saw in our first lesson he fully believes these things to be true.
- C. In our first lesson we examined his claim that before 325 A.D., when Emperor Constantine called the Nicean Council, Jesus was never considered by anyone to be divine – that it was first proposed and then voted on at that council.
 1. Jesus claimed divinity and the apostles preaching it 295 years before Constantine's council.
- D. Last time we looked at the claims that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were not only married but that Mary was pregnant with their daughter, Sara, at the time of Jesus' crucifixion.
 1. We carefully examined the supposed evidence and found it woefully lacking.
 2. There is no evidence at all that Jesus had any kind of an intimate relationship with anyone.
- E. In our lesson this evening we want to focus on statements made in the book about the Bible.
 1. Page 231, Teabing talking with Sophie:
 - a. Teabing cleared his throat and declared, "The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven."
 - b. "I beg your pardon." [Sophie]
 - c. "The Bible is a product of *man*, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book."
 2. Also on page 231:
 - a. "More than *eighty* gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relatively few were chosen for inclusion – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them."
 3. On page 234:
 - a. "The twist is this," Teabing said, talking faster now. "Because Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries *after* Jesus' death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a *mortal* man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history." Teabing paused, eyeing Sophie. "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."
 4. Also on page 234:
 - a. "Fortunately for historians," Teabing said, "some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. In addition to telling the true Grail story, these documents speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms. Of course, the Vatican, in keeping with their tradition of misinformation, tried very hard to suppress the release of these scrolls. And why wouldn't they? The scrolls highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming 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 His influence to solidify their own power base."

- F. So according to Brown the Bible as we have it today is not accurate in its portrayal of Jesus.
 - 1. The Nag Hammadi Gnostic gospels found in 1945 contain the true story of Jesus and only the deceived still have confidence in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
 - 2. In an interview Dan Brown said he was a Christian, and went on to say, "I am a seeker of truth wherever it may be found."
- G. Because people are ignorant of church history many are being swept away by such doctrines.
- H. Tonight we'll look at ancient Gnosticism, we'll consider briefly the Gnostic writings and the claim that they predate the N.T. books (especially the gospels), and we'll consider how they determined which books to include in our New Testaments.

I. Characteristics of Gnosticism.

A. Intro to Gnosticism.

- 1. The word "Gnostic" is derived from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means knowledge, and they were so designated because of their claims to superior knowledge.
- 2. Early Christian writers spent a lot of time battling the sect in their writings.
 - a. Irenaeus wrote his famous *Against Heresies* to refute it.
 - b. John dealt with some aspects of this movement in 1,2,3 John.
- 3. Two of the most famous leaders were Marcion and Valentinus.
- 4. Until 1945 and the discovery of the Nag Hammadi scrolls, most of what we knew about Gnosticism came from the early Christian writings against it.
 - a. But once the Gnostic books themselves were discovered, it only confirmed what the church fathers wrote about them.
- 5. But with the translation and publication of these books, Gnosticism gained new life as an outgrowth of the New Age movement.
 - a. It fits well with the mind set of postmodern spirituality of today, as well as with the "sexual revolution" and feminism.
- 6. It is these Gnostic writings that *The Da Vinci Code* claims were the true source of Christian teaching.
 - a. Remember, Teabing said there were over 80 gospels considered for inclusion in the N.T., but only four won out because the others supposedly taught Jesus was merely human and not divine.
 - b. But were there more than 80 gospels as *The Da Vinci Code* claims?

B. The Gnostic Writings.

- 1. Nag Hammadi is the town in the middle of Egypt where 13 leather bound codices (ancient books) were discovered in December of 1945.
 - a. They were discovered when Muhammed Ali (not the boxer) came across a jar of texts while digging in a cave.
- 2. The writings in these codices comprised 52 mostly Gnostic treatises, only four of which were called gospels.
 - a. The Gospel of Truth.
 - b. The Gospel of Thomas.
 - c. The Gospel of Philip.
 - d. The Gospel of the Egyptians.
 - e. [Some in their articles and outlines referred to a 5th, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*. I believe it was found separate from the Nag Hammadi codices, however.]
- 3. These codices were buried around 400 A.D., and the original documents they are copies of date to the 2nd and 3rd century.
- 4. Compared to the word:
 - a. Extremely difficult to understand and make sense of.
 - b. Filled with nonsensical things.

- c. Not an objective testimony of historical events, but secret teachings filled with hidden meanings.
- d. Lacking any connection to apostolic authority, for they came too late.

C. Main Teachings:

1. Central theme: Gnosis (knowledge).

- a. Emphasis on a quest for knowledge (*gnosis*), but not the common knowledge that all Christians could have – rather, it was a secret knowledge available only to an elite few.
 - 1) *The Gospel of Thomas* – “These are the secret sayings that the living Jesus spoke.”
 - 2) They consist mainly of supposed sayings of Jesus and when you come to understand their hidden meaning, you have gained *gnosis*.
 - a) Only the intellectuals who were initiated into the secret knowledge could understand these sayings.
 - 3) Their knowledge was not derived from intellectual comprehension of the Scripture but was a mystical knowledge.
- b. Contrast that with Jesus’ statements in the true Gospels – Matt.10:26,27; 11:25; Mk.4:21,22; Matt.19:14.
 - 1) The Bible CAN be understood – Eph.3:4.
 - 2) The only “secret things” were the things not revealed – Deut.29:29.

2. The knowledge was not gained through Scriptures as revealed from God, but rather it was found within one’s self and through experience:

- a. 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.”
- b. Elaine Pagels, in *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*:
 - 1) “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.’”
 - 2) “to know oneself, at the deepest level, is simultaneously to know God; this is the secret of *gnosis*... Self-knowledge is knowledge of God; the self and the divine are identical.”
- c. Through this knowledge found within one’s self, one comes to experience God, because God is within you, for the spirit within is the divine self.
 - 1) Can you see why the New Age movement was attracted to this?
 - 2) The similarities with Gnosticism are striking.

3. Dualism.

a. Regarding the nature of God and of the physical world.

- 1) Physical is evil; only spirit is good.
- 2) The true God can have no connection to this “evil” world.
- 3) So the physical world was created by the evil creator god of the O.T. (Demiurge).
 - a) Webster, “3. In some Gnostic systems, an inferior, not absolutely intelligent, deity, the creator of the world, identified by some with the creator God of the Old Testament, and distinguished from the supreme God” – page 267.
- 4) God’s creation was said to be good – Gen.1:31; 1 Tim.4:1-5.

b. Dual sexual nature to God – consisted of both divine mother and divine father.

- 1) The Bible teaches that God is genderless – Jn.4:24.
- 2) Presents Him as a “He” and a “Father,” yes – but He is spirit.
 - a) Sexual gender was created when man was created.
- 3) It’s this feminine aspect that is so appealing to our postmodern spirituality today – esp. among women.

- 4) But did Gnostics uphold women as some “sacred feminine”?
 - a) *Gospel of Thomas* 114: “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 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.”
- c. **Dualism in Jesus Christ.**
 - 1) The true (spiritual) Jesus was separate from the physical Jesus and saw him suffer on the cross but did not actually suffer himself.
 - a) *The Apocalypse of Peter* (81:4-24) (Peter speaking with Jesus): “I saw him apparently being sized 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 which remained in his likeness. And look at him, and [look at] me!”
 - b) *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (56:6-19): Jesus: “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.”
 - c) *Acts of John* (93) – Has John saying that sometimes he touched Jesus and felt a material body and other times he felt him “his substance was immaterial and incorporeal... as if it did not exist at all.”
 - d) Ironic thing is that TDVD doesn’t even represent Gnosticism correctly
 - i) Code: Jesus a mere mortal prophet (human).
 - ii) Gnosticism: Jesus was too divine to be human.
 - e) This is what apostle John was battling – 1 Jn.1:1-3; 2:22; 4:2,3; 2 Jn 7.
 - f) It was serious because if Jesus who died on the cross is not the Son of God, God incarnate, then God has not dealt with our sins.
 - i) That was OK for the Gnostics, because to them, salvation is in this secret knowledge and inner experience, not in the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

II. The New Gnosticism.

A. **Characterized by feminism and goddess worship (of a goddess named Sophia).**

1. Sophia is the Greek word for wisdom.

B. **Emphasis on experience and direct revelation from the Spirit.**

1. Emphasis today is on “Experiencing God” in some direct way through the emotions and the senses.
2. Contrast that with the scriptures that teach we “*walk by faith and not by sight*” – 2 Cor.5:7.
 - a. God is unseen – He doesn’t speak to us directly, but through His word

C. **Rejection of authority.**

1. The appeal of the Gnostic writings is their rejection of authority and to the exclusiveness of Christ’s teachings.
2. Since knowledge and god are found within, there is no need to follow any higher, revealed authority such as the Scriptures.
 - a. You can believe what you want to believe, interpret things the way you want to interpret them and essentially be your own god.

III. Which Gospels Came First?

- A. Again TDVC claims:
1. On page 231:
 - a. "More than *eighty* gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relatively few were chosen for inclusion – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them."
 2. On page 234:
 - a. "The twist is this," Teabing said, talking faster now. "Because Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries *after* Jesus' death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a *mortal* man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history." Teabing paused, eyeing Sophie. "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."
- B. This is what the Gnostic adherents today claim.
1. So were the Gnostic gospels the earlier gospels?
- C. Four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John:
1. **Muratorian Canon** (170 A.D.)
 - a. Discovered in 1740 by Italian historian Ludovico Antonia Muratori
 - b. The MSS (copy) dated to 8th Century A.D. but the original probably dates to late 2nd century, about 150 years before the Council of Nicea.
 - c. Names only four gospels.
 - 1) It says: "The third book of the gospel is that according to Luke." Re. John's gospel: "The fourth of the gospels is that of John, one of the disciples."
 - d. It refers to works by Valentinus and Marcion and says these should be excluded,
 2. **Irenaeus** (180 A.D.), in *Against Heresies* refers the four gospels (and only the four gospels), testifying to the fact that these were the accepted inspired gospels and criticizing various groups for only using selected portions of the four gospels (e.g. Ebionites, Marcion, Valentinus).
 - a. In ch.3:11:8 he says, "It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the 'pillar and ground' of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side.... the gospel is quadriform"
 3. **Justin Martyr** (160 A.D.):
 - a. Speaks of "the memoirs of the apostles and those who followed them," citing Matthew, Mark and Luke., calling them "gospels."
 4. **Diatessaron** (lit. "through the four") – A harmony of the four gospels created by Tatian, a 2nd century student of Justin Martyr.
 5. What about the *Gospel of Thomas* (called by some today "The fifth gospel")?
 - a. **Origen** (185-254) in his first homily on Lk.1:1, stated:
 - 1) "I know a certain gospel which is called 'The Gospel according to Thomas' and 'Gospel according to Matthias' and many others have we read... Nevertheless among all these we have approved solely what the church has recognized, which is that only the four gospels be accepted."
- D. The gnostic gospels date no earlier than the second century (some much later).
1. Dates for the gospels:
 - a. Matthew – 55-63 A.D.
 - b. Mark – 60,61 A.D.
 - c. Luke – 62 A.D.
 - d. John – 60-64 A.D.

IV. How Did They Determine Which Books To Include In The N.T.?

A. Apostolic Approval.

1. N.T. books are not authoritative because they made the canon list; they made the list because they are authoritative.
2. Not that some fellow said to include a book and thus it was regarded as the word of God.
 - a. Rather, it was included because it already was recognized to be the word of God.
3. That's the basic acid test for whether to include a book or not – was it inspired.
4. Was it written by an apostles or other inspired writer?
5. The gnostic gospels were not regarded as authoritative by first century Christians.
 - a. In fact, most of them were not written until 125+ years later.

B. Genuineness.

1. Is it the product of those for whom it is claimed?
2. Refers to the question of whether it is written by the man who is claimed to have written it at the time it was said to have been written.
3. Many of the gnostic gospels carry names that make you think they were written by some well-known Bible character at the same time as the N.T. books.
 - a. *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* was NOT written by Mary Magdalene.
 - 1) Most scholars date it no earlier than 180-200 A.D.
 - b. *The Gospel of Thomas; The Gospel of Philip; The Teachings of Silvanus; etc...*

C. Authenticity.

1. Is it a record of actual facts truly stated?
2. Answers the question, "Is it factual?"
 - a. If it contained obvious absurdities then it was rejected.

D. Testimony.

1. What is the testimony of early writers regarding the book?
2. Origen (185-254) mentions most books of N.T. by name, stating that a few were disputed by some.
3. Eusebius (265-340) mentions all as acknowledged except James, Jude, 2 Pet., 2,3 John.

Conclusion:

- A. Ironically, Gnosticism is supposedly a religion based on knowledge, but in reality is a religion based on ignorance.
 1. While claiming a higher knowledge, it leaves people in ignorance of the truth about Jesus Christ and Christianity, and the truth about how we got the Bible.
 2. It destroys the atoning work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, on the cross.
 3. It destroys the simplicity of the gospel and of the word of God.
- B. But the word of God is plain and simple: When you read it, you can understand it.
- C. These are the main areas of concern in TDVC.
 1. Let us use the interest so many have in this book as an opportunity to teach them truth, as found in God's word.

(This outline has leaned heavily on outlines by another preacher, but I have lost both his name and where I obtained them from. I am thus unable to give due credit.)