

CHRISTIANITY AND THE DA VINCI CODE

Teaching #2

GNOSTICISM THROUGH THE AGES

I. INTRODUCTION: Summary of last week

The birth of Christianity was a grass-roots movement that swept across the Roman Empire in the 1st and 2nd century
aided by Roman system of Pax Romana, superb roads, unifying Greek language, etc.
aided by Jewish synagogue system throughout empire due to earlier generations of Dispersion
caused by invading empires as well as economic hardships in Palestine
fanned by flame of New Life in Jesus Christ
based on witness by the masses of His teachings and healings, spread orally before written down
based on the Crucifixion and attendant forgiveness of sins
based on the Resurrection and the eyewitness accounts of hundreds to whom Jesus reappeared
based on outpouring of Holy Spirit and correlative outpouring of love for one another and those in need

The formation of the Bible

Began with oral tradition (highly accurate in that time)
Then letters circulated through churches all over the empire
Then “memoirs of the apostles”, later called Gospels, also circulated
Many stories and letters written about Jesus in first centuries after His death
None given the authority of Old Testament Scripture (Hebrew Bible) which Christians, like Jews, held to be Word of God
“Words of Jesus” passed down orally still cherished above all written material
Gradually *some* letters and *some* gospels were so revered that they were added to reading of (Hebrew) Scripture in Sunday worship
Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, 13 Letters of Paul, etc.
By end of 2nd century
evidence from variety of sources and variety of locations (Rome, Gaul, Alexandria, Carthage) that “canon” of Christian writings was forming
By beginning of 3rd Century
wide agreement about most of the books of the canon
By 4th century
various sources, various locations throughout Roman Empire (e.g., Alexandria, Milan, Hippo, North Africa)
all agree with “canon” as it now appears in Christian Bible
Surely the work of the Holy Spirit!

II. QUESTION OF HERESY ENTERS THE SCENE

Not surprisingly,
As personal authority of 1st generation of Christian leaders receded into past
many competing points of view began to creep into/challenge the original faith.

Paul, writing to young churches at Corinth and Colossae
gave delicate but firm corrections to false teachings he perceived

Corinth

Spiritual aristocracy: some prided self on possession of profounder wisdom and deeper mystical experiences than their brethren or even than Paul

Moral licentiousness in some, strict moral asceticism in others: both based on belief that spirit is everything, body is nothing, if not actually evil

Colossae

Worship of intermediate angelic powers, believed to possess power to guide some to God after death

All part of general category of competing points of view commonly labeled “Gnosticism”

believed by apostles and early church leaders to be “heresy”

Note “Heresy”, from Greek word for “choice” originally referred to “other choice” but by early 2nd Century implied falsehood, even evil

“Sect” generally used to describe a dissenting minority, but remains neutral and distinct from “heresy”

“Gnosticism”

Very “in” right now (I’ll tell you why in a minute)

Term used to describe dozens of rival sects which broke with, or were expelled from, early Christianity between late 1st and early 4th century

Term “Gnosticism” derived from ordinary Greek word (g)nosis

Word for “knowledge” – i.e., the special knowledge from insight, especially from knowing one’s self

Based on belief that a few were given special *insight* into interior “Divine Spark”, by which they could gain salvation

Imprecise religion

Existing independently of Christianity and prior to Christianity in strands of Jewish mysticism and in various forms of paganism

Took many forms

commonly associated with the names of particular teachers (e.g., Valentius, Basilides, Marcion)

But certain features are common to the movement as a whole

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS of Gnosticism

Dualism

Only spirit is good, all matter is evil

Therefore, the “natural order” is alien to God

Therefore, the Holy Supreme God is different from the *corrupted* Creator God, who is one of many an *emanation* from the Holy Supreme God

Therefore, all Old Testament must be rejected

because it was based on misunderstanding of the world as created good by good God

Therefore, the incarnation must also be rejected

because Christ could not be a material being and be Good

The divine Christ might have appeared to blinded worldlings
as if he were tangible flesh and blood but those with higher
insight perceived that He was pure spirit and that the physical
appearance was an optical illusion (dokesis)
from which get doctrine called Docetism

Note: Gnostic saying: “ When Jesus walked, he left no footprints”

Therefore, crucifixion was also rejected as unreal illusion,
and *irrelevant*
because while redemption was necessary,
it was redemption from evil environment, not from sin

Therefore, anyone who does not agree with this dualism is simply
ignorant of truth, and ignorance is the cause of man’s problem, not sin

Therefore, gaining knowledge(gnosis) of one’s inner Divine spark is
the goal of life, which means that
Moral behavior may be viewed either
as irrelevant (because flesh is evil anyhow) or
as ascetic (severe self-denial in attempt to get in
touch with one’s inner divine)

Therefore, witness of apostles must be discarded
(Marcion discarded all gospels but *parts* of Luke)
because they had misinterpreted their master and
had not possessed the insight (gnosis)
to comprehend the true meaning of Jesus

Elitism

Salvation from the evils of the world is possible only through Gnosis
(enlightened self-knowledge)
which is secret and completely interior
possible only for a select few

Redeemer figures (Jesus and others) are important,
but as spiritual guides who open access to spiritual
understanding to select disciples, who, in turn, become equal
with Jesus once they achieve enlightenment.

Gospel of Thomas

Opening words: “These are the secret words which the living
Jesus spoke and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote them down.”

Apocryphon of John

Literally the “Secret Book” of John
Opens with offer to “reveal the mysteries [and the things]
hidden in silence” which Jesus taught his disciple John”

Gospel of Judas

Recent notoriety by National Geographic (more later)

Introduction: “The secret account of the revelation that Jesus spoke in
conversation with Judas Iscariot during a week three days before he
celebrated Passover.”

GENERAL ANTI-CHRISTIAN BELIEFS of Gnosticism

Rejected Old Testament
Rejected incarnation of Jesus
Rejected humanity of Jesus
Rejected crucifixion of Jesus
Rejected resurrection of Jesus
Rejected sin as man's problem, Jesus as Savior from sin

ANTI-GNOSTIC WRITERS

“Heresy naturally breeds orthodoxy”

In seeking to combat false doctrines, the church felt obliged to elaborate its own dogma: and in order to make this dogma binding

It felt it necessary to establish itself as guardian of the true faith

St. Paul (mentioned above)

Corinthians

Colossians

Irenaeus: 180 A.D. Adversus Haereses, 5 vol, work

Attempted to “set forth the views of those who are teaching heresy...to show how absurd and inconsistent with the truth their statements are...I do this so that you may urge all those with whom you are connected to avoid such an abyss of madness and of blasphemy against Christ.”

Christian writers continued to insist:

- Oneness of the Supreme God and Creator God
- Sovereignty of Jesus, not just one among other spiritual guides
- Goodness of material creation
 - Jesus seen as “fullness of God’ who came down into human experience to *sacralize* it
- Reality of earthly life of Jesus,
 - especially His Crucifixion and Resurrection
- Knowledge of self (gnosis) *inadequate* for salvation because
 - knowing self not = knowing God: God is higher than man, God and man never identical
 - True knowing of God = *union* with God for which we are completely unworthy, yet made possible for us by Jesus on the cross
- Nothing about Jesus is secret or elite. Jesus had taught to the hillsides; “Come unto me, *all* who are burdened and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”
- Communal nature of faith rather than intensely private journey
- Man's deepest need is for redemption from an evil will, not a spiritual guide to lead out of evil environment

RECENT FASCINATION WITH Gnostic GOSPELS

With all these vast differences from Christianity,

Q. Why is gnosticism “in”?

A. “Everyone loves a conspiracy” (DaVinci Code p. 381)

Atmosphere of distrust

Corporate leader

Community leaders

Priests, Church hierarchy, etc

Fueled by anger at God for pain, etc.

Newly discovered source of knowledge about Gnosticism

Previously, Gnostic writings were almost completely unavailable
(the so-called “Hidden Gospels”)

Primary source had been writings *against* gnosticism
by early Church Fathers

(Justin Martyr c. 150, Iranaeus c. 180, Hippolytus,
Origen c.250, Tertullian, Epiphanius, etc)

Some of the attacks included *extracts* of the original Gnostic
documents, but were primarily counter-attacks

Finally, in 19th C.

Original Gnostic manuscripts were discovered and published

All found in “Codex” form (ie pieces of papyrus bound as in book form
rather than scroll. Codex name taken from ultimate purchaser
(eg Codex Askewianus)

All written in Coptic (Egyptian language)

All written in 300s A.D.

but considered to be copied from Greek originals,
dating from 200s

Codex Askewianus

containing Pistis Sophia

Codex Brucianus

containing the books of Jeu

Codex Berolinensis

Acquired in 19th c but not published until
1955

Contains: Gospel of Mary

Wisdom of Jesus

Acts of Peter

Apocryphon of John

All receiving little interest

But then, 20th C. (1945-46)

Priceless discovery at **Nag Hammadi**, Egypt

(The so-called “Hidden Gospels”)

12 Coptic Codices discovered by Arab peasant
digging for fertilizer

Containing 52 different texts

of which only 2 were previously known

Dating from 300-400 A.D.,

but copied from earlier, original Greek texts
c.120-150 A.D.

Now all located in Coptic Museum in Cairo

Publishing took *years*

not because hidden by church conspiracy
but because long list of various antiquities dealers
(incl black market)
uncertain about what they had
more concerned with getting good price
(see Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels)

Among those texts published are:

The Gospel of Truth

(deals with ignorance as the cause of man's lost state)

The Letter of Rhegenos

(Resurrection was not a physical event)

Gospel according to Thomas

(Collection of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus)

(some of which are in Bible but suggest
different meaning because of placement in
unorthodox context)

(many of which differ entirely from any known
Christian tradition in style and in theology)

The Living Jesus, for example, speaks in sayings as
cryptic as Zen

Jesus said "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

Note: this Gospel is distinct from another Gospel of
Thomas which describes the miracles supposedly
done by Jesus as a little child with his playmates)

Gospel According to Philip

(discusses sacraments, attributes to Jesus sayings
quite diff from NT) (see below)

The Apocryphon of John

(detailed account of the origin of the universe)

Revelation of Adam

(possibly pre-Christian Gnosticism)

Testimony of Truth

Gospel to the Egyptians

2006 Publication of The Gospel of Judas -

Had been referenced and excerpted by Iranaeus in 180 (see above)

"they declare that Judas the traitor...knowing the truth as no
others did, accomplished the mystery of the betrayal... They
produce a fictional history of this kind, which they style the
Gospel of Thomas."

and by Origen

but never found in original form

Discovered in Egypt, 1970's

Radiocarbon dated to between 220 – 340 A.D.

Textual analysis indicate original Greek text dates from 130 – 170 A.D.
 Therefore, not long after Biblical Gospel of John (c. 95 A.D.)
 13 sheets of papyrus, front and back,
 in more than 1,000 brittle fragments
 Circulated until recently among antiquities dealers
 Part of larger, leather bound Codex (originally 62 pages)
 Containing other texts
 Only 26 pages remain, pages being sold separately earlier
 Named Codex Tchacos after Zurich dealer who ultimately
 bought it in 2000
 When unable to resell, turned over to Maecenas Foundation for Ancient
 Art (Restoration) and Waitt Institute for Historical Discovery
 who gave Nat'l Geographic \$1 mil to restore
 Now television show, magazine articles, two books, and exhibition by
 National Geographic !

Form of Sethian Gnosticism, in which Jesus appears to be equated to
 Seth “The first is Seth, who is called Christ”

Key passage: Jesus said (to Judas) “Come, that I may teach you about
 [secrets] that no person [has] ever seen.....But you will exceed all of
 them, For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me.”

Possible meanings:

For some: Judas was closest to Jesus, and helped Him by betrayal
 For others: Jesus seems to have meant that in helping him get rid of his
 physical flesh, Judas would act to liberate the true spiritual self or
 divine being within Jesus.

What new information did Gnostic texts reveal?

See below
 First,.....

Why so few Gnostic texts?

Why the “secrecy”, the intrigue?

Differing points of view

- Officially denounced as heresy!
 Irenaeus (mid 2nd C) (see above)
The Destruction and Overthrow of Falsely So-called Knowledge
- Christian Persecution: Diocletian (late 3rd C)
 Ordered burning of *all* Christian literature, and Christians may
 have held their sacred texts while offering up for burning the
 questionable
 ones
- Constantine (early 4th C)
 Made Christianity an officially approved religion
 Bishops, formerly persecuted under Diocletian
 now become persecutors of “heretics”
 Book denounced as heretical burned and destroyed
 possession declared criminal offense

What the Gnostic texts revealed !

Nothing essentially new about person of Jesus !

The Gospel of Thomas

Fanciful story of little Jesus turning clay into birds to impress playmates

The Gospel of Mary

in which Levi breaks up an argument between Peter and Mary over what the Lord had told her secretly by saying “Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you are contending against woman like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you to reject her? Surely the Lord knew her very well. That is why he loved her more than us.”

The Gospel of Philip

Famous passage which DaVinci Code (and other books) expand into fiction, then declare historical

(“The marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record” p. 245)

“...the **companion** of the [Savior is] Mary Magdalene. [But Christ loved] her more than [all] the disciples and used to kiss her [often] on her [**mouth**]. The rest of the [disciples were offended]...They said to him, “Why do you love her more than all of us?” The Savior answered and said to them, “Why do I not love you as [I love] her?”

Mr. Brown’s conclusion from this reference (that Jesus and Mary were married) derives from 2 assumptions, both of which are only speculative at best.

1. He states that the word translated “companion” is *literally* the word used “in those days” for “spouse”. p. 246 He overlooks the fact that the same Greek word (*koinonos*) is used in Hebrews 10:33 as *companion* (KJV), *partner in faith* (RSV).

2. Mr. Brown omits the fact that the Nag Hammadi parchment of the Gospel of Philip is badly damaged, and the words in the brackets, such as [mouth] are words which are only guessed at since they do not appear in the original text. Therefore, Jesus could just as reasonably have kissed Mary on the cheek or forehead as was the custom in the early church. (see Romans 16:16, I Cor 13:12, I Cor 16:20, I Thess 5:26, I Peter 5:14)

This “hidden evidence”, according to DaVinci Code was part of a wider conspiracy “by the church” to cover up the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene and their children.

but for which there is *no* historical evidence

“Everyone loves a conspiracy”

Consider the actual “historical record” which Mr. Brown also overlooks:

“The church” of Jesus’ day was hillsides and home-churches
filled with those
 who had seen Jesus for 3 years
 who had loved Him *dearly*
 who would have *loved* his wife and children
 and protected them with their lives,
 neither banished them to France
 (forming the foundation of the
 Mergovingians, as Brown claims,
 nor erased them from history !

Marriage for Jesus would not have been considered naughty.

Nothing to ‘hide”

It just would have been inconsistent with His unquestionable mission to die for the sins of the world which He foretold again and again.

The New Testament canon of Jesus’ day,
and for a century following, was the oral tradition,
common to the general public, which could not have been edited by the most Stalinesque emperor, much less Constantine 200 years later.

Mary Magdalene, rather than being hidden by the gospel writers, was recorded in *all four* Gospels as being the *first* to witness the empty tomb and to be entrusted with taking the message to the disciples! (see Teaching #3) (Quite bold for the times)

Consider with me also the *general beliefs* of the Gnostic Gospels

(As noted above)

Because even if the Greek word for companion were *incontrovertibly* the word for spouse, so easy to see why text was banned not to cover up rightful leadership of Mary but because the *entire collection of gnostic text are so antithetical* to common understanding of Jesus in oral tradition and already circulating in letters and gospels
As though the quotes of interest were from a different religion altogether.

DURATION OF GNOSTICISM

Gnosticism in various forms persisted for several centuries
Sect of the Manichees survived in Turkistan until 13th C
Sect of the Mandaeans has survived in Mesopotamia (Iraq) until present day.

But it doesn’t end there.....

III. ONGOING GNOSTICISM through the ages

If I may take some liberties with the term “gnosticism”

I’d like to suggest that the humanist temptation to “gnosis”
(i.e., to a special “knowing” that distinguishes us from other hapless believers)
persists to this day

I’d like to suggest that our *assumptions* about God/Jesus/scripture/reality
shape our *conclusions* about them

every bit as much as they did for the original Gnostics
and that the battle for orthodoxy is as current today as in first centuries

For example:

Thomas Jefferson

Highly esteemed Revolutionary leader, ambassador, President, architect, inventor, author and quintessential pupil and exponent of the Enlightenment

Set about to present what he understood to be the *true* message of Jesus.

The task, as he put it, was one of

....abstracting what is really his (i.e., the words of Jesus) from the rubbish in which it is buried, easily distinguished by its lustre from the dross of his biographers, and as separate from that as the diamond from the dung hill.

Published The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth

(date unclear, sometime after 1819)

Commonly known as the “Jefferson Bible”

Assumptions

1. Jesus was the preeminently wise, “if not unique”, teacher of the human race. *Mortal only*.
2. The disciples of Jesus were uneducated (“the most unlettered and ignorant men”) and, therefore, incapable of recording accurately the life and teachings of Jesus.
3. It is possible, *on the basis of reason* and “without recourse to the notion of special revelation”, to know those few universal truths about God and the world and the relation between them that are necessary for a responsible moral life.

Conclusions:

A vastly edited Bible in which Jefferson eliminated (literally cut out with scissors)
the birth narratives
the miracles, including all the healings
the Resurrection

Critics say:

“Mr. Jefferson’s Jesus, modeled on the ideals of the Enlightenment thinkers of his day, bore a striking resemblance to Jefferson himself”

“Jefferson was in search not so much for the historical as for the *intelligible* Jesus”

½ C. later...

Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881)

“Legend of the Grand Inquisitor”

Best known 19th C. example of voices warning the church’s stupidity in breaking with authority of Holy Scripture and in trying to improve on God’s ways.

At its heart is the Inquisitor’s brazen claim to the returning Jesus that the Church knew better than its founder. “We have corrected your work... Why have you come to hinder us?” (Os Guinness, p.7)

Present day...

The Jesus Seminar (1985 – present)

Group of academic theologians (called “fellows”)
who meet 2 times/yr
to study and analyze Christian writings
from 1st to 3rd century CE (modern term for A.D.)
from a religiously liberal perspective

Founded in 1985 by Robert W. Funk

Now a project of Westar Institute in Santa Rosa, CA

Initially limited to 30 scholars

Grown to over 200

Composed of Protestant, Catholic Jewish and independent backgrounds

Goal:

To determine what Jesus *really* said, and
what Jesus *really* did

To separate historical fact from myth

To bring the quest for the Historical Jesus to the center of a global forum
(at least, no secrets, which is admirable)

Conclusions:

Differ significantly from what most Christian denominations have taught

May be point of view expressed by DaVinci author when he wrote

“Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false” p. 235)

Assumptions: (Everyone approaches the Bible with a set of assumptions)

1. All truth is able to be proved scientifically or historically

2. Therefore, the Gospel miracles could not actually have occurred

There was no virgin birth

no walking on water

no feeding of thousands with a few loaves and fish

etc.

Jesus’ bodily resurrection is a myth

as are His walking through walls

His ascension into heaven

His transfiguration

3. Therefore, Bible not uniquely inspired by God

Rather, books were composed by men (and perhaps 1 woman)

who promoted their own beliefs

(“The Bible is a product of man, my dear, not God...”) Brown, p. 231

4. There are no such entities as indwelling demons.

Conclusions

(based on scientific, historical analysis)

Rejected **all gospel miracles** as myth

The Virgin Birth

The Transfiguration

Jesus’ walking on the water

stilling the storm

feeding the 5,000

The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

(though they do acknowledge His crucifixion)

but that doesn’t matter because Christians can still celebrate

Easter with its symbolic message of hope and new life.

All resurrections appearances
The Ascension

Rejected: **all prophecy** in the Bible as inauthentic
therefore, Gospels could not have predicted the Destruction of the
Temple in 70 A.D. and
therefore, Gospels must have been written later, which places them
after 70 A.D. and long after events took place (40 + years)
therefore, Gospels not written by eyewitnesses
therefore, testimony of early church fathers can't be trusted.
Rejected: **82% of the teachings** normally attributed to Jesus
all dismissed as legendary accretions with no historical foundation
(Only 1 saying in Mark survived, none in John,
only 2 words of Lord's Prayer: "Our Father")

Founder of JS, Robert Funk, calls Jesus
"a secular sage who satirized the pious and championed the poor"
"perhaps the first stand-up Jewish comic"

Critics say (culled from newspaper, internet articles, etc.)

"JS doesn't start with historical evidence as purports to do !!"
Such as the world-changing spread of Christianity in 2 centuries,
based primarily on resurrection victory and offer of Jesus
Such as the martyrdom of early believers who died defending belief
that Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection
Such as account of early church fathers re. miraculous healing in early
church

In City of God by St. Augustine, 354-430 A.D.
he writes: "What am I to do? I am so pressed by the promise
of finishing this work that I cannot record all the miracles I
know"

Such as writing of respected English historian Edward Gibbon
author of the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman
Empire

Of the 5 reasons for the remarkable growth of Christianity,
one was "the miraculous powers of the primitive
church"
"The Christian Church, from the time of the apostles and their
first disciples has claimed an uninterrupted succession of
miraculous powers, the gift...of prophecy, the power of
expelling demons and of healing the sick..." (Gumbel, p.209)

Gibbon goes on to write about the contrast between the
miraculous power of God demonstrated in early church and
the skepticism of his own day: "Accustomed long since to
respect [only] the invariable order of Nature, our reason, or at
least our imagination, is not sufficiently prepared to sustain
the visible action of the Diety." (Gumbel p.210)

"This is not history, it is philosophy, specifically the philosophy of naturalism"

"Starts with presuppositions and assumptions it makes no attempt to prove."

JS discredits authenticity of Bible

but fails to acknowledge that by all standards of the *science* of textual criticism, the Bible stands unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings (Gumbel, p. 25)

According to textual criticism, the authenticity/credibility of an ancient writing is determined by

- a) the number of years between the original writing and the earliest extant copy and
- b) the number of copies of the earliest extant writings

In both cases, the Bible *far surpasses* such unchallenged classics as

Caesar's Gallic Wars
Livy's Roman History
Thucydides
Herodotus
(see attached chart, below p. 15)

“Closed-minded”

Christians are called “closed-minded” by JS scholars – but is it not the other way around ?

Because people like Robert Funk start with the scientific view that there can be no miracles, their bias arbitrarily eliminates options before the game gets started

They can't consider any evidence for the resurrection because they have closed their mind to the possibility of miracles

A Christian is not so encumbered

Believes in laws of nature but is *also* open to the possibility of God's intervention. (Both are consistent with his world view)

DaVinci Code 2003

Why would an author write a novel like DaVinci Code?

Consider what he writes and see if you don't believe that his

Assumptions very close to those of Jesus Seminar and liberal perspective of many !

1. Jesus was a great man.

“Until [Constantine], Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal. p. 233

2. The Church is not trustworthy, (and by inference, neither is the Bible)

Guilty of telling only part of the truth and/or of obscuring the truth for the advancement of its own power.

“It was all about power. Christ as Messiah was critical to the functioning of the Church and state. ” p. 233

3. “Hermeneutics of Suspicion” *“Everybody loves a conspiracy” p. 381*

4. Human reason is more reliable than apostolic tradition (gnosis)

“Jesus as a married man makes infinitely more sense than our standard Biblical view of Jesus as a bachelor.” p. 245

5. Truth is that which can be validated by science

“God has become obsolete. Science has won the battle. We concede.”
(see attached excerpt from Angels and Demons, p.378)

Why would we all buy The Da Vinci Code - and love it ???

Why would it become the biggest best seller in decades?

1. Culture shares many of author's assumptions !!
2. Post Modernism
 - Desire to be "open-minded"
 - Nowadays, the only agreed upon sin is *judgment*
 - Orthodoxy, or any other absolute truth, suspect, if not invalid because implies judgmentalism
 - Revisionism - so concerned with historical position of "underdog" that history rewritten to include their position (good) but often including the arbitrary editing of orthodox historical account (not good)
 - Prefers narrative to doctrine
 - So long starved for the pure story of Jesus – the one that took the Roman Empire by storm, passed from fisherman to tent maker to emperor – and so long stuffed with doctrine, dogma, that grab for "Story" even if incorrect

What are *your* underlying Assumptions ?

Do you begin with

- Jesus is man? or Jesus is/ or may be/ Lord?
- The Bible is the work of man? or possibly the work of the Holy Spirit through man?
- The Church is invalidated by corruption? or The church is a flawed but chosen vessel of God's healing love?
- The world is governed solely by Natural Law? or God has set up the Natural Order but can also intervene in miraculous ways?
- Seeing is believing? or Believing is seeing?
- Wisdom defined by human knowledge? or Wisdom as synonymous with holiness?
- etc.

I believe the latter in each case

- even if not currently fashionable.
- The simple story of Jesus is the Greatest Story Ever Told
- The Bible is uniquely inspired by God, as evidenced by its power to transform lives and form loving community
- Lives that allow His touch, His forgiveness, His direction – are the fullest lives possible!

and I want so much to shout it

- to shout to the author and all in our culture
- what I and millions believe to be so wondrously true
- both historically and experientially*
- and that is the gift of new life in the risen Jesus Christ !

**Excerpt from Questions of Life
by Nicky Gumbel
p.25**

TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF ANCIENT DOCUMENTS

Work	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span (yrs)	No. of copies
Herodotus	488-428 BC	AD 900	1,300	8
Thucydides	c. 460-400 BC	c. AD 900	1,300	8
Tacitus	AD 100	1100	1,000	20
Caesar Gallic War	58-50 BC	AD 900	950	9-10
Livy Roman History	59 BC – AD 17	AD 900	900	20
New Testament	AD 40-100	fragments AD 130 full manuscripts AD 350	300	5,000+ Greek 10,000 Latin 9,300 others

**Excerpted from Angels and Demons
by Dan Brown
pp. 378-383**

“...To the Illuminati... and to those of science, let me say this. You have won the war.

The wheels have been in motion for a long time, Your victory has been inevitable. Never before has it been so obvious as it is at this moment. Science is the new God.

Medicine, electronic communications, space travel, genetic manipulations.... These are the miracles about which we tell our children. These are the miracles we herald as proof that science will bring us the answers. The ancient stories of immaculate conceptions, burning bushes, and parting seas are no longer relevant. God has become obsolete. Science has won the battle. We concede.

But science's victory...has cost each one of us. And it has cost deeply. Science may have alleviated the miseries of disease and drudgery and provided an array of gadgetry for our entertainment and convenience, but it has left us in a world without wonder. Our sunsets have been reduced to wavelengths and frequencies. The complexities of the universe have been shredded into mathematical equations. Even our self worth as human beings has been destroyed. Science proclaims that Planet Earth and its inhabitants are a meaningless speck in the grand scheme. A cosmic accident. Even the technology that promises to unite us, divides us. Each of us is electronically connected to the globe, and yet we are utterly alone. We are bombarded with violence, division, fracture and betrayal. Skepticism has become a virtue. Cynicism and demand for proof has become enlightened thought. Is it any wonder that humans now feel more depressed and defeated than they have at any point in history? Does science hold anything sacred? Science looks for answers by probing our unborn fetuses. Science even presumes to rearrange our own DNA. It shatters God's world into smaller and smaller pieces in quest of meaning...and all it finds are more questions.

The ancient war between science and religion is over.... you have won. But you have not won fairly. You have not won by providing answers. You have won by so radically reorienting our society that the truths we once saw as signposts now seem inapplicable. Religion cannot keep up. Scientific growth is exponential. It feeds on itself like a virus. Every new breakthrough opens doors for new breakthroughs. Mankind took thousands of years to progress from the wheel to the car, yet only decades from the car into space. Now we measure scientific progress in weeks. We are spinning out of control. The rift between us grows deeper and deeper, and as religion is left behind, people find themselves in a spiritual void. We cry out for meaning. And believe me, we do cry out. We see UFO's, engage in channeling, spirit contact, out-of-body experiences, mind quests – all these eccentric ideas have a scientific veneer, but they are unashamedly irrational. They are the desperate cry of the modern soul, lonely and tormented, crippled by its own enlightenment and its inability to accept meaning in anything removed from technology.

...Science, you say, will save us. Science, I say, has destroyed us. Since the days of Galileo, the church has tried to slow the relentless march of science, sometimes with misguided means, but always with benevolent intentions. Even so, the temptations are too great for man to resist. I warn you...the promises of science have not been kept. Promises of efficiency and simplicity have bred nothing but pollution and chaos. We are a fractured and frantic species...moving along a path of destruction.

Who is this God science? Who is the God that offers his people power but no moral framework to tell you how to use that power? What kind of God gives a child fire but does not warn the child of its dangers? The language of science comes with no signposts about good and bad. Science textbooks tell us how to create a nuclear reaction, and yet contain no chapter asking us if it is a good or a bad idea.

...The church is tired. We are exhausted from trying to be your signposts. Our resources are drying up from our campaign to be the voice of balance as you plow blindly on in your quest for smaller chips and larger profits. We ask not why you will not govern yourselves, but how can you? Your world moves so fast that if you stop even for an instant to consider the implications of your actions, someone more efficient will whip past you in a blur. So you move on. You proliferate weapons of mass destruction, but it is the

Pope who travels the world beseeching leaders to use restraint. You clone living creatures, but it is the church reminding us to consider the moral implications of our actions. You encourage people to interact on phones, video screens and computers, but it is the church who opens its doors and reminds us to commune in person as we were meant to do. You even murder unborn babies in the name of research that will save lives. Again, it is the church that points out the fallacy of your reasoning.

And all the while you proclaim that the church is ignorant. But who is more ignorant? The man that cannot define lightening, or the man who does not respect its awesome power? This church is reaching out to you. Reaching out to everyone. And yet the more we reach, the more you push us away. Show me proof that there is a God, you say. I say use your telescopes to look at the heavens and tell me how there could not be a God! You ask what does God look like? I say, where did that question come from? The answers are one and the same. Do you not see God in your science? How can you miss Him? You proclaim that even the slightest change in the force of gravity or the weight of an atom would have rendered the universe a lifeless mist rather than our magnificent sea of heavenly bodies, and yet you fail to see God's hand in this? Is it really so much easier to believe that we simply chose the right card from a deck of billions? Have we become so spiritually bankrupt that we would rather believe in a mathematical impossibility than in a power greater than us?

Whether or not you believe in God, you must believe this. When we as a species abandon our trust in the power greater than us, we abandon our sense of accountability. Faith...all faiths...are admonitions that there is something we cannot understand, something to which we are accountable...with faith we are accountable to each other, to ourselves, and to a higher truth. Religion is flawed, but only because man is flawed....

CHRISTIANITY AND THE DA VINCI CODE
Teaching #2
Gnosticism Through the Ages

SUGGESTED ARTICLES

“Gnosticism (Catholic Encyclopedia)

www.newadvent.org/cathen/06592a.htm

“Let There Be Faith”

by Os Guinness

article published by Trinity Forum, Alexandria, VA, 2003

“The Gnostic World View: A Brief Summary of Gnosticism”

www.gnosis.org/gnintro.htm

“The Other Christians”

Review of Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas

by Elaine Pagels

New York Times Review of Books, Vol 50, Number 16

“The Jesus Seminar Under Fire”

Stand to Reason Commentary

www.str.org/cgi-bin/print.pl/commentary

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by Dan Brown

Pocket Star Books: New York, 2000

The History of the Christian Faith

by Brian Moynahan

Doubleday: New York, 2002

The Jefferson Bible

by Thomas Jefferson

Beacon Press: Boston, 1989

CHRISTIANITY AND THE DA VINCI CODE
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TRUE OR FALSE

1. “Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false.” p. 235
2. “The marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record” p. 245
3. “Moreover, Jesus as a married man makes infinitely more sense than our standard Biblical view of Jesus as a bachelor.” p. 245
4. “Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s *human traits*”. p. 234
5. “Anyone who chose the forbidden gospels – who chose the *original history of Christ* – was deemed a heretic.” p. 234.
6. “Everyone loves a conspiracy”. p. 381