

CHRISTIANITY AND THE DA VINCI CODE

Teaching #1

The Birth of Christianity and the Formation of the Bible

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. “The vast majority of educated Christians know the history of their faith.” ??!
(DaVinci Code p. 234)
- B. Four-part series to present true history and doctrine of Christianity so can *know* truth from fiction:
 - 1. Birth of Christianity and How the Bible Came to Be.
 - 2. Gnosticism Through the Ages and the “Hidden Gospels”
 - 3. The Role of Women in Christianity
 - 4. Who is Jesus? Present day conceptions of Jesus vs. His own self-declarations in the Bible

II. HISTORICAL SETTING FOR THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY

- A. Roman Empire, 1st Century
 - 1. One unifying language - Koine Greek
 - 2. Roman Roads
 - 3. Pax Romana
 - 4. Lifestyle same as Pompeii, destroyed by Mt. Vesuvius in 79ad
 - 5. Pagan moral and religious bankruptcy
- B. Judaism, 1st century
 - 1. Israel politically and economically weak, occupied by Rome, but allowed religious freedom
 - 2. Nation centered around Temple in Jerusalem until destroyed in 70 ad
 - 3. plus Dispersion of Jews around the entire Roman Empire (Cadiz to Crimea)
 - a. Centuries of imperialism
 - b. Weak economy in Palestine
 - c. 1 million Jews in Alexandria and N. Egypt in 1st C.
 - 4. Hallmarks of Judaism: Hospitality, ethical purity, loyalty of faith in Dispersion, devotion to the Word of God
 - 5. Synagogue system throughout Roman Empire
 - a. Jews unable to worship in Temple as Jerusalem developed weekly gatherings around the Word of God, with Teacher (Rabbi) rather than Priest
 - b. 12 synagogues in Rome in 1st C.
 - c. ready-made centers for spread of Christianity
- C. Christianity
 - 1. Born of Judaism: Jesus is long awaited Messiah
 - a. Considered a part of Judaism for first 30 years after Jesus died
 - b. Held Jewish Scripture as sacred Word of God (see below)
 - c. Began to split from Judaism in 60’s as called Jesus “Lord” and seemed in conflict with Yahweh as Lord
 - 2. Persecutions began when Christians no longer under protective umbrella of Judaism (but couldn’t quench the fire)
 - a. First persecutions under Nero (64 ad) Scapegoat for fire of Rome:
 - b. Persecutions intermittent and sporadic through reign of Diocletian (305 ad),

- c. Persecutions ended with Constantine (313 ad).
 - Legalized Christianity throughout Empire, along with other religions
 - Traditions differ as to whether he was motivated by sign of the cross in battle and subsequent Christian conversion or by political desire to control the faith
- 3. Began as religion of all the people
 - a. very public, no professionals though apostles were acknowledged leaders.
 - b. Mission conspicuously aimed at common people, not centers of power
 - c. Marked by new Way of Life (originally called The Way)
 - 1. “Brother, Sister” - family devotion and care
 - 2. Tertullian quoting pagan Aristedes “See how they love one another”
 - 3. Charity to all
 - 4. Cut across all race, gender, status issues
 - d. All were active in sharing the teachings of Jesus and the Good News of the love of Jesus, forgiveness on cross, resurrection victory over sin and death, New Life !!
- 4. Spread like wildfire throughout Roman Empire (within one generation)**
- 5. Early church services
 - a. Originally met on Saturday (Jewish Sabbath) but gradually moved to Sunday because of Resurrection
[In 321, Constantine decreed first Day of Rest for the empire to be Sunday, which served worship of both the Sun God and Christians]
 - b. Read from Hebrew Bible (as in synagogue)
 - c. added oral remembrances of Jesus, letters from other churches
 - d. added Lord’s Supper/Eucharist

III. HEBREW BIBLE (called Old Testament by Christians)

- A. Collection of books (Biblia = “Books”)
 - 1. Each book written and treasured independently
 - 2. Collection grew gradually
 - 3. **The “Canon”** is the final collection of those books measured by a standard (kanas) and accepted as divinely inspired, sacred
- B. Old Testament quoted throughout New Testament
 - 1. Considered by NT writers to be authoritative Word of God
 - a. II Timothy 3:16 (“All scripture is God-breathed...”)
 - b. II Peter 1:21 (“Prophecy [ie of OT] never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”)
 - 2. 10% of NT is quotes from OT (Jesus often quoted Scripture “As it was written...”)
- C. Had begun as Oral Tradition
 - 1. began 2000 BC ±
 - 2. transmitted accurately for centuries
- D. Gradually written down
 - 1. Moses first author
 - 2. wrote Pentateuch (first 5 books)
 - 3. c.1400 - 1200 BC ±, while Jews in wilderness
 - 4. written on papyrus scrolls

- E. Eventually became Hebrew “canon”
 - 1. Jewish historian Josephus’ recorded that final collection of Hebrew scrolls (“canon”) had been made by Ezra and “Great Synagogue” in 425 BC after return from exile
 - 2. Council of Jamnia - 90 AD
 - a. several books questioned (Esther, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon)
 - b. but no books deleted from Canon nor added to it
 - c. Hebrew Canon set for all times, although in different order than “Old Testament”

- F. Dead Sea Scrolls
 - 1. Discovered 1950’s in caves at Qumran on shore of Dead Sea
 - 2. Dated at 200 BC (therefore, *nothing* of the NT)
 - 3. Handwritten copies of every Old Testament Book
 - 4. Proved two important facts:
 - a. Accuracy of oral tradition (2 copies of Isaiah are 95% word for word identical to standard Hebrew text of 1000 yr later)
 - b. Body of Hebrew Canon had been set by 200 BC

IV. APOCRYPHA

- A. 14-15 additional books written after 425 BC
e.g., I and II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, I-IV Maccabees, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom of Solomon, etc)
- B. Not added to Hebrew Canon
but added to Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, called the “Septuagint”
c. 280 bc
used in the Dispersion
- C. Debate between Christian view points through the centuries
 - 1. Jerome (d.420s AD)
 - a. wrote Vulgate (Latin translation)
 - b. thought these books interesting but not canon
 - 2. Augustine (d.430s AD)
 - a. accepted books as canonical
 - b. this view prevailed throughout Middle Ages
 - 3. Martin Luther (1500s AD)
 - a. influenced by Nicolas of Lyra’s Treatise on the difference between the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint
 - b. translated into German what he called “Hebrew Bible” and “Apocrypha”
 - c. felt latter not equal to sacred scripture yet useful for reading
 - 4. Council of Trent 1546
 - a. reaction to Luther and Reformation
 - b. Roman Catholic Church adopted Apocrypha as Canonical
 - 5. Today
 - a. RC and Episcopal Church consider it canonical
 - b. Protestant churches consider it interesting but not canon (non authoritative)

V. NEW TESTAMENT

A. Oral Tradition

- 1. The Words of Jesus
 - a. were cherished and were considered holy, life giving
 - b. were the common possession of the community
 - c. were not considered urgent to preserve for posterity because early church expected Jesus to return soon
 - d. were the “canon” of the New Testament long before there was any literature to canonize
- 2. Words of the Apostles and their disciples

- a. As late as 135 AD, Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (Asia Minor) wrote of interviewing “disciples of the apostles” because the oral word was more important than the written word
- b. At same time, Papias mentions Mark as having *written* Peter’s Memoirs of Jesus

B. Written word

(concurrent with oral tradition)

1. Letters

13 letters of Paul (or bearing Paul’s name)

- a. written before Gospels
- b. not as Holy Scripture
- c. as “particular” letters to young churches begun by Paul
- d. not designed for collection or circulation, but

By early 60s

- a. being passed around from church to church (cf. Colos 4:16: After this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans and see that you also read the letter from [them])
- b. began to be collected

By 94 AD Bishop Clement of Rome mentions “collection” of Paul’s letters

Possible that writer of Ephesians was collector of original 9 letters and wrote Ephesians under Paul’s name as general intro to collection

- c. still granted no “authority”

Other letters also being written and circulated

I Clement c95

II Clement

Epistle of Barnabas

Shepherd of Hermas

etc

but only some Letters endured.

2. Gospels (from Anglo Saxon “Godspell = Good News)

- a. Much being written about Jesus at this time
Last verse of John’s Gospel (John 21:25)
“There are also many other things which Jesus did: were every one of them to be written, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

- b. Gospel of Mark c. 55-65 (Rome)
- Gospel of Matthew c. 60-65 (Palestine)
- Gospel of Luke c. 60 ± (Eastern Mediterranean)
- Gospel of John c. 85-90 (possibly Ephesus on western coast of Asia Minor)

Gospel of Thomas c. 150

Gospel of Philip c. 300

Gospel of Peter

Gospel of Mary

Etc. (though no record of “more than 80” such gospels)

- c. Authority (canonicity)
 - none of early gospels claimed to be “inspired”, nor treated others as “inspired”
 - see Luke 1:1-2

- Matthew and Luke both used Mark's gospel liberally
 - Justin Martyr and Tatian harmonized 4 gospels into "Diatessaron"
 - none accorded canonical authority of Old Testament
 - authority still lay in the "words of the Lord" preserved in oral tradition
 -
- d. **By second century**, authority shifts to words of Jesus' apostles, then of the apostles' disciples.
- 135 AD, Papias writes about Mark as having "written Peter's memoirs of Jesus"
 - 140s, Justin Martyr
 - writes that "the memoirs of the apostles, called 'gospels' are being read liturgically in church along with the Hebrew Bible
 - unclear which "memoirs" (gospels) or how many
 - but Holy Scriptures began to grow for Christians (consciously or unconsciously) according to what was used *repeatedly* and *throughout the empire* in worship !

C. New Testament "Canon"

1. Mid second century, first mention of a New Testament Canon

a. 150 AD – Marcion

- Gnostic heretic (to be discussed Teaching #2)
 - rejected all OT as inferior to Words of Jesus because he felt God of Old Testament driven by anger rather than love
 - rejected all gospels favoring Jewish readers (Mt., Mk)
 - rejected idea of Jesus born of a woman (appeared fully grown)
 - rejected all other letters he didn't approve of
- Included only
 - Gospel of Luke, edited to exclude Nativity Story
 - 10 Letters of Paul
- *But succeeded* in making the New Testament separate in minds of believers, rather than addition to Old Testament

b. Growing consensus re. Requirements for "Canon"

- Apostolicity (written by original apostles or disciple of apostle)
- Orthodoxy (eg Gospel of Peter rejected)
 - Gospel of Peter – first recorded rejection of a gospel bec of "heretical tendencies"
 - Bishop of Antioch
 - 190 AD: Letter to Church at Rhossus
 - "We receive both Peter and other Apostles but we reject writings falsely attributed to them for we know that such were not handed down to us".
- General Acceptance
- Public use
 - belonged to community, not elite educators
 - part of worship, instruction, confession, liturgy
 - visible to all through the Body, the church – nothing hidden

2. By end of 2nd C. (190s AD)

Evidence from variety of source

variety of locations

shows "Canon" of Christian writings forming

- a. **Rome:** Muratorian Canon (Earliest Roman List) (22 books)
 - 4 Gospels: Mt, Mk, Lk, Jn
 - Acts
 - 13 Letters of Paul
 - 3 Catholic Epistles (James, Jude, Peter)
 - Revelation
 - Apoc of John
 - Apoc of Peter
 - Shepherd of Hermas
- b. **Gaul:** Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons
(Letter notes shift in authority from oral to written)
 - 4 Gospels
 - Acts
 - 12 Paul Letters (no Philemon)
 - Catholic Epistles
 - Revelation
 - Shepherd of Hermas
- c. **Alexandria, Egypt:** Clement, head of great school of theology
“4 gospels which have come down to us”
 - 14 Paul Letters (incl Hebrews)
 - Shepherd of Hermas
 - few others
- d. **Carthage, North Africa:** Tertullian, Carthage lawyer, lay leader
 - 4 Gospels
 - Notes the unity of all apostolic writings as “New Testament”
 - Acknowledged New Testament as collection of books
 - with same authority as Hebrew Bible

3. By beginning of 3rd C. (200s AD)

Wide agreement about most of the books of the Canon

- a. certain about 19 books
 - 4 gospels
 - Acts
 - 13 letters of Pauline collection
 - Rev
 - I John
- b. uncertainty about others
 - Hebrews
 - I Peter
 - II John

Origin 203 AD

(succeeded Clement as head of School of Theol. in Alexandria)
 4 gospels
 Acts
 14 Paul letters
 James, Jude, etc

Diocletian Persecution: 280s ad

Ultimate test of authority of NT writings, as Christians ordered to
 burn all sacred books, raising question of which ones were
 “sacred”
 but still no official consensus on list

4. Fourth Century (300s AD)

Eusebius – wrote about 21 books as sacred
Four Gospels
Acts
13 Letters of Paul
I Peter
I John
Revelation of John (though authorship in doubt)
Constantinople: Constantine **313 ff**
Funded printing of more Bibles

Just as in 2nd C., various sources, various locations in Empire all agree

Alexandria, Egypt: 367 AD

Easter Letter of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria

Famous first to include exactly the 27 books and in order of today

North Africa, 393 AD

St. Augustine of Hippo: same 27 books

Milan: Ambrose of Milan same 27

Carthage, North Africa: Council of Carthage 397 AD

Same 27 books

“Apart from this canon, nothing read in church is scripture”

5. Twenty First Century

Discovery by Lance Lambert of spiritual correlation

between Genesis and Revelation. **(see attached)**

Lambert Thesis: The Bible is the Work of the Holy Spirit

Towe thesis:

The Birth of Christianity is the miraculous Work of God through
history

The entire Bible is,

just as Paul wrote to Timothy re. the OT, “God-Breathed !!!”

and

just as Peter wrote, “men speaking from God as they were
carried along by the Holy Spirit”

Excerpt from **God’s Eternal Purpose**
by Lance Lambert, Elim Publications, p. 16-17

Now, here we come to an amazing thing. When I first saw this quite a few years ago, I became so excited that for awhile I was almost speechless. For me that is quite miraculous! Nevertheless, it is true that for awhile I could hardly speak to anyone. I could not tell them what I had seen; all I could say was, "It is wonderful, it is wonderful."

The people said to me: "What is wonderful?" And all I could say was, "what the Lord has shown me." "And what has the Lord shown you?" And I could not really say.

If you take the first three chapters in the Bible and the last three chapters in the Bible, they totally correspond with the beginning and the end of a matter....

Heaven and Earth	Gen. 2:4	New Heaven and Earth	Rev. 21:1
Paradise Lost	Gen. 3:24	Paradise Regained	Rev. 21:3
Satan Enters	Gen. 3:1	Satan Cast Out Forever	Rev. 20:10
Earth Cursed	Gen. 3:17	No More Curse	Rev. 22:3
Adam & Eve (only 2 people)	Gen. 2:23	A Redeemed People which no man can number	Rev. 22:14 21:3
A Garden	Gen. 2:8	A City	Rev. 21:2
Tree of Life	Gen. 2:9	Tree of Life	Rev. 22:2
River of Life	Gen. 2:10	River of Life	Rev. 22:2
God Walking in Midst	Gen. 3:8	God Dwelling in Midst	Rev. 21:3
Earthly Marriage (Man-Woman)	Gen. 2:21-25	Heavenly Marriage (Lamb, Wife of Lamb)	Rev. 21:2
Gold, Onyx stone, BdeUium	Gen 2:11, 12	Gold, Precious Stone, Pearl	Rev. 21:18-21
Pain, Sorrow, Death	Gen. 3:16-19	No More Pain, Mourning and Death	Rev. 21:4
Time Ushered In	Gen. 1	Eternity Ushered In	Rev. 21
The Spirit Brooding	Gen. 1:2	The Spirit and the Bride say "Come"	Rev. 22:17

It is not as if John sat down and said: "I think the Bible needs a conclusion and I will write it." This revelation that came to John was contested from the very beginning, even to the fourth century after Christ. Even after four centuries there were still Christian leaders saying that Revelation should not be in the New Testament. It never occupied the last place in the canon of Scripture until about the third century. Sometimes it was attached to Luke; sometimes it was attached to John's letters but it was not at the end of the Bible. **Only by the appointment of the Holy Spirit did it finally come to occupy the last book of the sixty-six books of the Bible.** And then we find this amazing correspondence.

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SUGGESTED ARTICLES

“Dismantling the DaVinci Code”

by Sandra Miesel, a veteran Catholic journalist.

Crisis Magazine, September 1, 2003

www.crisismagazine.com/september2003/feature1.htm

“Cracking the Da Vinci Code”

by Margaret Mitchell

Associate Professor of New Testament at the University of Chicago
Divinity School and Chair of the Department of New Testament
and Early Christian Literature.

Sightings: September 24, 2003

www.marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_2003/0924.shtml

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By Elaine Pagels

Random House: 2003

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Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977

The Early Church

by Henry Chadwick

Penguin Books: Middlesex, England, 1967

The Faith: A History of Christianity

by Brian Moynahan

Doubleday, 2002

The Gnostic Gospels

By Elaine Pagels

Vintage Books: New York, 1981

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible

Vol. 1 “Canon of the New Testament”

Vol. 1 “Dead Sea Scrolls”

Vol. 2 “Gnosticism”

Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1982

Questions of Life

by Nicky Gumbel

Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne, England, 1996

CHRISTIANITY AND THE DA VINCI CODE
Teaching #1
The Birth of Christianity and How the Bible Came to Be

TRUE OR FALSE ?

1. The vast majority of educated Christians know the history of their faith. p. 234
2. The Bible is a product of man, my dear, not God....The Bible as we know it today was
collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great. p. 231
3. More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a
relative few were chosen for inclusion – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John among
them. p. 231
4. Fortunately for historians, 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. p 234

These are photocopies of the ...Dead Sea Scrolls, the earliest Christian records.
Troublingly, they do not match up with the gospels in the Bible. p. 245

5. Because Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries after Jesus' death,
thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a mortal man.
p. 234

To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke.
From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history. 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.
p. 234

6. Originally, Christianity honored the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday, but Constantine
shifted it to coincide with the pagan's veneration of the sun. To this day, most
church goers attend services on Sunday morning with no idea that they are there
on account of the pagan sun god's weekly tribute – Sunday. p. 233
7. The early Jewish tradition involved ritualistic sex. In the Temple, no less. p. 309