

What about Other Gospels?

Robert C. Newman

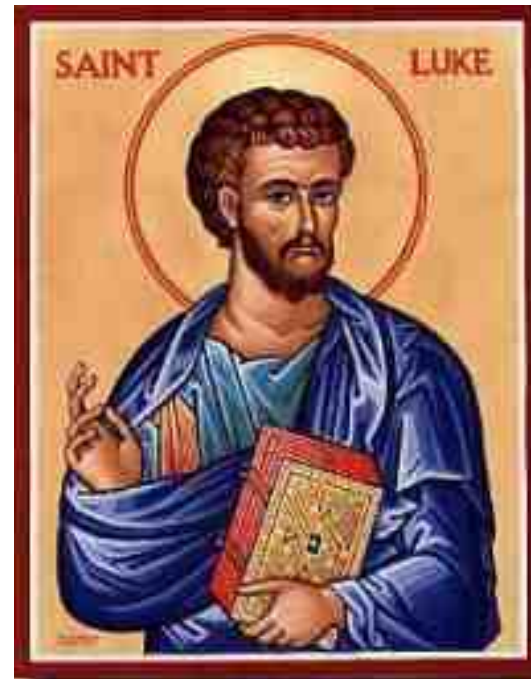


What about other Gospels?

- Weren't there other gospels in competition with those four that were finally accepted?
 - Yes, there were.
- What do we know about these?
 - Let's see.

The Testimony of Luke

- The author of the third Gospel, Luke, a physician and associate of Paul, tells us a little on the status of writings about Jesus at the time he wrote (probably in the late 50s of the first century).
- This is found in the first four verses of the Gospel of Luke.



The Testimony of Luke

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. – Luke 1:1-4

The Testimony of Luke

- Of our canonical gospels, no more than two had been written when Luke wrote (Matthew and Mark), possibly only Matthew.
- So there were apparently a number of other attempts in existence when Luke wrote.
- Luke does not suggest these present a different Jesus, but rather that they, too, depend on the testimony of the eyewitnesses.
- There is no evidence that any of these survived to be the gospels mentioned in later centuries. They were probably displaced early on by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Other Early Gospels

- From writings of the church fathers (that have been known for centuries), and from recently discovered manuscripts and fragments, we know something about 20-30 other gospels, orthodox or heretical, that circulated in the early centuries of church history, before Constantine.
- Let's have a look at some of these.

The Gospel of Thomas

- Found in 1945 among the Nag Hammadi papyri, this Gospel has attracted the most attention.
- The complete text is available only in Coptic, in a manuscript dating after Constantine.
- We also have 3 Greek fragments, the earliest dating ~ AD 200.



The Gospel of Thomas

- The date is disputed:
 - The common suggestion is AD 140.
 - Some suggest as early as AD 50.
 - There is now good evidence the Gospel depends on Tatian's *Diatessaron*, so dating after AD 175.
- In any case, the picture of Jesus in Thomas does not match that in *The DaVinci Code*.



The Gospel of Thomas

Simon Peter said to them: "Let Mary go out from among us, because women are not worthy of the Life."

Jesus said, "See, I shall lead her, so that I will make her male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven." – saying 114

The Gospel of the Hebrews

- This is the only non-canonical Gospel mentioned at all favorably in canon discussions (Origen and Eusebius).
- It probably originated in Egypt, sometime between 100 and 150.
- It seems to be Jewish-Christian, with a mixture from Gnosticism and other religions.

The Gospel of the Hebrews

- This Gospel is known only from seven scattered quotations by the church fathers Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Jerome.
- Two of these quotations are especially strange!

The Gospel of the Hebrews

"When the Christ wished to come upon the earth to men, the good Father summoned a mighty power in heaven, which was called Michael, and entrusted Christ to the care thereof. And the power came into the world and it was called Mary, and Christ was in her womb seven months."

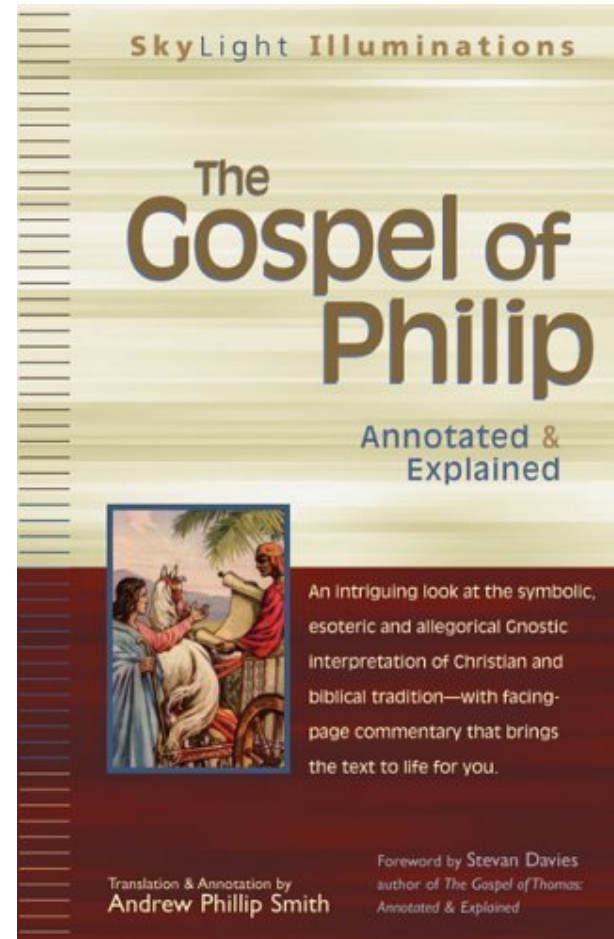
"Here the Savior says, 'Even so did my mother, the Holy Spirit, take me by one of my hairs and carry me away on to the great mountain Tabor.'"

The Gospel of the Hebrews

- The Gospel clearly introduces ideas that are foreign to the Old Testament, but of the sort characteristic of Gnosticism.
- In any case, it pictures Jesus having pre-existence as the Christ, which disagrees with the assessment in *The Da Vinci Code* that Jesus is merely human.

The Gospel of Philip

- A Gnostic gospel, probably written in Syriac, 250-300, known to us in Coptic.
- It rejects creation by God for creation by a lesser power.
- It rejects Jesus being born of virgin for a strange reason, and similarly argues that Jesus had an earthly father.



The Gospel of Philip

“The world came about through a mistake. For he who created it wanted to create it imperishable and immortal. He fell short of attaining his desire. For the world never was imperishable, nor, for that matter, was he who made the world.”

– 75.2-9

The Gospel of Philip

Some said, "Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit." They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. When did a woman ever conceive by a woman? Mary is the virgin whom no power defiled. She is a great anathema to the Hebrews, who are the apostles and the apostolic men.... And the Lord would not have said "My Father who is in heaven" unless he had had another father, but he would have said simply "my father." –
55.23-36

The Gospel of Philip

- This Gospel demonstrates flimsy interpretation of the Bible:
 - The Holy Spirit is feminine (because the Hebrew and Syriac words for 'spirit' are feminine).
 - The apostles & their followers are mistaken.
 - Jesus had an earthly father because he refers to God as his Father in heaven.
- All these arguments depend upon using our Bible, and twisting it to make points the Bible does not.

The Gospel of Philip

- The Gospel of Philip **is** one of the sources that Dan Brown, author of *The Da Vinci Code*, uses to support his reconstruction of Jesus and his emphasis on Mary Magdalene.
- Some of it supports his view, some of it doesn't.
- Another of his sources is the Gospel of Mary (Magdalene).

The Gospel of Mary

- Slightly under ½ of this gospel survives in the Coptic language in the Berlin Codex from the 5th century, 8 of 18 pages.
- The last two pages are also preserved in Greek from the early 3rd century.
- The gospel thus dates from sometime before AD 200.



The Gospel of Mary

- The first six pages are missing. On page seven we come in just at the end of a conversation of the risen Christ with his disciples. Then he blesses and leaves them.
- The disciples are sad and fearful, given their commission and what happened to Jesus.
- Mary Magdalene encourages them.

The Gospel of Mary

- Peter asks Mary to tell them the revelations she received from Jesus, who loved her above all other women.
- We begin to get a presentation of this when the text breaks off again (pp 11-14 are missing).
- When the text resumes, she is describing how the soul passes through the planetary spheres, and how the soul is to speak with the hostile powers guarding each sphere — a standard Gnostic motif.

The Gospel of Mary

- When she finishes, Andrew & Peter do not believe her.
- Mary weeps, saying she is no liar.
- Levi rebukes Peter, and the disciples go out to preach to the world.

That's what we know of the Gospel of Mary.

Summary on Other Gospels

- We have looked at four other Gospels:
 - Gospel of Thomas
 - Gospel of Hebrews
 - Gospel of Philip
 - Gospel of Mary
- These are the most important ones for our concern here.
 - Early
 - Mentioned in *The Da Vinci Code*

Summary on Other Gospels

- There is no evidence these gospels go back to eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry just because they claim to. Such claims (and claims to special revelation) are typical of false teachers.
- They also typically make claims to secret knowledge, while the canonical texts claim that Jesus' works and words were essentially public.
- The evidence that we do have suggests these came on the scene with Gnosticism, a mixture of paganism and Greek philosophy with Christianity.

Summary on Other Gospels

- In any case, *The Da Vinci Code* makes selected and distorted use of the gospels it does use.
- It tries to make Mary Magdalene Jesus' wife, but its sources more likely point to her being his mistress.
- It tries to make a marriage between the royal house of David, and the royal house of Saul, but its sources are intensely anti-semitic and anti-Old Testament, and have no interest in anything of this sort.

Summary on Other Gospels

- In fact, *The Da Vinci Code* uses just such details from the Gospels of Philip and Mary as the writer thinks his target audience might accept, and ignores those features which might cause them to think these texts are unbelievable.
- It looks with suspicion on the orthodox Gospels, and with gullibility on the un-orthodox ones.
- I would not trust *The Da Vinci Code* for reliable information about early Christianity.



The Other Gospels

Do Not Support

The Da Vinci Code