

The Fourth Ming Dao Bible Lecture
Issues from *The Da Vinci Code*
Why Four Gospels and the Nature of Jesus' Divinity
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I. Engaging Culture is a Spiritual Exercise

- ◆ Too many Christians have become so culturally isolated, they have lost the ability to share Christ.
- ◆ Sharing Christ involves more than knowing the Bible.
- ◆ Opportunities abound, but one must understand a little of how one's neighbor thinks. (Origen on being aware.)

II. Such Engagement is a Spiritual Issue

- ◆ The essence of spirituality involves 3 elements:
 - Honoring God and knowing Him (John 17:3),
 - Living righteously (Gal 5:22-26),
 - Thinking of how to bring Him to others (1 Pet 3).

III. *The Da Vinci Code*: Opportunity to Shine

- ◆ Illustration: *The Da Vinci Code*.
- ◆ My story of involvement with the book.
- ◆ The claim of page 1, the basic claims of the book, Dan Brown's testimony, and why it matters.
- ◆ The roots of the novel: Holy Blood, Holy Grail and some recent early church scholarship.

IV. The Premise

- ◆ We start with the key woman in our study, Mary of Magdala. In *The Da Vinci Code*, she is the wife of Jesus and the mother of his children, a secret the church wanted to cover up to protect the divinity of Jesus. In the book, she also is directly associated with the Holy Grail. The association with the Grail comes through the idea of Holy Blood, and its bloodline (p. 250), the sangreal. A word play on the term Sang Real gets us to a connection to the Holy Grail. The "hypothesis" is that the story of the Holy Grail really points to the holy bloodline of Jesus and Mary Magdalene coming into France. Da Vinci knew the "secret" and hinted at it in his Last Supper. (Not true according to art historians.)

V. 2 Key Texts - Was Jesus Married?

- ◆ Gospel of Philip 63:33-36 - an undefined special relationship to Jesus - (2 versions of this text: the original, the suggested.)
 - And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [...] loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [...].

- And 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] by it [and expressed disapproval].
- ◆ Gospel of Mary 17:10-18:21 - recipient of revelation.
 - 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."

VI. Summary on 2 Texts

- ◆ No text explicitly says Jesus is married.
- ◆ Meaning of the texts that might infer it are very unclear.
- ◆ 2 texts out of hundreds of texts.

VII. Implications for *The Da Vinci Code*

- ◆ The base element for the novel's claim is lost.
- ◆ Why this matters. Attempt is to redefine Christianity.
- ◆ Engage, do not withdraw, from the culture.
How? 1 Peter 3:14-17 - Be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in you.
 - In an informed manner.
 - Graciously.
 - Sensitive to how others think: listen and dialogue, don't just tell, but engage the facts.

VIII. Did the Church Lie about the Person of Jesus?

- ◆ The claim: Jesus was made divine by the fourth century church by those who won an ecclesiastical fight at the council of Nicea in AD 325 (pp. 231-35).
- ◆ "Alternative" Christianities existed in the first century (what some universities are teaching in religion classes).

IX. Claims about Christianity

- ◆ 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."

- ◆ “Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false.” (emphasis in *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 235)
- ◆ “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.” It was by a “relatively close vote” at that Nicean council in AD 325 that Jesus was made Son of God.
- ◆ So what of the claims?

X. 3 Correct Claims in the Novel

- ◆ Constantine was a key figure and that his rule was a turning point in Christian history.
- ◆ The Nicene Creed was an important affirmation in the history of the faith and was, in part, an effort to control what was to be believed. The creed was an attempt to affirm the core of what Christians regarded as essential for all Christians to believe, a significant exercise for a movement experiencing the diversity that Christianity faced in A.D. 325.
- ◆ The collection of texts into an official list that became the canon of Scripture gained momentum in this period.

XI. Before Nicea and the New Testament

- ◆ How were Christians instructed before there was a New Testament?
 - Books were read in the churches. Roots of some of our services, even today. The reading of the texts in the service. Part of being an oral culture. Doctrine was taught in short teaching units, hymns, and words over the Lord’s Table.
- ◆ Question became which books should be read in church to reinforce the teaching.
- ◆ 3 Questions:
 1. Was Jesus made divine in AD 325?
 2. How did we get to four gospels?
 3. Are the extra-biblical texts pro-women and is the theology of these books like the rest of Scripture?

XII. Issue 1: Jesus and Divinity: NOT Late or by a Close Vote

- ◆ Most “Secret” Gospels and related works have a “divine” Jesus, not a human one. (Novel is wrong in several ways: Gospels not a “secret”; Many of these texts had a divine Jesus, not a human one as novel claims.)
 - The Agenda: Let’s make Jesus like any other religious great. Let’s not focus on his uniqueness. A divine, unique Jesus messes things up.
- ◆ Jesus was worshipped from the start.
 - 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 - “Although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth -- as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’ -- yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” John 1:1, 14; Heb 1:3; Phil 2:5-11; Pliny’s Letter to Trajan (c. AD 117).

XIII. Jesus as Divine before AD 325

- ◆ The trial scene of Jesus, where Jesus himself makes the claim: “You shall see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:61)
- ◆ Point: The belief that Jesus was divine goes back to the earliest documents because the idea goes back to him. By AD 325, the idea that Jesus was divine was already “ancient” history. Early Church taught Jesus as Creator / Redeemer (Col 1:15-20).
- ◆ What the council did was to define what was believed in precise, more philosophical-theological language.

XIV. Issue 2: Why Only Four Gospels?

- ◆ Canon - “reed” or “standard”. Books that define the faith.
- ◆ By AD 180, the four gospels had clearly established themselves as the key witnesses to Jesus as several ancient witnesses make clear. All these witnesses date to the late second century, early third century (125-100 years before Nicea). Apostolic roots are key to these texts.
 - Justin Martyr - “apostolic Memoirs”.
 - Irenaeus - the “Four-fold Gospel” as the Gospel.
 - Tatian - The Diatessaron.
 - Muratorian Canon - only 4 Gospels listed.
 - Origen.

XV. Issue 3: Secret Gospels: Pro-women?

- ◆ One Text: Gospel of Thomas 114 - “Simon Peter said to them: ‘Let Mary go away from us, for women are not worthy of life.’ Jesus said: ‘Lo, I shall lead her, so that I may make her a male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself a male will enter the kingdom of heaven.’”
- ◆ One Teaching: The Role of Sophia in some of these texts. What kind of divine feminine do we have?

XVI. Secret Gospels: A Different Theology

- ◆ Creation bad / Bible: Creation good.
- ◆ Body corrupt / Bible: World is fallen because of sin, but body is God’s temple, sacred.
- ◆ Jesus laughs at those who think they crucified him / Bible: Jesus consciously went to his death for us.
- ◆ Issue is self knowledge, not Jesus’ work / Bible: Jesus calls on us to believe in God’s work through Him.
- ◆ Key is what you know, the “secret” knowledge for the religious elite / Bible: is an open book for all to read and study.

XVII. How Mary Magdalene Matters

- ◆ Mary, the Great Witness.
- ◆ How Mary Matters: The Point in Song.