

**Deification of Jesus according to *The Da Vinci Code***  
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**INTRODUCTION TO *THE DA VINCI CODE***

**What is *The Da Vinci Code*?** *The Da Vinci Code* is a book written by the American author Dan Brown. It was published in 2003 by Doubleday as part of a trilogy that started with *Angels and Demons* (2000). By August 2005, *The Da Vinci Code* was translated into 44 languages with a total of 36 million copies in print. Although written in the genre of novel (literary fiction), people wonder if it contains a grain of truth. In *The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown advocates a conspiracy theory that undermines traditional Christianity. Many of the premises were already developed in an earlier book, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (1982), written by Michael Baigent, Henry Lincoln, and Richard Leigh. (Baigent, in fact, filed a lawsuit against Brown in London, England). These premises are rooted in poor scholarship and have become the basis of popular beliefs about Christianity. In May 2006, a movie based on *The Da Vinci Code* will be released by Sony Pictures. It is produced by Ron Howard and will star Tom Hanks as the main character, Robert Langdon.

**Summary.** “A murder in the silent after-hour halls of the Louvre museum reveals a sinister plot to uncover a secret that has been protected by a clandestine society since the days of Christ. The victim is a high-ranking agent of this ancient society who, in the moments before his death, manages to leave gruesome clues at the scene that only his granddaughter, noted cryptographer Sophie Neveu, and Robert Langdon, a famed symbologist, can untangle. The duo become both suspects and detectives searching for not only Neveu's grandfather's murderer but also the stunning secret of the ages he was charged to protect. Mere steps ahead of the authorities and the deadly competition, the mystery leads Neveu and Langdon on a breathless flight through France, England, and history itself. Brown has created a page-turning thriller that also provides an amazing interpretation of Western history. Brown's hero and heroine embark on a lofty and intriguing exploration of some of Western culture's greatest mysteries--from the nature of the Mona Lisa's smile to the secret of the Holy Grail. Though some will quibble with the veracity of Brown's conjectures, therein lies the fun. *The Da Vinci Code* is an enthralling read that provides rich food for thought” (Review by *Jeremy Pugh*, amazon.com).

**HISTORICAL ASSERTIONS MADE BY LEIGH TEABING IN *THE DA VINCI CODE***

“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...The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great” (p. 231).

“In 325 A.D., he [Constantine] decided to unify Rome under a single religion. Christianity...Constantine was a very good businessman. He could see that Christianity was on the rise, and he simply backed the winning horse” (p. 232).

“until that moment in history [A.D. 325], Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal...Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea...A relatively close vote at that...Nevertheless, establishing Christ's divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman empire and to the new Vatican power base. By officially endorsing Jesus as the Son of God, Constantine turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable. This not only precluded further pagan challenges to Christianity, but not the followers of Christ were able to redeem themselves only via the established sacred channel—the Roman Catholic Church” (p. 233).

“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...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...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. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi” (p. 234).

“the early Church needed to convince the world that the mortal prophet Jesus was a divine being. Therefore, any gospels that described earthly aspects of Jesus’ life had to be omitted from the Bible. Unfortunately for the early editors, one particularly troubling earthly theme kept recurring in the gospels. Mary Magdalene...More specifically, her marriage to Jesus Christ” (p. 244).

“These are photocopies of the Nag Hammadi and Dead Sea Scrolls, which I mentioned earlier...The earliest Christian records. Troubling, they do not match up with the gospels in the Bible” (pp. 245-246).

“According to these unaltered gospels, it was not Peter to whom Christ gave directions with which to establish the Christian Church. It was Mary Magdalene...Jesus was the original feminist. He intended for the future of the Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene” (p. 248).

“Behold...the greatest cover-up in human history. Not only was Jesus Christ married, but He was a father...Mary Magdalene was the Holy Vessel. She was the chalice that bore the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ. She was the womb that bore the lineage, and the vine from which the sacred fruit sprang forth” (p. 249).

### **HISTORICAL PREMISES OF *THE DA VINCI CODE***

#### **1. The Roman Emperor Constantine conspired with the Roman Catholic Church.**

- a. Together they created “orthodox” Christianity at the Council of Nicea (325).
- b. Previously Jesus was followed as a good teacher and moral exemplar.
- c. Now for the first time Jesus was deified, i.e., turned into a god.
- d. The motive for duping the masses was power and wealth.

#### **2. This was accomplished by altering the historical record of Jesus.**

- a. A canon of acceptable writings was created.
- b. Some Christian writings were embellished.
- c. Other Christian writings were banned and burned.

#### **3. Some censored Christian writings have been discovered.**

- a. These writings reveal the truth about Jesus.
- b. They prove that Jesus was mortal and married.
- c. Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene with whom he had children.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF BROWN’S HISTORICAL PREMISES**

1. In *The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown is revising the history of Christian origins.
2. Traditional Christianity, according to Brown, is based on a lie fabricated at Nicea in 325.
3. Christians today unwittingly commit idolatry when they worship Jesus.

### **HISTORICAL REVISIONISM OF CHRISTIAN ORIGINS**

**Historical Revisionism.** Historical revisionism is re-writing history in a way that challenges previously accepted conclusions. Historical revisionism can be good and bad. It can be good because historical conclusions are tentative, open to further research and clarification. Historical revisionism, on the other hand, can be bad when it attempts to manipulate history for ideological purposes.

**Analogy: Historical Revisionism of the Council of Jamnia (A.D. 90).** Suppose that I wanted to undermine classical Judaism with its belief in Israel’s divine election as “the people of God.” Rather than attack its beliefs, I challenge its history especially its history of origins. Jews believe that their religion is rooted in God’s covenant with Abraham (ca. 2100 B.C.). In A.D. 90, the Jewish rabbis gathered together at the Council of Jamnia to reconstruct Judaism, which had been devastated by the destruction of the temple (A.D. 70). This is a historical fact. To undermine Judaism, however, I reconstruct the history of this Council. I conjecture that at this Council for the first time Jewish rabbis invented the Genesis account of God’s covenant with Abraham. In this account, the rabbis

fabricated a lie about God's covenant with Abraham, particularly his election of Israel and promise of the land of Canaan. To substantiate this lie, the rabbis embellished some Jewish writings while banning other Jewish writings that revealed the truth about their origins. Rather than originating with God's covenant with Abraham, Judaism originated with a lie created by Jewish rabbis at the Council of Jamnia. Through my historical conjecture, I've revisioned Jewish origins with the result of undermining Judaism.

**Traditional View of Christian Origins.** The traditional view of Christian origins is usually traced back to Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260-340). He is known as the "father of church history" for his writing, *Ecclesiastical History*. In his historical description of Christianity, Eusebius traces orthodox Christianity from Jesus and his appointed apostles through the early church fathers to the Council of Nicea. For Eusebius, Christianity was monolithic rather than diverse from its inception. But, what about heresies? Heresies, according to Eusebius, were corrupt offshoots from this straight line of orthodox Christianity. These heresies consisted of small sectarian groups that were never a serious challenge to the majority of orthodox churches.

**Walter Bauer, *Heresy and Orthodoxy in Earliest Christianity* (1934).** Bauer's thesis was that the terms "heresy" and "orthodoxy" are fourth century constructions developed by the strand of Christianity that rose to political dominance in the fourth century. For Bauer, it is anachronistic to apply these terms to the variety of churches that existed in the first three centuries. During this time, according to Bauer, Christianity was so theologically diverse that in some geographical locations what later became known as heresy was earliest and/or dominant. But how did one form of Christianity ascend to a position of political power? Bauer believed that aside from organizational structure (i.e., hierarchial) it was simply a "fluke of history" that the Roman form of Christianity rose to dominance. To solidify its position, Bauer argued that the Roman church asserted apostolic succession and preserved only those documents that reflected its form of Christianity; other documents were censored. Many scholars have been critical of Bauer's thesis especially methodology (e.g., arguments from silence, insupportable conjectures, forced interpretations, valuing heretical literature over patristic writings). Other scholars have challenged Bauer's conclusions about specific geographical locations, such as Egypt and Ephesus.

**Helmut Koester and James Robinson, *Trajectories* (1971).** Building on the work of Rudolf Bultmann, Koester and Robinson applied Bauer's thesis to the New Testament. They argue that Christianity from its very inception was not monolithic. From the very beginning, according to Koester and Robinson, those who followed Jesus had diverse opinions about who he was and what he accomplished. There was no orthodoxy in the New Testament, just a plurality of equally valid Christologies. The four gospels provide different portraits of Jesus not to mention Q and the Gospel of Thomas. These diverse interpretations of Jesus are represented by Koester and Robinson as trajectories that all trace their origin back to Jesus. They believe that Christian origins is best characterized by division and development rather than some kind of orthodox unity.

**Elaine Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels* (1979).** As a scholar, Pagels believes that she has an obligation to speak for the suppressed voice of Gnosticism, a voice that can be heard in recently discovered Gnostic writings. Pagels compares the Gnosticism to Orthodoxy as competing forms of Christianity. She applauds the Gnostic rejection of incarnation, blood atonement, and bodily resurrection, the very doctrines that modern liberals find offensive. As far as the bodily resurrection of Jesus, Pagels believes that orthodox leaders propagated this myth to legitimize their authority through apostolic succession. Orthodox Christianity, according to Pagels, persecuted Gnostic Christians because Gnostic beliefs challenged its authority. Gnostics, after all, advocated the importance of visions and self-knowledge rather than apostolic authority. Pagels also believes that Gnosticism was more favorable toward women.

**Recent Attempts at Historical Revisionism of Christian Origins.** Dan Brown is not the only one to revise Christian origins in recent years. Other popular attempts include Michael Baigent's *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (1983) and *The Jesus Papers: Exposing the Greatest Cover-up in History* (2006). In 2000, Richard Rubenstein wrote, *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome*. L. Michael White, a member of the Jesus Seminar, wrote, *From Jesus to Christianity: How Four Generations of Visionaries and Story-tellers Created the New Testament and the Christian Faith* (2004). In 2006, James Tabor wrote, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity*. One of the most prolific attacks against the traditional view of Christian origins has been waged by Bart Ehrman. In the last few years, Ehrman has published numerous books on this topic: *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (1996), *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (2003), *Lost Scripture: Books that Did not Make It into the New Testament* (2003), *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (2005), *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code* (2006), *Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (2006).

**Purpose of Revisioning Christian Origins.** Some modern scholars believe that Jesus was a mere man who was a moral exemplar and teacher of kingdom ethics. These ethics include tolerance (i.e., relativism) and egalitarianism. By revisioning the history of Christian origins, these scholars hope to create a secular Christianity, devoid of deity of Christ and anything spiritual or eternal.

**Challenges to Bauer's Thesis.** For the scholarly challenges to Bauer's thesis see the following books: H.E.W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* (1954), James Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (1977), Thomas Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined* (1988), Arland Hultgren, *The Rise of Normative Christianity* (1994). In spite of the fact that Bauer's thesis has largely been debunked, many scholars continue to assume it because they cannot accept the alternative, namely, the traditional view of orthodoxy.

## DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TESTAMENT CANON

**Fourfold Gospels:** First harmony of the gospels was Tatian's *Diatessaron* (A.D. 160)

**Pauline Corpus:** 10 letters, plus Hebrews, included in Chester Beatty Codex p46 (ca. A.D. 200)

| <b>Muratorian Canon<br/>(ca. A.D. 180)</b> | <b>Tertullian's List<br/>(ca. A.D. 207)</b> | <b>Eusebius' List<br/>(ca. A.D. 325)</b> | <b>Athanasius' List<br/>(ca. A.D. 367)</b> |
|--|---|--|--|
| <b><u>Included</u></b>                     | <b><u>Included</u></b>                      | <b><u>Included</u></b>                   | <b><u>Included</u></b>                     |
| Matthew                                    | Matthew                                     | Matthew                                  | Matthew                                    |
| Mark                                       | Mark  | Mark                                     | Mark                                       |
| Luke                                       | Luke  | Luke                                     | Luke                                       |
| John                                       | John  | John                                     | John                                       |
| Acts                                       | Acts  | Acts                                     | Acts                                       |
| Paul's Letters (13)                        | Paul's Letters (13)                         | Paul's Letters (13)                      | Paul's Letters (13)                        |
| James                                      | Hebrews                                     | Hebrews                                  | Hebrews                                    |
| I & II John                                | I Peter                                     | I Peter                                  | James                                      |
| Jude                                       | I John                                      | I John                                   | I & II Peter                               |
| Revelation                                 | Jude  | Revelation                               | I, II, III John                            |
| Wisdom of Solomon                          | Revelation                                  |  | Jude                                       |
|  |   |  | Revelation                                 |
| <b><u>Disputed</u></b>                     | <b><u>Disputed</u></b>                      | <b><u>Disputed</u></b>                   |  |
| Hebrews                                    | James                                       | James                                    |  |
| I & II Peter                               | II Peter                                    | II Peter                                 |  |
| III John                                   | II & III John                               | II & III John                            |  |
| Apocalypse of Peter                        |   | Jude                                     |  |
| <b><u>Excluded</u></b>                     | <b><u>Excluded</u></b>                      | <b><u>Excluded</u></b>                   |  |
| Shepherd of Hermes                         | Shepherd of Hermes                          | Shepherd of Hermes                       |  |
| Letter of Barnabas                         | Apocalypse of Peter                         | Letter of Barnabas                       |  |
| Teaching of the Apostles                   | Acts of Paul                                | Teaching of the Apostles                 |  |
| Gospel of the Hebrews                      |   | Gospel of the Hebrews                    |  |
| Marcion's Writings                         |   | Apocalypse of Peter                      |  |

## CRITERIA OF CANONICITY FOR NT CANON

**Introduction.** It is difficult to identify specific criteria used in the determination of the N.T. canon. It seems that the writings accepted were simply self-authenticating. They had a quality unlike other writings circulating at that time. Beyond this, we can probably point to two criteria that help in the canonization process: apostolicity and catholicity.

**1. Apostolicity.** The primary criteria of canonicity was apostolicity. There are actually three categories with apostolicity: apostolic authority, apostolic association, and apostolic affinity. If a writing was produced by an apostle, it was granted an authoritative standing. This applied to the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John, the letters

written by Peter and Paul, John's Letters and the Book of Revelation, and James. A second category of apostolicity is apostolic association. This meant that the author of a writing was associated with an apostle. Mark, for example, was associated with Peter and Paul. Luke was associated with Paul. Another category of apostolic authority is apostolic affinity. This meant that a writing was confirmed by the rule of faith, i.e., it agreed with the teachings of the apostles. In this category belong Hebrews and Jude.

**2. Catholicity.** The second criteria would have been catholicity. This does not mean “Catholic,” in the current usage of the word; it simply means “universal.” This means that these writings were universally accepted within mainstream churches from the very beginning. In other words, these are the writings that survived the test of time. Their universal usage testified to their authority. In this way, they were self-authenticating.

## **NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA**

### **Known prior to Nag Hammadi Discovery (1945)**

|  |                                     |                                |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Corpus Hermeticum</i>               | <i>Act of Peter</i>                 | <i>Odes of Soloman</i>         |
| <i>Pistis Sophia</i>                   | <i>Gospel of Mary [Magdalene]</i>   | <i>Apocryphon of John</i>      |
| <i>Sophia of Jesus Christ</i>          | <i>Gospel of Thomas (fragments)</i> | Gospel of the Egyptians (lost) |
| Gospel According to the Hebrews (lost) | Gospel of James                     | Infancy Gospel of Thomas       |
| Gospel of Peter                        | Gospel of the Twelve Apostles       | Gospel of the Seventy          |
| Gospel According to Matthias (lost)    | Gospel of Judas                     | Gospel of Bartholomew          |
| Protevangelium of James                | Gospel of Nicodemus                 | Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew       |
| Gospel of Gamaliel                     | Acts of Andrew                      | Acts of John                   |
| Acts of Paul                           | Acts of Peter                       | Acts of Thomas                 |

### **Discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt (1945)**

|                                     |                               |                                 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Acts of Peter & the Twelve Apostles | Allogenes                     | Apocalypse of Adam              |
| Apocalypse (First) of James         | Apocalypse (Second) of James  | Apocalypse of Paul              |
| Apocalypse of Peter                 | Apocryphon of James           | Apocryphon of John              |
| Asclepius 21-29                     | Authoritative Teaching        | Book of Thomas the Contender    |
| Concept of Our Great Power          | Dialogue of the Savior        | Discourse on the Eighth & Ninth |
| Eugnostos the Blessed               | Exegesis on the Soul          | Gospel of the Egyptians         |
| Gospel of Philip                    | Gospel of Thomas              | Gospel of Truth                 |
| Hypostasis of the Archons           | Hypsiphron                    | Interpretation of Knowledge     |
| Letter of Peter to Philip           | Marsanes                      | Melchizedek                     |
| On the Anointing                    | On the Baptism A              | On the Baptism B                |
| On the Eucharist A                  | On the Eucharist B            | On the Origin of the World      |
| Paraphrase of Shem                  | Plato, The Republic           | Prayer of the Apostle Paul      |
| Prayer of Thanksgiving              | 2nd Treatise of the Great Set | Sentences of Sextus             |
| Sophia of Jesus Christ              | Teachings of Silvanus         | Testimony of Truth              |
| Thought of Norea                    | Three Steles of Seth          | Thunder, Perfect Mind           |
| Treatise on the Resurrection        | Trimorphic Protennoia         | Tripartite Tractate             |
| Valentinian Exposition              | Zostrian                      |                                 |

## GNOSTICISM

**Origin of Gnosticism.** Gnosticism is a syncretistic religious movement that draws from Judaism, Christianity, Greek mystery religions, Zoroastrianism, Egyptian religion, and Greek philosophy. Gnosticism derives its name from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means "knowledge." Gnosticism manifest itself in Christianity in the middle to late 2<sup>nd</sup> century. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century, it had pretty much run its course. Though Gnosticism is not a monolithic movement, Gnostics share some common beliefs.

**Theology.** The one true God is the Absolute who is pure and transcendent spirit.

**Cosmology.** Cosmology is a theory of creation. As light particles emanate from the sun, so Gnostics believed that divine particles (aeons or gods) emanate from the Absolute. The more distant the aeon from the Absolute, however, the less pure it is. This, however, is not the fault of the Absolute anymore than distant darkness is the fault of the sun. One of the distant aeons, Sophia, unwittingly gave birth to the Demiurge, who in ignorance believed himself to be the only true god. The Demiurge, for some Gnostics, is none other than Yahweh, the Creator god of the Old Testament. Gnostics believe that the Demiurge wrongly created matter. Since Gnostics were dualists, they believed that while spirit was inherently good, matter was inherently evil.

**Anthropology.** When the Demiurge created humans, he imprisoned aeons (i.e., divine sparks) in material bodies. When humans die, their spirit is reincapsulated in a new body in an endless cycle of death and re-birth (i.e., reincarnation). The Demiurge keeps human in ignorance of their divine origin so that they continue to serve him. The evil in the world, then, is not the result of sin but divine oppression.

**Soteriology.** If the human problem is ignorance, then the solution is knowledge (*gnosis*). Not just any knowledge will do. Humans need special (esoteric) knowledge of their divine origin and their ability to return to the Absolute. Only this knowledge will re-awaken the divine spark. Gnostics believe that there are three types of people: Material, who only believe in the physical world; Psychial, who mistakenly believe that the creator is the true God; Spiritual, who are receptive to the gnosis of their divine origin. Because of their anthropological dualism, Gnostics were world-denying, practicing either asceticism or libertarianism.

**Christology.** But where does this knowledge come from? The Absolute ("Father"), according to Gnosticism, sends "messengers of light" to reveal gnosis to humans. Most recently he sent Christ to be the bringer of this esoteric (mysterious) knowledge. Some Gnostics deny the incarnations, believing that Christ only appeared to have a physical body (i.e., Docetists). Those who are spiritual receive Christ's redemptive knowledge and discover their divine potential. In Gnosticism, there is no substitutionary atonement or bodily resurrection. Christ's goal was simply to impart knowledge and to escape the prison-house of his body in order to return to his divine origin.

## GOSPEL OF PHILIP

**Extant Copies.** In 1945, a single fragmentary manuscript was discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt. This manuscript was written in Coptic, an Egyptian dialect with Greek characters, and dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The church father, Epiphanius (ca. 315-403), attributed the Gospel of Philip to a 4<sup>th</sup> century libertine Gnostic movement in Egypt. Although there is no evidence that the Gospel of Philip was written prior to this, many Coptic writings were copied from original 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Greek documents. The manuscript contains no title, but since Philip is the only apostle mentioned in this gospel, the gospel is attributed to him.

**Genre.** The Gospel of Philip consists aphorisms and short dialogues with little narrative context. It appears to be a loose collection of 127 excerpts from other writings, even though these writings have not been identified. In the Gospel of Philip, seventeen sayings are attributed to Jesus, nine of which come from the canonical gospels.

**Theology.** The Gospel of Philip conveys Valentinian Gnosticism. Valentinus (ca. 120-160) was a Gnostic leader who wrote the Gospel of Truth. The emphasis in the Gospel of Philip is on sacred rites (i.e., baptism, eucharist, marriage) and sacred names (i.e., Jesus, Sophia). It may have served as a catechism for Gnostic converts.

**Controversial Passage:** "And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [...] more than [...] kiss her [...] on her [...]. The rest of the disciples [...]. 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 like her?'"

## GOSPEL OF MARY

**Extant Copies.** In 1896, a 5<sup>th</sup> century Coptic manuscript of the Gospel of Mary was acquired in Cairo (Papyrus Berlinensis 8502). This fragmentary manuscript is missing chapters 1-3 and 6-7, as well as the beginning of chapter 8. Two small Greek fragments of the Gospel of Mary were also discovered. A 2<sup>nd</sup> century fragment (Papyrus Rylands 463) was published in 1938, while a 3<sup>rd</sup> century fragment (Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 3525) was published in 1983. There is much variation between the Greek and Coptic manuscripts, indicating development in the Gospel of Mary.

**Genre.** The Gospel of Mary consists of a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples and then between Mary (Magdalene) and the disciples. In the latter dialogue, Mary describes a vision that she had received from Jesus.

**Theology.** The theology of the Gospel of Mary is clearly Gnostic.

**Controversial Passage:** “Peter said to Mary, ‘Sister we know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of women. Tell us the words of the Savior which you remember which you know, but we do not, nor have we heard them.’ Mary answered and said, ‘What is hidden from you I will proclaim’” (5:5-7).

## GOSPELS: CANONICAL VS. APOCRYPHAL

|                       | <u>Canonical Gospels</u>        | <u>Apocryphal Gospels</u>  |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Status:</b>        | Orthodox                        | Heretical (primarily Gnostic)  |
| <b>Names:</b>         | Matthew<br>Mark<br>Luke<br>John | Truth<br>Egyptians<br>Thomas<br>Egerton<br>Philip<br>Infancy Gospel of Thomas<br>Peter<br>Infancy Gospel of James<br>Mary<br>Secret Book of James<br>Judas<br>Dialogue of the Savior |
| <b>Authorship:</b>    | Apostolic                       | Pseudepigraphic  |
| <b>Dates:</b>         | A.D. 50-90                      | A.D. 140-300   |
| <b>Genre:</b>         | Narrative                       | Sayings, Dialogues, Homilies   |
| <b>Circulation:</b>   | Catholic                        | Sectarian  |
| <b>Extant Copies:</b> | 5000+                           | 1, 2 (Truth, Egyptians), 4 (Thomas)  |
| <b>Variants:</b>      | Few                             | Many   |

### Notes & Definitions of Terms

Canonical: Writings that were accepted in the churches during the first three centuries.

Apocryphal: Writings rejected by mainstream churches in the second-fourth centuries.

Orthodox: True belief rooted in the teachings of Jesus and his apostles.

Heretical: False belief that corrupts the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

Apostolic: A writing associated with an apostle.

Pseudepigraphic: A writing “falsely attributed” to an earlier historical figure.

Catholic: A writing with “universal” acceptance within the churches.

Sectarian: A writing that is unique to a small fringe group.

Extant Copies: Discovered and preserved handwritten manuscripts of a book or portion of it.

Variants: Scribal changes to the manuscripts, whether intentional or unintentional.

## CHRISTOLOGY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

**Introduction.** Beginning with the Nicene Creed (325), we will trace the Christology of the early church through the patristic and canonical writings to the oral tradition embedded in the Pauline epistles. The patristic writings are the writings of the church fathers, the spiritual leaders of the early church, 100-700. They served as pastors, bishops, apologists, and theologians. Not only of the writings of these thirty authors have been preserved. Today we have 52 patristic writings bound in a 38 volume encyclopedic set.

### COUNCIL OF NICEA (A.D. 325)

**Constantine (ca. A.D. 272-337).** In A.D. 311, Constantine was instrumental in passing the Edict of Toleration which ended nearly 300 years of Roman persecution against the church. When Constantine won the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312, he became Emperor of the West. He attributed his victory to the God of Christianity and "converted" to Christianity. In 313, he issued the Edict of Milan, legalizing Christianity. Even though only 5% of the population was Christian, Constantine hoped that Christianity would unify the Roman Empire. To benefit the church, Constantine returned land that had been confiscated. He also granted new land to the church and provided money for building projects. The church used some of these funds to build orphanages, hospitals, inns, and old age homes. Constantine also stopped funding temple priests and festivals; instead, he confiscated these temples, destroying them or using them for other purposes. Constantine exempted clergy from taxes and military service, something that was previously done for pagan priests. In 321, he declared Sunday to be a day of worship and rest for Christians. In legislation, Constantine abolished crucifixion and infanticide; he also discouraged slavery and gladiator games. Constantine then imposed penalties for adultery, concubinage, and prostitution

**Alexander (d. 328).** Alexander served as the bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, from 313-328. He is most noted for his battle against Arianism. In 320, Alexander convened a council in Alexandria to evaluate the teachings of Arius. This council was attended by more than 100 bishops from Egypt and Libya. After hearing testimony, Arius was anathematized by the council. Arius fled to Nicodemia where he continued to teach his theology. In 325, Alexander would play an important role in fighting Arianism at the Council of Nicea (325).

**Arius (ca. 256-336).** Arius was born in Alexandria, and became famous for his expository sermons. He was very active in the church of Alexandria, serving as a presbyter. Around 318, he began to study with Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria. A point of debate arose when Arius rejected the co-eternity of the Son. Although he accepted Logos-Christology, he questioned the origin of the pre-incarnate Logos. For Arius, Jesus is the Logos, who is neither eternal nor divine. Arius based this belief on six factors. One, Jesus developed, which is something a perfect God cannot do. Two, Jesus was ignorant of his return, which is impossible for an omniscient God. Three, Jesus needed to pray to the Father, indicating dependence. Four, Jesus subordinated himself to the Father, making himself inferior to the Father. Five, the Logos was "begotten" of the Father, meaning he was created. Six, Jesus was forsaken by God while on the cross. For these six reasons, Arius concluded that the Logos is not the same substance as the Father. The Logos was created, making him a creature rather than the Creator. For Arius, there was a time when the Logos did not exist. The Logos, according to Arius, was an intermediate being, between Creator and creation. The Logos served as God's mediator at creation and redemption.

**Athanasius (ca. 296-373).** Athanasius served as a deacon under Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria. He acted as Alexander's secretary at Nicene Council (325). When Alexander died, Athanasius was appointed bishop of Alexandria (328). He was exiled five times while combating Arianism. In contrast to Arius, Athanasius believed in the eternal Sonship of the Logos. He based this conclusion on four points. First, Scripture clearly teaches the deity of Jesus. Second, the church has always worshiped Jesus as divine; were they now guilty of idolatry? Third, in order to save the world, Jesus must be divine. Fourth, Jesus is the Logos, who is none other than God himself.

**Nicene Creed (325).** "I believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [essence] with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And [I believe] in one Holy and Catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen."

**Role of Constantine.** In 323, Constantine became sole Emperor of the Roman Empire. Upon hearing of the debate between Alexander and Arius, he sent a letter to them encouraging them to reconcile. Constantine does not appear to realize the seriousness of the issue for he refers to it as, “quarrelling about small and very trifling matters.” After moving the capital to Byzantium (Constantinople) in 324, Constantine realized that the theological controversy between Alexander and Arius needed to be resolved. To this end, Constantine convened the First Ecumenical Council of the Church in Nicea, a city near Constantinople. All 1800 bishops were invited to attend. Approximately 300 bishops (only 4-5 from the Western Church) accepted Constantine’s invitation. Constantine provided the bishops with travel and lodging. He also allowed them to bring 2 presbyters and 3 deacons. But, only bishops could vote on church policy. Although Constantine presided over opening ceremonies, he was not involved in formulating or voting on the Creed of Nicea.

**Council of Nicea (325).** The Council addressed a variety of issues, such as the Meletian Schism, the date of Easter, and clerical discipline. Interestingly, the issue of the NT canon was never discussed. The primary purpose of the Council was to address the controversy between Alexander and Arius. After interviewing Arius, the vast majority of the bishops sided with Alexander. It was clear to them that Arius’ view was inconsistent with apostolic teaching. Although the bishops attempted to use biblical language to formulate their creed, they found that Arius was able to manipulate Scripture to support his view. While Alexander argued that Christ was *homoousios* (“same substance”) as the Father, Arius taught that Christ was *anhomoios* (“different substance”) from the Father. Some of the bishops proposed a mediating position, suggesting that Christ was *homoiousios* (“similar substance”) with the Father. Their attempt was to avoid the heresy of Sabellianism (i.e., modalism) which sometimes used the term *homoousios* to refer to Jesus. Eventually these bishops agreed to the language recommended by Alexander. The Council began its deliberations on May 20<sup>th</sup>, and by June 19<sup>th</sup> it had formulated a common creed. Most scholars believe that the Nicene Creed was actually a compilation of already existing creeds (i.e., Anitoch, Jerusalem). In the Nicene Creed, the Council replaced “Logos” language with “Sonship” language. They affirmed Jesus as the Son of God, begotten but not created. Jesus, according to the Nicene Creed, is not a creature but eternally born out of God. The Council rejected subordinationism in favor of consubstantiality. They affirmed that the Son and the Father share the same substance (*homoousios*). All but three bishops signed the Nicene Creed.

**Aftermath of the Council of Nicea.** Arius and his followers were excommunicated and sent into exile. Within a couple of years, however, Constantine became favorable to Arianism. He recalled Eusebius of Nicomedia from exile and eventually appointed him as an advisor. In 327, Constantine made arrangements to reinstate Arius in the church. Arius, however, died before this could take place. On his deathbed in 337, Constantine was baptized by Eusebius of Nicomedia. After Constantine’s death, Roman Emperors largely sided with Arianism. Nonetheless, the Nicene creed was confirmed by the Council of Constantinople (381) and the Council of Chalcedon (451).

## FOURTH CENTURY CHURCH FATHERS

**Athanasius (296-373), Bishop of Alexandria.** “Behold, we speak freely about the religious faith on the basis of the divine Scriptures; we place it as a light on the lampstand saying, ‘He is by nature true Son and legitimate from the Father, peculiar to his substance, the only-begotten Wisdom and true and only Word of God. He is neither a creature nor a work, but an offspring peculiar to the Father’s substance. Therefore he is true God, *homoousios* with the true Father” (*Orations against the Arians*, Book 1, chapter 9).

“He would not have been thus worshipped, nor thus spoken of, if he had belonged merely to the creatures. But as it is, since he is not a creature, but the offspring of the God who is worshipped, an offspring proper to his substance, and a Son by nature, therefore he is worshipped and is believed to be God, and is Lord of hosts, and has authority and is all-sovereign, as the Father is; for he himself says, ‘All things which belong to the Father are mine.’ For it is proper to the Son to have all that the Father has, and to be such that the Father is beheld in him, and that through him all things were made and that in him the salvation of all is brought about and is established” (*Orations against the Arians*, Book 2, chapter 24).

“Having said ‘I and the Father are one thing’ he adds ‘I in the Father and the Father in me’ to show the identity of the godhead and the unity of the substance. For they are ‘one thing,’ not in the sense of a thing divided into two parts, these being nothing but one thing; nor in the sense of one thing with two names, so that the Son is at one time the Father, at another time his own Son. Sabellius held this opinion and was condemned as a heretic. But they are two, in that the Father is father and not also son; the Son is son and not also father; but the nature is one (for the offspring is not unlike the parents, being his image), and all that is the Father’s is the Son’s. The Son is not another God, for he was not devised from outside; for then there might surely be many gods, if we assume a godhead besides the Father. For even if the Son is distinct from the Father, as his offspring, still as God he is identical with him; he and

the Father are one by specific and proper nature, and by the identity of the one godhead" (*Orations against the Arians*, Book 3, chapters 3-4).

**Alexander (d. ca. 328), Bishop of Alexandria.** "For this reason, with no delay, I aroused myself, beloved, to make clear to you the unbelief of those who say, 'There was once when the Son of God was not' and 'He who before was not, later came into existence; and when he came into existence, he became as every human being by nature.' They say, 'For God made all things from nothing,' including even the Son of God with the creation of all rational and irrational creatures. In accord with this, they even say that he is of a mutable nature, capable of both virtue and evil, and with their supposition 'from nothing' they destroy the divine Scriptures' witness that he always is, which Scriptures indicate the immutability of the Word and the divinity of the Wisdom of the Word, which is Christ. The wretches state, 'Then we too are able to become sons of God, just as he'" (*Letter to Alexander of Thessalonica*, chapter 10).

"Thus concerning this, we believe—as it seems best to the apostolic church—in one unbegotten Father, who of his being has no cause, who is immutable and unchangeable, always according to the same things in the same state, neither receiving progress nor diminution, who is giver of the Law, Prophets, and Gospels, who is Lord of patriarchs, apostles, and all the saints; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten not from nothing but from the Father who is, not according to the likenesses of bodies by dissections or emanations from divisions, as it appears to Sabellius and Valentinus, but inexplicably and indescribably, according to him who said, as we set forth above, 'Who will describe his generation?' [Isa. 53:8], since his *hypostasis* happens to be beyond investigation by every originated nature, just as the Father himself is beyond investigation because the nature of rational ones does not allow the knowledge of the divine generation by the Father" (*Letter to Alexander of Thessalonica*, chapter 46).

### THIRD CENTURY CHURCH FATHERS

**Dionysius (d. ca. A.D. 265), Bishop of Alexandria.** "he [Sabellius] blasphemously says that the Son is the Father and the Father the Son, while they in a manner preach three Gods, dividing the sacred Monad into three substances foreign to each other and utterly separate. For the Divine Word must of necessity be united to the God of the Universe, and the Holy Spirit must have his habitation and abode in God; thus it is absolutely necessary that the Divine Triad be summed up and gathered into a unity, brought as it were to an apex, and by that Unity I mean the all sovereign God of the Universe...Equally to be censured are they who hold that the Son is a work, and think that the Lord came into being, whereas the Divine Oracles testify to a generation fitting and becoming to him, but not to any fashioning or making...For if he came to be a Son, there was when he was not; but he was always, if, that is, he is in the Father, as he himself says, and if the Christ is Word and Wisdom and Power, as, you know, the Divine Scriptures say he is, and if these are attributes of God. For if the Son came into being there was when these attributes were not; therefore there was a time when God was without them; which is most absurd" (Athanasius, *De decretis*, 26).

**Origen (ca. 185-254), Alexandrian Theologian.** "It is now time, after this cursory notice of these points, to resume our investigation of the incarnation of our Lord and Saviour, viz., how or why He became man. Having therefore, to the best of our feeble ability, considered His divine nature from the contemplation of His own works rather than from our own feelings...After the consideration of questions of such importance concerning the being of the Son of God, we are lost in the deepest amazement that such a nature, pre-eminent above all others, should have divested itself of its condition of majesty and become man, and tabernacled amongst men, as the grace that was poured upon His lips testifies, and as His heavenly Father bore Him witness, and as is confessed by the various signs and wonders and miracles that were performed by Him; who also, before that appearance of His which He manifested in the body, sent the prophets as His forerunners, and the messengers of His advent; and after His ascension into heaven, made His holy apostles, men ignorant and unlearned, taken from the ranks of tax-gatherers or fishermen, but who were filled with the power of His divinity, to itinerate throughout the world, that they might gather together out of every race and every nation a multitude of devout believers in Himself...But of all the marvellous and mighty acts related of Him, this altogether surpasses human admiration, and is beyond the power of mortal frailness to understand or feel, how that mighty power of divine majesty, that very Word of the Father, and that very wisdom of God, in which were created all things, visible and invisible, can be believed to have existed within the limits of that man who appeared in Judea; nay, that the Wisdom of God can have entered the womb of a woman, and have been born an infant, and have uttered wailings like the cries of little children...Since, then, we see in Him some things so human that they appear to differ in no respect from the common frailty of mortals, and some things so divine that they can appropriately belong to nothing else than to the primal and ineffable nature of Deity...And therefore the spectacle is to be contemplated with all fear and reverence, that the truth of both natures may be clearly shown to exist in one and the same Being; so that nothing unworthy or unbecoming may be perceived in that divine and ineffable substance nor yet those things which were done be supposed to be the illusions of imaginary appearances...The Only-begotten of God, therefore,

through whom, as the previous course of the discussion has shown, all things were made, visible and invisible, according to the view of Scripture, both made all things, and loves what He made. For since He is Himself the invisible image of the invisible God, He conveyed invisibly a share in Himself to all His rational creatures, so that each one obtained a part of Him exactly proportioned to the amount of affection with which he regarded Him... This substance of a soul, then, being intermediate between God and the flesh--it being impossible for the nature of God to intermingle with a body without an intermediate instrument--the God-man is born, as we have said, that substance being the intermediary to whose nature it was not contrary to assume a body. But neither, on the other hand, was it opposed to the nature of that soul, as a rational existence, to receive God, into whom, as stated above, as into the Word, and the Wisdom, and the Truth, it had already wholly entered. And therefore deservedly is it also called, along with the flesh which it had assumed, the Son of God, and the Power of God, the Christ, and the Wisdom of God, either because it was wholly in the Son of God, or because it received the Son of God wholly into itself. And again, the Son of God, through whom all things were created, is named Jesus Christ and the Son of man. For the Son of God also is said to have died--in reference, viz., to that nature which could admit of death; and He is called the Son of man, who is announced as about to come in the glory of God the Father, with the holy angels. And for this reason, throughout the whole of Scripture, not only is the divine nature spoken of in human words, but the human nature is adorned by appellations of divine dignity" (Book II, ch. 6, *On First Principles*).

**Hippolytus (ca. 160-236), Roman Presbyter and Theologian.** "Now, that Noetus affirms that the Son and Father are the same, no one is ignorant. But he makes his statement thus: "When indeed, then, the Father had not been born, He yet was justly styled Father; and when it pleased Him to undergo generation, having been begotten, He Himself became His own Son, not another's." For in this manner he thinks to establish the sovereignty of God, alleging that Father and Son, so called, are one and the same (substance), not one individual produced from a different one, but Himself from Himself; and that He is styled by name Father and Son, according to vicissitude of times. But that He is one who has appeared (amongst us), both having submitted to generation from a virgin, and as a man having held converse among men. And, on account of the birth that had taken place, He confessed Himself to those beholding Him a Son, no doubt; yet He made no secret to those who could comprehend Him of His being a Father. That this person suffered by being fastened to the tree, and that He commended His spirit unto Himself, having died to appearance, and not being (in reality) dead. And He raised Himself up the third day, after having been interred in a sepulchre, and wounded with a spear, and perforated with nails. Cleomenes asserts, in common with his hand of followers, that this person is God and Father of the universe, and thus introduces among many an obscurity (of thought) such as we find in the philosophy of Heraclitus" (*Refutation of All Heresies*, 9.5).

"These things then, brethren, are declared by the Scriptures. And the blessed John, in the testimony of his Gospel, gives us an account of this economy (disposition) and acknowledges this Word as God, when he says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If, then, the Word was with God, and was also God, what follows? Would one say that he speaks of two Gods? I shall not indeed speak of two Gods, but of one; of two Persons however, and of a third economy (disposition), viz., the grace of the Holy Ghost. For the Father indeed is One, but there are two Persons, because there is also the Son; and then there is the third, the Holy Spirit. The Father decrees, the Word executes, and the Son is manifested, through whom the Father is believed on. The economy of harmony is led back to one God; for God is One. It is the Father who commands, and the Son who obeys, and the Holy Spirit who gives understanding: the Father who is above all, and the Son who is through all, and the Holy Spirit who is in all. And we cannot otherwise think of one God, but by believing in truth in Father and Son and Holy Spirit. For the Jews glorified (or gloried in) the Father, but gave Him not thanks, for they did not recognise the Son. The disciples recognised the Son, but not in the Holy Ghost; wherefore they also denied Him. The Father's Word, therefore, knowing the economy (disposition) and the will of the Father, to wit, that the Father seeks to be worshipped in none other way than this, gave this charge to the disciples after He rose from the dead: "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." And by this He showed, that whosoever omitted any one of these, failed in glorifying God perfectly. For it is through this Trinity that the Father is glorified. For the Father willed, the Son did, the Spirit manifested. The whole Scriptures, then, proclaim this truth" (*Against the Heresy of One Noetus*, 18).

**Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215), Christian Theologian.** "This Word, the Christ, the cause of our being—for he was in God—as also of our well-being, has now himself appeared to man. He alone is both God and man... This is the New Song, the manifestation of the Word that was in the beginning, and before the beginning. The Saviour, who existed before, has in recent days appeared. He, who is in Him that truly is, has appeared; for the Word, who "was with God," and by whom all things were created, has appeared as our Teacher. The Word, who in the beginning bestowed on us life as Creator when He formed us, taught us to live well when He appeared as our Teacher; that as God He might afterwards conduct us to the life which never ends. He did not now for the first time

pity us for our error; but He pitied us from the first, from the beginning. But now, at His appearance, lost as we already were, He accomplished our salvation” (*Exhortation to the Heathen*, ch. 1.7).

“Believe, O man, in him who is man and God: believe in him who suffered and is worshipped as the living God; servants, believe in him who was dead; all men, believe in him who is the only God of all men: believe and receive salvation for your reward” (*Exhortation to the Heathen*, ch. 10.106)

**Tertullian (ca. A.D. 150-212), Christian Apologist.** “We have been taught that He proceeds forth from God, and in that procession He is generated; so that He is the Son of God, and is called God from unity of substance with God. For God, too, is a Spirit. Even when the ray is shot from the sun, it is still part of the parent mass; the sun will still be in the ray, because it is a ray of the sun--there is no division of substance, but merely an extension. Thus Christ is Spirit of Spirit, and God of God, as light of light is kindled. The material matrix remains entire and unimpaired, though you derive from it any number of shoots possessed of its qualities; so, too, that which has come forth out of God is at once God and the Son of God, and the two are one. In this way also, as He is Spirit of Spirit and God of God, He is made a second in manner of existence--in position, not in nature; and He did not withdraw from the original source, but went forth. This ray of God, then, as it was always foretold in ancient times, descending into a certain virgin, and made flesh in her womb, is in His birth God and man united. The flesh formed by the Spirit is nourished, grows up to manhood, speaks, teaches, works, and is the Christ” (*Apology*, chapter 21).

“I put the argument very briefly. If God had willed not to be born, it matters not why, He would not have presented Himself in the likeness of man. Now who, when he sees a man, would deny that he had been born? What God therefore willed not to be, He would in no wise have willed the seeming to be...There are, to be sure, other things also quite as foolish (as the birth of Christ), which have reference to the humiliations and sufferings of God. Or else, let them call a crucified God "wisdom." But Marcion will apply the knife' to this doctrine also,, and even with greater reason. For which is more unworthy of God, which is more likely to raise a blush of shame, that God should be born, or that He should die? that He should bear the flesh, or the cross? be circumcised, or be crucified? be cradled, or be coffined? be laid in a manger, or in a tomb?...Have you, then, cut away all sufferings from Christ, on the ground that, as a mere phantom, He was incapable of experiencing them? We have said above that He might possibly have undergone the unreal mockeries of an imaginary birth and infancy. But answer me at once, you that murder truth: Was not God really crucified? And, having been really crucified, did He not really die? And, having indeed really died, did He not really rise again?...Thus the nature of the two substances displayed Him as man and God,--in one respect born, in the other unborn; I in one respect fleshly in the other spiritual; in one sense weak in the other exceeding strong; in one sense dying, in the other living. This property of the two states--the divine and the human--is distinctly asserted with equal truth of both natures alike, with the same belief both in respect of the Spirit and of the flesh” (*On the Flesh of Christ*, chs. 3, 5, 7).

“On the question of a distinction between the Father and the Son they are utterly defeated; we maintain it in a form which does not destroy the union between them—a union like that between the sun and its rays or a spring and the river flowing from it, one which is inherent in the indivisible character of the two or three...One then has to ask how the Word was made flesh—whether it was transformed into flesh or whether it put on flesh. The answer is emphatically that it put on flesh; for one must certainly believe God to be immutable and not subject to change of form in that he is eternal...So if it is impossible for him to be transformed, it follows that one must understand his being made flesh in the sense that he comes to be in the flesh and is manifested, seen and handled through the medium of flesh...But in fact we find him described both as God and as man without qualification (as the psalm we have quoted illustrated: ‘Since God was born a man in it and built it by the will of the Father’); and he is repeatedly called ‘son of God’ and ‘son of man,’ no doubt because he is God and man with each substance having its own distinct characteristics, since the Word is none other than God and the flesh is none other than man...We have here a dual condition—not fused but united—in one person, Jesus as God and man” (*Against Praxeas*, ch. 27).

## SECOND CENTURY CHURCH FATHERS

**Ireneaus (ca. A.D. 140-202), Bishop of Lyons.** “Now it has been clearly demonstrated that the Word which exists from the beginning with God, by whom all things were made, who was also present with the race of men at all times, this Word has in these last times, according to the time appointed by the Father, been united to his own workmanship and has been made passible man. Therefore we can set aside the objection of them that say, ‘If he was born at that time it follows that Christ did not exist before then.’ For we have shown that the Son of God did not then begin to exist since he existed with the Father always; but when he was incarnate and made man, he recapitulated in himself the long line of the human race, procuring for us salvation thus summarily, so that what we had lost in Adam, that is,

the being in the image and likeness of God, that we should regain in Christ Jesus...Therefore, as I have already said, He caused man (human nature) to cleave to and to become, one with God. For unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished. And again: unless it had been God who had freely given salvation, we could never have possessed it securely. And unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become a partaker of incorruptibility. For it was incumbent upon the Mediator between God and men, by His relationship to both, to bring both to friendship and concord, and present man to God, while He revealed God to man...But that He had, beyond all others, in Himself that pre-eminent birth which is from the Most High Father, and also experienced that pre-eminent generation which is from the Virgin, the divine Scriptures do in both respects testify of Him: also, that He was a man without comeliness, and liable to suffering; that He sat upon the foal of an ass; that He received for drink, vinegar and gall; that He was despised among the people, and humbled Himself even to death and that He is the holy Lord, the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Beautiful in appearance, and the Mighty God, coming on the clouds as the Judge of all men; -all these things did the Scriptures prophesy of Him...Vain therefore are the disciples of Valentinus who put forth this opinion, in order that they may exclude the flesh from salvation, and cast aside what God has fashioned. Vain also are the Ebionites, who do not receive by faith into their soul the union of God and man, but who remain in the old leaven of [the natural] birth, and who do not choose to understand that the Holy Ghost came upon Mary, and the power of the Most High did overshadow her:<sup>5</sup> wherefore also what was generated is a holy thing, and the Son of the Most High God the Father of all, who effected the incarnation of this being, and showed forth a new [kind of] generation; that as by the former generation we inherited death, so by this new generation we might inherit life" (*Against Heresies*, Book 3, chs. 18.1, 18.7, 19.2).

**Melito (d. ca. 190), Bishop of Sardis.** "On these accounts He came to us; on these accounts, though He was incorporeal, He formed for Himself a body after our fashion, -appearing as a sheep, yet still remaining the Shepherd; being esteemed a servant, yet not renouncing the Sonship; being carried *in the womb* of Mary, yet arrayed in *the nature* of His Father; treading upon the earth, yet filling heaven; appearing as an infant, yet not discarding the eternity of His nature; being invested with a body, yet not circumscribing the unmixed simplicity of His Godhead; being esteemed poor, yet not divested of His riches; needing sustenance inasmuch as He was man, yet not ceasing to feed the entire world inasmuch as He is God; putting on the likeness of a servant, yet not impairing the likeness of His Father. He sustained every character *belonging to Him* in an immutable nature: He was standing before Pilate, and *at the same time* was sitting with His Father; He was nailed upon the tree, and *yet* was the Lord of all things" (*The Discourse on the Cross*).

"For there is no need, to persons of intelligence, to attempt to prove, from the deeds of Christ subsequent to His baptism, that His soul and His body, His human nature like ours, were real, and no phantom of the imagination. For the deeds done by Christ after His baptism, and especially His miracles, gave indication and assurance to the world of the Deity hidden in His flesh. For, being at once both God and perfect man likewise, He gave us sure indications of His two natures: of His Deity, by His miracles during the three years that elapsed after His baptism; of His humanity, during the thirty *similar* periods which preceded His baptism, in which, by reason of His low estate as regards the flesh, He concealed the signs of His Deity, although He was the true God existing before all ages" (*On the Nature of Christ*).

"And so he was lifted up upon a tree and an inscription was provided too, to indicate who was being killed. Who was it? It is a heavy thing to say, and a most fearful thing to refrain from saying. But listen as you tremble in the face of him on whose account the earth trembled. He who hung the earth in place is hanged. He who fixed the heavens in place is fixed in place. He who made all things fast is made fast on the tree. The Master is insulted, God is murdered. The King of Israel is destroyed by an Israelite hand" (*A Homily on the Passover*, ch. 96).

**Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 100-165), Christian Apologist.** "And the truth is this that Jesus Christ alone has been begotten as the unique Son of God, being already his Word, his First-begotten, and his Power. By the will of God he became a man, and gave us this teaching for the conversion and restoration of mankind (*First Apology*, xxiii).

"And Trypho said, "We have heard what you think of these matters. Resume the discourse where you left off, and bring it to an end. For some of it appears to me to be paradoxical, and wholly incapable of proof. For when you say that this Christ existed as God before the ages, then that He submitted to be born and become man, yet that He is not man of man, this [assertion] appears to me to be not merely paradoxical, but also foolish." And I replied to this, "I know that the statement does appear to be paradoxical, especially to those of your race, who are ever unwilling to understand or to perform the[requirements] of God, but[ready to perform] those of your teachers, as God Himself declares. Now assuredly, Trypho," I continued,"[the proof] that this man is the Christ of God does not fail, though I be unable to prove that He existed formerly as Son of the Maker of all things, being God, and was born a man by the Virgin. But since I have certainly proved that this man is the Christ of God, whoever He be, even if I do not prove that

He pre-existed, and submitted to be born a man of like passions with us, having a body, according to the Father's will; in this last matter alone is it just to say that I have erred, and not to deny that He is the Christ, though it should appear that He was born man of men, and[nothing more] is proved[than this], that He has become Christ by election. For there are some, my friends," I said, "of our race, who admit that He is Christ, while holding Him to be man of men; with whom I do not agree, nor would I, even though most of those who have[now] the same opinions as myself should say so; since we were enjoined by Christ Himself to put no faith in human doctrines, but in those proclaimed by the blessed prophets and taught by Himself" (*Dialogue with Typhro the Jew*, chapter 48).

**Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. A.D. 117), Bishop of Antioch, Syria.** "As it has been clearly demonstrated that the Word, who existed in the beginning with God, by whom all things were made, who was also always present with mankind, was in these last days, according to the time appointed by the Father, united to His own workmanship, inasmuch as He became a man liable to suffering, [it follows] that every objection is set aside of those who say, "If our Lord was born at that time, Christ had therefore no previous existence." For I have shown that the Son of God did not then begin to exist, being with the Father from the beginning; but when He became incarnate, and was made man, He commenced afresh the long line of human beings, and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam-namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God-that we might recover in Christ Jesus" (*Against Heresy*, Book 3, ch. 18).

"There is one physician, fleshly and spiritual, begotten and unbegotten, God in man, true life in death, both of Mary and of God, first passible then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord" (*To the Ephesians*, vii. 2).

"I perceive that you are settled in unshakable faith, nailed, as it were, to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in flesh and spirit, and with firm foundations in love in the blood of Christ, with full conviction with respect to our Lord that he is genuinely of David's line according to the flesh, son of God according to the divine will and power, really born of a virgin and baptized by John that 'all righteousness might be fulfilled' by him, really nailed up in the flesh for us in the time of Pontius Pilate and the tetrarchy of Herod" (*To the Smyrnaeans*, i-ii).

"If any one preaches the one God of the law and the prophets, but denies Christ to be the Son of God, he is a liar, even as also is his father the devil, and is a Jew falsely so called, being possessed of mere carnal circumcision. If any one confesses Christ Jesus the Lord, but denies the God of the law and of the prophets, saying that the Father of Christ is not the Maker of heaven and earth, he has not continued in the truth any more than his father the devil, and is a disciple of Simon Magus, not of the Holy Spirit. If any one says there is one God, and also confesses Christ Jesus, but thinks the Lord to be a mere man, and not the only-begotten God, and Wisdom, and the Word of God, and deems Him to consist merely of a soul and body, such an one is a serpent, that preaches deceit and error for the destruction of men. And such a man is poor in understanding, even as by name he is an Ebionite. If any one confesses the truths mentioned, but calls lawful wedlock, and the procreation of children, destruction and pollution, or deems certain kinds of food abominable, such an one has the apostate dragon dwelling within him. If any one confesses the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and praises the creation, but calls the incarnation merely an appearance, and is ashamed of the passion, such an one has denied the faith, not less than the Jews who killed Christ. If any one confesses these things, and that God the Word did dwell in a human body, being within it as the Word, even as the soul also is in the body, because it was God that inhabited it, and not a human soul, but affirms that unlawful unions are a good thing, and places the highest happiness in pleasure, as does the man who is falsely called a Nicolaitan, this person can neither be a lover of God, nor a lover of Christ, but is a corrupter of his own flesh, and therefore void of the Holy Spirit, and a stranger to Christ" (*To the Philadelphians*, ch. 6).

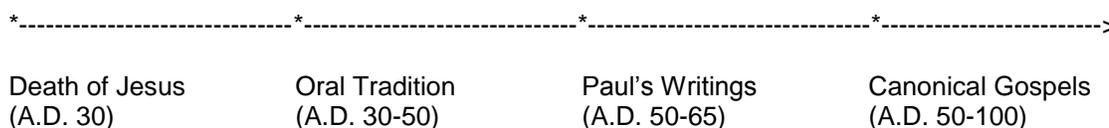
"For some are in the habit of carrying about the name [of Jesus Christ] in wicked guile, while yet they practise things unworthy of God, whom ye must flee as ye would wild beasts. For they are ravening dogs, who bite secretly, against whom ye must be on your guard, inasmuch as they are men who can scarcely be cured. There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God; first possible and then impossible,--even Jesus Christ our Lord. But some most worthless persons are in the habit of carrying about the name [of Jesus Christ] in wicked guile, while yet they practise things unworthy of God, and hold opinions contrary to the doctrine of Christ, to their own destruction, and that of those who give credit to them, whom you must avoid as ye would wild beasts. For "the righteous man who avoids them is saved for ever; but the destruction of the ungodly is sudden, and a subject of rejoicing." For "they are dumb dogs, that cannot bark," raving mad, and biting secretly, against whom ye must be on your guard, since they labour under an incurable disease. But our Physician is the only true God, the unbegotten and unapproachable, the Lord of all, the Father and Begetter of the only-begotten Son. We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin. For "the Word was made flesh." Being incorporeal, He was in the body; being impassible, He was in a passible body; being

immortal, He was in a mortal body; being life, He became subject to corruption, that He might free our souls from death and corruption, and heal them, and might restore them to health, when they were diseased with ungodliness and wicked lusts" (*To the Ephesians*, chapter 7).

"Let my spirit be counted as nothing for the sake of the cross, which is a stumbling-block to those that do not believe, but to us salvation and life eternal. "Where is the wise man? where the disputer? " Where is the boasting of those who are styled prudent? For our God, Jesus Christ, was, according to the appointment of God, conceived in the womb by Mary, of the seed of David, but by the Holy Ghost. He was born and baptized, that by His passion He might purify the water. The cross of Christ is indeed a stumbling-block to those that do not believe, but to the believing it is salvation and life eternal. "Where is the wise man? where the disputer? " Where is the boasting of those who are called mighty? For the Son of God, who was begotten before time began, and established all things according to the will of the Father, He was conceived in the womb of Mary, according to the appointment of God, of the seed of David, and by the Holy Ghost. For says [the Scripture], "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and He shall be called Immanuel." He was born and was baptized by John, that He might ratify the institution committed to that prophet" (*To the Ephesians*, chapter 18).

**Pliny the Younger (ca. A.D. 62-112), Roman Official.** "An anonymous pamphlet was issued, containing many names. All who denied that they were or had been Christians I considered should be discharged, because they called upon the gods at my dictation and did reverence, with incense and wine, to your image which I had ordered to be brought forward for this purpose, together with the statues of the deities; and especially because they cursed Christ, a thing which, it is said, genuine Christians cannot be induced to do. Others named by the informer first said that they were Christians and then denied it; declaring that they had been but were so no longer, some having recanted three years or more before and one or two as long ago as twenty years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods and cursed Christ. But they declared that the sum of their guilt or error had amounted only to this, that on an appointed day they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak, and to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath, not for the commission of any crime but to abstain from theft, robbery, adultery and breach of faith, and not to deny a deposit when it was claimed. After the conclusion of this ceremony it was their custom to depart and meet again to take food; but it was ordinary and harmless food, and they had ceased this practice after my edict in which, in accordance with your orders, I had forbidden secret societies. I thought it the more necessary, therefore, to find out what truth there was in this by applying torture to two maidservants, who were called deaconesses. But I found nothing but a depraved and extravagant superstition, and I therefore postponed my examination and had recourse to you for consultation (*Christians in Bithynia*).

## EARLIEST BELIEFS ABOUT JESUS



## CANONICAL GOSPELS (ca. A.D. 50-100)

### Gospel of John (ca. A.D. 90-100)—Divine claims made by Jesus

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (1:1, 14)

"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, had made him known" (1:18).

"Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.' For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." (5:17-18)

"'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am.' At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds" (8:58)

"'I and the Father are one.' Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God" (10:30-33).

"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9).

"And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (17:5).

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (17:24).

### **Synoptic Gospels (ca. A.D. 50-70)—Divine prerogatives practiced by Jesus**

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago...But I tell you..." (Mt. 5:21ff).

"When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'" (Mk. 2:5-7).

"And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (Mt. 14:32-33).

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep for the goats" (Mt. 25:31-32).

"But He kept silent, and made no answer. Again the High Priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, Are you the Christ, the Son of God of the blessed One?' And Jesus said, I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of Heaven.' And tearing his clothes the high priest said, What further need do we have of witnesses? You heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?' And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death" (Mt. 26:61-64).

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted" (Mt. 28:16-17).

"Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Lk. 24:52).

### **PAULINE LETTERS (ca. A.D. 50-65)**

"Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen" (Rom. 9:5).

"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 2:9).

"while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

### **ORAL TRADITION EMBEDDED IN PAULINE LETTERS (ca. A.D. 30-50)**

**Introduction to Oral Tradition.** As far as we know, neither Jesus nor his disciples wrote down Jesus' teachings. If was common, however, for disciples in an oral culture to memorize the teachings of their rabbi. Through a process of repetition, a disciple would memorize the teachings verbatim before they would transmit them from person-to-person and generation-to-generation. Scholars believe that some of this oral tradition is embedded in Paul's letters, our earliest written record of Christianity, ca. A.D. 49-62. This oral tradition, which is dated to A.D. 30-50, is identified by its literary structure and non-Pauline vocabulary. The creeds and hymns below are two examples of this oral tradition.

### **Creeds—Confessional statements used for catechism and worship.**

"That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

"yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (I Cor. 8:6).

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and then he appeared to Peter, and the to the Twelve" (I Cor. 15:3-5).

"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men" (I Tim. 2:5-6).

### **Hymns—Poetry probably sung antiphonally in the early church.**

"Who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Kenosis Passage, Phil. 2:5-11).

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all the fullness dwell in him. and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Christ Hymn, Col. 1:15-20).

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

### The Da Vinci Code

Richard Abanes, *The Truth behind the Da Vinci Code* (Harvest House, 2004)

Darrell Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (Nelson, 2004)

Hank Hanegraaff & Paul Maier, *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?* (Tyndale, 2004)

Erwin Lutzer, *The Da Vinci Deception* (Tyndale, 2004)

Lee Strobel, *Exploring the Da Vinci Code* (Zondervan, 2006)

Ben Witherington, *The Gospel Code* (IVP, 2004)

Stanley Porter, "The Da Vinci Code, Conspiracy Theory and the Biblical Canon," *MJTM* 6 (2003-2005), 49-80.

[www.davinci-code-breaker.com](http://www.davinci-code-breaker.com)

### New Testament Canon

F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (InterVarsity, 1988).

Philip Comfort, *The Origin of the Bible* (Tyndale, 1992)

Lee McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Hendrickson, 1995)

Lee McDonald & James Sanders, *The Canon Debate* (Hendrickson, 2002)

Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford, 1987)

David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford, 2000)

Paul Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations* (Baker, 1999)

### Early Church Fathers

Henry Bettenson, ed., *The Early Christian Fathers* (Oxford, 1956)

Arland Hultgren, et al, *The Earliest Christian Heretics* (Fortress, 1996)

Richard Norris, ed., *The Christological Controversy* (Fortress, 1980)

William Rusch, ed., *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Fortress, 1980)

Philip Schaff, et al, *The Early Church Fathers*, 38 volumes (Hendrickson, 1885)

### New Testament Apocrypha

Fred Lapham, *An Introduction to the New Testament Apocrypha* (T & T Clark, 2003)

James Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library* (Harper & Row, 1988)

Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 volumes (Westminster, 1992)