



Bethel Spiritual Studies

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The "Other" Books



Spiritual Studies “The Other Books” – recommended books

The Gnostic Gospels by Pagels, Elaine

A Study Guide for Elaine Pagels's "The Gnostic Gospels" (Nonfiction Classics for Students) by Gale, Cengage Learning

Lost Books of the Bible: The Great Rejected Texts, by Joseph Lumpkin

The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Gnostic Gospels (Complete Idiot's Guides) by Matkin, J. Michael

The Everything Gnostic Gospels Book: A Complete Guide to the Secret Gospels (Everything®) by Lester, Meera

OTHER BOOKS of the Bible – some background and a list from Pastor Sylvia

The Apocrypha, Dead Sea Scrolls, all the initial apostolic Church Fathers teachings and the Nag Hammadi are the main recognized “Other Books”. There are also other gospels and texts which have recently been unearthed.

Here is a list of removed or missing books/gospels/chapters/pieces of the Bible There are more, of course. (I don’t think anyone actually knows a verifiable exact number.)

These books were often considered heretical and didn’t fully align with the “canon” books, (the 66 books that piece together the modern (Protestant) Bible). They also did not always align with the patriarchal and political agendas of those who were determining which books would be recognized as the “Final List”. But the idea that a bunch of men sat around a table and decided is also “not quite true”.... What they did was “recognize”

The complete New Testament canon is set out in detail in Athanasius’s Easter letter of 367, which contains the 27 New Testament books to the exclusion of all others. During the fourth century, several church synods, such as the Councils of Rome (382), Hippo (393), and Carthage (397), accepted all 27 books of the New Testament as canonical.

We will study some selected books – especially Gospels, Epistles and Other Pieces Now Extant Attributed in the First Four Centuries to Jesus and his Apostles.

I think it’s important to obtain knowledge from the rejected books and writings to gain insight into the biblical stories and what things are mentioned in them that aren’t mentioned in the 66 canon books. Although, a large number of these should not be read because they do not align with the canon books.

Please note that a number of these are pseudepigraphic (sort of “Fan-Fiction”) works of the Old Testament and apocryphal works of the New Testament.

Pseudepigraphic Work = ***

Apocryphal Work = #

Books

- ***Book of Enoch 1, Book of Enoch 2 / The Secrets of Enoch - ***, and Enoch 3 - #***
- ***Book of Esdras 1 and 2***
- ***Book of Maccabees 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5***
- ***Book of Tobit***
- ***Book of Jasher***
- ***Book of Judith***
- ***Book of Esther*** — Missing sections
- ***Book of Ecclesiasticus / Sirach***
- ***Book of Jubilees***
- ***Book of Baruch 1, 2, and 3 - *** (Only Baruch 2 and 3 are pseudepigraphic)***
- ***Book of The Shepherd of Hermas***
- ***Book of Wisdom / Wisdom of Solomon***
- ***Book of The Psalms of Solomon - #***
- ***Book of The Odes of Solomon***
- ***Book of Giants - #***
- ***Book of Adam and Eve 1 and 2 / The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan***

Gospels

- ***The Gospel of James / The Protevangelion***
- ***The Gospel of Peter - ******
- ***The Gospel of Thomas***
- ***The Gospel of Nicodemus / Acts of Pilate - #***
- ***The Syriac Infancy Gospel / Infancy of Jesus Christ - #***

Epistles

- ***The Epistles of Jesus Christ and Abgarus, King of Edessa***
- ***The Epistles of Clement***
- ***The Epistle of Barnabas***
- ***The Epistle of Aristeas - ******
- ***The Epistle of Jeremiah***
- ***The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Laodiceans***

- ***The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to Seneca***
- ***The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians***
- ***The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians***
- ***The Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians***
- ***The Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans***
- ***The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians***
- ***The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrneans***
- ***The Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp***
- ***The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians***
- ***The Epistle of Herod to Pilate the Governor***
- ***The Epistle of Pilate to Herod***

Others — Chapters, pieces, special works

- ***Assumption of Moses - # / ******
- ***Apocalypse of Moses - #***
- ***Testament of Abraham - ******
- ***Apocalypse of Abraham - ******
- ***Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs - #***
- ***The Acts of Paul - ******
- ***The Acts of Paul and Thecla - #***
- ***The Apostles Creed***
- ***Psalm 151*** — Missing chapter in the Book of Psalms
- ***Story of Susanna*** — Missing chapter in the Book of Daniel (Chapter 13)
- ***Story of Bel and The Dragon*** — Missing chapter in the Book of Daniel (Chapter 14)
- ***Story of Ahikar***
- ***The Prayer of Azariah and the Songs of the Three Holy Children*** — Missing piece in Chapter 3 in the Book of Daniel
- ***Prayer of Manasseh*** — Missing piece in Chapter 33 in the Book of Chronicles 2

(Article from Ministry Magazine – March 2012)

Who decided which books should be included in the Bible?

Many Christians find great value in reading the Bible because they believe that this Book was given by the inspiration of God. But have you ever wondered who decided which books should be included in the collection that we refer to as the “Bible”? **Canonization**, the term given to the process by which books were included or excluded from the Bible, is a word derived from the Greek *kanon* whose basic meaning is that of a “rule.” Sometimes the books included in our Bible are, therefore, called canonical books, although canonization deals with more than a mere list of books.

Consider canonization as a question about why certain books came to be regarded as sacred and authoritative in the early Christian communities. How we address this question determines whether we believe that the Bible, as we have it, came into being as a result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the early church or whether political forces in the time of Constantine were responsible, as some people claim. Since the Bible consists of the Old and New Testaments, the question will be answered in two parts.

The Old Testament canon

Who decided which books should be included in the Old Testament? The question cannot be answered definitively due to a lack of historical sources. The same applies to the question regarding what time the decision was made. Historical-critical scholars believe the Bible gained its authority progressively. They suggest that the 39 books of the Hebrew Bible, arranged in three major divisions (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings), indicate a three-step development in the canonization process. According to this view, ***the Law—meaning the books of Moses, also called the Pentateuch—was canonized by about 400 B.C., the Prophets during the first century B.C., and then the Writings during the first century A.D.***¹

A conservative perspective. The story is quite different when viewed from a conservative perspective. Quite clearly the book of the Law (the Pentateuch) was regarded as the Word of God from its earliest existence. A number of biblical passages point to the self-authenticating authority of the Law from the very beginning. Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai “took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken

we will do, and we will be obedient!’ ” ([Exod. 24:7, NASB](#)). Centuries later, after the Babylonian exile, Ezra read from the “book of the law of Moses” and the people adopted it as the constitution of their restored commonwealth ([Neh. 8:1, NASB](#)). The reverence shown by the Jews to the books of Moses, variously called “the Law of Moses” (v. 1, NKJV), “the Book of the Law” (v. 3, NKJV), and “the Law of God” (v. 8, NKJV), points to the honored status of the books of Moses.

We do not have the details of how these books were brought together. It is conceivable that Ezra and Nehemiah may have been involved with the collection of the books composing the Old Testament canon. However, neither one person, or even several, decided which books should be included in the Old Testament because there were individuals throughout Israel’s history who were recognized as prophets of God, and what these people said and wrote was considered the Word of God. The writers did not have to wait for their work to pass the test of time for their authority to be acknowledged. Their work was received as Scripture because what they said and wrote was believed to be from God.

When did the Hebrew canon come into being? Jewish tradition informs us that the greater part of the Hebrew canon came into being with Ezra and Nehemiah. The noncanonical book of 2 Maccabees refers to records and memoirs of Nehemiah as well as to his library with books about the kings, prophets, and the writings of David ([2 Macc. 2:13](#)). The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus argues that unlike the Greeks, who had an innumerable multitude of books, the Hebrews had only 22 books;² he noted that these books “contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them, five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. . . . But as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, . . . the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life.”³

Josephus clearly implies that the Prophets were in place as a body of writings by the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and regarded as Scripture. He notes, “It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time.”⁴ No doubt, the prophetic books, like the Pentateuch, were considered authoritative from the moment they were written.

Apart from the testimony of historians, there is evidence in the Bible itself to indicate that by the time of Daniel and Zechariah, the Law and the earlier prophets (Joshua–Kings) were regarded as Scripture. For example, [Zechariah 7:12](#) (ca. 518 B.C.) mentions the hardness of the hearts of the people “ ‘so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets’ ” (NASB). And Daniel considered the book of Jeremiah as well as the Law of Moses as authoritative ([Dan. 9:2, 11](#)).

The ***third division of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings***, as a complete collection, dates somewhat later than the Prophets. The prologue to the Greek translation of Ecclesiasticus (an apocryphal book from the second century B.C.) refers repeatedly to the three sections of the Old Testament, indicating that the third section of the Old Testament was already recognized as canonical at that time.

The New Testament canon

The early Christian church followed the practice of Jesus and regarded the Old Testament as authoritative ([Matt. 5:17–19](#); [21:42](#); [22:29](#); [Mark 10:6–9](#); [12:29–31](#)). Along with the Old Testament, the church revered the words of Jesus with equal authority ([1 Cor. 9:14](#); [1 Thess. 4:15](#)). It could not have been otherwise since Jesus was perceived not only as a prophet but also as the Messiah, the Son of God. Following the death and resurrection of Jesus, the apostles came to occupy a unique position in spreading and bearing witness to the words of Jesus. Indeed, Christ had said of them that because they had been with Him from the beginning they would be His witnesses ([John 15:27](#)). As the church grew, and the apostles became conscious of the prospect of their own deaths, the need arose for the words of Jesus to be recorded ([2 Pet. 1:12–15](#)). None were keener to preserve and communicate authoritatively what had happened than the apostles who were witnesses of the salvation of God in Jesus Christ. Thus, the stage was set for the development of books that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, would in time become the New Testament canon.

For about two decades after the Cross, the message of Jesus was proclaimed orally. Then, from the mid–first century on, Paul’s letters began to appear. Somewhat later, the three synoptic Gospels and the book of Acts were written; by the end of the first century, when John wrote the book of Revelation, all the books of the New Testament were completed. Throughout the New Testament, the focus is on what God had done in Christ ([1 Cor. 15:1–3](#); [Luke 1:1–3](#)).

The New Testament books acknowledged as Scripture. As was the case with the books of the Old Testament prophets, the writings of Paul and the other apostles were immediately accepted as authoritative because the authors were known to be authentic spokesmen for God. The writers themselves were conscious of the fact that they were proclaiming God’s message, not merely their own opinions. Paul, in [1 Timothy 5:18](#), follows up the formula “Scripture says” with a quote from [Deuteronomy 25:4](#) and [Luke 10:7](#), thereby placing the Old Testament Scriptures and the New Testament Gospels on the same level of authority; and, in [1 Thessalonians 2:13](#), Paul commends the Christians in Thessalonica for accepting his words as “the word of God” (NKJV). Peter in [2 Peter 3:15, 16](#) also considered Paul’s writings as Scripture.

During the second century, most churches came to possess and acknowledge a collection of inspired books that included the four Gospels, the book of Acts, 13 of Paul’s letters, 1 Peter, and 1 John. The other seven books (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation) took longer to win general acceptance. The early church fathers—for example, Clement of Rome (flourished ca. 100), Polycarp (ca. 70–155), and Ignatius (died ca. 115)—quoted from most of the New Testament books (only Mark, 2 and 3 John, and 2 Peter are not attested) in a manner indicating that they accepted these books as authoritative. In this process, however, the authority that the books of the New Testament had was not subsequently attributed to them but inherently present in them from the beginning.

Reasons for the New Testament canon. Over a period of about four centuries when the New Testament canon took shape (specifically defining the list of books), a number of factors played a significant role. While the primary reason for the inclusion of the New Testament books in the canon was the self-authenticating nature of the books (i.e., their inspiration), other issues contributed to it.

One key motivating factor for establishing the New Testament canon was that during the second century several heretical movements developed in Christianity. Marcion, a prominent heretic, broke with the church around A.D. 140, and drew up his own list of Christian books that would provide a canon for faith and worship. Marcion accepted only a modified version of Luke’s Gospel and ten of the Pauline epistles as inspired. At the same time, a growing number of Christian writings appeared that claimed to relate unknown details about Christ and the apostles. Many of these books were written by individuals who belonged to a heretical movement called Gnosticism. The Gnostics stressed salvation through

secret knowledge (Greek *gnosis*). A number of “infancy” gospels supplied details from the hidden years of Christ’s life. *Numerous apocryphal books of Acts related the deeds of Peter, Paul, John, and most of the other apostles, and several apocalypses described accounts of personally conducted tours of heaven and hell by the apostles. Today, these writings are known collectively as the New Testament apocrypha.*

This period also saw the publication of lists of books known to have been written by the apostles or their associates. Among these lists were the Muratorian Canon, dated towards the end of the second century, the list of Eusebius of Caesarea from the early part of the fourth century, and the list of Athanasius of Alexandria from the middle of the fourth century. The first two lists were still incomplete, containing only about 20 of the 27 New Testament books. ***The complete New Testament canon is set out in detail in Athanasius’s Easter letter of 367***, which contains the 27 New Testament books to the exclusion of all others. During the fourth century, several church synods, such as the Councils of Rome (382), Hippo (393), and Carthage (397), accepted all 27 books of the New Testament as canonical.

While heretical movements and church councils played a certain role in the formation of the canon, the desire to preserve faithfully the events of what God had done through Christ, already evident in the New Testament, means that the driving force behind the history of the New Testament canon was the faith of the church. In fact, “much of what became the core of the New Testament canon . . . had already been unofficially and generally recognized as Scripture as the church began to consider making and approving a list that would set the limits of Christian Scripture.”⁵ In reference to the New Testament canon, Bruce M. Metzger correctly says of the Synod of Laodicea: “The decree adopted at this gathering merely recognizes the fact that there are already in existence certain books, generally recognized as suitable to be read in the public worship of the churches, which are known as the ‘canonical’ books.”⁶

Conclusion

Who decided which books should be included in the Bible? Our brief discussion has shown that for both Testaments the books that came to be part of the biblical canon had their own self-authenticating authority. The Old Testament books carried their own authoritative credentials by virtue of the writers who unequivocally declared that what they said and wrote was from God. The New

Testament books had immediate authority as faithfully witnessing to the events and meaning of God's action through Christ.

The Old Testament canon was, for the most part, settled within Judaism by the second century B.C., though discussions concerning it continued for several centuries. From history we know that the final shape of the New Testament canon existed by the fourth century A.D. Although heretical movements and church councils played a role in the actual formation of the New Testament canon, the church did not decide which books should be included in the canon. The church recognized and acknowledged the inspiration and self-authenticating authority of the 27 New Testament books and limited the canon to these books.

Notes:

1 James A. Sanders, "Canon," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:843.

2 Among the Jews, the 12 Minor Prophets were counted as one book, as were 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. Josephus may have counted Ruth as part of Judges and Lamentations as part of Jeremiah, but we do not really know how Josephus divided or grouped the books of the Old Testament to arrive at 22.

3 Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8.

4 Ibid.

5 Steven M. Sheeley, "From 'Scripture' to 'Canon': The

Development of the New Testament Canon," *Review & Expositor* 95 (Fall 1998): 518.

6 Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 210.

The Gnostic Gospels

The Gnostic Gospels: The 52 texts discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt include 'secret' gospels poems and myths attributing to Jesus sayings and beliefs which are very different from the New Testament. Scholar Elaine Pagels explores these documents and their implications.

From *The Gnostic Gospels*

by Elaine Pagels

Vintage Books, New York: 1979

pp. xiii-xxiii

In December 1945 an Arab peasant made an astonishing archeological discovery in Upper Egypt. Rumors obscured the circumstances of this find—perhaps because the discovery was accidental, and its sale on the black market illegal. For years even the identity of the discoverer remained unknown. One rumor held that he was a blood avenger; another, that he had made the find near the town of Naj 'Hammádì at the Jabal al-Tárif, a mountain honeycombed with more than 150 caves. Originally natural, some of these caves were cut and painted and used as grave sites as early as the sixth dynasty, some 4,300 years ago.

Thirty years later the discoverer himself, Muhammad 'Alí al-Sammán; told what happened. Shortly before he and his brothers avenged their father's murder in a blood feud, they had saddled their camels and gone out to the Jabal to dig for sabakh, a soft soil they used to fertilize their crops. Digging around a massive boulder, they hit a red earthenware jar, almost a meter high. Muhammad 'Alí hesitated to break the jar, considering that a jinn, or spirit, might live inside. But realizing that it might also contain gold, he raised his mattock, smashed the jar, and discovered inside thirteen papyrus books, bound in leather. Returning to his home in al-Qasr, Muhammad 'Alí dumped the books and loose papyrus leaves on the straw piled on the ground next to the oven. Muhammad's mother, 'Umm-Ahmad, admits that she burned much of the papyrus in the oven along with the straw she used to kindle the fire.

A few weeks later, as Muhammad 'Alí tells it, he and his brothers avenged their father's death by murdering Ahmed Isma'il. Their mother had warned her sons to keep their mattocks sharp: when they learned that their father's enemy was

nearby, the brothers seized the opportunity, “hacked off his limbs . . . ripped out his heart, and devoured it among them, as the ultimate act of blood revenge.”

Fearing that the police investigating the murder would search his house and discover the books, Muhammad ‘Alí asked the priest, al-Qummus Basiliyus Abd al-Masih, to keep one or more for him. During the time that Muhammad ‘Alí and his brothers were being interrogated for murder, Raghīb, a local history teacher, had seen one of the books, and suspected that it had value. Having received one from al-Qummus Basiliyus, Raghīb sent it to a friend in Cairo to find out its worth.

Sold on the black market through antiquities dealers in Cairo, the manuscripts soon attracted the attention of officials of the Egyptian government. Through circumstances of high drama, as we shall see, they bought one and confiscated ten and a half of the thirteen leather-bound books, called codices, and deposited them in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. But a large part of the thirteenth codex, containing five extraordinary texts, was smuggled out of Egypt and offered for sale in America. Word of this codex soon reached Professor Gilles Quispel, distinguished historian of religion at Utrecht, in the Netherlands. Excited by the discovery, Quispel urged the Jung Foundation in Zurich to buy the codex. But discovering, when he succeeded, that some pages were missing, he flew to Egypt in the spring of 1955 to try to find them in the Coptic Museum. Arriving in Cairo, he went at once to the Coptic Museum, borrowed photographs of some of the texts, and hurried back to his hotel to decipher them. Tracing out the first line, Quispel was startled, then incredulous, to read: “These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke, and which the twin, Judas Thomas, wrote down.” Quispel knew that his colleague H.C. Puech, using notes from another French scholar, Jean Doresse, had identified the opening lines with fragments of a Greek Gospel of Thomas discovered in the 1890’s. But the discovery of the whole text raised new questions: Did Jesus have a twin brother, as this text implies? Could the text be an authentic record of Jesus’ sayings? According to its title, it contained the Gospel According to Thomas; yet, unlike the gospels of the New Testament, this text identified itself as a secret gospel. Quispel also discovered that it contained many sayings known from the New Testament; but these sayings, placed in unfamiliar contexts, suggested other dimensions of meaning. Other passages, Quispel found, differed entirely from any known Christian tradition: the “living Jesus,” for example, speaks in sayings as cryptic and compelling as Zen koans:

Jesus said, "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."

What Quispel held in his hand, the Gospel of Thomas, was only one of the fifty-two texts discovered at Nag Hammadi (the usual English transliteration of the town's name). Bound into the same volume with it is the Gospel of Philip, which attributes to Jesus acts and sayings quite different from those in the New Testament:

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

Other sayings in this collection criticize common Christian beliefs, such as the virgin birth or the bodily resurrection, as naïve misunderstandings. Bound together with these gospels is the Apocryphon (literally, "secret book") of John, which opens with an offer to reveal "the mysteries [and the] things hidden in silence" which Jesus taught to his disciple John.

Muhammad 'Alí later admitted that some of the texts were lost—burned up or thrown away. But what remains is astonishing: some fifty-two texts from the early centuries of the Christian era—including a collection of early Christian gospels, previously unknown. Besides the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Philip, the find included the Gospel of Truth and the Gospel to the Egyptians, which identifies itself as "the [sacred book] of the Great Invisible [Spirit]." Another group of texts consists of writings attributed to Jesus' followers, such as the Secret Book of James, the Apocalypse of Paul, the Letter of Peter to Philip, and the Apocalypse of Peter.

What Muhammad 'Alí discovered at Nag Hammadi, it soon became clear, were Coptic translations, made about 1,500 years ago, of still more ancient manuscripts. The originals themselves had been written in Greek, the language of the New Testament: as Doresse, Puech, and Quispel had recognized, part of one of them had been discovered by archeologists about fifty years earlier, when they found a few fragments of the original Greek version of the Gospel of Thomas.

About the dating of the manuscripts themselves there is little debate. Examination of the datable papyrus used to thicken the leather bindings, and of the Coptic script, place them c. A.D. 350-400. But scholars sharply disagree about the dating of the original texts. Some of them can hardly be later than c. A.D. 120-150, since Irenaeus, the orthodox Bishop of Lyons, writing C. 180, declares that heretics “boast that they possess more gospels than there really are,” and complains that in his time such writings already have won wide circulation—from Gaul through Rome, Greece, and Asia Minor.

Quispel and his collaborators, who first published the Gospel of Thomas, suggested the date of c. A.D. 140 for the original. Some reasoned that since these gospels were heretical, they must have been written later than the gospels of the New Testament, which are dated c. 60-110. But recently Professor Helmut Koester of Harvard University has suggested that the collection of sayings in the Gospel of Thomas, although compiled c. 140, may include some traditions even older than the gospels of the New Testament, “possibly as early as the second half of the first century” (50-100)—as early as, or earlier, than Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John.

Scholars investigating the Nag Hammadi find discovered that some of the texts tell the origin of the human race in terms very different from the usual reading of Genesis: the Testimony of Truth, for example, tells the story of the Garden of Eden from the viewpoint of the serpent! Here the serpent, long known to appear in Gnostic literature as the principle of divine wisdom, convinces Adam and Eve to partake of knowledge while “the Lord” threatens them with death, trying jealously to prevent them from attaining knowledge, and expelling them from Paradise when they achieve it. Another text, mysteriously entitled The Thunder, Perfect Mind, offers an extraordinary poem spoken in the voice of a feminine divine power:

For I am the first and the last. I am the honored one and the scorned one.
I am the whore and the holy one.
I am the wife and the virgin....
I am the barren one, and many are her sons....
I am the silence that is incomprehensible....
I am the utterance of my name.

These diverse texts range, then, from secret gospels, poems, and quasi-

philosophic descriptions of the origin of the universe, to myths, magic, and instructions for mystical practice.

Why were these texts buried-and why have they remained virtually unknown for nearly 2,000 years? Their suppression as banned documents, and their burial on the cliff at Nag Hammadi, it turns out, were both part of a struggle critical for the formation of early Christianity. The Nag Hammadi texts, and others like them, which circulated at the beginning of the Christian era, were denounced as heresy by orthodox Christians in the middle of the second century. We have long known that many early followers of Christ were condemned by other Christians as heretics, but nearly all we knew about them came from what their opponents wrote attacking them. Bishop Irenaeus, who supervised the church in Lyons, c. 180, wrote five volumes, entitled *The Destruction and Overthrow of Falsely So-called Knowledge*, which begin with his promise to set forth the views of those who are now teaching heresy . . . to show how absurd and inconsistent with the truth are their statements . . . I do this so that . . . you may urge all those with whom you are connected to avoid such an abyss of madness and of blasphemy against Christ.

He denounces as especially “full of blasphemy” a famous gospel called the Gospel of Truth. Is Irenaeus referring to the same Gospel of Truth discovered at Nag Hammadi? Quispel and his collaborators, who first published the Gospel of Truth, argued that he is; one of their critics maintains that the opening line (which begins “The gospel of truth”) is not a title. But Irenaeus does use the same source as at least one of the texts discovered at Nag Hammadi—the Apocryphon (Secret Book) of John—as ammunition for his own attack on such “heresy.” Fifty years later Hippolytus, a teacher in Rome, wrote another massive Refutation of All Heresies to “expose and refute the wicked blasphemy of the heretics.”

This campaign against heresy involved an involuntary admission of its persuasive power; yet the bishops prevailed. By the time of the Emperor Constantine’s conversion, when Christianity became an officially approved religion in the fourth century, Christian bishops, previously victimized by the police, now commanded them. Possession of books denounced as heretical was made a criminal offense. Copies of such books were burned and destroyed. But in Upper Egypt, someone; possibly a monk from a nearby monastery of St. Pachomius, took the banned books and hid them from destruction—in the jar where they remained buried for almost 1,600 years.

But those who wrote and circulated these texts did not regard themselves as “heretics. Most of the writings use Christian terminology, unmistakably related to a Jewish heritage. Many claim to offer traditions about Jesus that are secret, hidden from “the many” who constitute what, in the second century, came to be called the “catholic church.” These Christians are now called gnostics, from the Greek word *gnosis*, usually translated as “knowledge.” For as those who claim to know nothing about ultimate reality are called agnostic (literally, “not knowing”), the person who does claim to know such things is called gnostic (“knowing”). But *gnosis* is not primarily rational knowledge. The Greek language distinguishes between scientific or reflective knowledge (“He knows mathematics”) and knowing through observation or experience (“He knows me”), which is *gnosis*. As the gnostics use the term, we could translate it as “insight,” for *gnosis* involves an intuitive process of knowing oneself. And to know oneself, they claimed, is to know human nature and human destiny. According to the gnostic teacher Theodotus, writing in Asia Minor (c. 140-160), the gnostic is one who has come to understand who we were, and what we have become; where we were... whither we are hastening; from what we are being released; what birth is, and what is rebirth.

Yet to know oneself, at the deepest level, is simultaneously to know God; this is the secret of *gnosis*. Another gnostic teacher, Monoimus, says:

Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. Look for him by taking yourself as the starting point. Learn who it is within you who makes everything his own and says, “My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body.” Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate . . . If you carefully investigate these matters you will find him in yourself.

What Muhammad ‘All discovered at Nag Hammadi is, apparently, a library of writings, almost all of them gnostic. Although they claim to offer secret teaching, many of these texts refer to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and others to the letters of Paul and the New Testament gospels. Many of them include the same dramatic personae as the New Testament—Jesus and his disciples. Yet the differences are striking.

Orthodox Jews and Christians insist that a chasm separates humanity from its creator: God is wholly other. But some of the gnostics who wrote these gospels

contradict this: self-knowledge is knowledge of God; the self and the divine are identical.

Second, the “living Jesus” of these texts speaks of illusion and enlightenment, not of sin and repentance, like the Jesus of the New Testament. Instead of coming to save us from sin, he comes as a guide who opens access to spiritual understanding. But when the disciple attains enlightenment, Jesus no longer serves as his spiritual master: the two have become equal—even identical.

Third, orthodox Christians believe that Jesus is Lord and Son of God in a unique way: he remains forever distinct from the rest of humanity whom he came to save. Yet the gnostic Gospel of Thomas relates that as soon as Thomas recognizes him, Jesus says to Thomas that they have both received their being from the same source:

Jesus said, “I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become drunk from the bubbling stream which I have measured out.... He who will drink from my mouth will become as I am: I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him.”

Does not such teaching—the identity of the divine and human, the concern with illusion and enlightenment, the founder who is presented not as Lord, but as spiritual guide sound more Eastern than Western? Some scholars have suggested that if the names were changed, the “living Buddha” appropriately could say what the Gospel of Thomas attributes to the living Jesus. Could Hindu or Buddhist tradition have influenced gnosticism?

The British scholar of Buddhism, Edward Conze, suggests that it had. He points out that “Buddhists were in contact with the Thomas Christians (that is, Christians who knew and used such writings as the Gospel of Thomas) in South India.” Trade routes between the Greco-Roman world and the Far East were opening up at the time when gnosticism flourished (A.D. 80-200); for generations, Buddhist missionaries had been proselytizing in Alexandria. We note, too, that Hippolytus, who was a Greek speaking Christian in Rome (c. 225), knows of the Indian Brahmins—and includes their tradition among the sources of heresy:

There is . . . among the Indians a heresy of those who philosophize among the Brahmins, who live a self-sufficient life, abstaining from (eating) living creatures and all cooked food . . . They say that God is light, not like the light one sees, nor

like the sun nor fire, but to them God is discourse, not that which finds expression in articulate sounds, but that of knowledge (gnosis) through which the secret mysteries of nature are perceived by the wise.

Could the title of the Gospel of Thomas—named for the disciple who, tradition tells us, went to India—suggest the influence of Indian tradition?

These hints indicate the possibility, yet our evidence is not conclusive. Since parallel traditions may emerge in different cultures at different times, such ideas could have developed in both places independently. What we call Eastern and Western religions, and tend to regard as separate streams, were not clearly differentiated 2,000 years ago. Research on the Nag Hammadi texts is only beginning: we look forward to the work of scholars who can study these traditions comparatively to discover whether they can, in fact, be traced to Indian sources.

Even so, ideas that we associate with Eastern religions emerged in the first century through the gnostic movement in the West, but they were suppressed and condemned by polemicists like Irenaeus. Yet those who called gnosticism heresy were adopting—consciously or not—the viewpoint of that group of Christians who called themselves orthodox Christians. A heretic may be anyone whose outlook someone else dislikes or denounces. According to tradition, a heretic is one who deviates from the true faith. But what defines that “true faith”? Who calls it that, and for what reasons?

We find this problem familiar in our own experience. The term “Christianity,” especially since the Reformation, has covered an astonishing range of groups. Those claiming to represent “true Christianity” in the twentieth century can range from a Catholic cardinal in the Vatican to an African Methodist Episcopal preacher initiating revival in Detroit, a Mormon missionary in Thailand, or the member of a village church on the coast of Greece. Yet Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox agree that such diversity is a recent—and deplorable—development. According to Christian legend, the early church was different. Christians of every persuasion look back to the primitive church to find a simpler, purer form of Christian faith. In the apostles’ time, all members of the Christian community shared their money and property; all believed the same teaching, and worshipped together; all revered the authority of the apostles. It was only after that golden age that conflict, then heresy emerged: so says the author of the Acts of the Apostles, who identifies himself as the first historian of Christianity.

But the discoveries at Nag Hammadi have upset this picture. If we admit that some of these fifty-two texts represents early forms of Christian teaching, we may have to recognize that early Christianity is far more diverse than nearly anyone expected before the Nag Hammadi discoveries.

Contemporary Christianity, diverse and complex as we find it, actually may show more unanimity than the Christian churches of the first and second centuries. For nearly all Christians since that time, Catholics, Protestants, or Orthodox, have shared three basic premises. First, they accept the canon of the New Testament; second, they confess the apostolic creed; and third, they affirm specific forms of church institution. But every one of these—the canon of Scripture, the creed, and the institutional structure—emerged in its present form only toward the end of the second century. Before that time, as Irenaeus and others attest, numerous gospels circulated among various Christian groups, ranging from those of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, to such writings as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, and the Gospel of Truth, as well as many other secret teachings, myths, and poems attributed to Jesus or his disciples. Some of these, apparently, were discovered at Nag Hammadi; many others are lost to us. Those who identified themselves as Christians entertained many—and radically differing—religious beliefs and practices. And the communities scattered throughout the known world organized themselves in ways that differed widely from one group to another.

Yet by A. D. 200, the situation had changed. Christianity had become an institution headed by a three-rank hierarchy of bishops, priests, and deacons, who understood themselves to be the guardians of the only “true faith.” The majority of churches, among which the church of Rome took a leading role, rejected all other viewpoints as heresy. Deploring the diversity of the earlier movement, Bishop Irenaeus and his followers insisted that there could be only one church, and outside of that church, he declared, “there is no salvation.” Members of this church alone are orthodox (literally, “straight-thinking”) Christians. And, he claimed, this church must be catholic—that is, universal. Whoever challenged that consensus, arguing instead for other forms of Christian teaching, was declared to be a heretic, and expelled. When the orthodox gained military support, sometime after the Emperor Constantine became Christian in the fourth century, the penalty for heresy escalated.

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Athanasius: Easter Letter of A. D. 367



Of the particular books and their number, which are accepted by the Church. From the thirty-ninth Letter of Holy Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, on the Paschal festival; wherein he defines canonically what are the divine books which are accepted by the Church.

1. They have fabricated books which they call books of tables, in which they shew stars, to which they give the names of Saints. And therein of a truth they have inflicted on themselves a double reproach: those who have written such books, because they have perfected themselves in a lying and contemptible science; and as to the ignorant and simple, they have led them astray by evil thoughts concerning the right faith established in all truth and upright in the presence of God.

2. But since we have made mention of heretics as dead, but of ourselves as possessing the Divine Scriptures for salvation; and since I fear lest, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, some few of the simple should be beguiled from their simplicity and purity, by the subtily of certain men, and should henceforth read other books — those called apocryphal — led astray by the similarity of their names with the true books; I beseech you to bear patiently, if I also write, by way of remembrance, of matters with which you are acquainted, influenced by the need and advantage of the Church.

3. In proceeding to make mention of these things, I shall adopt, to commend my undertaking, the pattern of Luke the Evangelist, saying on my own account: 'Forasmuch as some have taken in hand,' to reduce into order for themselves the books termed apocryphal, and to mix them up with the divinely inspired Scripture, concerning which we have been fully persuaded, as they who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, delivered to the fathers; it seemed good to me also, having been urged thereto by true brethren, and having learned from the beginning, to set before you the books included in the Canon, and handed down, and accredited as Divine; to the end that any one who has fallen into error may condemn those who have led him astray; and that he who has continued stedfast in purity may again rejoice, having these things brought to his remembrance.

4. There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number; for, as I have heard, it is handed down that this is the number of the letters among the Hebrews; their respective order and names being as follows. The first is Genesis, then Exodus, next Leviticus, after that Numbers, and then Deuteronomy. Following these there is Joshua, the son of Nun, then Judges, then Ruth. And again, after these four books of Kings, the first and second being reckoned as one book, and so likewise the third and fourth as.¹²⁹⁰ one book. And again, the first and second of the Chronicles are reckoned as one book. Again Ezra, the first and second are similarly one book. After these there is the book of Psalms, then the Proverbs, next Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Job follows, then the Prophets, the twelve being reckoned as one book. Then Isaiah, one book, then Jeremiah with Baruch, Lamentations, and the epistle, one book; afterwards, Ezekiel and Daniel, each one book. Thus far constitutes the Old Testament.

5. Again it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament. These are, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic), seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; after these, one of Jude. In addition, there are fourteen Epistles of Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John.

6. These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these. For concerning these the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, and said, 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.' And He reproveth the Jews, saying, 'Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of Me.'

7. But for greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity; that there are other books besides these not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being [merely] read; nor is there in any place a mention of apocryphal writings. But they are an invention of heretics, who write them when they choose, bestowing upon them their approbation, and assigning to them a date, that so, using them as ancient writings, they may find occasion to lead astray the simple.

FROM: Payton, Jeremy. The Gnostic Gospels Master Collection: The Rejected Gospel of Mary Magdalene, Thomas, Truth, Judas, Peter, Philip, Pistis Sophia and More. Includes 22 Supplementary Apocrypha for a Complete Immersion (p. 76). MINDSPARKPRESS LTD. Kindle Edition.

GOSPEL OF MARY – INTRODUCTION

The "Gospel of Mary" is a unique and invaluable text from the early Christian era, offering insights into non-canonical beliefs and the role of women within early Christian communities. Not to be confused with Mary, the mother of Jesus, this gospel is attributed to Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' closest followers and the first witness to his resurrection according to the New Testament.

Discovered in the late 19th century as part of the Berlin Codex, the "Gospel of Mary" unfortunately survives only in fragments.

Nonetheless, the portions that remain provide a profound exploration of Gnostic spirituality, a branch of early Christianity emphasizing direct knowledge or gnosis of the divine. Distinct from the canonical Gospels, the "Gospel of Mary" does not focus on the life, death, or resurrection of Jesus. Instead, its narrative commences after the resurrection, highlighting a dialogue between Mary Magdalene and the other disciples. Mary shares teachings she received from Jesus, addressing the ascent of the soul and overcoming the challenges posed by worldly powers and desires.

The text is notable for portraying Mary Magdalene as a spiritual leader, conveying teachings of Jesus not found in other accounts. This position, however, is met with skepticism and resistance from some of the male disciples, illustrating early tensions regarding gender and authority in Christian communities. While the "Gospel of Mary" was never included in the official Christian canon and was likely written in the 2nd century AD, it stands as a testament to the diversity of beliefs and the pivotal roles women played in the early Christian movement.

History of The Gospel Of Mary Magdalene

While traveling and researching in Cairo in 1896, German scholar, Dr. Carl Reinhardt, acquired a papyrus containing Coptic texts entitled the Revelation of John, the Wisdom of Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of Mary. Before setting about to translate his exciting find, two world wars ensued, delaying publication until 1955. By then the Nag Hammadi collection had also been discovered. Two of the texts in his codex, the Revelation of John, and the Wisdom of Jesus Christ, were included there. Importantly, the codex preserves the most complete surviving copy of the Gospel of Mary, named for its supposed author, Mary of Magdala. Two other fragments of the Gospel of Mary written in Greek were later unearthed in archaeological digs at Oxyrhynchus in Northern Egypt. All of the various fragments were brought together to form the translation presented here. However, even with all of the fragments assembled, the manuscript of the Gospel of Mary is missing pages 1 to 6 and pages 11 to 14. These pages included sections of the text up to chapter 4, and portions of chapter 5 to 8. Although the text of the Gospel of Mary is incomplete, the text presented below serves to shake the very concept of our assumptions of early Christianity as well as Christ's possible relationship to Mary of Magdala, whom we call Mary Magdalene.

Lost Books of the Bible: The Great Rejected Texts. Fifth Estate.
Kindle Edition.

The Gospel of Mary Magdalene (Pages 1 to 6, containing chapters 1 - 3, could not be recovered. The text starts on page 7, chapter 4)

Chapter 4

21) (And they asked Jesus), “Will matter then be destroyed or not?”

22) The Savior said, “All nature, all things formed, and all creatures exist in and with one another, and they will be dissolved again into their own elements (origins).

23) This is because it is the nature of matter to return to its original elements.

24) If you have an ear to hear, listen to this.”

25) Peter said to him, “Since you have explained all things to us, tell us this also: What sin did the world commit (what sin is in the world)?”

26) The Savior said, “There is no sin (of the world). Each person makes his own sin when he does things like adultery (in the same nature as adultery). This is called sin.

27) That is why the Good came to be among you. He came to restore every nature to its basic root.”

28) Then He continued; “You become sick and die because you did not have access to (knowledge of) Him who can heal you.

29) If you have any sense, you must understand this.

30) The material world produced a great passion (desire or suffering) without equal. This was contrary to the natural balance. The entire cosmos (body) was disturbed by it.

31) That is why I said to you, Be encouraged, and if you are discouraged be encouraged when you see the different forms nature has taken.

32) He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

33) When the Blessed One had said this, He greeted all of them and said; “Peace be with you. Take my peace into you.

34) Beware that no one deceives you by saying, ‘Look (he is) here or look (he is) there. The Son of Man is within you.’

35) Follow Him there.

36) Those who seek Him will find Him.

37) Go now and preach the gospel (this good news) of the Kingdom.

38) Do not lay down any rules beyond what I told you, and do not give a law like the lawgivers (Pharisees) or you will be held to account for the same laws.”

39) When He said this He departed.

Chapter 5

1) Then they were troubled and wept out loud, saying, “How shall we go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel of the Kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare Him, how can we expect that they will spare us?”

2) Then Mary stood up, greeted them all, and said to her fellow believers, “Do not weep and do not be troubled and do not waver, because His grace will be with you completely and it will protect you.

3) Instead, let us praise His greatness, because He has prepared us and made us into mature (finished or complete) people.”

4) Mary's words turned their hearts to the Good, and they began to discuss the words of the Savior.

5) Peter said to Mary, "Sister we know that the Savior loved you more than all other women.

6) Tell us the words of the Savior that you remember and know, but we have not heard and do not know."

7) Mary answered him and said, "I will tell you what He hid from you."

8) And she began to speak these words to them: She said, "I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to Him, 'Lord I saw you today in a vision.'

9) He answered and said to me; 'You will be happy that you did not waver at the sight of Me. Where the mind is there is the treasure.'

10) I said to Him; 'Lord, does one see visions through the soul or through the spirit?'

11) The Savior answered and said; 'He sees visions through neither the soul nor the spirit. It is through the mind that is between the two. That is what sees the vision and it is (there the vision exists).'"

(Pages 11 - 14 are missing. Text begins again at chapter 8)

Chapter 8

10) And Desire, (a lesser god), said, "Before, I did not see you descending, but now I see you ascending. Why do you lie since you belong to me?"

11) The soul answered and said, "I saw you but you did not see me nor recognize me. I covered you like a garment and you did not know me."

12) When it said this, the soul went away greatly rejoicing.

13) Again it came to the third power (lesser god), which is called Ignorance.

14) The power questioned the soul, saying, “Where are you going? You are enslaved (captured) in wickedness. Since you are its captive you cannot judge (have no judgment).”

15) And the soul said, “Why do you judge me, when I have not judged?”

16) “I was captured, although I have not captured anyone.”

17) “I was not recognized. But I have recognized that God (the All) is in (being dissolved) both the earthly things and in the heavenly (things).”

18) When the soul had overcome the third power, it ascended and saw the fourth power, which took seven forms.

19) The first form is darkness, the second desire, the third ignorance, the fourth is the lust of death, the fifth is the dominion of the flesh, the sixth is the empty useless wisdom of flesh, the seventh is the wisdom of vengeance and anger. These are the seven powers of wrath.

20) They asked the soul, “Where do you come from, slayer of men: where are you going, conqueror of space?”

21) The soul answered and said, “What has trapped me has been slain, and what kept me caged has been overcome.”

22) “My desire has been ended, and ignorance has died.”

23) “In an age (dispensation) I was released from the world in a symbolic image, and I was released from the chains of oblivion, which were only temporary (in this transient world).”

24) “From this time on will, I will attain the rest of the ages and seasons of silence.”

Chapter 9

1) When Mary had said this, she fell silent, since she had shared all the Savior had told her.

2) But Andrew said to the other believers, “Say what you want about what she has said, but I do not believe that the Savior said this. These teachings are very strange ideas.”

3) Peter answered him and spoke concerning these things.

4) He questioned them about the Savior and asked, “Did He really speak privately with a woman and not openly to us? Are we to turn around and all listen to her? Did He prefer her to us?”

5) Then Mary sobbed and said to Peter, “My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I have made all of this up in my heart by myself? Do you think that I am lying about the Savior?”

6) Levi said to Peter, “Peter you have always had a hot temper.

7) Now I see you fighting against this woman like she was your enemy.”

8) If the Savior made her worthy, who are you to reject her? What do you think you are doing? Surely the Savior knows her well?

9) That is why He loved her more than us. Let us be ashamed of this and let us put on the perfect Man. Let us separate from each other as He commanded us to do so we can preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior told us.”

10) And when they heard this they began to go out and proclaim and preach.

Studying the Gospel of Mary – Information from:

Lester Meera; The Everything Gnostic Gospels Book; A Complete Guide to the Secret Gospels (Everything); Adams Media; Kindle Edition;

The Gospel of Mary

The Gospel of Mary is the only gospel named after a woman. Popular and scholarly opinion assigns that gospel to Mary Magdalene, although the gospel itself does not say. Mary Magdalene's importance to Christianity is well established. She was one of Jesus' loyal followers, stood vigil at his cross, was eyewitness to his resurrection, and received the first commission to preach (declaring the “good news” to other disciples that Jesus had risen).

No Complete Copy

The Apostle John considered Mary Magdalene (or Miriam, as John would have called her) the founder of Christianity (John 20:1–31), asserted Jean Yves LeLoup in his book, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*. The Gospel of Mary exists in three fragmentary texts. To date, there is no complete copy; in fact, only about half of the entire gospel (eight of eighteen pages) survives. The Coptic version portrays Mary Magdalene differently than the two fragments preserved in original Greek. Scholar Karen King, author of *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala, Jesus and the First Woman Apostle*, pointed out that the Greek fragments are written in the original language and are dated earlier in church history while the more complete Coptic version features language and theology that places it in a later time and different milieu.

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Who translated the Gospel of Mary from the original Greek?

Most likely Christian scribes in Egypt during the second century translated the Gospel of Mary into the Coptic Egyptian script. Today, that language is still used for liturgical purposes by the Coptic Church and its parishioners known as Copts (Egyptian Christians).

The longest version of the Gospel of Mary is the fifth-century Coptic translation published in 1955 and known to scholars as the Berlin Codex 8502,1 (*Berolinensis Gnosticus* 8502,1). After being discovered at a burial site in Akhmim, in central Egypt, the Berlin Codex was sold to German scholar Carl Reinhardt, who took it from Cairo to Berlin in 1896. Although Reinhardt knew the manuscript was ancient, neither he nor the manuscript dealer from whom he acquired it knew what the codex contained. The Berlin Codex consisted of leaves stitched together and placed inside leatherbound boards. The book held a fragmentary copy of The Gospel of Mary in Sahidic Coptic (with some faulty translation errors) along with three other texts — The Apocryphon of John, The Sophia of Jesus Christ, and The Act of Peter. The amazing discovery in 1945 of the Nag Hammadi texts generated public interest in the Gospel of Mary, due in part to the Gnostic and Coptic linkage it shared with many of the Nag Hammadi writings.

The Other Fragments

The two Greek fragments of the Gospel of Mary date to the third century. They are called, respectively, Papyrus Rylands 463 and Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 3525. The former was translated and published in 1938 and the latter in 1983. Experts say the existence of the Gospel of Mary was already known as early as the third

century because of references to it by early church fathers; however, the original gospel likely dates to the second century. Scholar Karen King believes it belongs in the first half of that century.

In the gospel, Mary Magdalene is exalted. Peter, leader of the disciples, even acknowledges her stature when he tells her that the disciples know their Teacher loved her differently from other women. This Mary Magdalene is not represented as the penitent prostitute depicted for centuries by the church and in popular culture, but rather as a worthy woman loved by the Savior. She possesses knowledge that the Savior Jesus has not shared with the others. She appears to have a legitimate claim to leadership in the Christian circle.

Differences Between the Coptic and Greek Versions

The third-century Greek fragments have theological differences with the Coptic version. The Greek fragments seem to find no issue with a woman's right to teach or lead, but the Coptic version, two centuries later, suggests patriarchal challenges to female leadership. Taken together, the versions elucidate a historical shift toward increasing exclusion of women as leaders in the early Christian churches and communities. The conflict between Mary and Peter illustrated in the Gospel of Mary has resonance in the Pistis Sophia, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Gospel of the Egyptians and may have been indicative of tension within the church during the second century.

Mary's Special Revelation

Some early Gnostic Christian circles revered Mary Magdalene as the worthy repository of divine revelation and wisdom. They quite possibly saw her as Jesus' Sophia, perhaps even his spiritual heir. She was the Apostle to the Apostles, an honorific title bestowed upon her after she faithfully carried out the risen Jesus' commission to tell the other disciples the “good news” of his resurrection. In the third century, Hippolytus, a Christian bishop (circa A.D. 170–236), wrote of female apostles charged to rectify ancient Eve's sin through their obedience. His noting of female apostles suggests that at least in earliest Christianity, apostles were of both genders.

The Gospel of Mary reveals that Mary Magdalene was an authority figure who comforted her fellow disciples and turned their minds from the dark fog of grief and suffering back toward the “Good” after Jesus left them. The writer of that gospel provides a unique lens through which to view women disciples of Jesus in the infant early church that is exemplified in Mary Magdalene. Yet the wider culture, still patriarchal, held a view of women as inferior. By the end of the second century, Jesus' example of egalitarian and respectful treatment of women shifted back to the patriarchal status quo. A female authority figure with a message had to be defended. It was no longer assumed that she could speak with any real power. In the Gospel of Mary, Mary Magdalene represents the Gnostic Christian position in which women served as leaders, visionaries, prophetesses, preachers, and interpreters while Peter and Andrew represent the orthodoxy.

The Savior's Discourse and Departure

The Gospel of Mary opens on page seven (pages one through six are missing) in a scene after the Resurrection in which the disciples are having discourse with Jesus about matter and its nature and if it will last forever. Jesus explains that each thing born is interconnected but one day must return to its own root. Peter asks about sin and Jesus explains that there is no sin. The attachment humans have for things of matter is what deceives them. It is the improper mingling of the spirit with matter that causes disharmony and imbalance and that, in turn, brings about sickness and death.

Scholar LeLoup pronounces this teaching as both liberating and demanding. It basically says that people cannot blame others or their circumstances for their woes; instead, they must understand that they alone are responsible for their own actions and thoughts and attitudes. Even sickness and death are a result of their own actions. Blaming is a waste of time and energy.

The Gospel of Mary says that before Jesus departs, he warns the disciples against establishing rules or laws. If they make such laws or rules, then they will necessarily be constrained by them. Jesus commands them to go forth into the world and share the good news. He reminds them that the Son of Man is within each of them. This portion of the Gospel of Mary is known as the "Savior's Farewell."

After Jesus leaves them, the disciples are overcome with grief and they weep. Their hearts were deeply attached to their teacher. They fear that Jesus' unfortunate fate of being crucified will become theirs. Who will lead them now? Mary Magdalene stands and greets, comforts, and consoles them. She emphasizes the Savior's greatness. Mary, the gospel notes, turned the disciples' hearts away from the heaviness of sorrow and suffering back toward "the Good."

ESSENTIALS: Several sources on the Web feature English translations of the Gospel of Mary. One is The Gnostic Society Library, located at www.gnosis.org/library/marygosp.htm . Another site is at www.thenazareneway.com/the_gospel_of_mary_magdalene.htm . Excerpts from the gospel are at www.sacred-texts.com/chr/apo/marym.htm .

Seeing with the Mind's Eye

As they begin talking again about Jesus' words, perhaps about the best way to go forth and spread the gospel teachings, Peter tells Mary Magdalene that everyone knows that Jesus loved her more than all the other women. Peter asks her to share some of the Savior's words. He wants her to tell the disciples something that Jesus had not already shared with them. Mary Magdalene agrees. She tells him a vision she had of the Lord and how he called her blessed and praised her for not “wavering” at the sight of him.

Then she says that she asked Jesus how it was she could see him, whether it was with the soul or the spirit (pneuma), and he told her that it was through neither soul nor spirit but the mind between them. Then Mary recounts the part of the vision Jesus gave her about how the soul must move through seven wrathful powers in order to ascend to the place where it rests in silence.

Mary Magdalene's Vision

Mary Magdalene explains that the soul is questioned by seven cosmic powers as she (soul is most often referred to in the feminine

gender in ancient literature) ascends from matter through ever-higher realms toward her final place of rest. As she passes successfully through each of the seven powers that bind her to matter, the fetters become loosened. The seven powers she must pass through are darkness, desire or craving, ignorance, death wish, enslavement to the flesh, foolish fleshly wisdom, and guileful wisdom (wrath). Having successfully moved beyond them, the soul becomes free and rests in eternal peace and silence.

The idea of being able to direct the mind inward and to merge it with divine cosmic consciousness, thereby forever freeing the soul from its karmic bonds, has resonance with ancient eastern philosophies of Buddhism and Hinduism. Buddhists call the resting place of the enlightened *Nirvana* (meaning “extinguishing or unbinding”), while the Hindus call it *Maha Samadhi* (meaning “establish”). Dualism is transcended and the soul rests in an effortless and continual state of perfection, in silence, beyond all thought.

Importance of Mary's Secret Vision

In the absence of the Savior, Mary Magdalene stepped up as the voice of calm, reason, and authority. When the disciples were overcome with fear about their own safety in going forth to preach the “good news,” Mary reminded them that they had everything they needed. When Peter asked her to share some words of the Savior, his overture suggested a legitimacy that she possessed, perhaps as Jesus' favorite or most astute student who possessed secret words or teachings that the Lord had not shared with others. Peter made the overture toward her with at least a show of respect. He would have known that she was a visionary with a quick and insightful mind and that she had understood Jesus' teachings as perhaps he

and the others had not. Peter's request suggests that he was seeking comfort in her revelation of Jesus' words and that those words necessarily had value and importance.

Mary Magdalene held the pre-eminent position of Jesus' leading female disciple, and was also his friend, companion, and confidante. She, too, must have felt the pains of grief. Yet she showed a spiritual maturity by stepping into the void left by their departed teacher. Mary Magdalene complied with Peter's request and articulated the complex ideas that Jesus had revealed to her in her vision, and she did it with eloquence and clarity. You might think that the response from Peter, his brother Andrew, and the others assembled would have been to thank her. But quite the opposite happened.

Why Peter Disbelieves

The first response to Mary Magdalene's vision came not from Peter but from his brother Andrew, who didn't believe her. In an indirect challenge to her, he asked the other disciples what they thought of the things she had told them. He said that Jesus would not have spoken such things, as they were simply too different. Then Peter agreed with Andrew and opposed Mary Magdalene as well, asking rhetorically how it could be possible that Jesus would talk in such a way with a woman of secret things about which he (Peter, the chief disciple) and the others remained ignorant. Then he asked incredulously if they were to change their ways and listen to her. He wondered aloud if Jesus really chose her or preferred her to them, the male disciples.

Some scholars say that this scene shows the disharmony that existed within the core group of disciples that was also symptomatic of the tensions in the ancient world during the time when this gospel was written. Mary Magdalene, as you learned in previous chapters, had just given the disciples a teaching about how the powers of darkness, desire, ignorance, and such things keep the soul imprisoned. The emotions of anger and rivalry, along with the lack of respect toward Mary Magdalene by Andrew and Peter, do not seem like acceptable behavior from disciples of Jesus but rather appear to be in keeping more with the dark imprisoning powers in Mary Magdalene's vision. Peter and Andrew perhaps do not understand the teaching. Maybe they resent the fact that Jesus gave Mary Magdalene a special blessing that he did not give to them. Possibly they resented her ability to have visions. Or perhaps they felt threatened by their lack of understanding of the teaching.

Peter's Bullying

The Gospel of Mary reveals that Mary Magdalene wept and challenged Peter, asking him if he thought she just imagined the vision, made it up, and lied about Jesus. While Jesus was alive, she had expressed her fear of Peter. In other Gnostic texts, Jesus rebuked Peter for bullying Mary Magdalene. Peter was known to be volatile, dense, and at times even disbelieving of what Jesus said (Matthew 16:22–23). Like many of Jesus' other disciples, he probably had a rudimentary education (although two epistles ascribed to him were most likely written by secretaries and display a knowledge of Greek higher education). While he was tenderhearted and courageous on some occasions, at other times he seemed

uncomprehending and obtuse, trying Jesus' patience. He could be hot-headed, as demonstrated in the canonical Gospel of John.

Following the confrontation between Peter and Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of Mary, Levi steps in to calm the situation. He tells Peter that because of his hot temper he has stooped to treating Mary Magdalene like their adversaries do. Levi reminds Peter that if Jesus found Mary Magdalene worthy, who was he, Peter, to put her aside. Levi also reminds Peter that Jesus had loved her the most of all and that they should go forth, as Jesus had told them, to spread the gospel. The Gospel of Mary ends with the disciples going out to do the spiritual work Jesus had instructed them to do.

Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? — John 18:10–11

Articulating Jesus' Ideas and Words

The Gospel of Mary implies that Peter and Andrew seemingly have a desire to dominate her when they reject the precious teaching that Peter had requested from Mary Magdalene. In this way, the gospel illuminates a picture much bigger than Andrew and Peter in conflict with Mary Magdalene. The gospel delineates two distinct groups of people who followed Jesus. The Peter and Andrew types display what seems to be spiritual immaturity or ignorance, not only in devaluing Mary Magdalene's vision but in rejecting her as a woman with special knowledge that she willingly shared after they had asked her for it. This lack of consideration reflects the patriarchal

view of a woman having no real power in her own right beyond the male who heads her family. A woman's words are only to be believed or considered worthy if a man says they are so. In Jesus' time, women could not give testimony, were not educated, and had little value beyond running a household, preparing meals, and providing their husbands with children (preferably boys). Peter and Andrew represented the conservative and patriarchal branch of earliest Christianity.

FACT: Peter and Andrew were the sons of Jonah. Peter (also called Simeon bar Jona) was born in Bethsaida (John 1:44) and with his brother Andrew operated a fishing business with two other disciples of Jesus, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. After Jesus' death, Peter gave testimony to his young scribe Mark for the Gospel of Mark.

Mary Magdalene represented the non-orthodox branch. In standing up to Peter and Andrew, she gave a voice to women visionaries, prophetesses, and preachers, and those resisting injustice. She dealt with Peter's bullying much as the soul in her vision dealt with the cosmic powers, refusing further entrapment, enslavement, and domination. She perhaps understood better than her brethren Jesus' teaching in her vision about the dark powers, and that the ignorance displayed by Peter and Andrew was, as LeLoup classified it, a sickness of the mind and heart.

Elevated Status of Mary

Several scholars assert that after Jesus' death Mary Magdalene stood out in the Gnostic texts — in particular, the Gospel of Mary —

as an example of perfect discipleship and spiritual leadership. People likely gravitated to those closest to those Apostles for whom they felt a kinship or respect for correctly conveying Jesus' original teachings. Some chose to follow Peter, James the Just, or Paul. But others preferred Mary Magdalene — the Thirteenth Apostle, as the Gnostics referred to her.

Leader of a Gnostic Branch

Mary Magdalene might have been the leader of a Gnostic branch of the Jesus movement. Scholars say that Mary Magdalene was well qualified to serve because she had proven her worthiness and because her grasp of Jesus' spiritual teachings far exceeded any other disciple's. Loyal to Jesus throughout his ministry, she followed him to the cross where, in spite of concern for her own safety, she stood fearless under the watchful gaze of Jewish priests and Roman soldiers, according to the Gospel of John. After his death, instead of hiding out and giving in to despair, she took decisive action, showing everyone that she possessed a steady, confident heart. She ran to the empty tomb, was eyewitness to the risen transcendent Savior, and faithfully carried his message to the others. The Romans knew that killing the head of a movement made the movement likely to die as well, and were probably counting on that for the Jesus movement. But Mary Magdalene stepped into the void and became the cement that held the followers together. Peter and Andrew spoke of going back to their pre-Jesus lives as fishermen in Capernaum. All the disciples grieved. But Mary Magdalene remembered the “Good,” according to the Gospel of Mary, and helped the others to remember it as well.

Author of the Gospel of John?

Catholic author Ramon Jusino has theorized that Mary Magdalene may have been the Beloved Disciple of Jesus mentioned in the Gospel of John. In fact, he suggests that Mary Magdalene might have been the author of or source for that canonical gospel. He points out that if she were the author of the Gospel of John, that in no way diminishes the gospel's apostolic origin. She was most likely recognized as an apostolic authority within her community. The Roman Catholic Church has called her *apostola apostolorum* , the Apostle to the Apostles.

Other Sacred Texts Mention Mary Magdalene

The canonical gospels mention Mary Magdalene in the briefest way. All four of the New Testament gospels mention her central role in Jesus' resurrection. Also, she appears in several lists where a clue to her status can be found in her position (usually first) in a group of names. Some academics of ancient Christianity have theorized that references to her may have been largely edited from the New Testament but that her role in the Resurrection story was too well known for it to be completely eliminated. The canonical Gospel of John noted that three Marys stood vigil by Jesus' cross; one was Mary Magdalene.

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! — John 19:25–26

In spite of the reference to “thy son” in John 19:26, and using Ramon Jusino's theory that Mary Magdalene might have been the Beloved Disciple, the quote presents the puzzling but interesting possibility that Jesus might have been entrusting his mother into the care of Mary Magdalene. Elsewhere in the canonical gospels, it says that Mary Magdalene and the other women provided for Jesus out of their means (their own finances). Some sources say she may have been a wealthy woman and that she and other women may have financed the earliest beginnings of Christianity.

Gospel of Philip's Revelation

The Gospel of Philip agrees with the canonical accounts that there were three Marys who always walked with the Lord. They included his mother, her sister, and Mary Magdalene. That Gnostic gospel also suggests a relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus that goes beyond teacher and disciple. Seeing his display of affection toward her causes the other disciples to question his love for them. The modern best-selling book *The Da Vinci Code* makes a case for a marriage between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, based in part on the Gospel of Philip. However, a modern Gnostic hierophant (the equivalent of bishop) and spiritual successor to the Mary Magdalene tradition asserted that it would have been unlikely that Jesus and Mary Magdalene would have been married, since in those times marriage was about a form of ownership, something neither of them would have wanted.

The Pistis Sophia Shines a Spotlight on Her

The Pistis Sophia (the text of a Gnostic myth important to the Valentinian belief system) details Sophia's mistake, her repentance, redemption, and restoration. After Jesus discusses Sophia's remarkable and complex journey through the cosmos and his mission as Savior, Mary Magdalene requests permission from him to speak "in boldness." Jesus seems delighted and tells her that he will complete her in all that she lacks in knowledge of the divine mysteries because her heart exerts toward heaven more than those of her brother disciples. Mary Magdalene dazzles as the chief questioner of Jesus. She elaborates upon his comments. Of the forty-six questions asked in the Pistis Sophia, Mary Magdalene poses thirty-nine. Peter becomes upset that she dominates the discourse and complains to Jesus that he and the other disciples can no longer bear her because she won't let them speak. Jesus replies to Peter that anyone inspired should speak without hesitation. As if in an effort to placate Peter, Jesus gives him a hymn to decipher.

ESSENTIALS:

The Byzantine liturgy of Eastern Orthodox Churches allows for the intonation of Sophia's name before passages from the Gospels are read. Byzantine music such as sacred chant plays an important role in rites and ritual in the Greek-speaking world.

Mary Magdalene, the protagonist of several of the Gnostic texts, continues to be venerated by the Eastern Orthodox, the Catholic, and the Anglican churches as a saint. Her feast day is July 22. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Mary Magdalene went to Ephesus with Jesus' mother. After Mary Magdalene passed away, her relics were taken to Constantinople during the reign of Emperor Leo VI in A.D. 899, and they remain there today.

There is also a tradition of Mary Magdalene in southern France where her relics are venerated by the faithful at her sepulcher in the basilica of St. Maximin. The abbey of Vézelay also claims to have her relics. Finally, the grotto at Sainte Baume, where Mary Magdalene did penance for decades before her death, continues to be a popular pilgrimage site.

Lester, Meera. The Everything Gnostic Gospels Book: A Complete Guide to the Secret Gospels (Everything®) . Adams Media. Kindle Edition.