

Christophobics' Attempt to Dethrone Jesus; Textual Criticism of Ancient Manuscripts; Criteria for Canonicity; Gnostics' Attempt to Dethrone Jesus

Those who would like to discredit the canon of the New Testament have for centuries tried to promote these writings. One of their favorites has been *The Gospel of Thomas*. It received a lot of attention in the second century and has continued to do so into the twenty-first.

The newest piece of agitprop from those who want to redefine Christianity is the Gnostic screed, *The Gospel of Judas*, discovered in 1978 in the Al Minya province of Egypt. Its content is typical of all previously discovered Gnostic texts which are in stark contrast to the consistent message of grace found in New Testament books.

The National Geographic's version of *Judas* has come under critical review and been found wanting. The "biblical experts" it professes to have recruited to analyze the manuscript do not grasp the essential fact that Gnostic writings were immediately rejected as heretical. They were not left out of the canon. They were identified as Gnostic absurdities upon a first reading and ignored.

Nevertheless, the television special gained the attention of the masses and for those unaware of how the New Testament's twenty-seven books were recognized and assembled are easily led to believe there were significant writings that were purposefully ignored or, in the case of *The Gospel of Judas*, undiscovered.

On this subject, I recommend a book released in November 2007 that addresses current attempts by Christophobics to rewrite the life of Christ. *Dethroning Jesus*, by Darrell L. Bock and Daniel B. Wallace (Amazon.com at \$14.95) analyzes *The Gospel of Judas* and deconstructs it and its presentation by National Geographic. The book also critiques other Gnostic writings, such as *The Gospel of Thomas*.

The book can be beneficial for high school students and adults. Although written by two Dallas professors, the book is not written for those with a seminary background. It is a polemic written for the general public. It will sustain your confidence in the validity of the New Testament and provide insight as to why the spurious and heretical writings of the past were not considered for inclusion in the canon of Scripture.

It should be understood that the twenty-seven books were *in the canon* the moment each was completed over a fifty-year period from around A.D. 45 to 95. The job of what are called the Church Fathers was to identify these legitimate books while rejecting the spurious and heretical. There were six major criteria for determining that a book was part of the New Testament:

- 1) **Apostolic:** The human author must be an apostle or one closely associated with an apostle. Mark was closely associated with Peter and his Gospel reflects Peter's teachings. Luke was closely associated with Paul.
- 2) **Reception by the Churches:** The books must be universally received by the local church as authentic at the time of their writing.
- 3) **Consistency:** They must be consistent with the doctrine that the church already possessed – namely, the Old Testament and apostolic teaching.
- 4) **Inspiration:** Each book must give evidence, internally and externally, of being divinely inspired. The spiritual gift of discernment was used to determine canonicity.

- 5) **Recognition:** Each must be recognized as part of the canon by the early Church Fathers.
- 6) **Internal:** Each book must contain exhortation to public exegesis of the Word. The content of one book may not contradict the content of any other book but must maintain doctrinal consistency throughout.

By following these guidelines, the textual critic is able to identify not only those writings that are authentic but also those which are not. Divine revelation must have unity. The Old Testament is completed and complemented by the New. Therefore, no text is acceptable if it argues with the content of either Testament.

The first major challenge to the New Testament occurred before it was completed. Both Christianity and Gnosticism were in their incipency (early developmental stages). Although New Testament writers like Paul and John attacked the early efforts of the Gnostics, this religion did not gain wide-spread popularity until the second century.

Gnosticism was made up of a wild recipe. For starters, it included Christian concepts mixed with Persian Zoroastrian dualism and philosophical components drawn from Plato and Philo.

The resultant theology asserted salvation by knowledge or γνῶσις, *gnōsis*. The material world is evil but a spark of divinity had been encapsulated in the body of person destined for salvation. This spark is released by the instruction of a Messiah-like figure who reveals to them a secret knowledge (*gnōsis*) for salvation. Gnostic creation narratives reflect the philosophical theory of emanation which precludes creation out from nothingness but rather that the creation is eternal. Emanation was a prominent feature in the writings of Philo.