

A four part series:  
**Why the Da Vinci Code is True!**  
**( and today's Christianity is dysfunctional)**  
Part 2 of 4

## **The Cover-up of the Lost Gospels: Who “lost” them and why?**

© 2006 Paul R. Smith

*Given June 11, 2006 at Broadway Church in Kansas City.*

*(The words appearing in bold were projected with Power Point onto the front of the sanctuary.)*

Last week the Chinese government ordered movie theaters in China to stop showing the Da Vinci Code. The Christian religious institution in China had asked them to do this because they said it “threatened social stability.” Imagine: Something going on today around Christianity similar to what went on around Jesus 2000 years ago that certainly threatened social stability then!

The book and movie have given courage to many timid people who have wondered about some of the issues the Da Vinci Code raises. Now they are speaking up because it's a topic of conversation and actual study. What a gift Dan Brown the writer and Christian has given us.

I was recently talking with a man who said, “I don't like the idea that Dan Brown speaks with such absolute certainty about some things he is historically mixed up about in his book.” I replied, “Yes, just like the church has spoken with such certainty about things it's been mixed up about for seventeen centuries. If we Christians are going to criticize Brown's book, let's begin by criticizing our own book that we speak with such absolutely certainty about.”

My thesis in this series is:

**Encased in the facts and falsehoods of murder mystery fiction, The Da Vinci Code's vital premise - that there has been a cover-up in the Christian faith - is TRUE.**

The Da Vinci Code brings up the fact of the existence of some of the so-called lost gospels. He gets many of the historical facts about they say wrong, as usual, but it is actual history that they exist. Let's talk about them this morning from a factual perspective in Part 2 of my series: *The Cover-up of the Lost Gospels: Who “lost” them and why?*

This series is like unraveling a mystery, too. Let's get a time line so we can track down what happened when – and you can solve the mystery of the lost gospels and how we got the ones in our Bible. The idea here is not to remember any of these specifics, but to get a sense of what happened. Only crazy people like me remember the details. But the details can lead to a general idea of the flow of history.

Let's begin with an important date that most scholars agree upon:

### **30 CE Jesus was crucified.**

Next let's consider that probably around

### **50 CE The Gospel of Thomas (1<sup>st</sup> ed.) was written.**

That's the date Marcus Borg and other scholars support\* If they are right, then the Gospel of Thomas was a very early, independent, and authentic collection of Jesus' sayings.

### **50-60 CE The letters of Paul were written.**

Because of the order the books are placed in our New Testament we forget that Paul wrote his letters before the four Gospels were written.

### **70-100 CE Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John (written in that order)**

Other gospels were being written also during this time.

### **200 CE Christianity has become mostly an institution led by various bishops with increasing dominance by Rome.**

This was both good and bad, and inevitable. It probably helped Christianity survive, but also blocked the Christian path from further spiritual growth and development because institutions are in business to maintain the status quo, usually not to pursue evolutionary growth.

### **At least fifty gospels were circulating in various Christian communities by now.**

Not eighty as The Da Vinci Code states. But is it crucial that it was fifty or eighty? What's important to note is that more gospels than most of us are aware of were written and circulating back then. We know of twelve only by name, four only because of early quotations from leaders condemning them, seven which have fragments including the Gospel of Judas and the Gospel of Mary recently discovered, four complete gospels including Thomas recently discovered, the four gospels in today's Bible, and a couple that have been hypothesized (Q and the Signs Gospel). There were certainly more and some of them may be uncovered in future generations.

Let's look at three of the recently discovered lost gospels. I want you to get a sense of them. Here is one that begins with the resurrected Jesus saying:

### **The Son of Man is within you. Follow after him!**

That sounds pretty good. I like it. Are you really in me, God? Yes! Someone said to me the other Sunday, "God says to you, 'Let's play tag. You're it. . . . YOU REALLY ARE IT!'" Wow! We have as hard of a time believing that as Jesus' first disciples because when Jesus said that to his disciples, according to this gospel, the disciples were fearful. And guess who stands up to encourage them? It was Mary Magdalene.

\* Helmut Koester, Stevan Davies, and Stephen Patterson argue vigorously and plausibly that Thomas presents us with an independent and often earlier, more authentic version of those Jesus sayings it holds in common with Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In addition there were teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas which were completely suppressed later on. Other scholars believe it was written around 90 CE, which would make it written about the same time as the Bible's Gospel of John (90 – 100 CE). Either way, it is definitely a gospel written very close to when our four canonical gospels were written.

**Mary says, “Do not weep, and do not grieve nor be afraid, for his grace will be with you completely and will protect you.” *Gospel of Mary***

This is all in the *Gospel of Mary*, probably written around 180 CE. Then Peter asks her to tell the others the teaching that Jesus gave to her alone. At one point;

**Andrew says, “Did he really speak with a women without our knowledge, and not openly. Are we supposed to turn and listen to her? Did he love her more than us?” *Gospel of Mary***

Oh, poor jealous, inferior feeling Andrew. The battle of the sexes is going on full force. The Gospel of Mary was banned according to scholar Karen King because it affirms the resurrection as spiritual, not physical and that women can serve as teachers and preachers.

Here’s another lost gospel.

**Jesus said to Judas, “Come, that I may teach you about secrets no person has ever seen. You, Judas, will exceed them all. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me.” *The Gospel of Judas***

Remember, as we said last week, that the Gnostics believed Jesus was two separate beings, one God and one man. The man doing the clothing was the human Jesus. The man being clothed was the God being of Jesus. Judas, according to this gospel, was ordered by Jesus to give over the man being Jesus to be crucified while the God being lived on.

Jesus laughs a lot in *Gospel of Judas*. I guess so. The part that didn’t have a body with all its pain and suffering might enjoy himself quite a lot.

This is a gospel that had not been seen since the early days of Christianity (written sometime before 180 CE) and which few experts had even thought existed – a gospel told from the perspective of Judas Iscariot, history’s ultimate traitor. In this interpretation, Jesus asks Judas to betray him., and, from being a villain, Judas emerges as a hero.

The *Gospel of Judas* was probably a product of a Gnostic group called the Cainites in the second century. Most of it is a conversation between Jesus and Judas who is portrayed as superior in his understanding compared to the other apostles. Judas understands what Jesus is really about and is helping him.

Isn’t it interesting that these two gospels focus on certain of Jesus’ followers being “on the inside.” We must remember that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are also all accounts that come from a certain bias. Guess who in the *Gospel of John* has said about him five times, “He is the disciple Jesus loved.”? Yep, John. The *Gospel of Judas* adds to our understanding of diversity of the early church – and the politics of groups vying to make their hero the real insider with Jesus. However, it was written a long time after the events of which it speaks and is not reliable history

Now to my favorite - the amazing Gospel of Thomas. Listen to two of these great sayings of Jesus:

**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, it will destroy you.” (Thomas: Saying 20)**

**Jesus said, “Whoever drink from my mouth will become like me: I myself shall become that person and the hidden things will be revealed to them.” (Thomas: Saying 108)**

Thomas is filled with the profound spiritual teaching that Jesus came to teach us to rediscover our divinity by going within. That spiritual path became suppressed because it was the ultimate threat to outside authority figures like bishops, priests, and the institutional church.

I don't recommend you spend much time reading any of these lost gospels except for Thomas, unless you are a history buff. There is probably not much reliable history in them. I have copies of the Gospel of Thomas available for you if you would like to read it in its entirety. It's only 114 verses long.

What happened to these “lost gospels” as they are called? Who “lost” them?

Let's go back to our time line: By 200 CE the institutional church had become the dominant force in early Christianity over the more loosely organized groups like the Gnostics and Thomasines. The institutionalized church already had its bishops, priests and deacons, all men of course who were not just teachers but rulers. And they were beginning to ban the books about Jesus they didn't like. It is incredibly difficult for institutions to encourage further evolution because they seem to believe they are in the job of stopping it and preserving the present, which rapidly becomes the past. Broadway is an incredible exception to that. I am so grateful.

Of particular historical interest to our topic today is that in:

**367 CE Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria ordered the monks to destroy all but approved books**

He issued an Easter letter in which he demanded that the Egyptian monks destroy all writings except the ones he listed as acceptable. That list was just about identical to our New Testament. But someone, perhaps monks at the monastery of St. Pachomius, gathered dozens of the leather bound books Athanasius wanted to burn, removed them from the monastery library, sealed them in a heavy six-foot jar, and buried them on a hillside near Nag Hammadi. Sixteen hundred years later an Egyptian villager names Muhammad Ali (yes, that was really his name) stumbled upon them and the rest is not only history, but important history.

**More important decisions for the Christian faith were made in the first 300 years of Christianity than in all the time to the present.**

One of those decisions was to eliminate from the face of the earth those writings with which the rulers of the dominant institutional church did not agree so their secrets were lost to humankind.

The church is still keeping secrets. For instance, there are the Vatican Secret Archives in Rome. The Vatican Secret Archives have been estimated to contain 30 miles of books. The entire contents of the pre-8th century archives, which contained the world's best collection of [heretical](#) texts, have disappeared, according to the Vatican's official account of the library's history. They said it was "for reasons not entirely known." There can be no copies made, recording devices or cell phones used in the parts open to selected scholars. There is no browsing in any of the Vatican Archives, and selected scholars must ask in advance for the precise document they wish to see; thus, they must know in advance that such a document exists.

Dysfunctional families always have secrets! Uncovering the secrets leads us to a more healthy family life, be it in our own intimate families, or our government families, or our religious family. The Da Vinci Code, in its way, is about uncovering secrets. This series is focusing on the more historically accurate versions of those secrets.

Christian scholar of early Christianity, Elaine Pagels, says: "What I find interesting about Dan Brown's book is that it raises a very important question: If they –meaning the leaders of the church–suppressed so much of early Christian history, what else don't we know about? What else is there to be known? And as a historian, I think it's a really important question because the answer means a great deal."

One of the widespread "secrets" seems to be: How did we get our Bible of today? I was taught that the stork brought it. Well, not exactly but just about. I was taught it just happened because the Spirit did it. And so most of us know a lot more about how babies are born than how the Bible was born. In *The Da Vinci Code* Teabing says to Sophie:

**"The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven."**

And he was right! At least fifty different gospels were circulating around groups of Christians for the first 200 years. Certain ones were popular with certain groups. Then as the church began to be ruled by bishops and the bishops at Rome became more and more influential, those bishops began favoring certain gospels. They began sifting the approved gospels down to just a few. We really don't know for sure how they decided what was important and what was not.

We do know that one of the chief leaders in all this defends his belief there should be only four gospels by saying, "Just as there are four regions of the universe, and four principal winds, the church itself requires only four pillars." Irenaeus (180 CE) How's that for spiritually sound reasoning.

But however it happened, it did. And it was not a fax from heaven. Much to the embarrassment of some of our neighboring Christians in Kansas, the Bible EVOLVED over a period of three hundred years.

**397 CE Today's Bible was ratified by the Council of Carthage in North Africa**

In an article attacking the Da Vinci Code called "Declaring War on God," in a journal from Liberty University, one of the faculty members, Dr. Edward Hindson says, "From the very earliest time,

Christian authors accepted only the four canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) as legitimate accounts of the life, message ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

I’m sorry Dr. Hindson, but that’s just not true. History is not on your side. What are you afraid of? The truth is liberating according to Jesus.

I am not saying that the gradual evolution of the Bible into today’s version was a bad thing. They made some good choices and it’s good to have a recommended list of books valued by your group. That’s not the problem. The problem is when you elevate that list to sacred status, say this is the only list, and then burn every other viewpoint! Jesus never said to collect a certain number of books about his message and then stop. HE SAID JUST THE OPPOSITE! He said:

**“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. The Spirit of truth will guide you into all the truth.” John 16:12**

Someone says, “What? The things Jesus said were not all of the truth. I was taught he already told us everything we needed to know. And if there was anything left, the letters of Paul and Revelation were it. There was and is more to come?” Some must think that Jesus somewhere sometime issued an order saying once the church’s recommended books were collected over three hundred years after his death that absolutely no more was left to be said about him or from him.

NO! Jesus was saying here that we should never place a period where God has placed a comma.

**So let’s not put a period at the end of the Bible!**

I think we should at least add Thomas to our Bible. It’s easy. Just go online to my website [www.revpaulsmith.com](http://www.revpaulsmith.com) and link to the NTGateway Gospel of Thomas website to download a copy of it along with enlightening commentary.)

And take a big black marker and mark out the parts in your Bible that don’t sound like Jesus. And we should put a warning and disclaimer on the Old Testament: Warning: This is not an accurate picture of God. Jesus said that God is not like the vengeful, violent, sadistic one often portrayed here.”

I like this Bizarro cartoon in the paper the other day. As Moses is leaving the mountaintop with the Ten Commandments, a voice from the mountain says, “And don’t forget to come back every ten years for updates. Times change, you know.”

Where was that cartoon back in the fourth century? Not only do times change, but we change. And then we are able to see that our understanding of God has deepened and evolved.

Surely the Spirit of God has spoken through many sacred books: Confucian, the Analects; Taoist, the Tao; for the Hindu, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita; the Islamic, the Qur’an. And all must be discerned just like our Bible.

I may sound like I am dismissing the Bible, but only because I am talking to a religious culture that has done bad things with the Bible. I value the Bible. I teach from it all the time. I quote it all the time. It is an indispensable resource.

But according to the Bible itself, the Spirit is still speaking more truth than what is contained in the Bible. So let's add to the Bible:

- 1. The Gospel of Thomas and others writings, especially by the mystics through centuries**
- 2. Today's scholarly research**
- 3. Some of today's teachers, writers, and "channelers."**

Don't be afraid of the word "channel." That's just today's word for what the apostle Paul advocates as a most powerful gift, the gift of prophecy (read I Corinthians.) Paul was also clear that prophecy, or channeling, must always be discerned because the prophets and channels can go all the way from harmful, dumb, and okay, to astoundingly helpful.

Add to your list of recommended writings whatever feeds you spiritually, including perhaps such writings as *A Course in Miracles*, Edgar Cayce, Neale Walsh's *Conversations with God* and others – if they speak to you – and remember to discern them. They are ALWAYS a mixture of various levels of truth.

And most importantly add to your list of recommended messages from Jesus that incredible channel that is –

- 4. YOU.** For you are a part of the on- going work of the Spirit, the never-ending Bible, *The Gospel According to (your name goes here)*

Don't do a "little ol' me?" number here. Don't be incredulous. If Jesus has more things to say, just who is going to say them? It has to be people like you and me. Got it?

Let me sum up the idea of how indispensable both the Bible AND the Spirit of truth continuing to write the "more bible" of today and everyday.

My daughter Beth went to Ireland three weeks ago. She and her eight-year old daughter Dahlby are rarely separated. So Beth recorded stories for Dahlby to listen to while she was in Ireland. At bedtime Dahlby would play the stories and soon be off to sleep. Listening to stories told by Mom is a wonderful thing. I love to hear the stories of Jesus in the Bible. They really are precious to hear. What would we do without them. But what's also wonderful, and even better, is having Momma come back to keep teaching you and to be with you. And Momma did come back from Ireland to be with Dahlby. With Jesus, we get the stories and the sayings from the early writings of Christianity. And then Jesus came back in spirit form so we get him, too. In the Jesus path we get both the original stories of Jesus' life here on earth and the continuing teaching right here and now.