The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth Behind Alternative Christianities by Darrell L. Bock Ph.D.

An Interesting Textual Discussion

What others are saying about The Missing Gospels

Darrell Bock has written a timely and valuable study for anyone curious about the question of lost or missing gospels. The Missing Gospels is a breath of sanity!

-Philip Jenkins, Professor of History and Religious Studies, Penn State

Those who don't want their prejudices disturbed will want to avoid this book. Those with an open mind and readiness to learn from scholarship . . . read with profit.
-Larry Hurtado, Professor of New Testament Language, Literature, and Theology, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Darrell Bock patiently, and accessibly, sifts through all the relevant issues and offers much-needed guidance to those who want to discern fact from fiction. If you read only one book on this issue, this is it!

-Andreas J. Kostenberger, PhD, Professor of New Testament and Greek, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

The Missing Gospels is a unique resource for those who wish to respond to the new school with accuracy and confidence.

-Frederica Mathewes-Green, National Public Radios Morning Edition Commentator

A necessary book that corrects many still fashionable but even more questionable hypotheses about the origin of the Gospels, the Nag Hammadi texts, and the development of Christian theology in the first two centuries AD.

-Prof. Dr. Martin Hengel, Professor Emeritus of New Testament and Ancient Judaism, University of Tubingen, Germany

For a brief overview from Dr. Bock on the contents of the Gospel of Judas along with other materials, please visit www.thomasnelson.com/missinggospels.


Bock's Missing Gospels is an interesting tome, but not for the faint of heart. This is not just a casual discussion of the Gnostic texts made so popular recently by the Di Vinci Code, but a thorough comparison and discussion of these texts with respect to the Orthodox Christianity of the period. Although it gets to be heavy going at times, it's quite clear from the author's discussion that the two types of text are quite different.

For one thing, anyone who has the notion from the Di Vinci Code that the Gnostics were early feminists can get that out their mind right away. While the texts make mention of women and what the Di Vinci Code popularized as the "Divine Feminine," most of them make it quite clear that the females in question are inferior in quality to men. At one point Jesus says he will make Mary Magdalene male so that she is worthy of receiving the mysteries he imparts to his disciples. Definitely not politically correct from the modern perspective.
I'm not entirely certain I agree with the author that the earliest Gnostic ideas were later than those of Orthodoxy and therefore do not reflect the "true" teachings of Jesus. While I do agree that one can’t argue from lack of evidence, neither do I agree that lack of evidence is evidence of absence. I suspect that much of what was circulating after the death of Jesus was rich and varied. That the texts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were committed to parchment earlier than the Gnostic works is hardly surprising given the characters of the two distinct beliefs.

What has become the traditional church position is pretty clear cut. In fact I was surprised at just how clear cut it was from these earliest 1st Century works. Essentially one is expected to follow the Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments, and confess your belief in Jesus Christ as the savior of mankind. The Nicean Creed, which I learned in confirmation class says exactly that. Do these things and your future in heaven is guaranteed. And it's not just an ethereal future either. Your mind, body and soul will be resurrected in a much better, much fairer world.

This form of Christianity is accepting and open to all; in fact it urges everyone to become part of it. No one is considered unworthy to participate. Furthermore, the various centers of the faith tended to communicate with one another, instruct, and support adherence to the core beliefs.

On the other hand, the Gnostic texts portray a variety of beliefs with no sense that their proponents have respect for or even contact with the others. In these texts, the speaking disciple has become a repository to which the master has committed some very special knowledge about reality, the soul, the hereafter, and right living. The contents of these tracts suggest secretiveness, divisiveness, and exclusivity. It reminds me of the Masons and the Eastern Star, both of which are secret societies. My guess is that these beliefs appealed to an educated elite more than to the average man in the street.

The message transmitted by these texts is couched in language that is almost like that of Eastern philosophies, which is probably why the Gnostic texts are enjoying a renaissance in modern times. The neophyte is encouraged to get to "know" themselves, to find their "inner deity" in order to find God. The resurrection is of the soul or spirit of the devotee. There are no apparent clear cut "how tos" involved. Even to learn the very secret words imparted by Jesus, the individual must be inducted into the group. Because of this, I'm not at all surprised that the Gnostic texts were set to paper later than that of the Orthodox religion. I'm more surprised that they were committed to the written word at all.

It is precisely because the differences between the two types of belief are so very apparent that I am inclined to believe this author and others who maintain that the Orthodox Church was not responsible for their
suppression. The early Romans might have been, but they were an equal opportunity culture, they suppressed all Christian texts.

The reason for my position is that Gnosticism itself, with its secrecy and exclusiveness, simply failed to survive the intellectual "survival of the fittest". Just as biological beings survive or suffer extinction by virtue of the numbers, so too do ideas.

Orthodoxy included everyone who wanted to join, was open with its liturgy and beliefs, appealed to the average person's understanding of life and its demands, gave clear cut rules for achieving grace, and encouraged everyone to "spread the good word." Their formula was extremely successful for over 2000 years.

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