

The Jesus Seminar

Social Reformer/Cynic Philosopher: Jesus wasn't concerned about religion or eschatology (end times). His view of the kingdom was more "here and now" and emphasized the peaceful promotion of an egalitarian society that balanced the scales between peasants and aristocrats (a "brokerless kingdom"). His ministry combined Greek Cynic philosophy and Jewish magic.

The Jesus Seminar

- Leading figures:
 - John Dominic Crossan (1934-)
 - Burton Mack (1931-)
 - Robert Funk (1926-2005)
- Voted on authenticity of Gospel stories using color-coded bead system.
- Prioritized Q and Thomas.
- Prioritized non-eschatological sayings.

The Gospel of Thomas

- Discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945.
- 114 sayings of Jesus in Coptic.
 - Half resemble the canonical Gospels.
 - Half resemble Gnostic or Cynic teachings.
- Rejected by early church fathers Origen and Eusebius as apocryphal.
- Probably from mid-2nd century AD.
- Sample of sayings
 - "Lucky is the lion that the human will eat, so that the lion becomes human. And foul is the human that the lion will eat, and the lion still will become human." (Saying 7)
 - "If they say to you, 'Where have you come from?' say to them, 'We have come from the light, from the place where the light came into being by itself, established [itself], and appeared in their image.'" (Saying 50)
 - "I am the light that is over all things. I am all: from me all came forth, and to me all attained. Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there." (Saying 77)
 - "Simon Peter said to them, 'Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life.' Jesus said, 'Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven.'" (Saying 114)

Who were the Cynics?

- Movement began with Antisthenes and Diogenes (5th-4th c. BC)
- Live a simple life in harmony with nature
- Don't rely on worldly possessions
- Very rude. Often performed bodily functions in public (gross!)
- Pejoratively called "dogmen" (Greek *kynikoi*)

What's wrong with this theory?

- **Comprehensible.** Jesus must have made sense within 1st-century Judaism, but 1st-century Galilee was VERY resistant to pagan Greek influence.
- **Crucifiable.** Jesus must have been offensive enough to make the Jewish leaders want to kill him, but if Jesus was just roaming around promoting kindness, that wouldn't offend anybody!
- **Consequential.** There must have been something about Jesus that made the early Christians devote their lives to him, but Platonists didn't worship Plato. Why did Christians worship Christ?

The Da Vinci Code

Jesus Bloodline Theory: Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and had children with her. It is possible that their descendants survive even to this day.

The Da Vinci Code (2003)

- “The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great.... Three centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Christ’s followers had multiplied exponentially. Christians and pagans began warring, and the conflict grew to such proportions that it threatened to rend Rome in two. Constantine decided something had to be done.... In 325 A.D., he decided to unify Rome under a single religion, Christianity.... Until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet ... a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless.... Jesus’ establishment as ‘the Son of God’ was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea... A relatively close vote at that.”

Debunking The Da Vinci Code

- Christians and pagans were *not* tearing the Roman Empire apart. Before Constantine’s conversion, Christians were only 5% of the population—a persecuted and powerless minority.
- Constantine did *not* decide the canon of the New Testament. In fact, he didn’t decide *any* doctrine at Nicaea.
- Most of the canon was “universally recognized” (homologoumena) long before Constantine.
 - Antilegomena (“disputed” books): Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude, Revelation
- Constantine did *not* make Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.
 - The **Edict of Milan (AD 313)** merely legalized Christianity.
 - The **Council of Nicaea (AD 325)** condemned Arianism and set the date for observing Easter.
 - The **Edict of Thessalonica (AD 380)** made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire under Theodosius I, well after Constantine’s death.
- Jesus’ status as a mere man was *not* an issue debated at Nicaea. Even the Arians believed in the preexistence of Christ, seeing him as the first created being.
- Before Nicaea, there was one Christian sect that claimed that Jesus was just a man: the **Ebionites**
 - 2nd-century Jewish Christians who followed Old Testament laws (maybe Judaizers)
 - Saw Jesus as a wise and virtuous prophet adopted by God (but he was *not* married!)
 - Some scholars today (like Ehrman) claim Ebionism was the earliest view of Christ.
- There are no early Christian texts that claim Jesus was married.
 - A recently discovered papyrus fragment called *The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife*—in which Jesus says the words “my wife”—turned out to be a modern forgery.
 - A 3rd-century Gnostic gospel called *The Gospel of Philip* refers to Mary Magdalene as Jesus’ “companion” whom he would “kiss.” But the manuscript is badly damaged.

Criteria of a plausible portrait of Jesus

- **Comprehensible:** Jesus must have made sense within 1st-century Judaism...
 - ...Plenty of 1st-century Jews were married with children. But plenty also practiced celibacy (the Essenes, John the Baptist, Paul, etc.).
- **Crucifiable:** Jesus must have been offensive enough to make Jewish leaders want to kill him...
 - ...But this theory doesn’t really say anything about Jesus’ *teachings*—just his marital status.
- **Consequential:** Jesus’ life and teachings must have had an impact on the beliefs of the early Christians...
 - ...But if Jesus was married with kids, why didn’t any early Christians mention that? It would have to have been a conspiracy of silence.