

Darrell L. Bock. *The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth Behind Alternative Christianities*. Nashville: Nelson Books, 2006, pages 230, price \$21.99.

Am I missing something, or did the *Da Vinci Code* movie virtually kill the interest in these alternative gospels? I have heard almost nothing about them since the movie. The Christian community seemingly did a good job of informing our churches about the false claims inherent in that novel, and most of us have moved on to other issues. The proponents of alternative Christianities have not gone away, however, but Bock's book to me is like the definitive nail in the coffin of the claims made by Pagels, Meyer, and Ehrman.

Their proposal is that the early church was a mixture of religious claims. There was no standard "orthodox" view of Jesus, and supposedly everything was up in the air until Irenaeus began to shape the book list for the developing New Testament and began to define who Jesus was. This is certainly not a correct view of the contribution of Irenaeus.

In 1945 a trove of books were found in Egypt (no copies were found anywhere else) at a site known as Nag Hammadi, where a Gnostic community lived and wrote a series of unusual books claiming that Jesus really was not who the rest of the Christian world thought he was. The authentic gospels, written by the apostles and accepted throughout the Christian world, were challenged in this set of Gnostic (heretical) documents that had names like the *Gospel of Thomas*, *of Philip*, *of the Savior*, *of Truth*, and *of Mary Magdalene*. Other significant works tied to this alternative tradition, which is not at all a consistent set of presentations, include the *Apocryphon of John*, *Dialog of the Savior*, and *Aprocryphon of James*.

What Bock does is to study pre-Irenaeian literature to see if it is as diverse as claimed. Was orthodoxy something that emerged from the earliest Christian communities surrounding the Mediterranean, or was it competing mixture of alternative Christianities. He reviews themes like

God and creation, the person of Jesus as human and divine, the saving of man, and the main purpose of the life of Jesus. Bock searches to see which traditions are tied to the oldest texts or traditions.

Bock's conclusion is that Nag Hammadi Gnosticism really stands alone as a minor offshoot of Christianity, one that had lost touch with authentic Christianity, one that was never accepted by the vast majority of Christians, and one that was at all times considered to be false and heretical by the vast network of churches across the empire. Bock provides in an Appendix a rather complete list with comments about extant, early texts other than the four canonical gospels.

All of this is very helpful and makes Bock's work valuable beyond simply a review of the Gnostic literature of Nag Hammadi. Darrell Bock has provided the theological community a sound and reasonable evaluation of the whole "alternative and lost Christianities" movement, and he finds it to be unsound. This book needs to be in every church library and every pastor's study.

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