

Tomorrow I will be doing an all-day seminar at UNC for the Program in the Humanities and Human Values. This is a terrific organization on campus. Among other things, it puts on weekend seminars — usually Friday afternoon/evening; Saturday morning — that involve four faculty lectures on a set topic. Scheduling was such that we decided to put all four lectures on a Saturday this time. I've done these things for 25 years, and love them.

Most of the time the program chooses a topic and has four different professors from UNC (and occasionally one from Duke or another school nearby) each giving a lecture, and then at the end the four doing a kind of brief panel discussion of each other's papers. For some years now I've not done those, but have done a four-lecture seminar on some topic or other on my own. That will be the case tomorrow.

There will be about 130 people there, all adults, many of them senior citizens but younger folk (i.e., my age. Or even younger!) too, all of them eager to learn about a topic, and many of them very knowledgeable and interesting people. The Question and Answer sessions at these things are great.

My topic, as you'll see, is "Lost Gospels." I guess it should be called "No Longer Lost Gospels," but that's probably not as catchy. The "occasion" for this seminar is the publication over the past couple of years of my two books that give translations of the Gospels not in the New Testament — one of the books for scholars (which includes the original Greek, Latin, and Coptic texts, with a facing-page English translation) the other for layfolk (just the translations; and somewhat simplified Introductions to each text). For the seminar I've picked some of the more interesting and historically significant texts.

Anyway, here is how I have described the seminar and each of the lectures.

The Lost Gospels

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In recent years readers interested in the world of early Christianity have become fascinated by the books that did not make it into the New Testament. These other Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses present fascinating, if occasionally bizarre, accounts of Jesus and his followers, and even though they are, as a rule, highly fictionalized and legendary, they can inform us about how Christians in later periods were understanding their religion. In this seminar we will look at several of the Gospels from outside the New Testament: two that deal with the birth and young life of Jesus, one that contains a number of his teachings that cannot be found in the New Testament, one that provides an alternative account of Jesus' death and resurrection, and several that contrast the role of an innocent Pontius Pilate and the guilty Jews in the death of Jesus.

Lecture One: The Proto-Gospel of James and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas

The Proto-Gospel is concerned to address the question of who Jesus' mother was and why she was chosen to bear the son of God into the world, stressing her unique character and emphasizing her virginity when Jesus was born. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas attempts to fill in the gaps of our knowledge about Jesus as a young boy; the driving question behind

this text is this: If Jesus was a miracle-working Son of God as an adult, what was he like as a kid?

Lecture Two: The Gospel of Thomas

The Gospel of Thomas is arguably the most important discovery of an ancient Christian text in modern times. Uncovered near Nag Hammadi Egypt in 1945, the Gospel contains 114 sayings of Jesus. Nearly half of these sayings are similar to teachings of Jesus in the New Testament, but the others strike modern readers as strange, mysterious, and mystical. In this lecture we will discuss the meaning of this Gospel and ask whether any of its unusual teachings could actually go back to the historical Jesus.

Lecture Three: The Gospel of Peter

It comes as a surprise to many readers to learn that the Gospels of the New Testament do not narrate the resurrection of Jesus. But they do not: they indicate that after Jesus was buried, his women followers discovered his tomb to be empty. But there is no account of Jesus coming out of the grave. There is one, however, in the early second century Gospel of Peter, which provides an alternative, though fragmentary, account of Jesus' trial, death, and resurrection.

Lecture Four: The Pilate Gospels

The Roman governor Pontius Pilate is one of the most maligned figures from the Gospels stories, but in some Christian circles he was looked upon as innocent in the death of Jesus. In fact, as time went on, Pilate became more and more innocent, as can be seen in several Gospels from outside of the New Testament, where Pilate's heightened innocence was used to assign all responsibility for Jesus' death to his enemies, the Jews. Remarkably, in some later traditions Pilate came to be portrayed as a Christian convert and, eventually, even as a Christian saint.



[My Non-Disclosure Agreement and the Gospel of Judas](#)
[The Gospel of Judas: Discovery, Restoration, and \(Non-\)Disclosure](#)