SAN DIEGO ADVENTIST FORUM—13th ANNUAL RETREAT

LOCATION: PINE SPRINGS RANCH, MOUNTAIN CENTER, CALIFORNIA

DATE: MAY 20-22, 2011

THEME: The B-List: Early Christian Writings That Didn't Make the Cut—and What They Tell Us about the Early Church

SPEAKER: John R. Jones, PhD, Associate Professor of Religion, La Sierra University

Are you aware that there are documents, including some that have come to light rather recently, that have titles such as The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Peter, The Gospel of Mary, The Acts of Paul and many others that were not included in the New Testament? Why were they written and why are they not part of the Bible? What do these other “gospels” teach us about Jesus, his relationship with Mary, the early Christian church and its appeal to women. What is “Q” and what do we know about it? Dr. Jones will lead us in a fascinating journey as he answers these and many other questions. (more details on reverse side)

REGISTRATION FEE: rates listed below depend on number of occupants per room and include

- five meals per person
- two nights lodging (two double beds per room—maximum occupancy = 4 persons)
- five presentations
- Saturday night entertainment

REGISTRATION FORM

PRIMARY CONTACT ________________________________________________________________

MAILING ADDRESS ______________________________________________________________

CITY ___________________________ STATE _____ ZIP _________________

TELEPHONE (______) _______________________________

EMAIL ________________________________________________

NAME OF FIRST OCCUPANT ____________________________________________ $220 total for 1

NAME OF SECOND OCCUPANT ________________________________ $340 total for 2

NAME OF THIRD OCCUPANT _________________________________ $450 total for 3

NAME OF FOURTH OCCUPANT ________________________________ $560 total for 4

TOTAL DUE for room, meals & meetings $ ________________

Please make check payable to SDAF and mail by April 15 to:

San Diego Adventist Forum
PO Box 3148
La Mesa, CA 91944-3148

Note: CHECK-IN TIME—3:30 p.m. Friday
Friday evening: “So what was Leigh Teabing talking about, anyway?”

*The Da Vinci Code* is built around the claim that there were many early gospels, which the patriarchs of the Church eventually suppressed—and which would surprise us if we had and read them. Parts of this theory are true, and parts are not—but which is which? First, a quick overview of non-canonical “gospels:” general characteristics, variety of viewpoints, connections back into various aspects of Jesus’ life, driving motives. And a look at the stages in the preservation of the memories about Jesus.

Then we’ll look at the actual text of certain of the earliest non-canonical gospels—a process that’s both entertaining, intriguing and serious. We sample materials from the only two serious contenders for pre-New Testament gospels: (a) The *Gospel of the Nazareans*, and (b) that fascinating, mysterious source called “Q” – a pretty clear example of a “gospel behind the gospels.”

So what do we learn from these sources, that we didn’t know before?

Sabbath morning: “The Other Muhammad Ali”

An amazing discovery in the sands of Egypt that rivals that of the Dead Sea Scrolls—yielding a treasure-trove that includes the *Gospel of Thomas* and 45 other early Christian documents not included in the New Testament. What are we to make of these?

Sabbath morning: “Peter, Paul and Mary”

We’ll look at the *Gospel* and the *Acts of Peter*, and then turn to especially consider two women who obviously bothered the early Christians a lot: The story of the *Gospel of Mary* is itself an episode of discovery and recovery in the midst of two world wars and other tragedies. And it preserves the early Christian intrigue with the relationship between Jesus and Mary, and its influence in the early Christian movement. Three fragmentary copies of this text exist, dating from the 3rd and 5th centuries; but the material they preserve has been dated on linguistic grounds to the late 1st to early 2nd centuries. Definitely worth a look!

The second story of an early Christian woman derives from the *Acts of Paul*, and takes place in Iconium. It too records material that, while not traceable back to Paul, appears to be in circulation by the end of the first century AD. Not only is the story of *Thecla* a rattling good yarn, it reveals much about early Christianity’s appeal to the female half of the human race. How to relate this tradition to the appeal for public respectability and conventional conduct in the epistles to Timothy and Titus?

Sabbath afternoon: “…and last but not least, Judas”

One of the most despised figures of history, Judas too has his own early document—completely unknown until one threadbare papyrus copy was discovered by some peasants in Egypt in the late 1970’s, and then subjected to a bizarre series of cloak-and-dagger misadventures until finally deciphered in 2000. We’ll view a bit of the National Geographic video tracing this strange story, then read what we have of the actual text in English translation. Then we’ll ask ourselves what motives prompted the composition of this strange and haunting work?

Sunday morning: “So what can we conclude about all this?”

We complete our survey of these early non-canonical Christian materials with a look at the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, the earliest attempt at a church manual, regarded by some scholars as predating the canonical gospels.

There is much more: The *Epistle of Barnabas*, dating from the turn of the 1st/2nd century; the *Epistles of Ignatius* bishop of Antioch, written to a half-dozen churches as he was passing through them en route to his martyrdom in Rome (108 AD), the *Shepherd of Hermas*, a visionary Christian apocalypse written during the first half of the 2nd century, and more. Each of these works was regarded as sacred scripture in some early Christian circles, and functioned as part of their Bible. At the same time, certain of our New Testament books—most notably the *Epistle to the Hebrews* and the *Revelation of St. John*—were seriously doubted in certain Christian groups. As the canon gradually took shape in the 5th century and beyond, we consider anew the influences that gave it shape—and what we can learn about the first believers from all of their writings.