The Theme

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 Mary, 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.

The Presentations

Friday evening: “So what was Leigh Teabing talking about, anyway?”
The Da Vinci Code 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 2: “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 episode of discovery and recovery in the midst of two world wars and other tragedies. And a look at the stages in the preservation of the memories about Jesus.

We relate this tradition to the appeal for public respectability and conventional conduct in the epistles to Timothy and Titus?

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 (108ad), 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 6th 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.

John R. Jones, PhD

A third-generation Adventist, John grew up in the Philippine Islands and graduated from Walla Walla College and Andrews University prior to a pastoral internship in Napa, California. He then spent five years at Hong Kong Adventist College, where he chaired the theology department.

After earning a PhD at Vanderbilt University, John returned to Asia in 1978, where he taught at the Far Eastern Division’s theological seminary. He has been with Loma Linda and La Sierra Universities since 1987 and served as Dean of the School of Religion at La Sierra from 1990 - 2007 when he returned to his first love, full-time teaching.
John’s areas of expertise are New Testament studies and Asian religions. A well-known preacher and public speaker, he is a member of the American Academy of Religion, the Society of Biblical Literature, and the Adventist Society of Religious Studies. His extracurricular interests include several languages, folk music of several traditions, and conducting adventuresome study-tours “to obscure places like Tibet and the Silk Road.”

SDAF goes digital
The “new” SDAF website (www.sandiegoadventistforum.org) is functional and nearly completed and we hope you’ll visit it often to learn of our upcoming events and news and to download MP3 files of our meetings. The audiocassettes of the mid-1997 to 2002 meetings have been recently digitized and uploaded so immediately downloadable MP3 files (that sell for half the price of CDs) are now available online along with the 2003-2012 meetings. This also means that the last 15 years of our meetings are now available in CD format as well. Tapes of the prior remaining 1980-1997 meetings are currently being digitized and also will be available digitally later this year. Similarly, membership applications and media subscriptions may be completed online. Give it a try today—it’s easier than you think!

2012 membership renewal and media subscriptions past due
The free six-month extension of last year’s membership ended on December 31. It is now time to renew your membership, media subscriptions and printed Newsletter subscriptions for 2012 (emailed Newsletters are free). New members and subscribers are always welcome as are your tax-deductible contributions. Since SDAF is a completely volunteer organization, 100% of the funds you contribute are applied to programming.

2012 Summer Meeting
Date: September 8, 2012
Speaker: Sigve Tonstad, MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Religion, Loma Linda University
Title: The Lost Meaning(s) of the Seventh Day
Location: Tierrasanta SDA Church, 11260 Clairemont Mesa Blvd., San Diego, California, 92142

SAN DIEGOADVENTIST FORUM—13th RETREAT
LOCATION: PINE SPRINGS RANCH, Mountain Center, California
DATE: MAY 4-6, 2012
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
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

Please make check payable to SDAF and mail by April 6 to:
San Diego Adventist Forum
PO Box 421320
San Diego, CA 92142-1320

Note: CHECK-IN TIME—3:30 p.m. Friday