Outline Lecture Four—Orthodoxy vs. Heterodoxy: The Suppression of Gnosticism

Key Questions:
1) What threats did heterodox sects like Gnosticism pose to Church orthodoxy?
2) How did the fates of Gnosticism and women in the history of Christianity intersect?

I) Suppression of Heresy
   a) The Role of Dissension in Early Christianity
      i) Strife over leadership and doctrine after the death of Jesus
         (1) Question of apostolic authority
      ii) Anti-establishment, anti-patriarchal tendencies most prominent in Gnostic gospels
   b) Gnosticism
      i) Definition: Greek word for “knowledge” or “recognition” epi-gnosis
         (1) Tradition centered around the “secret teachings” of Jesus
            (a) “But if you will not know yourselves, you will dwell in poverty”
         (2) Esoteric tradition for the spiritual “elect”
            (a) “Blessed are the solitary and elect”
      ii) Contest between Gnosticism and the orthodox, patriarchal branch of the early Church
           between 2nd and 4th centuries C.E.
           (1) Exclusion from the New Testament
           (2) 1945 discovery at Nag Hammadi

II) The Gnostic Texts
   a) Gospel of Thomas
      i) Attributed to Didymos Judas Thomas or “Judas the Twin”
      ii) Anti-establishment tendency
         iii) Advocating a transient approach to life
   b) Non-patriarchal view of creation
      i) Primary Creator—androgynous and dyadic
      ii) God of Israel as a “derivative” creator

III) Gender and Heresy
   a) The Central Role of Mary Magdalene in “The Gospel of Mary”
      i) Key spiritual leader immediately after the death of Jesus
         (1) Levi: “For he knew her completely [and] loved her devotedly” (“Gospel of Mary” #10, 365)
      ii) Mary’s superior spiritual understanding
         (1) “For where the mind is, there is the treasure” (#7, 363)
   b) Women in the early Church
      i) Pagels’ thesis: the suppression of Gnosticism as heresy by the orthodox church went hand in hand with its exclusion of women
      ii) Gender trends in the Mediterranean world circa 1st century
      iii) Women in early Christian practices
   c) Patriarchal backlash starting from the mid-2nd century
      i) Return to old synagogue tradition of segregation
      ii) Why did this backlash occur?
(1) Ideology of the “pseudo” Pauline Injunction
(2) Social shifts in the ranks of followers
   iii) The Impact of Caesaropapism

IV) Role of Women in the Catholic Church Today
   a) Exclusion of women from the Church hierarchy today
      i) Anachronistic “Old Boys’ Club”?
   b) Implications for the future of the Catholic Church