

Jesus' Wife, part one

“Behold, the greatest cover-up in human history. Not only was Jesus Christ married, but He was a father.” And, we find out from the Da Vinci Code, he was married to Mary Magdalene.

This stunning assertion is one of the key revelations in Dan Brown's book. Jesus had a wife, and it was Mary Magdalene, a familiar figure from the Gospels. Mary Magdalene is the woman out of whom Jesus had cast out seven demons (Luke 8:2) and who was present at the crucifixion and afterwards a witness to the resurrection of Jesus (Mark 15:40; 16:1). She is not to be confused with the other Marys in the Gospels: The mother of Jesus, the sister of Martha, or the Mary who anointed Jesus. Could she have been the wife of Jesus? No, not a chance. No reliable scholar, Christian or non, would ever make such a claim. The only people who are claiming this are 1) gullible people who read the Da Vinci Code; 2) cranks writing pseudo-scholarship for the UFO crowd; 3) novelists using books written by cranks to sell books to gullible people. There is not a shred of evidence to support such a claim.

But Dan Brown says there is. And he claims “all depictions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.” He claims that he “researched” the material in his book, and that he “stands by” his research. One way to lie convincingly when you have to pass off a really big whopper is to look people in the eye and say confidently, over and over again, that you are telling the truth. Eventually people will start to think that no one would say something so ridiculous if it were not true. If you assert something long enough, some people will start to believe you. Elvis isn't dead, he just got tired of all the publicity. He's really a cook in a truck stop in Kansas.

Another way to lie convincingly is to cite a bunch of documents that people are not familiar with, that have some kind of mystery surrounding them because of age or circumstance. This has several advantages. First, no one knows what is really in the documents and most people are too lazy to go find out. Second, this works best if you don't completely lie about the contents, but just exaggerate them or twist their meaning. Third, non-scholars don't always know how to judge a reliable document from an old gossip rag. If Jesus doesn't come back in the next hundred years, somebody is going to dig up a copy of the Weekly World News and wonder if Bat Boy really existed and whether he helped fight Saddam Hussein. This is the essence of pseudo-scholarship; it seems like deep stuff, but it is really about appearances. It is like a redneck overhaul: paint the black parts black, the silver parts silver, and spray a can of engine cleaner over the whole thing. It LOOKS like a new engine.

One way that Brown tries to lie convincingly is to use the Gospel of Mary. The “gospel” is a short document of which we only have two ancient copies. In the Gospel, Mary reveals to the disciples secret teaching that Jesus hid from the rest of the disciples. She then gives them the secret teaching, which is a bewildering little lecture that makes little sense to modern listeners (I tried reading it to my congregation: Eyes glassing over, drool

escaping from corners of mouths, people sliding onto the floor...ok I'm exaggerating, but only a little). There's also stuff in there about Jesus loving Mary Magdalene more than the others and him kissing her on the [hole in manuscript]. Wow, obviously Jesus and Mary were married and founded a goddess-worshipping sex cult!

The first thing about this that all reputable scholars are pointing out, is that if the Gospel of Mary WAS a reliable account, which it is not, it doesn't even begin to advance Brown's claims. Christians greeted each other with kisses. We know this from both Scripture (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14), and also from Church history. The practice of Christians calling each other "brother" and "sister" and kissing each other led to early charges of incest. Tertullian, a second and third century Christian dealt with this at great length. It means nothing for a document to claim that Jesus kissed someone. It also means very little that Jesus said (in this document) that he "loved" Mary more than the others. This language appears in Scripture in very non-sexual ways (John 11:5; 13:23; and others). And in the Gospel of Mary it is used not to establish a sexual relationship between Jesus and Mary, but establish authority for the distinctive teaching she is imparting.

The second thing about all of this is that the Gospel of Mary has never had any claim for authenticity. The earliest anyone thinks it could have been composed is one hundred years after Jesus. There is no indication that the author/ess had any connection with anyone associated with Jesus. No church ever used it. No pastor or church scholar ever endorsed it. So why did it even exist?

It existed because it was a "gnostic" document. The gnostics were teachers who believed that this world was created by an evil or bumbling god (the demiurge) who had become detached from the source of other gods and the source of the other gods (the pleroma) had sent another manifestation of itself to this world to rescue it from the demiurge. Those who understood this great mystery would themselves be saved from this terrible physical world that the demiurge created. I'm grossly oversimplifying this, but it probably still doesn't make sense (I don't know if the gnostics really understood it either). Here's the really simple version: Matter bad, spirit good. Dumb people bad, smart people good. Simple religion bad, complicated philosophy good.

The document is a way to put gnostic religion/philosophy into the mouth of someone close to Jesus. Mary is a convenient candidate because she didn't write anything else, so there's nothing to contradict her gnostic teaching. This technique is called "borrowing authority." Find someone who is well respected and come up with a way to say that they are on your side. This doesn't usually draw away many faithful adherents, but it does give you an edge with the undecided.

The Gospel of Mary is a fantasy piece of gnostic drivel which doesn't even promote what Dan Brown is using it for. The writer of Mary was a neo-Platonic gnostic, Dan Brown is a sex-religion pagan. The Gospel of Mary isn't a challenge to Christianity, it is a bad joke.

-Travis Hutchinson