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Was Jesus Married? Answering the New Gnostics

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Tuesday, November 18, 2003

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Sales of The Da Vinci Code were certainly helped along by November 3 ABC news special "Jesus, Mary, and Da Vinci," hosted by reporter Elizabeth Vargas. The ABC special was an example of television at its worst—combining weak research with manipulative overtones and sensationalistic claims.

As the one hour "Prime Time Monday" program began, reporter Elizabeth Vargas related a legend claiming that in the first century, after the death of Jesus, refugees from the holy land landed on the coast of France. According to the legend, this group included some of the closest followers of Jesus, including Lazarus and Mary Magdalene. Vargas continued: "But what if we told you there was more to the story? What if we told you that some people think that Mary Magdalene was not a repentant prostitute but instead Jesus' wife? That she bore his child? That the truth was suppressed by the church but handed down by a secret society whose most famous member was Leonardo Da Vinci? And that Leonardo encoded the truth in some of his most famous paintings?"

Of course, with the "what if we told you" formula, the reporter was able to present this "legend" for consideration, while taking no responsibility for its truthfulness. And who would corroborate this story? None other than Dan Brown, author of The Da Vinci Code, who was interviewed for the "Prime Time Monday" broadcast as if he were a historian, rather than a suspense novelist. In a serious tone of voice, Brown explained that he began his research as a skeptic. "I really thought I would disprove a lot of this theory about Mary Magdalene and holy blood and all of that," he explained, "nevertheless, I became a believer." Are we supposed to be impressed?

The network advertised the "Prime Time Monday" broadcast by raising the question: "Was Jesus married?" With this sensationalistic tease, Vargas and her host of guests debated whether the church had been involved in a vast conspiracy to deny what Brown and others had supposedly recently discovered—that Mary Magdalene was not a repentant prostitute, but Jesus' wife.

This was a question sure to inflame the faithful and to create a sizable television audience. Nevertheless, the program was instructive, in that it puts a host of liberal theologians and post-Christian authors on the record for all to see.

Dan Brown's research, if you can call it that, was not very serious. As a novelist, he knows a good story when he sees one, and one may strongly suspect that he is more surprised than anyone else to know that many persons, evidently including some at ABC News, have taken him seriously.

There can be no serious question about the marital status of Jesus. The canonical gospels, (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) preclude any option of understanding Jesus as married. He operates as an unmarried teacher with a band of devoted disciples. He is not the head of a household, but builds a household of faith—the church. At the crucifixion, he assigns John responsibility for caring for Mary, his mother. There is no mention of any wife, certainly no mention of children.

This is no problem for Dan Brown and others who promote their invented Christology. According to Brown and

author Margaret Starbird, Jesus not only married Mary Magdalene, but also fathered a child who became the head of the Merovingian royal dynasty.

So, how can Brown and others promote this theory? Simply by asserting that the marital status of Jesus was hidden by Christian leaders by means of a vast conspiracy. This conspiracy, we are told, explains the absence of any mention of Jesus' marriage in the New Testament and the church's denial of any such suggestion throughout its history.

What evidence would Brown and Starbird produce in order to buttress their case?

Starbird points to Jesus' instruction to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection, as recorded in John's gospel. When Jesus tells Mary not to touch Him, Starbird claims that this actually means, "do not cling to me," which is further asserted to mean that they were married. As Vargas explains by means of a question: "and that kind of embrace would have been unusual if it were not between a man and a woman, husband and wife?"

Darrell Bock, professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary, countered Starbird's assertion. "Its just her single act of devotion," Bock explained, "given to him without concern about what people are thinking about what she's doing." Vargas then conceded that the majority of biblical scholars consulted for the program agreed with Professor Bock's assessment. Nevertheless, don't count that as a complete loss, for she did find one biblical scholar who thought that the scene in the garden might "point to an intimate relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus."

Father Richard McBrien of the University of Notre Dame quickly confirmed that if Jesus had married, it would have been to Mary Magdalene. "If he was married, it was obviously...oh, yeah, it was obviously Mary Magdalene." Father McBrien evidently confuses romance novels with the New Testament.

One of the central arguments found in *The Da Vinci Code* is that certain leading figures in history have always known the truth. The "Priory of Sion," asserted to be a cabal of the illuminated ones, is central to Brown's plot. The Priory is claimed to involve a host of luminaries from European history including, of course, Leonardo Da Vinci. According to Brown's thesis, Da Vinci hid hints of Jesus' marriage in works of art such as his famous masterpiece, "The Last Supper." Brown argues that one of the figures in the fresco standing next to Jesus isn't a man at all, but Mary Magdalene.

Jack Wasserman of Temple University isn't buying that argument. A prominent art historian, Wasserman simply countered that the figure doesn't even look like a woman, once we understand the artistic style of the era.

As a matter of fact, art historians have poked holes in most of Dan Brown's interpretations found in *The Da Vinci Code*. Of course, if you are promoting a conspiracy theory, you just make this part of the conspiracy. When Elizabeth Vargas asked Dan Brown why so many art historians dismiss his theories "as absolutely bizarre and crazy," Brown explained: "I think its because we see what we've been told we see." Oh, now we see. Instead of seeing what we've been told we should see, we should now see what Dan Brown wants us to see. See?

The most fascinating insights revealed in the "Prime Time Monday" broadcast had actually very little to do with *The Da Vinci Code* itself. Of far greater interest to thinking Christians were the arguments made by liberal theologians and divinity school professors that directly attacked the truthfulness of the Bible. This is, of course, of much greater concern than the interpretation of Leonardo Da Vinci's masterpieces.

In introducing this material, Vargas argued: "If you look at the Christian Bible, it's clear that there are large holes in the stories we have about the life of Jesus. The church chose four gospels that tell his story in the New Testament. But there were other stories written about Jesus, other gospels so controversial the Church ordered them destroyed. And they were, except for one set of copies. And it remained hidden in Egypt until about fifty years ago." Ah ha! The conspiracy deepens.

Vargas' hyped introduction referred to the Nag Hammadi scrolls found around the time of World War II. These Gnostic gospels were heretical accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. Early Christians were aware of these spurious writings and rightly rejected them as sub-biblical and erroneous.

Of course, Dan Brown and company are now ready to tout the Gnostic gospels as even more reliable than the New Testament. These documents and fragments are not older than the canonical Gospels, as is often claimed. They are

examples of the false gospels that were recognized as such by the early church.

Father Richard McBrien, well known as a liberal Roman Catholic academic, is ready to elevate Mary Magdalene to the status of an apostle. As he claimed, "She really was every bit as much an apostle, a companion, spokesperson for Jesus and his gospel as any of the men were." Of course, this assertion denies the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and the consensus of all branches of Christianity throughout the last two thousand years.

Karen King of the Harvard Divinity School argues that the denial of Jesus' marital status and the marginalization of Mary Magdalene are the result of a male conspiracy to deny the equality of women and the rightful place of female leadership in the church. Of course, since she sees Christianity as something that human beings have made, she would now call for the church to remake itself in a way more to her liking.

"Sometimes religion is presented as something that's fixed and stable," King explained, "where you have to accept it or reject it." But, as you might now suspect, professor King does not see Christianity as anything fixed or stable. To the contrary, as she asserted: "But the fact is that religious traditions, and certainly Christianity among them, is very diverse, very filled with possibilities. And we need to take responsibility for the kind of religion we make."

That final sentence is a quintessential statement of liberal theology. According to professors like Karen King, we "make up" Christianity as we go along. Now, informed by feminism and New Age spirituality, we can remake Christianity and leave behind all that tired, stale, orthodoxy that has been handed down to us.

The evidence against these revisionist forms of Christianity is massive. Belief in the veracity and historical credibility of the New Testament is the great dividing line between Christianity and this new religion posing as Christianity. According to John 3:16, Jesus is "the only begotten" Son of God. He came to redeem sinners by His atoning death and resurrection in order that we might become adopted as the sons and daughters of God. Jesus Christ did not marry and did not beget any children of the flesh. Through faith, we become the sons and daughters of God through Christ's accomplished work of salvation.

All these revisionist versions of Christianity are rejections of the Gospel handed down from the apostles and honored by faithful Christians in every generation. Dan Brown has written a suspense thriller that ABC News has taken as a serious historical argument. They were able to find a host of liberal enablers to help push the case and hype the story. But, in the end, we have to choose between the Christ of the New Testament and the Christ of The Da Vinci Code.

Check it out for yourself, and read the New Testament. Truth is far more interesting than fiction. The mythical Christ of The Da Vinci Code is no match for the authentic Christ of the Bible.

