

Bad Doctrine in Good Fiction

The Da Vinci Code, written by Dan Brown, has spent months on the best seller lists. It is a fascinating book. I have read it, and it contains one of the most gripping stories from beginning to end that I have ever read. In its pages it gives much factual information about all kinds of fascinating things like gargoyles, cryptexes, the knights' templar, the rose line, pentacles and tarots, freemasons, atbash ciphers, iambic pentameter, the Age of Aquarius, and the Roman Catholic Church putting Christian-themed holidays on top of formerly pagan dates. I assume the book is correct in much of the detail it gives in those things that I don't know much about.

But the book doesn't stop there. It goes on to assert some things that I do know a whole lot about, and I can confidently declare to you are wholeheartedly false. Yet they are presented as fact, and have confused many and strengthened the unbelief of others by the book's central assertion: that for 2000 years the church has covered up the fact that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and His blood relatives live among us to this day.

In addressing that thesis I start by asking, "Who is Mary Magdalene? What does the Bible tell us about her?" The answer is...it tells us very little. In fact, Mary Magdalene is only mentioned 12 times in the New Testament. To put that in perspective for you, Peter is mentioned 156 times, John 115 times. Judas is mentioned 31 times, Martha the same as Mary Magdalene, 12.

There's really only 1 passage that tells us anything about her before the passion week of Christ, Luke 8:1-3. We learn that she was one of the women who traveled with Christ and the disciples. Not alone, but as part of a company of followers. We learn from Luke 8:2 that Mary Magdalene had been demon possessed- Jesus had cast 7 spirits out of her. She was indebted to him for freeing her and saving her. Along with the other women she helped provide for the needs of this large group as it traveled from place to place.

That's all we know about her until the Passion Week.

You say, "I thought she was the woman who anointed his feet with her hair." Nope, it doesn't say that! You say, "I thought she was a prostitute." Nope, it doesn't say that. One of the Popes said that in a sermon in about the year 600 A.D., but he didn't find it in the Bible.

So what else does the Bible teach about her from the Passion Week of Christ?

In Matthew 27:56 it tells us that she, along with several other women, were there when Jesus was executed. Mark, Luke, and John report this as well. In Matthew 27:61 it tells us that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sat opposite the tomb after he had been placed in it. Mark, Luke, and John report the same thing. In John 20:16 it tells us that she had the privilege of being the first person to see the resurrected Lord! Matthew, Mark, and Luke report the same thing.

So, in summary, what does scripture tell us about her? She owed Jesus spiritual freedom and she had become His all out follower, was a witness of his crucifixion and had the privilege of being the first person to witness his resurrection from the dead.

So where does the Da Vinci Code get that she and Jesus were married? The charge made is that the church, under the power of the converted Christian emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicea at 325 AD, chose the 4 gospels over about 80 other potential gospels. When they did this, they shut out the “gospels” that tell us the truth about Mary Magdalene and Jesus.

The problem is that almost no Christian literature from those first 300 years after Christ makes much of anything about Mary Magdalene. If you like you can go to www.ccel.org and go to their searchable online version of the works of the fathers. When you type in Mary Magdalene, she only appears 42 times. That’s in contrast to Peter appearing 1259 times, John appearing 2510 times, Judas appearing 351 times, and Martha, 48 times, actually more than Mary Magdalene.

But you say, “I heard that new Gnostic gospels have been found that clearly state Jesus and Mary Magdalene’s relationship.” I’ll address that in a moment, but...

First, we need to state that all 4 gospels were written by 100 A.D. The writings from the early church make clear that they were used to reject unorthodox teachings way before 325 when the Council of Nicea met to clarify some Christian doctrines.

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, Christianity had become popular enough that other writings begin to circulate that claimed to be gospels. Some of them were good history and even quite devotional. Others were bizarre. The early church really did a good job sticking with the ones written within 75 years of Christ’s life on earth. Every book in the New Testament of your Bible fits that description.

There are 2 books, both written 200 years or more after Christ, that give rise to the speculation about Mary Magdalene. The first is the gospel of Phillip, which states, “And the companion of the (text unclear) Mary Magdalene...(text unclear) loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her (text lost). Where did he kiss her? The lips, the cheeks, where? Was it a kiss of fellowship, or an intimate kiss? That’s all it says...a fanciful writing written 200 years after Christ. Then in the Gospel of Mary Magdala, Peter is shown being terribly upset that Jesus has revealed truth to a woman like Mary Magdala. Levi rebukes Peter’s jealousy and tells him to cool it. That’s it, that’s the textual evidence for Jesus’ marriage to Mary Magdalene.

There’s so much more that could be said, but the main point I want to make as I close this article is this: it is amazing that the same people who will not bow the knee at what they see written by those who experienced Jesus first hand will allow themselves to conjure up fantasy based on fanciful documents written several hundred years after his resurrection!

Mary Magdalene deserves our admiration for being an example of the change Jesus can make in a life and for her historic role as the first person to witness Christ's resurrection. Celebrate the real Mary Magdalene, and let the facts of the gospel change your heart as they did hers! Unless you are born again like Mary Magdalene you will not see the Kingdom of God! <><