

## **CODE 6: WAS MARY MAGDALENE AN HONORED APOSTLE?**

- DVC claims a special leadership role for Mary Magdalene that was later suppressed. The thought in the book is that if the truth got out it could “[single-handedly crumble the Church](#)” (p. 243). In order to prevent this, the Church turned Mary Magdalene into a prostitute. This accomplished a couple of things: 1) it limited the influence of women (or repressed them in some circles), and 2) it denied them leadership positions in the Church
- It is in this context in DVC that remarks are made about [DaVinci's Last Supper and the V-shape that is said to identify Mary Magdalene in the place of John](#) (see p. 238). Teabing later refers to Jesus as “[the original feminist](#)” (p. 248).
- Bock notes that this claim is complex and that there is some merit to what is affirmed. He argues, however, that these claims are exaggerated and that the “suppression of Mary” theory is overblown.

### *How Mary Magdalene is Used: The New Code Behind the DaVinci Code*

- Again, all this speculation points back to the fact that we just don't know a lot about Mary Magdalene. These theories, then, are an effort to fill in the gaps.
- The claim goes as follows: In the beginning was the full, new story of the Christian faith. This story was suppressed by the Church.
- Harvard's [Karen King](#), in her book called *Gospel of Mary Magdalene: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle*, refers to the story the Church sought to replace the true story with as the “master-story.” The master-story is the story as told by the “winners” and, thus, it controls all other stories (p. 128-9).

While the plot of the master story presents a powerful and compelling – if problematic – paradigm for religious belief, it is poor history. First of all, the story is incomplete and noticeably slanted. The roles of women, for example, are almost completely submerged from view. In the master story, the male Jesus selects male disciples who pass on tradition to male bishops. [Yet we know](#) that in early centuries and throughout Christian history, women played prominent roles as apostles, teachers, preachers, and prophets. Moreover, the use of terms like “orthodoxy” and “heresy” immediately designates who were the winners and losers, but in practice “heresy” can only be identified by hindsight, instituting the norms of a later age as the standard for an earlier period. Hence the logic is circular; the New Testament and the Nicene Creed define orthodox Christianity, not only in the fourth century and beyond, but anachronistically in the previous centuries as well.

One consequence of the triumph of Nicene orthodoxy was that the viewpoints of other Christians were largely lost, serving only in documents denouncing them. Until now, the clearest contribution of the recent discoveries is in providing a wealth of primary works that illustrate the plural character of early Christianity and offer alternative voices. They disclose a much more diverse Christianity than we ever suspected; for the later story presents only two kinds of Christians: true Christians (the orthodox) and false Christians (the heretics). We know that the real situation was more complex. Not stark contrasts, but multiple levels of intersection and disjuncture best define the situation... And just as the master story functioned to authorize the particular theology and practices of what later came to be orthodoxy, the invention of Gnosticism and Jewish Christianity by modern scholars continues that process in our own time. (pp. 160-161)

- o So here we have the “new” school. This is, in scholarly form, what Dan Brown is in everyday language. These are the “new-Gnostics” as they have been called. But as we've seen in looking back at the “old” school Gnostics – this isn't new. This is what the Church Fathers battled in their war of words with the Gnostics.
- [Helmut Koester](#), Harvard, has said the following (p. 130)  
The earliest gospel traditions and gospel writings contain seeds of both, later heresy as well as later orthodoxy. For the description of the history and development of gospel literature in the earliest period of Christianity, the epithets “heretical” and “orthodoxy” are meaningless.

Only dogmatic prejudice can assert that the canonical writings have an exclusive claim to apostolic origin and thus to historical priority. (p. xxx)

- So here, again, is the scholarly, seed form of DVC's ultimate point: "Christianity needs a new story because the old one was bad history in which the suppressed losers were denied a hearing. Injustice needs correcting" (Bock, p. 131). The ancient Church is painted as a liar. The master-story is wrong, outdated, and needs to be replaced.
- BUT AGAIN!!! The best evidence for the master-story/orthodox/ancient/Apostolic view of things doesn't come from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It comes from the 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>...by people in the debate at the time. IN OTHER WORDS, we should examine what the people in the actual debate said at the time and in their own contexts, rather than beginning at a point after them and ignoring them.
- There was REAL DEBATE about the nature of Christianity that flourished in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. Nor can it be denied that the four Gospels had risen to the top of the heap well before Nicea in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.
- Contrary to King and Koester, **Martin Hengel (Tubingen, Germany)** defends the thought that the title "Gospel" was affixed to the four NT Gospels and occurred with such consistency that they were firmly entrenched in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. In other words, the titles were not given as a response to Gnostic titles as Koester suggests (p. 133).

Let those who deny the great age and therefore basically the originality of the Gospel superscriptions in order to preserve their "good" critical conscience, give a better explanation of the completely unanimous and relatively early attestation of these titles, their origin and the names of the authors associated with them, Such an explanation has yet to be given, and it never will be... The four-gospel collection did not result from the attempt to defend the "apostolic" Jewish tradition against His [Marcion's] radical attack. It was the other way around.

#### *What to Make of the New Gospel Finds*

- Note well that we can make a solid case without even turning to the New Testament (since these were considered "tainted," that may be best). The case can be made very well by looking at the texts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries which carried the ancient debate.
- The irony is that today privilege is given to the "new" texts when privilege of the old texts is the crime the Church is alleged to have perpetrated.
- In the ancient debate, both sides agree that both views cannot be representative of the roots of the Christian faith. They are too different.

#### *So What About Mary and the Leadership of Women?*

- Note what **King** argues regarding the suppression of women as quoted on page 136:

The apostles were considered to be the guarantors of the true teaching of the church, and male bishops continued to be their sole legitimate successors. This male model of discipleship also provided (and continues to provide) a rationale for the exclusion of women from leadership roles, ignoring the presence of women disciples though Jesus' ministry, at the Crucifixion, and as the first witnesses to the resurrection. (p. 167)
- o Affirmation of Women in the Biblical Material
  - Tremendous respect for women and their role is given in the New Testament (although it doesn't extend as far as the new school would like). In fact the treatment of women by Jesus and the Church is revolutionary. It seems if the Church wanted to suppress women, they would have omitted all references to women serving the Church as prophets (**Acts 21:9; Luke 2:36-38**) and as bearers of the news of the resurrection (see also **Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-42; Acts 18:26; 1 Timothy 3:11**).
  - So, the New Testament affirms, not suppresses, women. The question is how far they go. The culture of the 1<sup>st</sup> century did not regard women as reliable witnesses, but Jesus did (see resurrection accounts where they were the first to see Him) as all four Gospels attest. Incidentally, this fact gives more credence to the claims of the Gospels regarding the

resurrection. If they had been trying to elevate Jesus' deity by making up the resurrection, they would not have used the testimony of women because it would not have been believed in that culture.

- Biblical Evidence of Limitations on Women
  - Jesus chose 12 men, no women. This is important because the 12 were not inventions of the later Church. They would have likely removed Judas in order to correct the “problem” of his inclusion by Jesus.
  - Also, in **Acts 1:15-26**, in choosing Matthias as a replacement for Judas there seem to have been three requirements: 1) male, 2) be with Jesus from the beginning, 3) witness to the resurrection of Christ. These predate Nicea by 250 years.
- General Conclusions on the Role of Women in the Bible
  - Jesus and the Church affirmed women and their role in cultural ways.
  - But they didn't go as far as people would like today. Jesus was not a “feminist” as those who impose a 21<sup>st</sup> century idea on the ancient texts would have you believe (cf **1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-36; 1 Timothy 2:11-15**)
- What About the Charge of Suppression by the Church?
  - Again, the first mention of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute came some 250 years after Nicea in AD 591 by Pope Gregory.
  - Not only that, the Eastern Orthodox Church NEVER accepted the Western Church's view of Mary. If this was some grand conspiracy to suppress, it would have to go back to the very beginning...before there was an Eastern and Western Church. We can't even see it in AD 325 at Nicea and we don't see it in half of Christianity.
  - Further, this seems to go against the veneration of Mary that developed in the Church.

#### *But What of the Non-Biblical Evidence Regarding Mary Magdalene?*

- **Ann Graham Brock** argued that **Hippolytus' phrase “apostles to the apostles”** should be the singular “**apostle to the apostles.**” This is the basis for her claim that Mary was the lead Apostle. We have already noted, however, that this is an erroneous translation of Hippolytus which goes back to the Middle-Ages (10<sup>th</sup> century) and is not reflective of what Hippolytus said.

- Mary as apostle in Hippolytus (Church Father)
  - Not plural. It's a reference to women and the Church as a whole.
  - Mary was not alone at the tomb or in her travels.
  - “apostle” is not used in the technical sense of the 12 but in it's more normal usage as commissioned messenger.
  - In this sense, we're all apostles, for we've all been commissioned to share the news of Jesus' resurrection.
- Mary in the *Gospel of Mary*
  - In relation to the *Gospel of Mary* text quoted previously regarding Mary's dispute with Peter. Did some want to rank Peter under Mary?
  - It has been well understood that the Gnostic texts are more symbolic than historical in what they ascribe (reflecting their understanding of secret knowledge). The problem pictured here symbolically seems to be Peter representing orthodoxy attempting to supplant Mary representing new revelation. So, this text is probably a picture of the struggle for authority and access to revelation, and not a struggle about gender (p. 147).

We have noted that these extrabiblical texts are more symbolic than historical. Karen King says of the *Gospel of Philip* and its famous kiss passage, “*The Gospel of Philip* again offers literal images – kissing and jealousy – in order to interpret them spiritually” (p. 146). I agree with her analysis here and extend it to the *Gospel of Mary*, as this is characteristic of these mystery texts. The conflict portrayed between Peter and Mary pictures the conflict in the early church. Peter, who represented the forces of orthodoxy, refused to accept that God could work with another group, apart from him (that is, the believers who accepted secret knowledge). Mary in her role as

the “underdog” female represented those who accepted secret knowledge...What is important to understand about this reading of the *Gospel of Mary* is that the story is not about Peter and Mary at all or about gender roles. They symbolize the dispute over revelation. This reading confirms our earlier breaking of the code about the secret gospels. It confirms that the real fight was about who receives revelation from God and who can speak to what Christianity is. Modern readers, seekers after a new code and story, have reversed the imagery and turned the text into one about gender wars.

*Mary Magdalene and Gender Roles in the Early Church*

- Again, the position of women was elevated in relation to the culture of the day. Women were given roles and responsibilities that they never would have been given in the culture, although this elevation didn't reach the heights that those today would have liked.

*Mega-Code - (p. 149).*

The Da Vinci Code is not a mere work of fiction dressed in the clothes of quasi nonfiction. It reflects an effort to represent and, in some cases, rewrite history with a selective use of ancient evidence that it ironically claims was the failing of the old story. It reflects an effort to redefine one of the key cultural forces standing at the base of Western Civilization, the Christian Faith. It claims to expose as fact something that is not there. Though there are a few points to be made and appreciated from such study, most of what lies at the base of this mega code lacks substantive historical support. In breaking The Da Vinci Code, we have discovered there is much more going on here than the creation of an entertaining novel – there is a revision of what Christianity was and is. It is virtual reality at work.

## **CODE 7: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

- Is there a great cover-up?
- Teabing (DVC p. 253-54) (p.151 Bock) says the foundational premise of *Holy Blood Holy Grail* was sound, listing it as source number 1 even over other primary historical sources.
- Foundational Claims of Da Vinci Code Lacking, as is every sub-claim made...(Bock, p. 152)

We have examined this claim and found it wanting historically at every key point. Mary Magdalene was not married to Jesus. Jesus was not married to anyone else. He had no children. Jesus was single in a manner that Jews of His time could appreciate Jesus, as a religious Jew, could be single.

The secret gospels do not tell us much new about the centuries just after Christ, other than to make clear that they contain a distinct theology from the Biblical books, to show that the church fathers who described their views did so accurately, and to let us hear them present their views in their own worlds. The secret gospels noted in the novel were a part of the contentious dispute among various Christian factions about who spoke best for Jesus and Christianity. These gospels, written after the four Gospels of the new Testament, claimed access to revelation from God independent of the writings that many in the church regarded as authoritative and as a reflection of the church's most historic tradition. The presence of such views fueled the formal recognition of the canon, a process completed in the fourth century.

The deity of Jesus was not a creation of a fourth-century vote or council but is based on the teaching of the four Gospels and other New Testament books. These four canonical Gospels are rooted in apostolic tradition, and they were firmly established as the defining texts of the Christian church by the end of the second century if not earlier.

Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute, but neither was that description part of an act of suppression. Mary was affirmed in her role as a witness to the Resurrection, a role that made her among the first to announce the Resurrection to the eleven remaining apostles. In a sense, she was "an apostle to the apostles." The dispute of the early Christian centuries was not primarily about gender or gender roles, but about theology, namely views about God, Jesus, salvation, spirituality, and revelation.

### *What Remains of the Da Vinci Code?*

- 2 claims that do stand up to scrutiny (believe it or not)...
  - o Women were elevated by what Jesus taught (although not to the level they would like)
  - o Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute
- So there is no basis for saying MM was the holy grail, or that a Merovingian line goes back to Jesus, that a Sion Priory has any reason to exist, or that there was any church cover up. You have to understand how few people *actually* believe this...especially "experts."

### *What of the Code Behind the Da Vinci Code?*

- What of the academic layer that surfaces under the Da Vinci Code? – The sources behind the novel?
- Not as sloppy and undisciplined as DVC, but still found lacking
- Christian faith has always claimed to be rooted in history
  - o That's why we had this discussion...because history IS important to a faith that is rooted in history. It is falsifiable.
- With the DVC, the discussion of these historical facts moved from the ivory tower of academia to the water cooler.

## **CODE 8: WHO IS JESUS AND WHAT CAN MM TELL US ABOUT HIM?**

*Core Issues of life are about more than facts*

- Life is a mystery we don't know how long it will last or where we'll end up... or the twists and turns along the way. Thinking back to formative events that have shaped us.
- Life is a treasure- newborns – but it's also perplexing – death

*The Divine Jesus Code*

- MM was witness to the greatest event *sine qua non* in human history – Jesus' Resurrection.
- Jesus uniquely stands and reveal at the center of what God did and does for humanity.
- The death and resurrection is the focal point – the breakout event
- What does resurrection mean?
  - o It means that life and death collided, and life won.
  - o It means that when we struggle to come to grips with this perplexing life, there is one who struggles with us because He overcame.
  - o It means that through Him, we can experience what we were meant to experience – fullness of life in Him.
- Why do we need God?
  - o Sin (p, 163) – all of us
- God's Solution
  - o The Cross (p. 164-65)
- Our response
  - o Faith (p. 165-66)

*Ours and MM's Stories Unite (p. 166-67)*