

Dialog with The da Vinci Code: Jesus & the Magdalene by Ken Wilson

Fundamental question raised by Dan Brown: What is the relationship of Jesus in the NT gospels to women? Thesis: NT gospels have the effect of undermining, subverting, overturning, age old problem of men dominating women.

Fact: ancient world treated women as an inferior rank of human.

Fact: the lot of women in world at large is still marked by awful oppression.

God is willing to associate with us in our current state and work to transform us. Same is true of human cultures.

Tendency to uphold women as either virgins or whores. Unease with female sexuality. (Contrasting view in Song of Songs, from Hebrew Bible)

Two most important women in gospels were Mary, mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene, the disciple of Jesus. Sometime after NT era, reputations of both these women were embellished toward the classic ancient extremes.

NT MOTHER MARY: virgin at time of Jesus birth, but went on to have other children by normal means, per Mk. 3:31 (NT urges married couples not to abstain from sex, except for a season) Mary viewed as "Blessed among women."

MOTHER MARY in later Catholic tradition: viewed as "ever virgin"---never had sex. Probably an influence of this "unease with female sexuality" in culture. Blessed among women becomes "Queen of Heaven"

NT MARY MAGDALENE: A disciple of Jesus who provided for other disciples out of her means; freed from demonic oppression, but many people were, no indication her oppression led to prostitution.

MARY MAGDALENE in later Catholic & Protestant tradition: Pope Gregory I, 6th Century, inaccurately labeled her a (former) prostitute. (Honest mistake or....prominent woman in gospels with a leading role, which threatened male-only hierarchy of church, by that time, strongly patriarchal, so this was convenient?) Reversed in 1969.

The church has been influenced by society's view of women. Why would we expect it to be otherwise?

Individuals cannot change too much too fast.

Cultures cannot change too much too fast.

Jesus had a different method for transforming people and societies: *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the*

largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." (Mt. 13: 31-32)

Yes, Jesus picked 12 apostles, all men. But no record of him saying, "I picked them because they were men and don't ever pick any women as leaders--and that applies until I return in glory."

He worked subversively to overturn the age old oppression of women and Mary Magdalene was part of that subversive work.

Mary Magdalene, has been called, "the apostle to the apostles" by early church writers....because she is the primary witness to the resurrection: *John 20: 10-18*

Luke adds this detail about how the male disciples responded to Mary's report: *"And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them."* (Luke 24:11)

The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, ends like this: "Simon Peter said to them, 'Mary should leave us, for females are not worthy of life' Jesus said, 'Look, I shall guide her to make her male, so that she too may become living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter kingdom's heaven.'" (Gospel of Philip: 114)

From a NT gospel perspective it's a moot point because Jesus and the Magdalene were closer than lovers.

Mark 3: 20-21; 31-34

+ Why wasn't this suppressed?

+ Disciples have closer relationship with him than any familial bond.

There is an intimacy closer than sexual intimacy and it's an intimacy with God that Jesus offers to all are willing to be his disciples.

The Shaping of a Life, by Phyllis Tickle p. 179.

"I am in the father and you in me and I in you" (Jn. 14: 20)

Whether Jesus kissed Mary or not is irrelevant. The fact is, by bringing her into the circle of disciples he brought her into that place that allows a relationship closer than lovers. And this circle is open to us.

For Further Study:

The Gnostic Gospels of Jesus, by Marvin Meyer

Women in the Ministry of Jesus by Ben Witherington III

The Shaping of a Life, by Phyllis Tickle

