

# SCHOLAR'S CORNER

***The Da Vinci Code* quotes an ancient book, *The Gospel of Mary*, that says Mary Magdalene was especially close to Jesus, even physically intimate. Does this mean the New Testament Gospels and the whole Christian religion have hidden the idea of Jesus having been sexually active?**

*The Gospel of Mary* does present a different picture of Mary Magdalene's and Jesus' relationship, but that picture is not necessarily more historical than that of the canonical Gospels. Just because something is written in an ancient book does not mean that it really happened. After all, there are many gospels that contradict each other and cannot all be correct. The conclusion must be that many people made up stories about Jesus.

For instance, *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (one of the Gnostic books found at Nag Hammadi) says that Jesus escaped crucifixion, with Simon of Cyrene being crucified in his place: "I did not succumb to them as they had planned. But I was not afflicted at all. Those who were there punished me. And I did not die in reality but in appearance....! suffered according to their sight and thought...For my death which they think happened, (happened) to them in their error and blindness, since

they nailed their man unto their death....It was another...who drank the gall and vinegar, it was not I...it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder....But I was rejoicing in the height....And I was laughing at their ignorance."

Interestingly, this is the account also in the Qur'ān: "They said, 'We killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God.' But they did not kill him nor crucify him, for only a likeness of him was shown to them....It is certain they did not kill him. No, God raised him up to Himself." (Qur'ān 4:157-158).

Non-Muslim scholars conjecture that Muhammad met and discussed religion with Gnostic Christians for this story to end up in the Qur'ān.

Obviously, Jesus cannot both have been crucified and resurrected (as in the canonical Gospels) and not crucified but raised to heaven without dying (as in this Gnostic book and in other Gnostic literature).

I realize I've been using the word "Gnostic" as if everyone knows what Gnostic Christianity was. Briefly, Gnostic Christians believed they were the superior, "spiritual" Christians who knew the secret "inner" Christianity that Jesus did not reveal publicly or even to all his disciples, but only to a select few (for example, Thomas and Mary Magdalene). Gnostic Christians believe the canonical gospels contain the public teaching, but the Gnostic gospels give the secret teachings of Jesus.

These secret teachings, they believe, include: the structure of spiritual realm; how it happened that the physical universe got created in the first place by an emanation of God who wrongly thinks he is the highest god and how it happened that "sparks" or "shards" of divinity got trapped in matter and especially in human beings. Some Gnostic Christians said only they had a "spark of the divine" and were therefore one with God and part of God and were

God. In Gnostic Christianity, Jesus is the revealer of the truth of our divinity and not the Savior from sin. The problem with mankind is not sin but ignorance of its divine nature.

The fact is that many people made up stories about Jesus that fit their theology. Gnostic Christians had their gospels that presented the Gnostic Jesus. *The Gospel of Mary* is one of those.

Stories about Jesus have to be evaluated for historical plausibility and the theological perspective of each gospel considered. Just because something is said in an ancient book doesn't mean it is correct.

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