

# NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE

By Rev. Will Nelken

*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, May 14, 2006*

---

According to *USA Today*, “*The Da Vinci Code’s* popularity shows that ‘readers are clamoring for books which combine historical fact with a contemporary story line,’ says Carol Fitzgerald, president of *Bookreporter.com*... ‘They say, “I like being able to learn something as well as read a story”.’”

Does Brown include historical fact, or simply masquerade fiction as fact? Actually, he reinvents well-known and oft-refuted esoteric religious fables as though they were not the historically discredited theories that they are. He presents them as mainstream truths long-conspired to be hidden from the masses by a politico-religious power-grab.

In every generation, there seems to be enough general distrust in governments and leadership to give credence to theories of power-hungry conspirators. It’s a smoldering ember of mass paranoia that needs only a whisper to be fanned into flame.

Exposing Brown’s subterfuge, Sandra Meisel notes, “Blasphemy is delivered in a soft voice with a knowing chuckle: ‘[E]very faith in the world is based on fabrication.’”

These are a few of the reasons that the Church must respond to this book. It asserts a fact base that is unsupported, and attacks the established Christian faith at every turn. Fiction is presented as fact until the meaning of the word is lost. Truth is exchanged for “truthiness” — a truth-like fabrication.

Yesterday’s *Marin Independent Journal* reported: “British Justice Peter Smith, who recently backed Brown against plagiarism charges, summed up the situation:

‘Merely because an author describes matters as being factually correct does not mean that they are factually correct. It is a way of blending fact and fiction together to create that well known model “faction.”’

‘The lure of apparent genuineness makes the books and the films more receptive to the readers/audiences. The danger of course is that the faction is all that large parts of the audiences read, and they accept it as truth.’”

Isaiah issued a warning that applies here:  
*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;  
Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness;  
Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!*

## **Who Was Mary Magdalene?**

Brown suggests she was the wife of Jesus of Nazareth, who mothered His daughter, Sarah, and the intended Chief Apostle and Head of the Church. These are not new ideas, though they do not come from the New Testament and are unsupported by recognized histories.

Here is what we can say with certainty about Mary Magdalene. Her name was actually Miriam, after the Jewish prophetess and sister of Moses. Magdalene was not her last name but a reference to her hometown, Magdala — a tiny fishing village on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee — an area evangelized by Jesus. Magdalene means “from Magdala,” just as Nazarene (referring to Jesus) means “from Nazareth.”

Miriam was one of Jesus’ disciples and traveled with Him. The first mention of her is by Luke (8:1-3) who tells of her deliverance from demonic powers. She is not mentioned in the other three gospels before the last week of Jesus’ life. In the Early Middle Ages a rumor first linked her with the prostitute mentioned in Luke 7, who

anointed Jesus' feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee. However, it was necessary and appropriate in a culture of oral storytelling to name significant persons upon their first mention, and Miriam is not named until Luke 8.

The next time we hear of her is during the last week of Jesus' life. She and several other women accompanied Him to Jerusalem's Passover celebration. She is mentioned again at the scene of the crucifixion, watching from a distance. She also observed where Jesus was buried and returned to the tomb early Sunday morning, not expecting to see Him alive but intending to embalm His body. She was the first to meet Him after His resurrection and the first to carry the message that He was alive to the other disciples. And that is the last we learn of her from the New Testament.

## Was Jesus Married to Mary Magdalene?

*The Da Vinci Code* offers another story:

"These are photocopies of the Nag Hammadi and Dead Sea scrolls, which I mentioned earlier,' Teabing said. 'The earliest Christian records. Troublingly, they do not match up with the gospels in the Bible.' Flipping toward the middle of the book, Teabing pointed to a passage. 'The Gospel of Philip is always a good place to start.'

"Sophie read the passage:

*"And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to Him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?'"*

"The words surprised Sophie, and yet they hardly seemed conclusive. 'It says nothing of marriage.'

"*Au contraire.*' Teabing smiled, pointing to the first line. 'As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant *spouse*.'

"Langdon [a Harvard University professor] concurred with a nod."

This passage is fraught with error. The text of Gospel of Philip has many gaps, actually reading: "*And the companion of the...Mary Magdalene...her more than...the disciples...kiss her...on her...*" (Gospel of Philip 63:32-36). Brown has filled in those gaps just as he wished.

Author Dan Brown makes reference to the Nag Hammadi manuscripts and the Dead Sea Scrolls as "the earliest Christian records." However, the Dead Sea Scrolls are all Jewish documents; they are not Christian, and haven't a single reference to Jesus. The Nag Hammadi manuscripts were not scrolls, but papyri, from the Gnostics (an early Christian cult) of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The *Gospel of Philip*, which he quoted, was composed no earlier than 350 A.D. (200 years after the New Testament gospels).

"Companion" did mean spouse in Aramaic, but the Nag Hammadi manuscripts were not written in Aramaic, but in Coptic (an Egyptian language). "Companion" comes from a word borrowed by the Coptic from the Greek (*koinonos*), meaning *joint owner, partner, colleague, accomplice, companion*. The word for wife or spouse is not *koinonos*, but *gyne*.

Dan Brown also refers (page 247) to the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* as supportive of their marriage, however, that document roots Mary's special knowledge in a post-resurrection vision, not a marriage relationship during Jesus' lifetime.

Based on the bare suggestion of only two verses in only two obscure documents dismissed for thousands of years, a counter-doctrine has been offered. *The Da Vinci Code* argues from silence. One cannot affirm whatever he wants simply because the text doesn't deny it. In the New Testament gospels, Jesus is always portrayed as single. Various members of Jesus' family are mentioned — brothers and sisters — but there is no mention of a wife or marriage, in any of the gospels or any of the apostolic letters. What's more, Paul (1 Corin-

thians 7) portrays singleness (celibacy) as a uniquely gifted condition for total devotion to the service of God, as seen also in the lives of various Old Testament prophets. This would fit the character of Jesus.

Paul also writes to the Corinthian believers, “*I promised you as a pure bride to one husband, Christ*” (2 Corinthians 11:2). The Christ, too, has but one spouse, one bride: the Church. And His marriage supper is yet to be served. Such an arrangement leaves no room for an earthly wife.

## **Role Of Women In Christianity**

Was Christianity, as presented in the New Testament, an attempt by men to gain control over women, as *The Da Vinci Code* suggests? The irony is that Jesus took women more seriously than his contemporaries. The rabbis generally held women to be inferior. A common saying in that day was: “It is better that the Torah be burned than be taught to women.” A familiar prayer of the rabbis began with these words: “Blessed art Thou, O God, who did not make me a woman.”

One group of especially devout rabbis took a vow never to touch nor even *look* on a woman. Consequently, if they noticed, out of the corner of their eye, a woman approaching, they would shut their eyes until she had passed from their line of sight. Not surprisingly, they often tripped and fell or ran into things. They were known as the “Bruised and Bleeding Rabbis.” They were willing to injure their bodies rather than “defile” themselves by looking on a woman. That was the world in which Jesus lived.

*Luke 8:1* Not long afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby cities and villages to announce the Good News concerning the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, <sup>2</sup> along with some women he had healed and from whom he had cast out evil spirits. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons;

<sup>3</sup> Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.

Jesus developed a community of women and men who traveled and studied and did ministry together. Do you realize how counter-cultural that was? His disciples were repeatedly surprised by the way Jesus would speak with and deal with women. This led to the formation of what pastor and author John Ortberg calls “a community of another kind.”

Here’s the revolutionary thought that Jesus inspired:

*Galatians 3:28* There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians—you are one in Christ Jesus.

This flies in the face of Brown’s favored *Gospel of Thomas*, the final verse of which (one that Brown conveniently omits to mention) portrays Peter sneering, “Let Mary go away from us, because women are not worthy of Life.” Jesus responds, “I myself shall lead her in order to make her male...For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” I think you’ll agree, if accepted, that document would reverse all that Jesus has achieved in elevating the status of women.

Brown asserts that Rome honored women more than men because they worshipped goddesses, but in actuality, widows were socially rejected as useless financial burdens, except by the Church.

Women were not allowed to give legal testimony in court; their word was worthless. This makes the New Testament gospel accounts of the resurrection of Christ all the more striking, for the testimony of His resurrection is based on the report of two women, who were the first to visit the tomb in which Jesus had been buried. If the evangelists had contrived to make their writings more believable, they would have put that report in the mouths of men instead. The fact that they did not suggests one thing: they were simply telling what happened.

## **Women Responded To Jesus**

The women mentioned with the disciples of Jesus in the New Testament were more than traveling companions, they were financial backers of Jesus’ ministry. They followed Him. They worshiped Him. They supported

Him. They ministered to Him and His entourage. Apart from John, the only followers mentioned at the scene of Jesus' crucifixion were women. Women returned to His tomb to embalm His body. And women were the first to carry the report of His resurrection.

Women respected Jesus, because He respected them. Many of the first church leaders were women, who were thanked, praised, and greeted by Paul in His letters.

Women have served as evangelists, missionaries, church planters, pastors and teachers throughout the Church's history.

Trinity Community Church was founded in 1937 by a woman who followed the call of God to Glad Tidings Bible Institute in San Francisco. After graduation, she moved to the North Bay to plant a church in San Rafael, beginning with a Bible study in her own apartment. When the group outgrew her apartment, they rented a store front on the west end of Fourth Street. The rest, as they say, is history.

Women have served us effectively over the years as teachers, evangelists, prayer and worship leaders, and several have distinguished themselves as deacons. This year, Linda Pierce received her Certificate of Ministry with the Assemblies of God. Jill Drohan has almost completed her studies for the same credential.

The Spirit of God pours out His gifts on "all flesh" — both "sons and daughters." God recognizes no disqualification by gender.

### **Seek The Truth**

What the book has done, and what the movie soon will do is bring to the surface the questions raised by such a battle between truth and error. That's where you come in. People standing around the water cooler will be attempting to hash out the divinity of Jesus Christ. If all the information they have to work with is *The Da Vinci Code* and their memory of what their grandmother said she believed, they won't have much of a chance. But if you are willing to stand with them and begin by prayerfully *listening* to their views and opinions and questions, a door of opportunity will swing wide open for the Holy Spirit to make Jesus Christ known *through you*.

You don't have to have all of the answers they need, nor all of the facts to counter the fiction they express. If you know the Lord yourself, you can testify to His divinity and His living presence. You can tell what the church has meant in your life and how the people here have not manipulated what you believed or how you behaved, but supported you in your quest to know Christ more and live by the leadership of His Spirit. You can tell them that your pastor has read the book and knows many details about the errors it presents. You can offer to give them sermon notes or a book or an article to read. Don't worry about convincing them of the truth; just keep them open to talking about it. Encourage them to really seek the truth.

I agree with Christian writer John Fisher, who concludes:

"Mr. Brown...has concerned himself more with building an entertaining story than with the truth, and he has done that by creating his own unique blend of fact, legend, and his imagination, bending them all to serve the story he created. You have to remind people where they found this book: in the fiction section.

"It's a good lesson for all of us about telling the truth all the time because if you blend any part of the truth with a story, it all becomes fiction, and no one knows how to separate the truth from the lie.

"Ironically, the tag line for the upcoming movie is exactly right: 'Seek the truth.' Anyone who seeks the truth in regard to this story will find out pretty quick that this isn't it."

*Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).*