

# *Cracks in the Code*

## A New Testament Scholar Muses on Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*

### I. **The Woman in His Life: Mary Magdalene—Jesus' "special" friend?**

"the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record. . . Moreover, Jesus as a married man makes infinitely more sense than our standard biblical view of Jesus as a bachelor. . . If Jesus were not married, at least one of the Bible's gospels would have mentioned it and offered some explanation for His unnatural state of bachelorhood." (*Code*, 245; cf. 244)

"Jesus was the original feminist. He intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene." (248)

"Behold the greatest cover-up in human history. . . Not only was Jesus Christ married, but He was a father. My dear, Mary Magdalene was the Holy Vessel. She was the chalice that bore the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ" (249)

"The Church, in order to defend itself against the Magdalene's power, perpetuated her image as a whore and buried evidence of Christ's marriage to her, thereby defusing any potential claims that Christ had a surviving bloodline and was a mortal prophet." (254)

#### 1. **Mary Magdalene's time has come.**

##### a. **She holds an honored place in the arts**

- Classical depictions
  1. Georges De La Tour's *The Penitent Magdalene*
  2. Titian's *Noli Me Tangere*
- Images in popular culture
  1. *Jesus Christ Superstar*: "I don't know how to love him."
  2. *The Last Temptation of Christ*: Jesus marries Mary Magdalene.

##### b. **She has become the focus of a number of "alternative" historians**

- Peter Gandy & Timothy Freke, *Jesus and the Lost Goddess: The Secret Teachings of the Original Christians* (Three Rivers, 2002)
- Lynn Picknett, *Mary Magdalene: Christianity's Hidden Goddess* (Carroll & Graf, 2003); Lynn Picknett & Clive Prince, *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ* (Touchstone, 1998).
- Margaret Starbird, *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalene and the Holy Grail* (Inner Traditions, 2002); *ibid.*, *The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine* (Bear & Co., 1998).
- Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh & Henry Lincoln, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (Dell, 1983).
- Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor* (Riverhead Books, 1993).

##### c. **Reputable scholars have recently shown keen interest in M-M traditions also.**

- Marvin Meyer of Chapman University: *The Gospel of Mary: The Secret Tradition of Mary Magdalene, the Companion of Jesus* (Harper San Francisco, 2004)
- Karen King of Harvard University: *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Polebridge, 2003)
- Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* (Continuum, 2002).

## 2. Mary Magdalene according to Dan Brown: wife of Jesus, chief of the apostles.

Riding this wave with abandon is Dan Brown who firmly believes that Jesus was married to MM, with whom he had a child whose blood line may have survived, if only barely, down to the present day. The relevant section in *Code* is found on pages 236-271, where we encounter the following claims:

- MM was of royal descent, of the tribe of Benjamin. (248)
- Jesus married MM with whom he had at least one child. (This unites the royal blood from 2 tribes, Benjamin and Judah.) (249)
- Jesus preferred MM to the other disciples, and instructed her as to how to establish the church. (248)
- MM was pregnant at Jesus' death and fled for safety to France where her daughter, Sarah, was born. (255)
- The church launched a smear campaign, depicting MM as a prostitute, to undermine her authority as chief apostle, and to suppress the truth that Jesus left behind a merely mortal bloodline.
- Jesus' bloodline survived and mingled with French royal blood, producing the Merovingians (a term appearing most recently in *The Matrix*).
- MM is the Holy Grail of ancient legend. (236-239, 243-246, 249)

What are we to make of these claims? What evidence lends support? Are there clues in the New Testament that Dan Brown is onto something? What do we know about MM from the earliest sources?

### a. Mary Magdalene is prominent in the New Testament.

MM is actually rather prominent in the Gospels. If, as Brown suggests, the church fathers set out to rewrite history—to edit the Gospels—in order to hide her significance, they did a poor job.

- First mention: Luke 8:1-3
  - Magdala: town located N. of Tiberias, on sea of Galilee
  - “from whom seven demons had gone out”
  - now among the women traveling with Jesus and providing financial support
- Crucifixion: Matt 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; John 19:25
  - followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem
  - used to minister (serve, support) Jesus
  - present at crucifixion (unlike male disciples who had fled: Matt 26:56)
  - listed *first* among the women in Matthew and Mark; listed last in John
- Burial: Mark 15:47
  - eyewitness, along with Mary of Joses, to the location of the burial
- Resurrection: Matt 28:1-10; [Mark 16:9-11]; John 20:1-2, 11-18
  - mentioned first among earliest visitors to the tomb, along with “the other Mary”
  - encountered an angel who told the women to report to Jesus “disciples”
  - met and “worshiped” Jesus who had them tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee
  - announced empty tomb to Peter and the “disciple whom Jesus loved”
  - speaks to two angels: “they have taken away my Lord. . .”
  - meets Jesus, calling him “rabbouni” (= teacher)
  - told by Jesus: “stop clinging to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. . .” (Jn 20:17)

On a historical note, the prominent role of women at the crucifixion, burial and resurrection is not something early Christians would have invented. The credibility of women in ancient patriarchal societies (whether Jewish or Roman) was minimal.

This NT inventory suggests that Mary Magdalene is indeed a significant, and perhaps under-appreciated, figure. Whether or not she was Jesus' *wife*, we can all agree that she was a faithful *disciple*. She did not flee when all the “real” disciples

did. She was the first to proclaim the resurrection. Mary Magdalene appears on the pages of the NT as one of the most significant women in Jesus' life. Precisely *how* significant is the interesting question.

**b. Mary Magdalene should be distinguished from other Gospel women.**

Unfortunately, when it comes to Mary Magdalene, confusion reigns, in popular imagination. Mary Magdalene and several other women have been conflated. It looks like she has been a victim of identity theft. Here's why.

First of all, with six or seven Marys in the Gospels, we should probably expect some confusion. These women include the mother of Jesus; the mother of James and Joses; the mother of John Mark; the mother of Rufus; Mary of Clopas; and Mary Magdalene. Most importantly, the NT does not identify Mary Magdalene with the sinful woman of Luke 7, the adulteress of John 8:1-11 or Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha) in John 11:1-46; 12:1-3. (See below.)

The first mention of Mary Magdalene is in Luke 8:1-3, immediately after the story in Luke 7 of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet (7:36-50). But Luke 8 introduces M-M *as if for the first time*, so the two women do *not* appear to be the same person.

Perhaps the main reason it is tempting to conflate several female NT figures is the similarity between 4 anointing episodes:

- Matt 26:6-13 & Mark 14:3-9: an unnamed woman with an alabaster jar anoints Jesus' head with ointment as he sat at table in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper. This act draws criticism from "some" (Mark) or from Jesus' "disciples" (Matt).
- Luke 7:36-50: an unnamed, sinful woman with an alabaster jar finds Jesus dining in the home of Simon the Pharisee, anoints his feet with her tears (wiping them with her hair) and with ointment. This draws criticism from Simon who condemns Jesus' unguarded association with a sinner. Jesus responds with a story and a challenge to Simon, and then tells the woman that her faith has saved her.
- John 12:1-8: as Jesus dines in Bethany, in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, Mary anoints Jesus' feet with costly ointment and wipes them with her hair. This draws criticism from Judas Iscariot, who (we are told) used to dip into the money box. (On this important family, see also Luke 10:38-42 and John 11:1-46).

	Dinner host	Description	Location	Woman
Matt 26	Simon	leper	Bethany (Judea)	not named
Mark 14	Simon	leper	Bethany (Judea)	not named
Luke 7	Simon	Pharisee	not stated (Galilee)	not named
John 12	Lazarus/Mary/Martha	close friends	Bethany (Judea)	Mary

Do these four episodes point back to a single event? Was Mary of Bethany (a town in Judea) known also as Magdalene (a town in Galilee)? It is easy to see why someone might conflate all figures into one.

The **anointing** theme itself is another good reason for confusion. Mary Magdalene is prominent in the Passion account. All four Gospels list her among those who first go to the tomb. And Mark 16:1 and Luke 24:1 say she (with others) brought spices to anoint Jesus' body. This Easter trip to anoint Jesus' dead body is sure to recall the earlier anointing (Matt 26:12; Mark 14:8; John 12:7) which Jesus described as

a preview of his burial. So this provides further incentive to identify (probably wrongly) the earlier woman as Mary Magdalene.

The confusion / conflation of two or three women, under the name of Mary Magdalene was popularized and legitimized by Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540 – 604) in a sermon preached on Sept 21, 591, summoning his people to repentance in the face of famine and war, and using this constructed Mary Magdalene as the ideal penitent. According to Dan Brown, however, Gregory's conflation was part of an ongoing, grand conspiracy to suppress the truth about her. Rather than conspiracy, however, this looks more like readerly inattention and confusion.

**c. Gnostic texts do not claim Mary Magdalene is Jesus' wife.**

So far we've observed that we've often been guilty of creating a composite Mary from various NT women. But what about Brown's claim that Mary was Jesus' wife? What is his evidence?

What about John 11:5 which says that Jesus *loved* Mary? Actually, what it *really* says is that Jesus "loved Martha, and her sister [Mary], and Lazarus." Remember, this is Mary of *Bethany*, not Mary of *Magdala*. Might we find hints in John 20:17, where Jesus tells Mary to stop clinging to him? Could this be the embrace of a wife for her beloved husband?

The best evidence Dan Brown provides comes in a book called the ***Gospel of Philip*** ("a good place to start," *Code*, p.246). What do we know about the *Gospel of Philip*?

- A single manuscript, in Coptic, survives, discovered in 1945. The document was probably manufactured in 1<sup>st</sup> half of 4<sup>th</sup> c.
- The original composition dates from between late 2<sup>nd</sup> c. (Schneemelcher I, 183) and 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 3<sup>rd</sup> century (Isenberg)
- The manuscript consists of a collection of excerpts from the teaching of Jesus, allegedly recorded by Philip, but betraying the influence of a 2<sup>nd</sup> century Gnostic named Valentinus (in Rome c. 138-158 C.E.).
- This "gospel" is certainly about Jesus, but the differences with the 4 Gospels are clear:
  - no narrative framework; any coherence is largely coincidental
  - depicts the human dilemma as sexual differentiation between male and female
  - contends that Christ came to reunite Adam and Eve
  - union with Christ takes place in a sacramental bridal chamber

Dan Brown points to two key passages in the *Gospel of Philip* to make his case:

**32** There were three (women) who kept company with the Lord at all times: Mary, his mother, <his> sister and **Magdalene, who is called his companion**. His sister and his mother and **his companion** were all called Mary.

Brown claims special insight into the word *companion*: "As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant *spouse*" (*Code*, 246).

But here we run into several problems:

- The text of GPhilip is in Coptic, from an original Greek.
  - § It looks like Brown gets the "spouse" idea from Picknett and Prince, *The Templar Revelation* (1998), p.65 who claim "the original Greek" meant *spouse* or *sexual partner*. Picknett, in her recent book, *Mary Magdalene* (2003), points in turn to Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene* (1993), who herself depends upon R. McL. Wilson, *The Gospel of Philip* (1962). Wilson, the first bonafide scholar in the chain, identifies the Greek original *koinōnos* behind the Coptic term. [On

- this chain of influence, see the helpful detective work of R. V. Huggins [<http://www.irr.org/da-vinci-code.html>, accessed April 12, 2004.]
- The Coptic here uses two terms (*tef-koinōnos* and *tef-hotre*) behind which would stand the Greek word *koinōnos*: companion, partner, sharer
    - § *Koinōnos* occurs 10x in the NT: Matt 23:30; Luke 5:10; 1 Cor 10:18, 20; 2 Cor 1:7; 8:23; Phm 17; Heb 10:33, 1 Pet 5:1; 2 Pet 1:4. It refers to a variety of partnerships and alliances (in mission, business, friendship), but not once to marriage or sex. Nor do we find such an entry in the standard Greek lexical.
    - § *TDNT* notes one passage in Malachi (LXX) that uses this term with reference to a marriage partnership. Other sorts of companionship/partnership are far more common and predictable.
    - § The text is depicting three Marys in three primary relationships to Jesus—mother, sister, companion—probably as an allegory of the Spirit or of Wisdom. (See R. Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 228-229; R. McL. Wilson.)

**55b** . . . And the companion [or Savior?] of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [... loved] her than all the disciples, and used to kiss her often on her [ . . . ]. The rest of the disciples **64** [...]. They said to him "Why do you love her more than all of us?" The Savior answered and said to them, "Why do I not love you like her? When a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. When the light comes, then he who sees will see the light, and he who is blind will remain in darkness."

- Here, as in several other Gnostic texts, Mary Magdalene enjoys a lofty status above the other disciples, both men and women. See also *Pistis Sophia* (e.g., 19, 54, 97, 132), *Gospel of Mary* 10:2-3; 18:14-15).
- Mary's role is substantial here, but there is little to suggest that the kissing here is sexual; the physical contact probably symbolizes, or causes, the transfer of spiritual power and insight from Jesus to Mary.
- Mary is prized by Jesus here not romantically or sexually but for her insight and wisdom, in contrast to his often dull, short-sighted male disciples.

This 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> century elevation of Mary Magdalene parallels the elevation of a number of other NT figures, part of a larger effort to fill in the gaps in the story and to answer the burning questions of many early disciples. Given Mary's personal encounter with the risen Jesus, she would be an obvious choice as a legendary spokesperson for gnostic types looking to recruit a saint as the source of extra revelations and hidden teachings of Jesus.

#### d. It is not at all clear that Jesus was married.

" . . . Jesus was a Jew, . . . and the social decorum during that time virtually forbid a Jewish man to be unmarried. . . . If Jesus were not married, at least one of the Bible's gospels would have mentioned it and offered some explanation for His unnatural state of bachelorhood." (*Code*, 245)

If the evidence that Mary Magdalene was Jesus' wife is slim, the evidence that Jesus was married to anyone at all isn't much better.

- Nowhere in the Gnostic Gospels does it clearly state Jesus was married.
- Celibacy was uncommon in Jesus' day, but by no means was it unheard of.
- OT Prophets like Jeremiah were called to celibacy during times of crisis in Israel (Jer 16:1-2).
- In Jesus' day, the Qumran Essenes ran a celibate community of Jewish monastics.
- The Apostle Paul commended celibacy (1 Cor.7:7) as a legitimate and even desirable status, in light of the times.

- In 1 Cor 9:1-6, Paul mentions the wives of the other apostles, of Jesus' brothers and of Cephas, but says nothing about Jesus' wife.

The silence of the Gospels proves neither marriage nor celibacy.

- for a brief, but helpful, essay see Darrell L. Bock, *Was Jesus Married?* on Beliefnet [[http://www.beliefnet.com/story/135/story\\_13520\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/135/story_13520_1.html)]

## II. The Gnostic Gospels: evidence of a lost, suppressed Christianity?

"Fortunately for historians," Teabing said, "some of the Gospels Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. In addition to telling the true Grail story, these documents speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms." (p. 234)

"Teabing located a huge book and pulled it toward him across the table. The leather-bound edition was poster-sized, like a huge atlas. The cover read: *The Gnostic Gospels*. . . . '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.'" (p. 245)

"The Gospel of Philip is always a good place to start." (p. 246)

"Sophie had not known a Gospel had existed in Magdalene's words." (p. 247)

"According to these unaltered gospels, it was not Peter to whom Christ gave directions with which to establish the Christian church. It was Mary Magdalene." (p. 248)

Dan Brown's character *Teabing* points us to a collection of lost gospels which, he contends, point behind our four Gospels to the *true, unaltered story*. What are these Gnostic Gospels? Whether or not Brown's hunches are right about Mary Magdalene, what can we learn about Jesus from these documents? Can we trust them to show us the real, historical Jesus?

Before we consider these extra gospels, we need to pause to note the numerous mistakes in these *Code* quotations:

- the first Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1948, not the 1950s
- the DSS have nothing whatsoever Christian in them; they are entirely pre-Christian Jewish texts; almost all scholars believe they are sectarian documents preserved and/or created by a Jewish monastic sect. They contain no mention of Jesus or John the Baptist.
- the Coptic manuscripts were not "scrolls" (rolled leather), they were books (codexes).
- thus, a book entitled *The Gnostic Gospels* would certainly not include the Dead Sea Scrolls, and only a small number of the 46 Nag Hammadi documents are "gospels."
- the Nag Hammadi documents date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The Gnostic Gospels themselves were likely composed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, a century or more later than the earliest Christian documents.

### 1. Christian conspiracy theories are big these days.

It has become popular recently to suggest that the church—especially the Roman Catholic Church—is guilty of conspiring to cover up dangerous truths about Jesus and his teachings. Conspiracy makes a great plot in novels, and also in film, as we see in two recent films, *Stigmata* and *Jesus of Montreal*.

- *Stigmata* (1999): the story of a newly discovered document that contains the actual writings of Jesus himself, in which he promises his presence everywhere, even in nature, which we're told means he is no more present in the institutional church than anywhere else. As the plot unfolds, the church violently opposes the release of this gospel.

This allegedly dangerous, authentic saying of Jesus is worded several ways in the film: "The Kingdom of God is inside/within you (and all about you), not in buildings/mansions of wood and stone. (When I am gone) Split a piece of wood and I am there, lift the/a stone and you will find me." As it turns out, these are variations of a saying in the most famous of the Gnostic Gospels: *Gospel of Thomas* 77b.

- *Jesus of Montreal* (1990): in this story, recent scholarship has revealed the truth about Mary's illicit union with a Roman soldier and Jesus' illegitimate birth. The Catholic Church, shot through with hypocrisy and double standards, cannot allow this truth to get out.

Dan Brown's appeal to this popular conspiracy theory—the claim that the book contains secret, dangerous knowledge—is, I believe, the principal reason for the book's success. Readers like to feel like they know something others don't. We like to gain access into secret chambers of hidden knowledge. But Dan Brown offers much more than a mere secret—he offers a conspiracy, a cover-up, secret knowledge that threatens to topple a huge, powerful institution (the R-C church). The story's mass appeal should be no surprise.

## 2. The Gnostic Gospels: background details

Dan Brown calls us to turn away from the NT Gospels to the so-called Gnostic Gospels for there, we are told, we will find the truth. What exactly are these Gnostic Gospels?

- little known until 1945
- jar discovered at Nag Hammadi, Egypt containing 12 leather-bound papyrus volumes
- books produced in 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 4<sup>th</sup> century
- were likely buried in a jar to preserve them, by monks from a monastery 3 miles away, founded by Saint Pachomius in the 4<sup>th</sup> century
  - Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, whose annual pastoral letter of 367 CE identified (our) 27 NT books, and rejected other "heretical" books
  - perhaps these monks liked these books and so hid, rather than destroy, them
- documents likely date from 2<sup>nd</sup> century
- written in Coptic, probably from Greek originals
- contents: 46 documents including: Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Truth, Secret Book of John
- other Christian Gnostic texts include the *Gospel of Mary* (discovered 1898)
- they were opposed by church fathers like Irenaeus (c. 180), Tertullian (c. 200)
- they are radically dualistic; ascetic; obscure; diverse; salvation through *gnosis*

The question that has puzzled Jesus scholars is this: do these texts provide independent witnesses to Jesus, or are they dependent for anything authentic, upon the NT Gospels?

Only one of these Gospels, the Gospel of Thomas, appears to have preserved substantial traditions going back to Jesus, though even here there is debate about whether even this text simply borrows from the NT Gospels.

- Christopher M. Tuckett, *Nag Hammadi and the Gospel Tradition* (1986) argues that the NHC are dependent upon the Synoptics, especially Matthew, though he grants GThomas as a possible exception
- Stephen Paterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (1992) argues that GThomas, like John, stands independent of the Synoptics

Why does Mary Magdalene figure prominently in several (not all) of these texts? It may be enough to say, with Raymond Brown, that the story of M-M seeing and touching Jesus in John 20 would have been enough to prompt early Gnostics to promote her to chief Gnostic and rival of Peter.

### 3. *The Gospel of Thomas: notes and excerpts*

If Brown does not appeal to the Gospel of Thomas, it may be because the work concludes, in saying 114, with a very non-feminist declaration of the superiority of the masculine.

- surviving manuscripts
  - Coptic (Sahidic) version found in 1945; dated to c. 350 C.E.
  - Greek fragments (among Oxyrhynchus Papyri 1, 654, 655, discovered early 20<sup>th</sup> c.) date to c. 200 CE
- contents: 114 secret sayings attributed to Jesus, recorded by Didymus Judas Thomas (Jesus' twin brother)
  - contains no narrative account (e.g., stories, activities, death, resurrection)
  - over ½ of the sayings find parallels in the Gospels (e.g., ##20, 34, 54), but literary dependence on canonical Gospels is disputed.
  - some sayings may go back to 1<sup>st</sup> c. & preserve authentic sayings not in the canonical Gospels
- theology: in its *final* form, GT presupposes Gnostic thought:
  - material / physical world is worthless; a container for divine spirits
  - salvation comes through knowledge (*gnosis*) of one's true spiritual identity
  - Jesus is the source of saving knowledge
  - salvation means the restoration / perfection / unification of all things
  - contains nothing about Israel's God, sin, repentance, Jesus' death, coming Kingdom on earth
  - assessment in the early church
  - rejected by Origen in 233 C.E. (followed by Jerome, Ambrose, the Venerable Bede, and probably Eusebius [260-341])
  - selected sayings ("Scholars' Translation" by Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer):

1 And he said, "Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death."

2 Jesus said, "Those who seek should not stop seeking until they find. When they find, they will be disturbed. When they are disturbed, they will marvel, and will reign over all. [And after they have reigned they will rest.]"

3 Jesus said, "If your leaders say to you, 'Look, the (Father's) kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is within you and it is outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty."

49 Jesus said, "Congratulations to those who are alone and chosen, for you will find the kingdom. For you have come from it, and you will return there again."

50 Jesus said, "If they say to you, 'Where have you come from?' say to them, 'We have come from the light, from the place where the light came into being by itself, established [itself], and appeared in their image.' If they say to you, 'Is it you?' say, 'We are its children, and we are the chosen of the living Father.' If they ask you, 'What is the evidence of your Father in you?' say to them, 'It is motion and rest.'"

77 Jesus said, "I am the light that is over all things. I am all: from me all came forth, and to me all attained. Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there."

114 Simon Peter said to them, "**Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life.**" Jesus said, "Look, **I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven.**"

### 3. *The Gospel of Mary: "Jesus was the original feminist" (Code, p.248)*

In addition to the *Gospel of Philip*, the other key text cited by Dan Brown to prove his thesis is the *Gospel of Mary*.

- survives in two fragmentary papyrus manuscripts: one Greek early 3<sup>rd</sup> c.; one Coptic early 5<sup>th</sup> c.
- acquired in Cairo, Egypt in 1896
- probable date: 2<sup>nd</sup> century
- contents: a dialogue between the risen Christ and his disciples, in which Jesus answers questions and teaches about matter and sin
- Mary evidently represents prophetic / Gnostic views opposed to official orthodoxy, here represented by Peter and Andrew
- Mary not only heard extra teachings of Jesus but sometimes Jesus even hid them from the others
- Several key texts might be thought to lend support to Brown's case:

**5:1** But they were grieved. They wept greatly, saying, How shall we go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel of the Kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare Him, how will they spare us? **2** Then **Mary** stood up, greeted them all, and said to her brethren, Do not weep and do not grieve nor be irresolute, for His grace will be entirely with you and will protect you. **3** But rather, let us praise His greatness, for He has prepared us and made us into Men. **4** When Mary said this, she turned their hearts to the Good, and they began to discuss the words of the Savior. **5 Peter said to Mary, Sister we know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of woman.** **6** Tell us the words of the Savior which you remember which you know, but we do not, nor have we heard them. **7 Mary** answered and said, **What is hidden from you I will proclaim to you.** **8** And she began to speak to them these words: I, she said, I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to Him, Lord I saw you today in a vision. He answered and said to me, **9** Blessed are you that you did not waver at the sight of Me. For where the mind is there is the treasure. **10** I said to Him, Lord, how does he who sees the vision see it, through the soul or through the spirit? **11** The Savior answered and said, He does not see through the soul nor through the spirit, but the mind that is between the two that is what sees the vision and it is [...]

**9:1** When **Mary** had said this, she fell silent, since it was to this point that the Savior had spoken with her. **2** But **Andrew** answered and said to the brethren, Say what you wish to say about what she has said. I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas. **3 Peter** answered and spoke concerning these same things. **4** He questioned them about the Savior: **Did He really speak privately with a woman and not openly to us?** Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did He prefer her to us? **5** Then **Mary** wept and said to Peter, My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I have thought this up myself in my heart, or that I am lying about the Savior? **6 Levi** answered and said to Peter, Peter you have always been hot tempered. **7** Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. **8** But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. **9** That is why **He loved her more than us.** Rather let us be ashamed and put on the perfect Man, and separate as He commanded us and preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said. **10** And when they heard this they began to go forth to proclaim and to preach.

My hunch is that some of these dialogues including Mary Magdalene do preserve genuine historical reminiscences. She was a well-known disciple of Jesus, and many would have sought her out to learn from her what she had learned from him. So Dan Brown is not entirely wrong. But it is one thing to reclaim a remarkable woman from the dust heap of history, and quite another to claim that these very opaque texts promote her to the status of goddess or queen or bride or chief apostle. The Gnostic Gospels open up a window on the wonderfully diverse, lively, raucous deliberations of those early Christian centuries, but they do not speak with one voice, they do not present a single, coherent, alternative system, and they do not state anywhere that Mary was involved romantically or sexually with Jesus. Anyone who wants to find order and to discover a single (scandalous) secret in all that early chaos and diversity will have to ignore or distort the evidence.