

Lost Gospel or Lost in Gnosticism? (Part Two) By Bob Waldrep

NEW CODE OR DA VINCI CODE

Fortunately for the reader, the authors claim to have decoded the story and determined the following:

- Aseneth is actually code for Mary Magdalene/Artemis
- Joseph is actually Jesus/Helios
- Pharaoh's Son is code for Germanicus, the adopted son of the Roman Emperor Tiberias
- The wedding of Joseph/Jesus/Helios to Aseneth/Mary Magdalene/Artemis in part establishes ritualistic sex as the means to worship God

Sound familiar? If so, it is possibly because you read *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown or perhaps saw the film adaptation. For much of what this book puts forward is just a regurgitation of Brown's book and others like it, upon which he drew information. In fact the authors state, "What the Vatican feared – and Dan Brown only suspected – has come true. There is now written evidence that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that they had children together."⁹

A major distinction between what Brown wrote and *The Lost Gospel* is that Brown claimed his book was a fictional account based on facts; *The Lost Gospel* is a book claiming to be fact but based in fiction. As Dr. Cargill notes:

"...as an archaeologist and a tenure-track professor at a major research university, I must recommend against this book. Just don't bother. Were it a Dan Brown-esque novel, positing a speculative interpretation about the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene utilizing a fanciful allegorical interpretation of a document written six centuries after Jesus came and went, I'd say buy it and have fun...But the problem with this book is that Mr. Jacobo-

vic believes what he's writing. He believes his interpretation is true. He *wants* it to be true. And that hovers somewhere between comical and scary."¹⁰

As an example of Cargill's conclusion, after acknowledging their awareness of *Joseph and Aseneth*, the two authors write, "As Biblical historical researchers, we knew that the few scholars who had examined the text had expressed bewilderment over its meaning".¹¹ Apparently, Jacobovic did not use his "Google-skills" to research this; otherwise, he and Wilson would have known the commonly held view by researchers is the story is about Joseph and Aseneth of Genesis. Then how did Jacobovic and Wilson come to their interpretation? They write, "Oddly enough, the discovery of the manuscripts meaning came through an epiphany, a sudden blast of insight."¹²

It gets even stranger when one considers where this so-called epiphany took place. It came as they stood before a statue of the Greek goddess Artemis while in Ephesus working on another project in 2008. Here is their account from the book:



Statue of Artemis viewed by Jacobovic and Wilson

"In Ephesus, Turkish authorities allowed us to get within an inch of the imposing statue of the goddess Artemis...we were able to notice details that visitors could not see from fifteen or twenty feet away. For example, we observed that her garment was covered with—bees. More than this, multiple protrusions cling to her chest. Some [scholars] identified them as breasts. They argued that since Artemis was a nourishing goddess, she must have had dozens of breasts...Standing before Artemis, it all came together for us. Suddenly the meaning of the protrusions became apparent – they were bee cocoons or, more accurately, queen bee cells. Our eyes now tracked to the top of the statue. There crowning her head was a tall tower."¹³

CAN YOU SEE BEES

Why are these bees and tower so important to the authors? In the *Joseph and Aseneth* story, Aseneth lived in a tower and there is a scene, during the angel's visit, in which "a thousand thousands of bees" with gold crowns "circled around and seized and clung to her from her feet to her head."¹⁴

This, Jacobovic and Wilson say caused their epiphany. "We looked at each other at the same time and immediately blurted out with the excitement of children: 'Could these be the bees and tower we have been puzzling over in our *Joseph and Aseneth* text?' Suddenly our text came into sharp focus. It began to make sense and the light began to dawn."¹⁵

And, what was that "light"? They continue, "Put simply, in order to convey the stature of – perhaps Mary the Magdalene – to his audience, the unknown author of

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our manuscript selected a dominant image of his culture, one that he could be sure his readers would readily understand.”¹⁶

Their description of the statue leads the reader to imagine a garment covered in thousands of bees as in the story, which clearly states she was covered from “feet to head.” However, one does not need to be inches away from the statue they viewed to realize their comparison is incorrect. For, although the Artemis statue is girded with a belt of alternating bees and flowers, it is not “covered with bees.” In fact there are very few bees on the garments.

Furthermore, it is interesting that, while they include photographs in the book, they do not have any depicting the bee-covered garment that created their epiphany. This is likely due to there being many more animals on the garment than bees (search for images of Artemis and you will find the bees on her garment are greatly outnumbered by animals, such as goats, deer, lions and bears), which would mean – based on their method of interpretation – Aseneth should have been covered in animals. Also, keep in mind that none of the bees on the statue are wearing golden crowns.

Considering the actual appearance of this statue, it is difficult to believe this is what caused their belief the story was “code” for Jesus and Mary Magdalene being married or that Mary was the dominant person, not Jesus. Rather, it appears they already had that notion in mind and were looking for a new way, something fresh and intriguing to present their belief. In other words, surely no one would come to such a conclusion unless trying to bend the evidence to support a previously held supposition.

For example, let’s say it is a widely accepted fact that wine was readily available in the days of Jesus. Let’s add that I have the wild idea that wine was actually “code” for carbonated beverage. Now assume that I am pondering this while walking the back roads of Judea and I trip over an old rusty can. Picking the can up for closer examination, I see that while the words on it are barely discernable I can faintly make out the Pepsi logo. “Aha,” I yell. “Here is proof they were drinking soft drinks in the days of Jesus.”

My assumption is they drank wine in Jesus day and wine is code for carbonated beverage.

Jesus lived in and walked about Judea. I found an old rusty Pepsi can in Judea; therefore, Jesus drank soft drinks. Sounds silly, doesn’t it? Does it sound any more silly or “comical,” as Dr. Cargill puts it, than the “eureka” moment described by Jacobovic and Wilson?

They say Aseneth was covered with bees in the story and the garments on the statue of Artemis are covered with bees. They further say, Artemis was a “dominant image” of the



Garment of Artemis Statue:
Note More Animals than Insects

culture of the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* (even though they readily admit no one knows who wrote the story or when it first appeared). Mary Magdalene was also a dominant figure in the culture of the Church; therefore, they conclude Aseneth is code for Artemis/Mary Magdalene. The jump from bees to Artemis to Mary Magdalene seems quite a leap indeed. However, it is a necessary leap in order to get them over their next hurdle and real purpose for the book – rewriting the story of Jesus. For, in their mind, if Mary Magdalene is represented by Artemis, what does that communicate about Jesus and his standing compared to that of Mary Magdalene?

DIFFERENT JESUS, DIFFERENT GOSPEL

Concerning Jesus, the writers speculate he may have been the son of a Jewish woman who was either in love with or raped by a Roman soldier.¹⁷ He became a Messianic figure who declared war on the high priest Caiaphas with the backing and protection of the Roman commander Sejanus.¹⁸ However, upon the death of Sejanus, Jesus no longer had the protection of Rome and was arrested and crucified. His disciples removed the body from the tomb in which Joseph of Arimathea had placed it and secreted it away to a different burial site.

In their rewrite of the biblical narrative,

Jesus comes across as little more than a minor player who failed in his task. As they affirm, “...as in *Joseph and Aseneth*, and in contrast with the canonical Gospels, it’s the bride, not Jesus, who is front and center.”¹⁹

This brings us back to Aseneth’s tower. Keeping in mind that Artemis was the Greek goddess of fertility, the authors make much ado about observing a tower on the head of the statue. Little wonder this is so important to them as they have determined Aseneth’s tower is “triple code” – as if “code” is not sufficient. It is reminiscent of young children on the playground trying to make a simple “dare” have even greater meaning by making it a “double-dog dare” or a “triple dog-dare.” Don’t worry; they explain the triple code, as follows:

“On the one hand, Aseneth’s dwelling on top of the tower is a clear metaphor for the temple. On another hand, there is clear sexual imagery here with her bed-chamber representing the Holy of Holies inside the temple. There is a third level, however, that would not have been lost on [the story’s] 1st or 2nd century readers...In halakhic [rabbinic law] terminology, heder [chamber] signifies the innermost part of the female genitals... Aseneth’s body is the temple containing the Holy of Holies. It is within that sacred space that redemption occurs, spiritually and physically...So Mary is truly the Magdalene: she is Tower, Temple, and Holy of Holies.”²⁰

In the author’s version of Christianity Mary Magdalene is the redeemer; she is the leader of the Church. As they clearly write, “Make no mistake about it: this is not simply about sexual liberation. It’s a different model of redemption. In this scenario, salvation is not brought about through Jesus’ death but through his life giving marriage, sexual relations, and offspring.”²¹ “According to this view, death is not conquered by Jesus resurrection, but by the new Eve’s sex life with the new Adam.”²²

Clearly, theirs is a different Jesus and a different gospel than presented in the Scriptures. Yet, incredibly and very tellingly, they write, “But our gospel survived and, though it tells a very different story from the canonical Gospels, it is not incompatible with them.”²³ It is telling, in that they rightly refer

to it as “our” gospel, for it is not the gospel of the first century Church. And, it is incredible in that they could write so many pages disputing the historical beliefs of the Church and then say it is compatible.

What they are really saying is the canonical Gospels are compatible if interpreted their way. Or as they put it, “*Joseph and Ase-neth* forces us to reassess enigmatic passages in the Gospel and understand them in a new way.”²⁴ Such is the basis for all that has been deemed heresy.

Since the Church first began to proclaim the gospel, there have been those who offered a “new way” to understand the gospel – a “new way” to see Jesus. Invariably such offers also include a “substitute” for Jesus. This stands in stark contrast to the words of Jesus who said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.”²⁵

While one certainly has the right to reject these words there is no way they can be reinterpreted to Jesus referring to Mary Magdalene or sacred sex. No, the message would have to be changed or removed altogether to come to such a conclusion. Jacobovic and Wilson stand in a long line of those who have previously attempted to make such a change.

CHRISTIANS MASQUERADE AS SCHOLARS

But as Dr. Cargill points out, “Absolutely no scholar will take this book seriously. It will not change Christianity. It will not change biblical scholarship.”²⁶

“Anticipating such a reaction, the authors try to address this in *The Lost Gospel*: “Of course there is room for legitimate debate concerning our research and conclusions. But

we know what happened in the past when scholars and journalists presented facts that did not support Pauline Christian dogma. Immediately those individuals who masquerade as disinterested scholars, while taking oaths to defend their churches and their theologies, [tried] to discredit the findings and the people who brought them to the world.”²⁷

The authors try to paint all opposition as being from Christians who are attempting to protect their own boundaries. That is why Dr. Cargill was chosen as the only opposing scholar quoted in this review. For, he certainly has no “Christian” agenda as he is a self-described agnostic and humanist, a believer in human evolution. Here is what he has to say on this point:

“Scholars won’t reject Mr. Jacobovic’s findings because of some “theological trauma” or a confessional, apologetic desire to preserve the Jesus described in the Bible. I’m an agnostic. I have no dog in the fight of whether Jesus was married or not. He could be married and have 4 kids like me and I wouldn’t care. The problem is not a theological one; it is one of scholarship, methodology, and the (mis)use of evidence. Scholars won’t reject Mr. Jacobovic’s claims because they want to defend Christianity, scholars will reject Mr. Jacobovic’s speculations because he engages in circular reasoning, lacks evidence, breaks any number of rules of textual criticism, and engages in what I’ve described in the past as ‘speculation wrapped in hearsay couched in conspiracy masquerading as science enconced in sensationalism slathered with misinformation’ – all of which is designed to sell books and get viewers to watch the

accompanying documentary in the weeks leading up to Christmas.”²⁸

It is little wonder that there is no shortage of such books as *The Lost Gospel* that are released every Christmas and Easter season when people are most likely to be thinking about and interested in Jesus and his message. And, like so many of their ilk, the authors realize there is money to be made off the person of Jesus during these seasons. As Christians we can begrudge their doing this, or we can recognize that the popularity of such books and documentaries provide us a wonderful opportunity to engage those in culture, who are drawn to such, with the story of the real Jesus – Immanuel – God with us!

Jesus loves you this I know, for the Bible tells me so!

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:16

Foot Notes (Part Two):

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| 9. <i>The Lost Gospel</i> , p. ix | 19. Ibid. p. 287 |
| 10. Ibid. Robert Cargill | 20. Ibid. p. 172 |
| 11. <i>The Lost Gospel</i> p. XI | 21. Ibid. p. 181 |
| 12. Ibid. p. XI | 22. Ibid. p. 191 |
| 13. Ibid. p. XII-XIII | 23. Ibid. p. 291 |
| 14. Ibid. p. 353 | 24. Ibid. p. 292 |
| 15. Ibid. p. XII | 25. John 14:6 |
| 16. Ibid. | 26. Ibid. Robert Cargill |
| 17. bid. p. 202-203 | 27. <i>The Lost Gospel</i> p. 304 |
| 18. Ibid. p. 261-275 | 28. bid. Robert Cargill |

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Could Americans' View of the Bible Be Cause for Interest in Alternate Views of Jesus?

- 19% - View the Bible as “just another book of teachings written by men” and “contains stories of advice” (it was 10% in 2011).
- 19% - Believe the Bible is the “actual or inspired Word of God” and read it “at least four times a week. This is the same as those who are skeptical of it.
- 79% - Believe the Bible is sacred (this was 86% in 2011).
- 40% of those who say their reading the Bible has decreased gave the reason as being “too busy with life’s responsibilities” (was 33% in 2011)
- 26% of those who say their Bible reading has increased said it was due to “having downloaded the Bible onto their smartphone or tablet.” Interestingly, another 11% said it was due to having watched The Bible miniseries that aired on History channel during the Easter season
- 56% - Say they come to the Bible to “connect with God” (this was 64% in 2011)
- 80% Believe values and morals are declining but only 26% believe it is due to a lack of Bible reading (a 6% decrease from 2013). 33% believe the decline is due to “movies, music, and TV” (a 4% increase from 2013).

Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction (Part Two) by Bob Waldrep

(On 11/03/03 ABC *Primetime*, with Elizabeth Vargas, investigated the "factual" claims of *The Da Vinci Code*—this is the second of a two part review of her findings.)

Vargas states: "We interviewed a number of scholars who specialize in medieval history and Grail mythology. The vast majority told us the Knights Templar had no particular connection to Mary Magdalene and there was no proof any Priory of Zion ever existed."

She is told by one of these, Umberto Eco, "The Holy Grail is born as a literary invention. The historical reality of the Holy Grail is the same as the reality of Pinocchio and Little Red Riding Hood."

Vargas' conclusion: "Our attempt to unravel the legends and stories in the south of France have been a strange detour. We found that there was no evidence of a child of Jesus and Mary Magdalene."

Some might think this entire program was a strange detour. However, the detour includes one final segment – a discussion of the Gnostic gospels or the Nag Hammadi texts as they are sometimes referred to after the location in Egypt where they were discovered.

The author of *The Da Vinci Code* tells Vargas these books, "essentially tell an alternative history to the time of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The Church made a very concerted effort to take these documents and destroy them throughout time. The question historians ask themselves is, if the Church is making such a concerted effort to destroy this information you have to assume that it was fairly explosive."

Why is it so important to Brown, and those who believe like him, that these Gnostic gospels be viewed as credible sources? Because they are the only documents that can be produced that will even remotely support any of the other theories they hold surrounding the Grail and Mary Magdalene. However, before accepting these as a reliable source, one must first completely dismiss or reinterpret the Biblical record.

It is for this reason that Brown uses the characters in *The Da Vinci Code* to alter the facts about how the Bible came into being, asserting it is a fabrication of a male dominated Church that sought to deify the man Jesus rather than follow his intent to place a woman in charge of the Church and worship the goddess.

Are these so-called Gnostic gospels credible? Vargas doesn't bother to address that question, perhaps because at this point they are desperate to find anything that will lend credibility to Brown's assertion his book is rooted in exhaustive and painstaking research and justify having allocated an hour of network programming to this venture.

Vargas' opening statement for this segment makes it clear she is working from the framework that these "gospels" are, in fact, valid:

"If you look at the Christian Bible it's clear there are large holes in the stories we have about the life of Jesus. The Church chose (her emphasis) the four

gospels that tell His story in the New Testament. But, there were other stories written about Jesus – other gospels – so controversial that the Church ordered them destroyed. And they were, except for one set of copies and it remained hidden in Egypt until about fifty years ago."

It seems she has bought into Brown's version, previously stated, "...if the Church is making such a concerted effort to destroy this information you have to assume that it was fairly explosive." The inference being that they must be true because the church tried to destroy them. This argument is widely appealed to by those who believe in the veracity of the Nag Hammadi texts.

On this point Christian scholar Douglas Groothuis has accurately noted, "Many sympathetic with Gnosticism make much of the notion that the Gnostic writings were suppressed by the early Christian church. But this assertion does not, in itself, provide support one way or the other for the truth or falsity of Gnostic doctrine. If truth is not a matter of majority vote, neither is it a matter of minority dissent." (*Christian Research Journal*, Winter 1991)

**"...there were stories written
about Jesus—other gospels—so
controversial that the Church
ordered them destroyed".**

Elizabeth Vargas , ABC Primetime

Though these documents were destroyed, that they existed certainly had not been swept under the rug. Irenaeus, an early Christian theologian and a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John, wrote *Against Heresies* to address some of the heresies of these Gnostic teachings.

As Groothuis points out, "Irenaeus went to great lengths to present the theologies of the various Gnostic schools in order to refute them biblically and logically. If suppression had been his concern, the book never would have been written as it was. Further, to argue cogently against the Gnostics, Irenaeus and the other anti-Gnostic apologists would presumably have had to be diligent to correctly represent their foes in order to avoid ridicule for misunderstanding them." (Ibid)

The existence of these documents is not in question. Even Christian scholars readily admit they are real documents that were found in Egypt and date back to the fourth or fifth century. What needs to be addressed is: Were they in circulation shortly after the time of Christ's death? Did those close to Jesus really write them? And most importantly, is the information they contain accurate?

Rather than address these questions, Vargas focuses on whether these Gnostic gospels affirm that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. Again, one must bear in mind that even if they do teach this, the issue of their credibility must be addressed.

However, laying that issue aside and simply addressing their teaching concerning Jesus and Mary

Magdalene, here are the statements given Vargas by Dr. Elaine Pagels, Princeton University and Dr. Karen King, Harvard Divinity School, both of whom have written in support of the Gnostic gospels and trust their reliability:

"And whether Jesus loves Mary in some kind of sexual way, is a possible implication of the story." (emphasis added)

King: "There is this, these tantalizing *hints*, but they are *not definitive*." (emphasis added)

Vargas tells the viewer that Pagels confirms the Gnostic gospels do, "tell us how Mary Magdalene was remembered and regarded by some early Christians."

Pagels then states on camera: "If I were *guessing*, and we are *guessing*, I would *guess* that there was a special relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. I would also *guess* that it did not take a sexual form." (emphasis added)

It is "possible", "hints" at, is "not definitive", a "guess". This is hardly the shocking evidence we were led to expect.

Seemingly unable to prove Jesus and Mary were married, Vargas moves on to another point telling the viewer that Pagels thinks, "there is evidence that Mary Magdalene was remembered as a powerful figure in the movement."

Vargas thinks she is now on to something stating that, "Even outside the Gnostic gospels there is evidence that in the first centuries after Jesus, Mary Magdalene was treated with great respect by several of the early church leaders who were men."

So after almost an hour of programming and no telling how many man hours of research and production, *Primetime* has concluded that while there may not be evidence that she was married to Jesus there is certainly evidence that she was a powerful or prominent figure in the movement.

This is hardly new and sensational information. In fact, most Christians would agree, it is supported by, both the Biblical record, and the writings of the early Church fathers. As Dr. Jeffrey Bingham of Dallas Theological Seminary states in his interview with Vargas, "You don't need to go to the Gnostic gospels in order to find a high view of Mary and a praise of her for her faith."

WHAT CONCLUSIONS DID VARGAS DRAW

"We didn't find any proof that Jesus ever had a wife or that he left behind a child when he died. Nor did we unlock the mysteries behind the Holy Grail. But we did learn a lot more about a man who changed history and the woman who was very important to him. Whether or not they were husband and wife, this is a love story because we discovered that Mary Magdalene was closer to Jesus than we ever imagined."

Actually, the viewer learned nothing new about Jesus. Other than being exposed to numerous theories and conjectures that were repeatedly admitted as having no basis in fact. Even their proponents failed to come up with any supporting evidence that can be substantiated. Had that not been the case, Vargas' closing statement would have been much different than the above.