

Is the Church Down on Women?
The Real Story of Mary Magdalene
Luke 8:1-3; John 20:10-18

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Two views about the movie, "The DaVinci Code" have been expressed by people involved with this project. Tom Hanks stated that people should calm down about the movie because it is just a good film based on a lot of "hooyey". On the other hand, the author, Dan Brown, claims that the book is historically accurate. The book is based on a secret organization called the Priory of Scion that exists to protect the secret that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. They had children whose descendents today are the royal bloodline of Europe. Brown believes in the conspiracy theory he presents.

I. Here are some examples of the historical inaccuracies in the book:

1. The "Priory of Scion" never existed. It is all a hoax!

Pierre Plantard, a shady character who had already spent time in jail for fraud, admitted under oath in a 1993 trial that he created this hoax by planting forged documents in libraries in France. Leonardo DaVinci and other historical figures were never a part of this secret society because it never existed. (Plantard, by the way, tried to claim he was the true heir to the throne of France by being the blood descendent of the royal line of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.)

2. Leonardo DaVinci's own notes tell us that John is the disciple seated next to Jesus, not Mary Magdalene. We do not base our faith on a picture painted hundreds of years after Christ anyway!

3. None of the so called "lost Gospels" that Dan Brown prefers ever mention that Jesus was married, much less married to Mary Magdalene. It would be difficult to find anyone before the 1950's when this hoax was created that believed Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. The Gnostic Gospels are also more negative towards women, not advocates of goddess worship.

4. One of the inaccuracies is in a figure he gives out about how many women were killed for being witches and pagans in the Middle Ages. Brown says 5 million were killed when most scholars believe it was no more than 50,000. That is a big difference. However, none should have died. We cannot justify everything that so called Christians have done in the name of Christ. But the record shows that many Christians spoke up against this practice.

II. Throughout the book Dan Brown implies that the church and our Bible are down on women. Is this true?

1. First let's look at the revolutionary way Jesus treated women:

- Women were prominent followers of Jesus. (Luke 8:1-3) This was radical in His day. But Jesus also gave time and compassion to women who were considered outcasts in their day because of their past: the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, etc.

- Women were the most faithful followers of Jesus. All the men but one deserted Him on the cross. But several women were there and were the first to come to his tomb on Sunday morning.
- Mary Magdalene was given the privilege of being the first witness to the Resurrection of Jesus.

2. The rest of the Bible holds women in high regard.

- Women were great leaders and heroes in the Old Testament. One past ruler of Israel was Deborah, who was appointed by God Himself to be Judge of Israel.
- Women were given prominent roles in the NT. On Pentecost Day, Joel's prophecy was fulfilled in which both sons and daughters prophesied. Philip's daughters were prophetesses. Priscilla and Aquila were a husband and wife Bible teaching team.
- One of the most revolutionary verses in the Bible which was shocking in the Roman World where wives were not allowed in public and could not even own property was **Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."**
- Perhaps one of the best ways to understand the Bible's view of women comes from a quote from Matthew Henry in the 1700's. He was commenting on the story in Genesis on how God created the first women from Adam's rib.

"A woman was not made out of man's head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him. But out of his side to be equal with him and under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be cherished."

3. Wherever the Gospel has gone, the lives of women have been bettered.

Dan Brown acts as if the worst enemy of women in all of time has been the existence of the Christian church. The evidence is the opposite.

If you visit any place in the world where there has not been a strong Christian presence, women are oppressed.

- I had a husband and wife team of doctors in my church in NC who were from Egypt. Prior to coming to the USA, they served a hospital in Saudi Arabia. She was chief of surgery but was not allowed to go outside without her husband. In Saudi Arabia, women can't shop alone, cannot have a driver's license, and have little respect.
- When I was in Africa, I found the plight of African women in non-Christian areas to be horrible. Among the Pokot, a tribe that is just receiving the Gospel, the wives are considered to be of less value than a man's cows. You can imagine how excited a Pokot woman gets when her husband becomes a Christian and is told he must love his wife the way that Christ loves us.

- In Communist China, because of population concerns, they have a law that says you can have only one child. In this culture that has had little exposure in the past to the Gospel, little baby girls are often left to die after birth. The father has absolute say whether the child lives and since he values only boys, the girls can be left outside to die of exposure. In homes that are affluent enough to have a sonogram to determine the sex of the baby, most often the girl babies are aborted.

III. The reason many believe that the Bible is down on women is because of the teaching about submission found in Paul and Peter's teachings. (Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3)

1. While the Bible teaches that men and women have equal standing before God, we still have different roles.

Logically this can be seen in the fact that only women can bear children.

2. The teaching about women submitting to their husbands is combined with the command to the husband to love his wife like Christ loves us and to treat a person's wife with honor and respect. (Ephesians 5:25, 1 Peter 3:7)

Most women have no problem letting their husbands be the leader in the home if he loves her like Christ loves the Church.

- When Dr. Alan Redpath was a teenager and still not a Christian, he heard his father apologize to his mother. "I'm sorry I spoke to you the way I did. I'm ashamed of myself." This act of humility convinced Redpath that the Christianity of his father was true.

3. The teaching about submission does not mean that the woman is unnecessary. The Bible teaches that "two become one," so you are only half of what you are meant to be without the wisdom and insight or your spouse.

Many couples have figured out which area the other is best at and worked out a great partnership.

- Albert Einstein was married for over 50 years. Someone asked him their secret. He replied, "We decided early on that I would make all the big decisions and she would make all the little decisions. We kept to that for 50 years. The strange thing is that in fifty years we have never faced one big decision."

4. Before women are told to submit in Ephesians 5:22, both husbands and wives are commanded to submit to each other in Ephesians 5:21. The Bible teaches mutual submission.

- A Christian leader in Taiwan was asked to comment on a preacher's sermon on wives being submissive. He added that he hoped everyone would obey their wives the way he had obeyed his. Before he became a committed Christian, he came home drunk one night. His wife smashed his bottle and

said, "You are a Christian so live like one!" He said that woke him up and he was glad from then that he did what she had asked of him.

IV. What does the Bible teach about Mary Magdalene?

1. She was not married to Christ, but she was one of his closest followers.
2. Mary had a shaky past because the Bible teaches that Jesus cast seven demons out of her.
3. Mary was there at the foot of the cross and saw all of Jesus' agony along side Mary the Mother of Jesus.
4. Mary was with the women who went early Sunday morning to the tomb to finish preparing Jesus body for burial. They had to cut short because the sun fell on the Sabbath before they were through.

I believe that Mary pictures the three greatest strengths that women bring to the Christian church:

1. Women have a great capacity for intimacy with Christ and generally have the strongest prayer lives.

This is one of those ingrained differences. Women talk more than men! They can share their hearts. Men are usually more action oriented. We jump at the chance to do a mission trip, we are there if there is service the Lord needs. But our prayer times are not as long and intimate as women. We are made different. A man can call someone his best friend and play golf and tell jokes and rarely share anything of depth with his friend. Women share their souls with their best friends.

If it weren't for women, people would not be prayed for the way they ought to be!

2. Women tend to be more faithful to Christ. Only one man stayed by Jesus as he died, but many women were at his feet. It was women who went back to the tomb on Sunday morning. Mary didn't want to leave the tomb till she found Jesus and when she found him alive, she grabbed him and didn't want to let him go. It was if she were saying, "I lost you once. I will never lose you again."

Many churches would have had to close their doors long ago if it weren't for the faithfulness and hard work of the women.

3. Women are often the best witnesses for Christ. Mary was the first to tell others Jesus was risen. Women need little urging to talk about those they love, just ask any college coed to talk about her boyfriend or any grandmother to talk about her grandchildren. Their love for Jesus erupts in the desire to tell others about Him.

I am not excusing us men by praising women. We ought to be challenged by women to pray more, to be more faithful, to be better witnesses. While women need the strength of convictions and other assets men bring to the church.

Conclusion to the series: One of the benefits from the fact that Christians have risen up all over the world to face the challenges of the DaVinci Code has been the realization that our faith can be defended.