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Response to "The Gospel of Mary"

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"After reading the recovered excerpts from the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, I was intrigued by several of the statements and ideas that the text presents. Even with my limited knowledge of New Testament writings, I still recognized significant discrepancies between the person and teachings of Jesus portrayed in this Gnostic gospel and the figure of Jesus described in the traditional canonical gospels."

Brief Essay



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Response to “The Gospel of Mary”

Katie Kreutter

After reading the recovered excerpts from the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, I was intrigued by several of the statements and ideas that the text presents. Even with my limited knowledge of New Testament writings, I still recognized significant discrepancies between the person and teachings of Jesus portrayed in this Gnostic gospel and the figure of Jesus described in the traditional canonical gospels.

The original manuscript for this gospel was not completely intact upon its discovery. As a result, a significant number of pages are missing, and, sadly, new insights and information reflecting second and third century life in the Middle East have been lost along with them. Despite its incomplete nature, there is still a considerable amount of thought-provoking concepts introduced within the Gospel of Mary.

The first half of this gospel describes Jesus' interaction with the apostles after his resurrection. The Great Commission present in the New Testament where Jesus issued the instruction to "go and make disciples of all the nations" by preaching the gospel is still present, but within a context of extremely different circumstances. Prior to issuing this statement, Jesus reveals the nature of sin to the apostles, stating that "There is no sin, but it is [people] who make sin when [they] do the things that are like the nature of adultery, which is called 'sin.'" I found this to be a rather fascinating concept. Throughout my lifetime, I have often wondered about the extent to which the story of the Original Sin in the Garden of Eden should be interpreted literally. I have questioned whether or not the concept of sin could still be valid without such a stringent definition. I have even heard that free will itself is Original Sin in that all humans have been endowed with the inherent capacity to make destructive decisions. Personally, I tend to view sin as that which separates a person from God, or harms the well being of an individual or others. It must be mentioned that I have no specific Biblical basis for this view, and it could easily be discredited as it is only my opinion. Nevertheless, Jesus' teaching on this subject in the Gospel of Mary seems to support this thought, in that Jesus defines sin as a label for the actions in which humans engage, rather than existing in and of itself.

The second half of this gospel could, arguably, be more controversial within traditional Christian circles. In this portion, Jesus has already left the apostles, and Mary Magdalene begins to share the details of a vision she has experienced in which Jesus revealed the way for the human soul to reach eternal rest by a process of ascension through the ruling powers of the world. Once this process has been completed, the gospel declares that the soul resides eternally in a perpetual state of silence. This view seems to contain many parallels to Eastern religions, especially Buddhism, where followers are encouraged to reach nirvana, the ultimate state of being after one's death where a person is freed from the continuous cycle of reincarnation. This revelation presented in the Gospel of Mary challenges traditional Christianity in many ways. Besides that it seems to imply there is no Heaven, the fact that Jesus kept this information hidden from the apostles and shared it only with Mary confronts the very nature of the predominantly male-dominated view points within Christianity.

As with all Biblical texts, it is imperative that this gospel be examined within its

historical and cultural context. It is important to note that Gnostic gospels contain the common theme of freeing oneself from the “material world.” Since they were written hundreds of years after the four canonical gospels, a need for increased scrutiny in determining their credibility could be warranted. However, my time as a student at Fisher has taught me that writing can contain many valid truths without being factual or historical.