

# Role of mary magdalene in da vinci code movie

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In 2006, a film adaptation of author Dan Brown's book, *The Da Vinci Code*, released in theatres around the world. The film was adapted from Brown's original work, but rather than have the albino monk look for a golden chalice as the Holy Grail, the secret of the Holy Grail lay within the relationship of Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene. Love, sex, and a royal bloodline are all parts of what is thought of to be the biggest secret of the Christian world, but could it be true? In order to fully understand who exactly Mary Magdalene was, one must first analyze historical Mary Magdalene, specifically her identity as a 'sinful' woman, Mary as a follower of Jesus, the first woman apostle and Cathartic legend, and Mary's controversial relationship with Jesus of Nazareth.

Current and available accounts surrounding the existence and role of Mary Magdalene come from the four Gospels in the New Testament and several apocryphal manuscripts that have been dated from the end of the First century to the turn of the Fourth century (Beavis, *From Holy Grail to The Gospel: Margaret Starbird and Mary Magdalene Scholarship*, pg. 237) She is said to be one of Jesus' most beloved followers and is known as one of the several women that followed Jesus even throughout his crucifixion and beyond (Mark 15: 40-41; Luke 23: 49, NRSV). However, there are many claims in which Mary's historical credibility is slowly being attacked and changed. Both the writers of Mark and Luke describe Mary Magdalene as the woman "from whom seven demons had been cast out," (Mark 16: 9 & Luke 8: 2-3, NRSV). She is also described to have been a "sinful woman" (Luke 7: 36-39, NRSV) and is often even associated with having been a 'prostitute' or sex worker of that time period. Additionally, claims of Mary being a prostitute

did not appear until around 591 CE, when Pope Gregory I made the statement that the unknown sinful woman in Luke's gospel, Mary, sister of Martha, and Mary Magdalene, were all one in the same (James Carroll, "Who Was Mary Magdalene," 2006: <http://www.smithsonian.com/history/who-was-mary-magdalene>).

However, scholars argue that it is nearly implausible for all the Mary's mentioned within the four Gospels to be the same person. Deidre Good, editor of *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother*, argues that one of the main reasons that there is so much confusion is because the name 'Mary' was the most common name in the First century. She says, "Herod the Great's wife was Mariana and so in honor of the wife of Herod the Great, many women in the First century took that name. A form of it is Miriam and a shorter form of it is Maria or Mary," (*The Secrets of Mary Magdalene*, Rob Fruchtman, Hidden Treasure Productions, 2006). Not only is there confusion created by the countless amounts of Mary's, but the stories of these Mary's overlap with stories of nameless women who are only identified by their 'sinful' nature. Dr. Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Professor of Theology at St. John's University, goes further to say that the woman who anoints Jesus in the house of the Pharisee (Luke 7: 36-50, NRSV) and the Mary Magdalene whom Jesus had drove out the seven demons (Mark 16: 9, NRSV) are, in fact, not the same person at all. He states that the exorcism of Mary Magdalene is, "inconsistent with the story of the woman who anoints Jesus in the house of the Pharisee, but there is the tendency to put all of these things together, and to suggest, that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. There is no evidence to that effect whatsoever,"

(The Secrets of Mary Magdalene, Rob Fruchtmann, Hidden Treasure Productions, 2006).

By the late 20th Century, the Roman Catholic Church had changed their views on the idea of Mary Magdalene being a prostitute, thus removing any language that affiliated her with such acts from Catholic doctrine (Terpstra & Haskins, " Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor," pg. 65). Recently, scholars have now regarded Mary Magdalene as being a rather wealthy women, who enjoyed the teachings of Jesus and supported him financially (Kent Grenville, " Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and the Sinful Woman of Luke 7: The Same Person?" 2010, pg. 15).

Much of what is known about Mary Magdalene comes after the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. In the three Synoptic Gospels, Mary Magdalene was one of several women who witnessed the crucifixion. However, in the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene is seen as one of the most important witness who actually stood at the foot of the cross during Jesus' death. In fact, the Gospel of John is the only Gospel that mentions Mary's interaction with Jesus after is resurrection in detail. The story goes as followed: Mary Magdalene arrives to the tomb to find that the stone had been rolled away (John 20: 1, NRSV). She then runs to find Peter and informs him of what she witnessed. Peter and several other of the disciples go to the tomb and find that, indeed, the stone had been rolled away and that the body of Jesus had been removed from the tomb. All that remained in the tomb were the various linens and cloths used to wrap the body in. Saddened at what they had witnessed, the disciples leave Mary and return to their homes (John 20: 3-10, NRSV). However, Mary

remains and begins to cry. As she is crying, two angels appear to her and ask her “ Woman, why are you weeping,” for which she responds that she is saddened because somebody has taken the body of Jesus. She then turns around and sees a man, who she believes to be the gardener. She then asks him if it is he who has taken Jesus’ body (John 20: 13-15, NRSV). After the man calls out her name, she recognizes that the man is Jesus and runs to him. Jesus then tells her to not embrace him, because he has not “ yet ascended to the Father,” (John 20: 17, NRSV). Mary then goes and announces what she has seen to the other disciples and tell them what Jesus told her (John 20: 18, NRSV).

This story puts Mary Magdalene in a privileged position as she can, in a way, be seen as the “ apostle to the apostles,” according to Dr. Jean-Pierre Ruiz, professor of Theology at St. John’s University (The Secrets of Mary Magdalene, Rob Fruchtman, Hidden Treasure Productions, 2006).

Interestingly enough, in verses 19-31, Jesus does end up getting divine power from God and then he breathed onto them the Holy Spirit. However, what is most interesting about this encounter with Jesus post-crucifixion is the fact that Mary Magdalene is nowhere to be mentioned. Dr. Elaine Pagels, Professor of Religion at Princeton University believes that “ the story, in a way, demonstrates the opposite of what some of us (scholars) wish it would. It demonstrates why Mary, although she was the first to see the risen Jesus, is not a disciple,” She further argues that it is because the Gospel of John that Mary Magdalene is not regarded as a disciple of Jesus or an apostle by orthodox communities. (The Secrets of Mary Magdalene, Rob Fruchtman, Hidden Treasure Productions, 2006).

In recent decades, scholars have begun to recognize that there is a clear pattern of gender inequality that has been embedded into the institutionalization of Christianity. Mary Magdalene is and has always been at the center of this controversy. According to Margaret Starbird, author, it was very possible that Mary Magdalene had equal, if not more, authority to teach and proclaim the the Gospel as Jesus' male disciples did. In fact, Jesus only appears to two of his disciples alone: once to Peter and once to Mary (Luke 24: 34; John 20: 16-18, NRSV). However, Starbird argues that while Peter had been given the " keys of the kingdom' (Matthew 16: 19, NRSV), Peter fails at often understanding the teachings of Jesus and is often criticized with not recognizing that Jesus' life was coming to a close end. Mary, on the other hand, had full comprehension of the teachings of Jesus and even accepted Jesus' fate on the cross through her act of anointing him (Matthew 26: 12, NRSV). Dr. Elaine Pagels suggests that there is a possibility of a rivalry in the early Church, between those who advocated for Peter and those who advocated for Mary considering that texts that have an emphasis on Peter downplay Mary's role, and those with an emphasis on Mary downplay Peter's role. This rivalry could also suggest that women during this time period could have held positions of leadership in the church in which men of the time period did not want women to have (The Secrets of Mary Magdalene, Rob Fruchtman, Hidden Treasure Productions, 2006). However, as Christianity began to grow, stories of Mary Magdalene became less prominent and were eventually declared as heretical. However, this did not stop the legends of Mary Magdalene to continue to grow.

In the 11th century, worship of Mary Magdalene became popular in various parts of Western Europe, specifically in the Southern region of France. Her followers grew into a cult-like Christian group who never had accepted her as a 'fallen' woman. According to Dr. Jane Schaberg, author of *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, Mary was pushed out of the Christian community and put on a boat, where she traveled to the South of France and settled there (*The Secrets of Mary Magdalene*, Rob Fruchtman, Hidden Treasure Productions, 2006). The legend of Mary Magdalene was also tied to a very religious group called the Cathars, who influence spread throughout Europe and the Middle East. They were also thought to be the keepers of the Holy Grail, in which they were trusted to keep safe (Beavis, *The Cathar Mary Magdalene and the Sacred Feminine: Pop Culture Legend vs. Medieval Doctrine*, 2012, pg. 422). They believed that Jesus was in fact a human made of flesh and blood, who was bestowed with a divine principle or energy, 'The Christ'. According to Starbird, the Cathars believed that 'The Christ' allowed Jesus, a human being, to perform miracles. After Jesus was crucified, 'The Christ' had fulfilled its mission and therefore left Jesus and ascended into Heaven. However, Jesus ends up surviving the crucifixion and then takes Mary Magdalene as a wife (Starbird, *Mary Magdalene: Bride in Exile*, 2005, pg. 107-109). However, before the last of the Cathars were written off as heretics, they managed to steal away what was once believed to be the secret of the Holy Grail, a chalice, but soon even that legend would come to change.

As the legend of the Holy Grail changed from a golden chalice, in which Jesus is said to have drunk from during the Last Supper, to Mary Magdalene

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herself, the connection to Cathartic belief was only further strengthened. In France, the legend grew to where Mary, who had secretly married Jesus, was now carrying the holiest of bloodlines within her womb (Beavis, *The Cathar Mary Magdalene and the Sacred Feminine: Pop Culture Legend vs. Medieval Doctrine*, 2012, pg. 422). The legend goes that from France, Mary sailed to Egypt and remained there for a while. She then sailed back to France with Lazarus, his sister Mary and Martha, and an Egyptian slave girl named Sarah (Starbird, *Mary Magdalene: Bride in Exile*, 2005, pg. 101-104). To many, Sarah is known as the daughter between Mary Magdalene and Jesus of Nazareth. It is said from Sarah, there came a line of French kings, whose lineage still Today, Sarah is regarded as a Saint and is often the patron saint of gypsy communities in France and throughout Western Europe.

While there is no evidence of the Holy Grail within biblical texts, the legend of the Holy Grail is a story that is found in medieval history, romantic 18th and 19th century literature and is the foundation of the book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln (Burstein, *Secrets of Mary Magdalene*, 2007, pg. 56). Then, in 1945, while digging in their home garden in Egypt, three brothers came across a six-foot tall jar. Within the jar were 13 leather bound papyrus books which are now known as the Gnostic Gospels. Scholars have theorized that these books might have been hidden in order to protect them from leaders of the Church, who had regarded these books as heretic. These Gnostic texts transformed Mary Magdalene into a very important role within early Christianity. In the Gnostic Gospels, Mary is given authority from Jesus that is unmatched by any other disciple (Starbird, *Mary Magdalene: Bride in Exile*, 2005, pg. 107-109).



Unfortunately, the discovery of these Gnostic texts did not cause a stir outside of the academic world. It wasn't until Dan Brown's controversial novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, in which Mary Magdalene is once again thrown into the spotlight.

In Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, Brown takes Gnostic texts such as the Gospel of Mary Magdalene and the Gospel of Philip and transforms them into historical texts. Both of these texts contain evidence in which they describe a relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus of Nazareth that could have been sexual (Burstein, *Secrets of Mary Magdalene*, 2007, pg. 73). In the novel, Brown's character Professor Langdon further makes the argument that given the time period, it would have been considered odd if Jesus, a rabbi and Jewish leader, was not married and did not have a family, as it would have been perfectly normal for him to do at the time (Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 2005, pg. 123). Furthermore, Dr. Elaine Pagels argues that perhaps Mary Magdalene is more than just Jesus' companion, but rather is a symbol for the Holy Spirit and represents the feminine side of divinity (*The Secrets of Mary Magdalene*, Rob Fruchtmann, Hidden Treasure Productions, 2006).

Throughout the course of history, Mary Magdalene has been used to fit various roles; sinner, prostitute, follower of Jesus, wife of Jesus, bearer of the Holy Grail, and apostle. Today, she is a symbol and role model of women's apostleship, especially within the Roman Catholic Church, where women are prohibited of priesthood. For women, she has become a symbol of feminist spirituality and sexuality which is often opposed by Christian groups. " It is

like having a photograph, in which one of the major images has been airbrushed out and now we're seeing that in fact, that image has been there from the beginning and we're recognizing that it belongs as part of the tradition we know," (Dr. Elaine Pagels, Professor of Religion, Princeton University, *The Secrets of Mary Magdalene*, Rob Fruchtmann, Hidden Treasure Productions, 2006). For Mary Magdalene, she has been recasted as a symbol of hope, striving to bring healing and new perspective to a patriarchal society. She was just like all us, a woman who had good days and some bad ones, but eventually she found the peace she was looking for. Regardless of how one sees the image of Mary Magdalene, she has always been what society has made her and needed her to be.