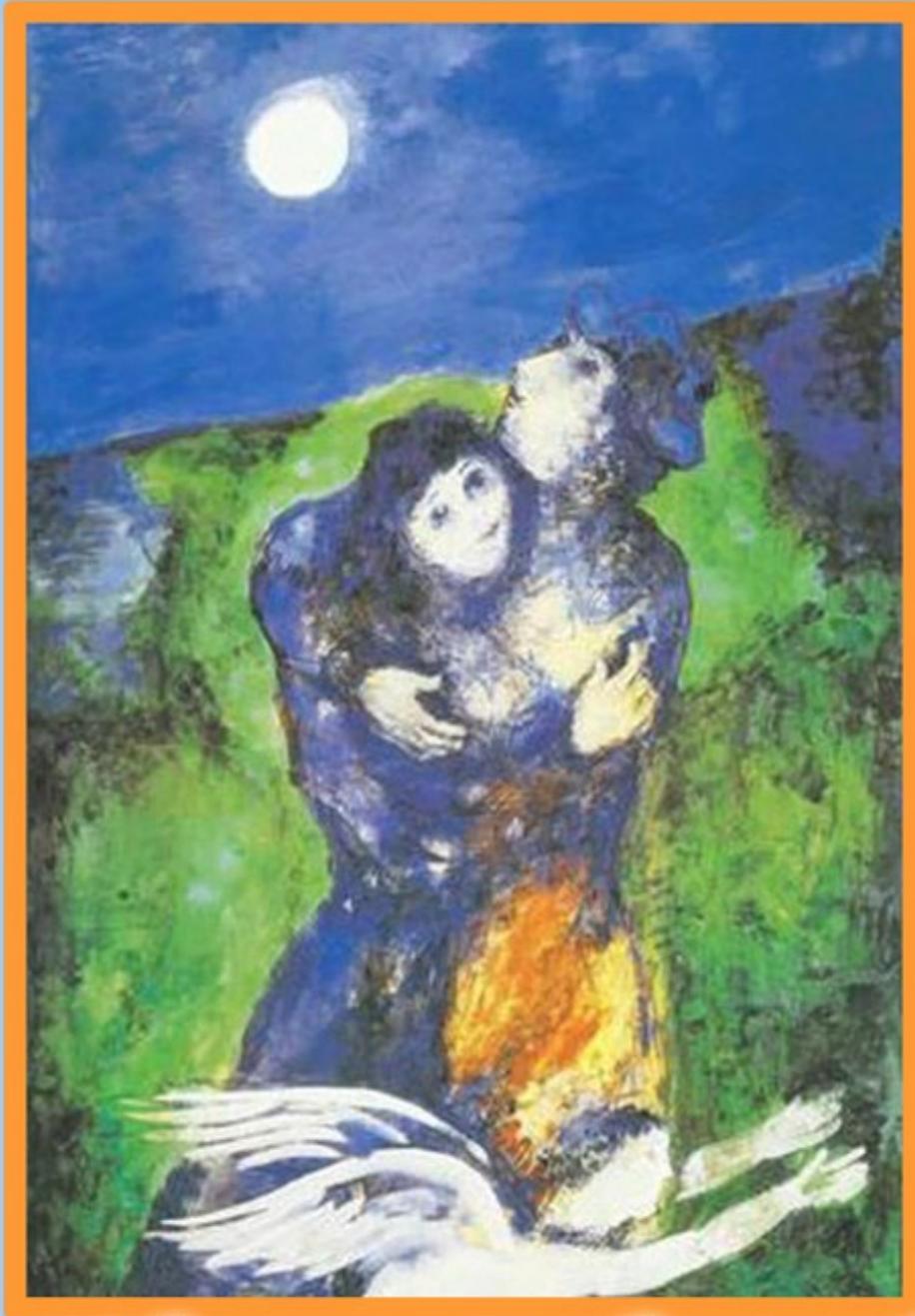


MAGDALENE CHRISTIANITY



Wife or Beloved?

HELEN MARTINEAU

Lovers in the Moonlight, by Marc Chagall (section)

WIFE OR BELOVED?

Love is the essence

The idea of Jesus being married or having a lover lies outside empirical research, yet it clings on because it taps into a deeper layer in the human psyche. The patriarchal view of existence in religion and society cuts across the essence of who we are. Women and men, all of us, bear a wound that doesn't heal. It's a spiritual wound, inner harmony broken. And from this comes the longing for the existence of true love, if not in ordinary life then at least in our high stories, including that of Jesus Christ.

Mary Magdalene is the woman most commonly given the role of his beloved. This is about the only legend in which she expresses the fullness and beauty of a loving woman. Most of the time she is an idea – the church had her as the redeemed prostitute; in Gnosticism her female gender links her to the wisdom of Sophia.

Let's look at the case for Mary as wife of Jesus.

Jesus had to be married?

Nothing is said about whether Jesus was married or not in the early writings making up the New Testament canon. For these authors it was not relevant to their story of Christ.

The Hebrew Bible and the second century Jewish Talmud are packed with laws surrounding marriage without explicitly stating that an adult had to be married, as argued by those who insist that Jesus had a wife – although you could say it was assumed for most people because of the importance given to procreation.

Girls at that time were married early, if possible when they reached puberty. Men could put off marriage for various reasons. They might be building up enough income to support a family or be undergoing intense study of the Law. The latter highly esteemed activity could take a man well into maturity. To be thirty and unmarried was not unusual for a man, a rabbi especially.

Jesus appears as an itinerant teacher, healer and prophet. Although he moved outside officialdom he was called 'rabbi' by his followers because of his charisma and knowledge. This was not exceptional; a teacher could be known as a rabbi even if he did not belong to an official Pharisaic rabbinic school. Like any Jewish male in the first century, Jesus was

welcome to read the Torah and speak in the synagogues. That was until he began to offend the establishment.

Information about Jesus's life before age thirty when he was baptized by the prophet John in the Jordan River comes from legend and from spiritual insight; nothing, though, about a marriage. He was executed about three years after his baptism, and it was over this brief period that divine purposes came into play. We cannot say for certain whether Jesus was ever married.

What about Mary?

I am sure she did love much and probably passionately. It took the woman-hating Pope Gregory and his bishops to distort the beauty of her love. But again, there's no information in the New Testament gospels. Her significance came from her genuine insight as a leading disciple.

I did find reasons for doubting their marriage in the realistic psychology portrayed in Mary's crucial and profound moment of recognition on finding Jesus risen from the tomb (John 20:16). She calls out '*Rabboni*', teacher, intimate yet more formal than a personal name one would expect of a wife, or a lover. Still, there are other signifiers.

The need for a feminine counterpart

I have written about the philosophy behind the gnostic works discovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. Dating from after the lifetimes of Mary and Jesus, in them Mary is elevated to the one with higher knowledge. Are there indications of physical-sexual intimacy?

One of these works, the Gospel of Philip, is a collection of gnostic 'sayings' in the Coptic language, probably compiled in the third century. Like the other works it is damaged but contains a major source of continuing speculation that the Magdalene and Jesus were husband and wife or lovers. There's the following statement:

The Lord did everything in a mystery, a baptism and a chrism and a eucharist and a redemption and a bridal chamber.

The significant word is 'mystery' – the essence of the five events is spiritual, the forms are like temporary containers for the soul activity involved in mystical unfolding. In this it has parallels to the parable of the ten virgins who await the bridegroom in Matthew 25:1-13. The 'bridal chamber' is the fulfillment of a five-fold initiatory process. And it also clarifies the saying in the Gospel of Thomas that, 'only the single will enter the bridal chamber' (logion 75). To be single is to have achieved a soul state beyond duality.

Two more texts in Philip's gospel raised even more speculation:

There were three who always walked with the Lord: Mary, his mother, and her sister, and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion.

Mary Magdalene is the companion of the Lord. An equivalence has been drawn to the ancient Greek *hetaera*, a high-class sexual companion. But in Coptic the word for 'companion' is based on ancient Greek *koinonos*. This makes the connection more open-ended because *koinonos* can mean a variety of close relationships from a business or family connection to a spiritual bond.

Then we have (with the gaps or unclear words marked by dots):

And the companion of the . . . Mary Magdalene . . . her more than . . .
. . . disciples . . . kiss her often . . . on her mouth . . .

Translators do become interpreters. Isenberg's decidedly interpretive version is often quoted – 'The Lord loved her more than the other disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth.'

Adding the word 'loved' links with the next part of the text, where Jesus explains that he loves her more than the other disciples because she's the one who can 'see the light'. As to Jesus kissing her, you could then see Mary as wife or lover, or not; to early Christians (including gnostic ones) kissing on the mouth signified intimacy through fellowship.

In 2012 Harvard Divinity professor Karen L. King made known the existence of a tiny rectangular partly illegible fourth century fragment in Coptic, possibly copied from an earlier source. This so-called Gospel of Jesus's Wife contains these words scattered across fourteen lines (again with illegible phrases marked by dots):

My mother gave me life . . . the disciples said to Jesus . . . deny. Mary is . . . worthy of it . . . Jesus said to them, 'My wife . . . she is able to be my disciple. Let wicked people swell up . . . As for me, I am with her in order to . . . an image.

Years of forensic research eventually led King to conclude that it proved nothing, other than some Christians believing that Jesus was married. Nevertheless, the gaps have been filled in to popularise the idea that it records the memory of Mary Magdalene as the wife being referred to.

The Cathar influence

Medieval Catharism in the Languedoc region of southern France turned orthodoxy on its head with a distinctly gnostic slant. Central to Cathar belief was the high value given to the feminine based on the status of Mary

Magdalene as Jesus's most important co-worker and apostle. No church hierarchy was required; women and men could rise to the spiritual status of 'the perfect' through their own efforts. It is recorded that the perfect abstained from sexual relationships because such activity belonged to a fallen world.

After fruitless efforts to persuade adherents to repent, the Catholic Inquisition instigated the brutal Albigensian crusade against the Cathars. In 1244 with the destruction of the castle fortress of Montségur, and the murder of its inhabitants, Catharism was officially wiped out although scattered pockets of belief remained.

A medieval Cistercian monk, Peter of Vaux de Cernay was a chronicler of the crusade. In his highly condemnatory work Peter stated that the Cathars believed Mary was the concubine of Jesus. This shows that the idea of an intimate relationship did grow and thrive outside the Catholic church.

As most Cathar writing was destroyed, contradictions and legends have filled the gaps in our knowledge, especially about their beloved Mary Magdalene. Ever since, there has been conjecture and counter conjecture about the romantic exploits of Jesus, mostly with the Magdalene as his partner.

The Hieros Gamos

Margaret Starbird drew extensively on the Old Testament, mythology and legend to write *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar* (1993). She comes down fully on the side of a sacred marriage between Mary and Jesus and asks:

How can we fail to do all in our power to reclaim her true story? Justice and chivalry require that we honor this woman in the role to which the canonical Gospels themselves attest – as the beloved Queen of the messianic King of Israel.

This powerful idea draws on the necessity of a sacred marriage of the god and goddess echoed in the true King of Israel and his Queen.

The marriage between the god and goddess, sun and moon, heaven and earth in mythology is called the *hieros gamos*. The Hindu philosophy of Tantra which means interweaving, covers far more than sacred sex. But in in erotic temple carvings we see the bliss of Shiva and Shakti being enacted as the *hieros gamos*.

It was known as a ritual in many ancient cultures where the king and queen stood for the divine beings who represented the life forces governing existence. The union could be physically or symbolically sexual.

In some cases, the woman was a sacred temple prostitute. In the Sumerian city-states the king representing Dumuzi united with a High Priestess of Inanna, the powerful goddess of love, fertility and warfare. In a time before the patriarchy ruled, the king offered her his service.

The *hieros gamos* was taken further in the reign of the revolutionary Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten. In a divinely anointed union, he and his wife Nefertiti are powerfully depicted as co-rulers embodying divine power and representing Shu and Tefnut. Here they are in the Great Hymn to the Aten:

The son of Re who lives by Ma'at (order, justice, wisdom)
The Lord of crowns *Akhanyati* (Akhenaten), great in his lifetime
And the great Queen whom he loves,
The lady of the Two Lands, *Nafteta* (Nefertiti)
Who lives and rejuvenates
For ever, eternally.



(L) *The courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi & (R) Pharaoh Akhenaten and his queen Nefertiti together receive the power of the Aten through the sun-rays ending in the ankh above their noses giving them both the divine breath.*

In biblical Israel we see the feminine and sacred marriage in a more disguised form. Wisdom, *Hokhmah* was with the creator at the beginning

(Proverbs 8:22-31) and is hidden in the number seven, revealing completion through divine Wisdom.

Moses found seven sisters by the well of Wisdom in Midian and was initiated into the cult through his marriage to one of them, Zipporah. King David married Bathsheba, which means 'daughter of seven'. He stole her, yet this was how Wisdom was brought to Jerusalem. The dark-skinned Queen of Sheba whose land means 'seven' came to King Solomon with offerings of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Extra-biblical stories state that by uniting with her he learned the secrets of nature.

The *hieros gamos* lived on in Greek philosophy and flourished under its influence down the centuries. It is symbolised in medieval alchemy's union of Sun and Moon in the Chymical Wedding and in Jungian psychology of individuation. There are echoes in today's wedding ceremonies and vows, including secular weddings. Nature too can symbolise the sacred union – tree and its roots, bee and flower. In other words, potent archetypes are at work and they live in us.



(L) Marriage of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba by Lorenzo Ghiberti, the northern door, Baptistry of San Giovanni, Florence (opened 1424)

(R) Alchemical image of Sun and Moon as male and female

The meaning that changes things

So were Mary Magdalene and Jesus married according to the *hieros gamos*? Were they lovers? Did they, two real life individuals represent the god and goddess? Well, yes and no.

I have come to see Mary as deeply connected with Jesus on a human level, and that they had been together in some way in previous incarnations, which meant their connection was full of spiritual purpose.

But the question impinges on the epic story of divine purposes. People welcomed Jesus when he came to Jerusalem. In the realm of human activity, they wanted kingship restored to free them from the yoke of Rome. And many did see him as the true king of Israel. That is how they understood the messiah (*mashiah*), which means 'anointed', as does *christos* in Greek.

Yet the predicted and longed for anointed one could be a king, or a priest or prophet. And the New Testament shows Jesus fulfilling all these roles, but not in terms of worldly achievements or status. 'My kingship is not from this world,' he said to Pilate (John 18:36).

Understanding is too often lost when focusing only on the human Jesus. Over the years my spiritual teacher Mario Schoenmaker took us with him into the profound meaning of Christ Jesus. We discovered that the Prologue to the 'spiritual' Gospel of John encapsulates the power of the divine Word (*Logos*) pouring, like a glass full and overflowing, through the layers of the spirit towards the earth. We learned that it was in the divine plan that the spiritual beings would experience for the first time the fullness of humanity when one of the *elohim*, a Sun Being and spirit of form, incarnated in the pure soul of Jesus who had himself been born to facilitate an extraordinary destiny. This began at his baptism when that spirit entered, and it was fulfilled at Golgotha. 'Christ' is the name used by the first Christians for that mighty being.

The gospels depict Jesus encountering and overcoming temptations humans are subject to that betray one's humanity concerning greed, materialism and power. But not sexuality, which is a natural part of who we are. The rules of society place borders around many normal human behaviours, from keeping clean to personal relationships. And the idea of sinful sex would emerge from those rules. Really, humans are sexual beings whether or not they perform the sexual act.

What we can say is that the incarnating divine being did experience all human feelings, although feelings filled with the light of the Word and Wisdom. And in the incarnation the cosmic *hieros gamos* is involved because divine Wisdom-Sophia is the ever-present feminine counterpart.

I explore this through Mary's symbolic attribute, *The Red Egg*, in the portal 'Seeing Mary through her Symbols'.

Becoming Anthropos

Jesus Christ was both archetype and prototype of *anthropos*, the completed and harmonised human being. And Mary, through her preparedness and profound inner experiences, was initiated into the mystery of the Christ. Her love for the man Jesus would be transfigured, raised beyond personal want and need. This would bring her to the mystical marriage, the *hieros gamos* with the Christ spirit – in her soul, which began at the empty tomb.

Depicted only in John's gospel, Mary's extraordinary encounter in a realm beyond the physical reveals the moment when she reaches the 'bridal chamber'. In Christ's words, 'Do not cling to me,' there's an invocation and invitation to see beyond the physical, for she is ready now to fulfil the sacred union. This marriage is the culmination of her initiation into the Christ mystery. That is, she could now love consciously in her full humanity, body, soul and spirit.

In this gospel words are layered with meaning. When Mary first sees the risen Christ and calls out 'Rabboni', she is seeing the *form* of Jesus as she knew him. But by the time she brings the news to the disciples in hiding, she says, 'I have seen the Lord', *Adonai* – a divine being.

There is more to her union and this is an awesome and wonderful subject directly impacting on Magdalene Christianity. I have called on the beautiful goddess Aphrodite in the portal 'Return of the Goddess' to help us reach Mary's true world significance.

Agape

Meanwhile I will broaden the theme of love. In John's gospel Jesus is described as loving three disciples, Lazarus, Martha and as we have seen Mary the Magdalene (John 11:5). It's pertinent to know which love (with many words for different kinds of love in the Greek language of the gospels). It is *agape*, the highest expression of love. John's gospel speaks of the spiritual love that bonds the divinely anointed one with three close pupils and disciples who grasp something of the depths of the truth Jesus portrays and who come to know the reality of the Christ.

Especially during significant events and challenges, archetypes play out in our lives. We speak of our journey, our heroes and heroines, our mentors and what 'bedevils' us. All archetypes. And despite reductionism and the human frailties that diminish its power and purity, the quest for love lives in the collective unconscious, our psychic DNA.

And in any relationship founded in openness, generosity, respect, honour, compassion and empathy the love called *agape* can grow. The wound can be healed when we encounter this beautiful higher reality. The sacred marriage lives as a potential within our souls. I recognise the resonance of this for our lives today in the need to raise the power of love and rebalance the masculine and feminine in the world. Inwardly in the soul this mystical marriage is utterly necessary.

And this cannot be discovered without the feminine part of our being. This is why I have dedicated the following portal to the goddesses who offer us insights into what needs to be reclaimed and renewed. We need to bring the ancient Wisdom goddesses to mind again. Yet we need to view them with the eyes of the emerging consciousness soul.