

As a follow-up to my previous post, I'll now re-post a couple of reflections on this question that has obsessed modern people: was Jesus probably married? I should say that what obsesses most folk is not what obsesses scholars, as a rule; in my roughly 89 million discussions with New Testament scholars over the past 44 years, I don't recall ever having a detailed back-and-forth about it, except in public settings in front of a crowd of non-scholars. It's kind-a like Shakespeare. I know this is disappointing, but the major Shakespeare scholars in universities in England and America do NOT have discussions about whether Shakespeare really wrote the plays. It's just not the issue....

Anyway, I did have to deal with the question of Jesus possible marriage, with a couple of other scholars, in front of a crowd five years ago. I posted on it afterward. Here's what I said.

I am en route just now, back from Las Vegas, where I participated in a discussion with two other scholars at the Black Mountain Institute on the question "Would It Matter If Jesus Were Married?" The Black Mountain Institute is part of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas (UNLV); it sponsors events having to do with literature and history. Usually these involve two or more scholars, on stage, on chairs, with a moderator, discussing a topic of mutual interest. The moderator last night was Carol Harter, the former president of UNLV. The two other scholars were Karen King and Mark Jordan.

Both Karen and Mark are very well known and highly respected scholars. Karen is a professor of early Christianity at Harvard, where she holds the oldest endowed chair, of any kind, in the country; her expertise is especially in early Christian Gnosticism, and she has become best known in the past few years for her role in publicizing the "Gospel of Jesus' Wife" that I have blogged on before (search and see!). I've known Karen for years, but not well. She is a very insightful feminist historian with special interest in issues involving women, gender, sexuality, marriage in the early Christian movement.

Mark is one of the great scholars of religion in the country. He is extraordinarily wide ranging, having translated Thomas Aquinas on the one hand and having written, on the other, some of the most important books ever produced on the issues of gender and of sexual ethics and, especially the history of homosexuality in the Christian tradition, including his book The Invention of Sodomy. He is not principally an expert on early Christianity per se, but he knows an uncanny amount about just about everything. If he weren't such a friendly and affable fellow, he would be flat-out intimidating.

Our task was to discuss in front of an overflowing crowd (standing room only: turns out this was a hot topic) various issues related to Jesus' marital status. Was he married? Why does it matter to people? Should it matter? If he could be shown to have been married, would it matter? For women? For understandings of sexuality? For notions of marriage? For the celibate priesthood in the Catholic Church? For anyone or anything else?

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