

I pointed out in my last post that most people simply assume that Jesus was not married because there is no mention of his wife in any of our sources, or any mention that he ever had a wife. And so it is assumed that he did not have one. As scholars often, and rightly, argue, that is an argument from silence, and on its own it is not a very strong one – since, among other things, none of these sources indicates, either, that he was not married. And so it is not evidence in one direction or another.

It's a good point, but my own view is that the silence in this case is telling – though not for the reason people sometimes say. It is sometimes wrongly asserted – by no less an inimitable authority than Dan Brown, in the Da Vinci Code – that if there was no claim that Jesus was not married that must mean that he was married, since Jewish men were “always” married. In my last post I showed why that simply is not true, and will not go over the same ground here. Instead I want to make the case that the fact that Jesus is never said to be married is probably evidence that he was not married.

In my view, the “non-mention” of Jesus’ wife has to be put into the broader context of the “mention” of those who were his family members and associates. That is to say, Jesus’ mother is mentioned in our sources (repeatedly). So is his father. So are his brothers. So are his sisters. So are his disciples. So are other people he came into contact with.

The early Christian traditions were not at all averse to mentioning Jesus’ relations and companions. Given that circumstance, why would his wife not be mentioned if he had a wife? This is a far louder silence than normal.

This way of looking at things applies in particular to Mary Magdalene, the woman who is most commonly associated with Jesus as a possible spouse and/or lover in the minds of modern novelists, film-makers, and other makers of fiction. Here I should say several things about Mary Magdalene. The first is – to the surprise of many people – she...

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