

## Harvard professor joins buzz about Mary Magdalene

By Richard Ostling  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Imagine that alongside Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, your New Testament includes a fifth Gospel where "seven Powers of Wrath" interrogate the human soul, accusing it of being a "human-killer" and "space-conqueror."

Imagine further that the soul responds, "I was set loose from a world and in a type, from a type which is above and from the chain of forgetfulness in time" to enter silent rest during "the time of the due season of the aeon."

And how about a Jesus who says "matter gave birth to a passion which has no image" and that "there is no such thing as sin?"

There actually was a Gospel that said these things. Although the words sound like musings from some 1960s New Age guru, they appeared in an ancient text known as the "Gospel of Mary." The title referred to the disciple Mary Magdalene, not to Jesus' mother.

The text, rediscovered in 1896 and published in 1941, came from secret-knowledge ("Gnostic") sects that rejected biblical Judaism and ortho-

dox Christianity.

The quotes appear in "The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle" by Karen L. King of Harvard Divinity School. The publisher is Polebridge Press, allied with the left-wing Jesus Seminar in which King participates.

Since most of the original "Mary" text vanished, King's translations of the surviving fragments fill only five pages.

Mary Magdalene is fashionable at the moment thanks to the odd pseudo-historical thriller "The Da Vinci Code." It promotes the ludicrous rumor — developed many centuries after Jesus' lifetime — that he married Magdalene and had children who migrated to France. Newsweek ran a cover story on the Magdalene fad with the misleading headline "The Bible's Lost Stories."

Gnosticism is also hot, due to "Beyond Belief," a book about the "Gospel of Thomas" by King's Princeton soulmate Elaine Pagels.

Like Pagels with "Thomas," King would like to believe that "Mary" was a full competitor alongside the New Testament Gospels, though church leaders judged it late

and fraudulent.

Dating is crucial for judging authenticity. King's first paragraph states flatly that "Mary" was written "early in the second century" but she waits until Page 183 to explore the debate.

Facts: Most of the "Mary" material that survived is found in a partial manuscript in Egypt's Coptic language, written in the fifth century. We also have two fragments in Greek from the early third century.

Though King doesn't say so, those fragments came a century later than the earliest surviving fragment from the New Testament Gospels. Most scholars conclude that "Mary" originated in the late second century as a Gnostic attack on the earlier New Testament. King mentions that consensus only in her final pages.

What is King's argument for leaping backward a century and putting "Mary" in the time the New Testament was written (as Pagels attempts with "Thomas")? King says the "Mary" topics "fit best in an early second century context," things like women's roles and the meaning of Jesus' life and teachings. But

those issues were equally pertinent a century later.

Whatever agenda "Mary" originally promoted, it obviously meets 21st-century desires for a feminist and "spiritual" faith, unshackled from traditional churches and doctrines.

The Gnostic Magdalene was the queen of apostles who supposedly preserved Jesus' secret revelations and told the male apostles what's what. Poor befuddled St. Peter asks, did Jesus "speak with a woman in private without our knowing about it" and did he "choose her over us?"

In the "Mary" version of reality, Jesus and his followers despised material reality and other aspects of their Jewish heritage, sought inner enlightenment without external rules, and preached the future dissolution of matter, the "modeled form" of created beings, the soul's ascending powers and the extermination of desire.

The "Mary" circle saw no saving value in Jesus' death on the cross or his bodily resurrection from the grave, and considered early church leaders illegitimate.

In other words, the Gospel according to "Mary" claimed the New Testament was a big lie.

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## Pope laments 'misunderstood' sense of rights that is disturbs meaning of matrimony, family

By Nicole Winfield  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VATICAN CITY — Pressing his campaign against gay unions, Pope John Paul II lamented Sunday what he called the "misunderstood" sense of rights that was altering the true sense of marriage and family these days.

In his traditional Sunday greeting, John Paul called for increased support from all those who believe "in the importance of the family based on matrimony," which he said was a "human and divine" gift that should be defended by society.

The Vatican defines matrimony as a divine union between man and woman, and in July it launched a global campaign to stem the tide of widening legal recognition for same-sex marriages.

### Church drafts gay marriage license

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORTSMOUTH, N.H. (AP) — To promote the legalization of same-sex marriages, the pastors at South Church plan to sign marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples they wed and mail them to City Hall for approval.

Following a practice accepted in the Unitarian Universalist faith, the church has performed marriage ceremonies for gay and lesbian couples for more than 15 years, even though the unions are not recognized by law.

The move departs from a rebellious approach taken by other Unitarian Universalist ministries. Parishes as far as California and as close as Exeter have refused to marry straight couples until same-

A document from the Vatican's orthodoxy watchdog, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said Catholic politicians had a "moral duty" to oppose laws granting legal rights to gay couples, and that non-Catholics should follow their lead since the issue concerns "natural moral law."

John Paul raised the issue Sunday, noting that Christmas was a time to remember the "holy family" of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, whose birth is celebrated by the church on Dec. 25.

"In our times, a misunderstood sense of rights has sometimes disturbed the nature of the family institution and conjugal bond itself," John Paul said. "It is necessary that at every level, the efforts of those who believe in the importance of

the family based on matrimony unite."

Marriage, he added, "concerns a human and divine reality that is defended and promoted as a fundamental good of society."

John Paul has been a staunch promoter of the institution of marriage, as well as of the family. He strongly opposes abortion as well as artificial birth control.

The Vatican's opposition to condoms recently came under renewed fire after a top cardinal, Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, said condoms don't protect against AIDS. The U.N. World Health Organization, among other groups, called his comments "dangerous" and "totally wrong."

The Vatican maintains that chastity is the best method of HIV prevention.

sex marriages are recognized by law.

Saunders said that protest, while admirable, is not the best way to effect change. A marriage strike, he said, has the potential to "anger heterosexuals who just want to marry."

Saunders said that he and his wife, the Rev. Marta Flanagan, will address the issue from the pulpit Jan. 11.

The church advises same-sex couples to hire a lawyer to ensure that they get all the legal privileges available, which are significantly fewer than those granted to straight couples.

The next gay or lesbian couple to schedule a wedding there, he said, can fill out the new certificate designed from

the template used for heterosexual couples.

Last fall, the Rev. Kendra Ford of the First Unitarian Society of Exeter announced that while she will continue to perform ceremonies for both straight and same-sex couples, she will sign marriage certificates for neither until marriages of all couples are recognized by law.

Julia Rodriguez, a South Church parishioner from Durham, said different congregations must choose how strong they make their statement.

"What were seeing now is a tension between taking a gradual or more rapid approach to change," Rodriguez said. "Do we speak out or do we disrupt?"

## Cross on a cap causes controversy

By Dennis P. Connor  
Religion News Service and Benfit.com

Cincinnati, Dec. 29 — (RNS) Sometimes there is no better marketing than word of mouth. That has been especially true in this southwest Ohio city in the wake of a controversial call by the National Football League, which fined Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Jon Kitna \$5,000 for wearing unauthorized headgear too close to game time during a television interview.

Kitna's cap was emblazoned with a simple cross—a symbol of the Pro Bowl quarterback's devotion to Jesus.

The NFL told the Bengals Kitna was in violation of a rule requiring all merchandise worn by players or other team personnel to be approved and licensed by the football league. The cross cap was not a licensed item.

The news hit hard in the Queen City, and upon learning of the NFL's decision, owners of The Catholic Shop in a northern suburb decided they would begin selling the caps for \$5 a pop. Since Dec. 22, they've sold more than 4,000 of the black caps with a white embroidered cross, and they anticipate selling up to 1,000 a day "as long as we can get them in," said Catholic Shop co-owner Dan Giroux.

Giroux's wife, Ann, had been a guest on a local radio talk show, originally scheduled to discuss Mel Gibson's new movie, "The Passion," when the hat controversy emerged.

"She and the talk-show host got talking about how Jon Kitna was such a great guy, a good quarterback and a really dedicated Christian, and by the end of the show,

she announced over the air that we were going to sell the caps with the cross on it," Giroux said.

Now dubbed "Kitna caps," the items have attracted buyers from as far away as Chicago, Indianapolis and Wheeling, W.Va., he said. "The phone's been ringing off the hook, and we quit taking pre-orders because of all the out-of-town folks who said they weren't going to leave without a cap," Giroux said.

Just before Christmas, Giroux said Kitna visited the store to thank the entrepreneurs for their support. "He just showed up, unannounced, very shyly and reached out to shake my hand," Giroux said. "Then he just walked away."

As the quarterback walked away, Giroux decided he wanted to get one of his caps autographed for his wife. "He

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### "A Word From Our Partners"

#### "The Season for Living"

Don Stegar, Ph.D.,  
Pastor of Reeder Memorial Church

During the days of Christmas, despite the all the excitement, it seems that many of us are left with unresolved feelings of disappointment and disillusionment. This cycle seems to repeat itself each year? Have we simply adopted the world's expectation and view of what Christmas is supposed to be?

Perhaps as we come to the end of the "holiday and prepare for the New Year, we might retain some of the excitement about the Christ Child. There are so many factors to consider that impact our spirits during this time of year. Yet, we go through the motions of celebrating, feeling less than we would like to feel. Although our mood threatens to permeate the inner essence of our being, we seem to want to suppress or ignore that feeling within, the feeling that reminds us that something is missing. Perhaps this year its not to late to identify what it is...and capture something to resolve it.

There is resolution—a means to let go of your troubled feelings and enhance your frame of mind. Like the angels that descended to earth to tell of Jesus' birth, there is good news to lighten your burden and offer hope to overcome anything affecting your joy. No matter what your mood may indicate is lacking from your life, regardless of anything you are facing or experiencing, there is good news not just for the season, but for every day of your life.

There is Good News! "For a child will be born, a son will be given; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful counselor, mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6). His birth was meant to be the beginning of the abundant life. May we seek diligently to find that abundant life as we go forward from this season and make a "new beginning."

A life complete in the knowledge that you are loved, and through God's love for you, you can have eternal peace. He has promised that He will never leave you, nor forsake you. He has promised you the company of a counselor within you, and he will guide you along your journey. This is one of so many promises God has made to His children.

All that is required to receive Him and connect with the Spirit of the Baby born long ago, is to study His word, and ask for help to live in Christ's peace and compassion. Develop a loving and giving heart. Release your hurts, fears, and sorrows to God. In doing so, you will develop the faith needed to trust Him in meeting all your needs and to fulfill your heart's desires.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The things you have learned and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4: 6-7, 9).

God's gift to us, "the Christ child," the greatest equalizer this world will ever know to compensate for whatever is lacking or missing from your life. The greatest gift to ourselves is a connection with Him. You can achieve complete restoration, and be made whole in the process, for God has given us an opportunity to live beyond our shortcomings and losses.

At this season, and with each day that follows in the New Year, accept and acknowledge God's perfect gift. Accept God's forgiveness and love for you, and share this gift with others. Accept God's healing for your hurts and disappointments. Connect and maintain your connection with Him. Trust Him...your greatest gift to God!

May this be your season for living, and may it last all year long. Let the Joy and peace that came to fill our lives with knowing and trusting be yours today, and for as long as you live. Furthermore, may all that you resolve to be and do last all year long.