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Did Jesus really have a wife?

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When I heard about the piece of parchment on which Jesus is quoted as having used the phrase "My wife" and saying that she would be a disciple of his, it first led me to speculate on what life might have been like for Jesus' wife -- if he had one.

Not easy, I suspect. It would likely have entailed constant travel, worry over criticisms from temple authorities, concern over quarreling apostles, concern about where the whole mission was going. On the other hand, she would surely have marveled as she watched the crowds gather to hear his message. (Maybe she held her own "Jesus Seminar" on the side?) Anyway, if she did exist, Jesus' wife had to be a very hardy, special and deeply spiritual woman.

But this new parchment evidence, brought to light by Karen King of Harvard, also brought back memories from years ago.

Anthony Padovano, one of the longtime leaders of CORPUS, a national association for a married priesthood, gave a speech at a CORPUS convention a number of years ago in which he explicitly put forward the thesis that Jesus was probably married. Granted, he and CORPUS have a vested interest in thinking this might be true, but it also provided motivation for considering the question in a scholarly way. On the other hand, the defenders of a compulsory celibate priesthood also have a vested interest in a celibate Jesus.

In his CORPUS presentation, Padovano did not surface any recently discovered scrolls or ancient texts but based his speculation on his own knowledge about the period in which Jesus lived.

And we need to be clear: The theory of a married Jesus, whether articulated by Karen King or Anthony Padovano, is speculative. Nothing I've seen provides hard and fast evidence of a married Jesus. And I'm

sure both scholars would agree with that. But it is provocative.

I can't recall Padovano's entire thesis, but I do remember his saying Jesus was considered a rabbi, and rabbis in that age were expected to be married. My Jewish friends say that is still true. But Padovano went even further, suggesting that Jesus' wife was probably Mary Magdalene.

The CORPUS audience that day was receptive (as you might imagine). But his thesis has always stuck in my mind -- so much so that I think the possibility of Jesus' being married is an open question. We just don't know. And Karen King's findings just add to the speculation.

So I suspect we won't know the truth until eternity perhaps when she "outs" herself ... or not.

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