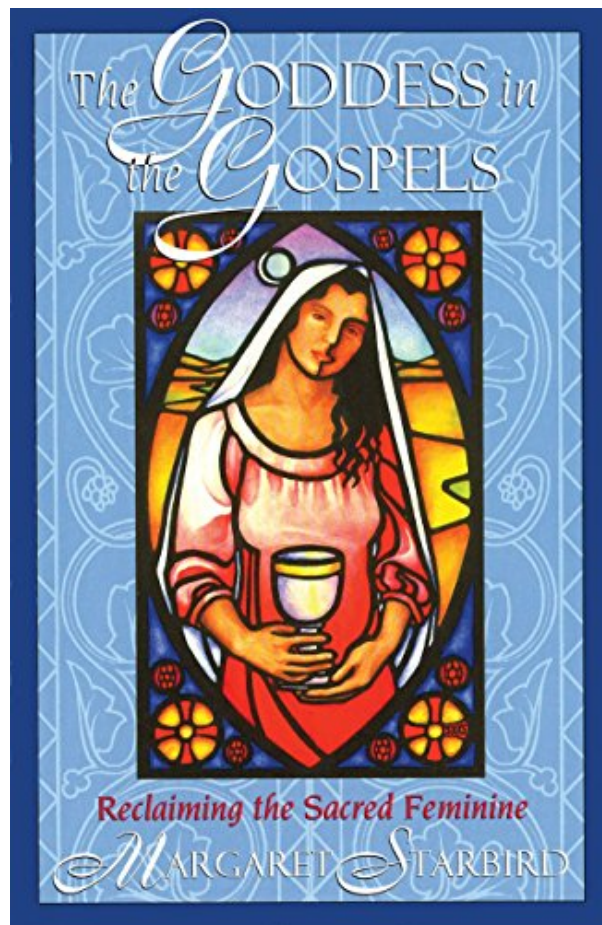
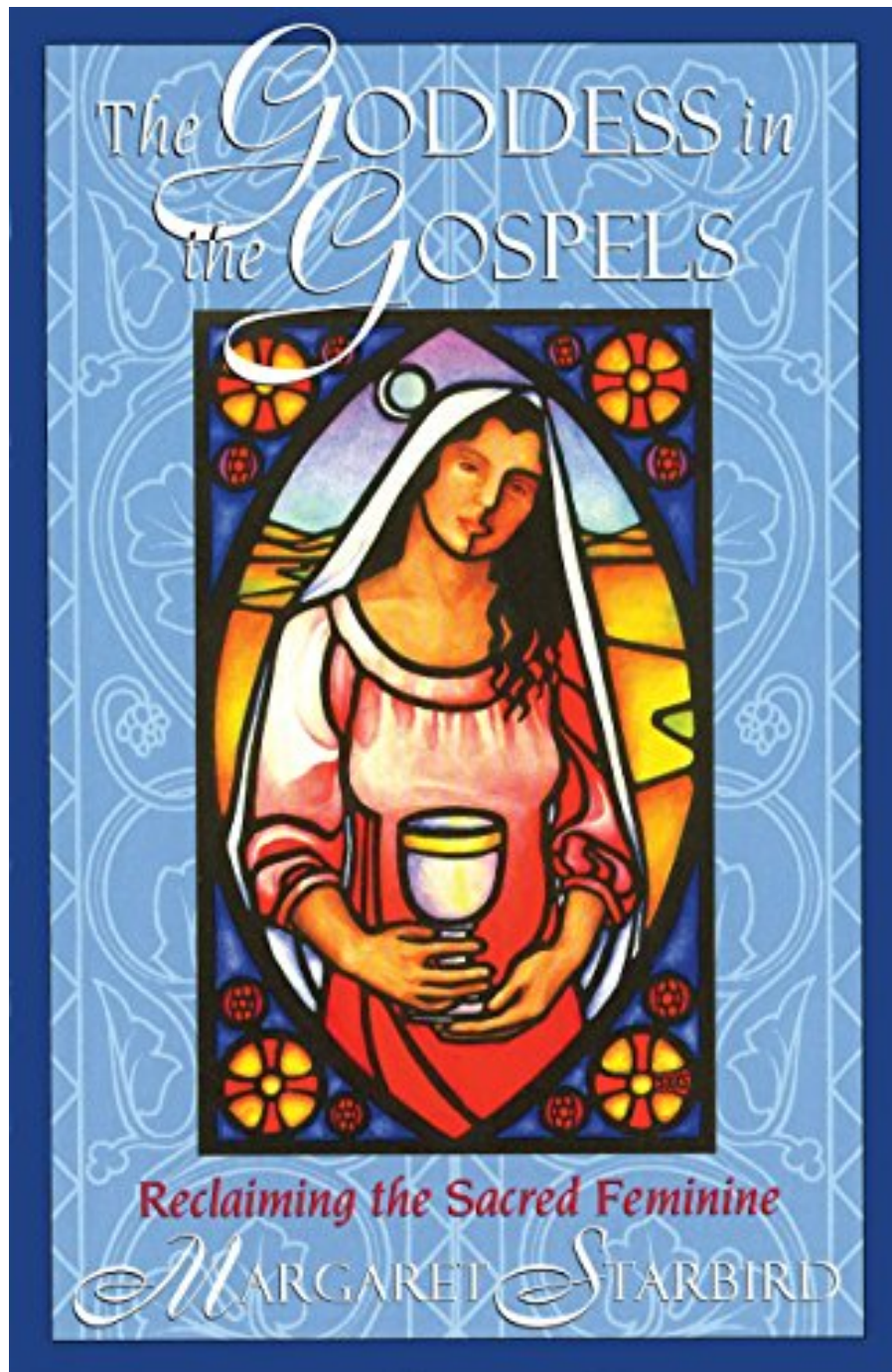


**THE GODDESS IN THE GOSPELS:
RECLAIMING THE SACRED FEMININE BY
MARGARET STARBIRD**



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The Gaulic Christian Goddess

By Orville B. Jenkins

This is a combination of personal biography and historical fiction. Writing this in 1998, Starbird presents her second book here on the alternative history of the New Testament and the Nazarene [original Jewish Christian] movement. She tells the story of her discovery of the story of Mary Magdalene around her own spiritual pilgrimage and the personal faith challenges she met along the way to this new enlightenment she reports.

Starbird presents her original research on the topic in her first book in 1993, *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalen [sic] and the Holy Grail*. The strong evidence she presents for the case that Mary Magdalene and her children and other original members of Jesus' disciples is based primarily on two genres of source.

Art and Legend

One is the late medieval painting and related evidences in medieval art and architecture, along with their literary attestations. The other is the Gnostic stream of literature.

One amazing characteristic of Starbird's writing, and the recent spate of "alternative" Christian histories and theologies, is that she and they place the Gnostic literature on a par with the original Christian literature, now collected in what is called the New Testament. There is the implication, and the outright claim by other writers, that these Gospels were actually written in the same era as the New Testament documents.

The Gnostic gospels are assumed to be just as original and authoritative, but neglected or suppressed by an official party of the Roman Church. The extreme of this view is found in some authors who claim that the Gnostic gospels were actually written first, but suppressed in favor of the now-standard Four Gospels, and the writings of Paul and the other documents of our standard New Testament.

A popularizer who has drawn together many recent threads of such thought from various recent authors, is journalistic historian Laurence Gardner, who has developed a full genealogy of the bloodline of Jesus, from his children by Mary Magdalene. I also read his book *The Magdalene Legacy* concurrently with Starbird's book. Gardner pulls together all kinds of sources and draws a sweeping scenario that ignores anomalies and contradictions, as he claims to clarify the ones in the New Testament and official Roman Catholic traditions.

Less Radical

Starbird is not as radical as Gardner and some others he quotes. Starbird actually claims that Jesus died, while Gardner claims that Jesus lived and went on additional missions, and was even with Paul on the first mission with Barnabas to Cyprus. He traces many activities of Jesus and his family members in totally unbelievable situations that would have been no doubt referred to in the canonical literature if they had really occurred as Gardner claims.

In contrast to Gardner, who simply spins the story, footnoting the original sources of the claim, without any critical analysis, Starbird's writing has the appearance of actual scholarly attention to sources and detail. This work, however, is more a followup and testimonial of how she came about her discovery, and how her personal devotional life and personal faith challenges were experienced. Her earlier work was the basic presentations of the conclusions she personally came to on the basis of the research she did.

Uncritical Use of Sources

I do not doubt that Starbird really did perform acceptable research into the questions she reports on. The problem I see is that she does not clearly distinguish between various sources, but treats them all on the same level of authority, no matter how old or of what type. Here are some problems with that approach in considering the validity of her conclusions.

1. She does not distinguish clearly between serious reports of experienced events, which most scholars of whatever persuasion agree is at least at the core of the New Testament Gospels and letters, aside from any evangelistic intent or missionary fervor that shaped the choice of events reported or their form. It seems quite likely that the medieval romantic fantasies involving New Testament figures were a special style of popular lyric literature, primarily sung by the troubadours, who were not particularly Christian in our sense.

They wove a lot of the pre-Christian ideas among the local populace into their romances. The Arthur legends of the Middle Ages have this character also, included an anachronistic romanticized combination of various Celtic, old Gaulo-Roman and various Germanic local superstitions and ancient cultural practices into the romances of what we think of as King Arthur.

The Cathars and the Magdalene

Starbird does point out that the "heretical" Cathars, or Albigenses, with their unusual understandings of baptism and salvation, were related to these legends of Mary Magdalene and her descendants. She ties the Albigensian persecution to the suppression of the Magdalene claims to be the original "Christianity," that is, the original Nazarene stream of the followers of Jesus, as opposed to the followers of the Imperial Church of Rome.

She does not apparently apply any critical analysis to the folk legends, which are represented in the paintings of several famous medieval Europeans and referenced in several established authors in various Christian centres. This medieval literature incorporating these old local legends are what we now call Historical Fiction.

In medieval Europe, the whole artistic genre expressed these, in the basically oral culture, paintings and even church windows expressed these local variations of popular understandings of the Christian characters and figures. Myth, legend and scripture references were all intermeshed in the popular cultural tapestry.

Uncritical Syncretism

Starbird joins other New Age writers to perpetuate this uncritical syncretistic mindset, seemingly uncritically. In Starbird's writings, however, you can see the claims and context of these medieval witnesses. This is a broad-based perspective that we need to be aware of and account for.

Too Late

2. Textual critics and other historical scholars indicate the Gnostic gospels and other literature were not written until in the 200s and 300s. Gnosticism as we think of it was not the full movement that these writings represent until probably in the late 200s. Gnosticism was likely an embryonic idea in the first century, with the basic concept of esoteric knowledge and the concept of Revealer-Saviours. The Gnostic writings among Christians definitely were quite late.

The Gnostics contrasted with the "canonical" writings in that Gnostic concepts and writings restricted access to initiated members in a chain of reveler-initiate insiders, while the approach of the canonical literature is free and open knowledge for all persons, no matter what their status.

Good Information

The information and cultural context of the claims Starbird puts forth here are things we need to know. We need to be aware of this strong folk stream of legend centred in the Marseilles and Languedoc area, concerning Mary Magdalene. Starbird presents a restrained and thoughtful version of the possibilities out of these stories. But when you weigh the context and origin, along with the times and types of the sources, in the final analysis still what you have is Historical Fiction, not a serious alternative stream from the original gospel.

Medieval Romantic Fantasy

Even if Mary Magdalene and others of Jesus' companions did escape to Europe, the style and format of these stories, as well as the general claims, are characteristic of medieval romantic fantasy, not historical fact.

It is hard enough to extract what we consider objective history from the serious writings. It is a whole new level of difficulty in the different genre of these romantic legendary stories. Even the versions found in the writings of certain clergymen like Bernard of Clairvaux.

They also exhibit in some degree the credulous superstitious esoterism of their times. I read Starbird's book

seriously, and gave it sympathetic and critical attention. It comes out as a report of historical fictions, no matter how I try to analyze it, which she has not dealt with critically. The change she reports in her own beliefs is, I believe, primarily because she failed to distinguish the critical factors I mention above.

Personal Reactionary Experience

She also mentions various teachings and ideas in the Roman Catholic Church that were additionally problematic. These were also factors that led to her willingness to consider some alternative, even though this radical challenge was apparently a real faith crisis for her. Starbird seems unaware that there are other forms of Christianity, both eastern and western, that do not suffer the limitations, entail the problems or include the tendencies she keeps going back to in her arguments.

A broader awareness of the varieties of Christian expression might have given her a broader perspective from which to more critically evaluate these findings from history, culture and legend, that she now seems to accept as a hidden alternative and persecuted core of original Nazarene Christianity.

102 of 137 people found the following review helpful.

"Forgive us faithful....."

By Rod McClure

Goddess of the Gospels gives the church the best opportunity to confess to their faithful since the release of the Dead Sea scrolls and is a must read for all who love Jesus and his teachings. A mind expanding spiritual journey supporting growing evidence that Jesus and his family were denied justice after he challenged priestly power of his day. Persecution and crucifixion grew to a conspiracy which continued for 2000 years behind the habits of church politicians and the robes and power of their fellow brethren as they schemed and defaced the true life of the anointed Christ and his wife Mary Magdalene We are told our present Pope was born on the day of a lunar eclipse when the symbolic female passed before the male to activate the female of this wonderful Pontiff. This female is the holy grail, the chalice of Mary Magdalene the female within male, balance, love and logic. Margaret Starbird demonstrates her spirit, Catholic faith, her courage and conviction, with genuine feminine intuition and woman's wisdom. Margaret deserves the accolades offered in tribute of this wonderful work. Let this knowledge be known and shared, such expressions of love will positively influence the future to the womb of creation.

66 of 71 people found the following review helpful.

A Courageous Spiritual Search

By A Customer

The Goddess in the Gospels is not a history-- it is the story of a spiritual quest and should be read as such. Starbird's journey reflects that of many men and women who have sought a deeper spiritual connection and arrived at the belief that a new paradigm-- that of male-female partnership-- is needed in the temporal and spiritual realms.

Interestingly, Starbird's thesis is reflected in Native American wisdom teachings and in the Jewish Kabbalah, as well as in

secular studies such as "The Chalice and the Blade". This memoir extends the concept of a shared male-female paradigm to a Christian context, and is important in this respect.

Note that this book is a memoir, and should be read as such. Those interested in evidence that supports Starbird's thesis are best directed to her *Woman with the Alabaster Jar*, and the extensive bibliography provided therein. In addition, Starbird has clearly been in the vanguard of spiritual exploration-- her efforts began during the 1970s and have extended over a period of close to 30 years. Thus, her views should be of interest to those who have embarked more recently on a spiritual quest.

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