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## New data about Jesus, real or not, should enrich the Christian conversation

By LAWRENCE M. KRAUSS

### Tennessee Voices

As a scientist, I am always suspicious when I read or hear about someone seeking hard for evidence to support their pet theory. Why? Because experiments are really supposed to allow us to prove a theory to be false. Only in this way that we can unambiguously know when we should give up on an idea and move forward.

So while my interest was piqued by the furor over the documentary, *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, my scientific inclination tended to side, uncharacteristically perhaps, with those who were inclined to support traditional Christian dogma in the face of this new supposed attack from science.

It is intriguing that the six names on ossuaries found in an Israeli building site may read, under one plausible interpretation, Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Mary Magdalene, Judah and Matthew and that the statistical likelihood that these biblically related monikers would all appear congregated in a single vault is small. But statistically unlikely events happen all the time. My key question is: Assuming the ossuaries are from a plausible biblical time, what observation could the filmmakers perform that would definitively rule out their claim that this was the burial tomb of Jesus and his possible wife, Mary Magdalene, and son, Judah?

Consider how the "scientific" evidence could invalidate the claims of the discoverers.

Apparently, DNA testing suggests the Jesus and Mary Magdalene in the tomb were unrelated. This hardly proves they were married.

Similarly, if the DNA of Joseph and Jesus showed no genetic relationship, some might claim that as evidence for virgin birth. But it could also simply mean that the Joseph in this crypt and the Jesus were merely unrelated.

And what would the real challenge to faith be if these claims are taken seriously? If Jesus's remains are intact, does that rule out any sort of bodily resurrection? If Jesus had a son, could he not Himself still be the son of God?

For those whose faith in a Christian God is deep-seated enough, even a radical change in the historical record should not be viewed as a threat but rather as important new data to further inform their religious beliefs.

Just as the scientific evidence that humans and the rest of animal species evolved from a common ancestor has forced rational theologians to moderate their claims of special creation, and just as indisputable evidence that the universe is now 10 billion to 15 billion

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years and not 6,000 years old requires a non-literal interpretation of the Bible, so, too, I presume a married Jesus who was a loving father would not violate His claim to divinity.

Rather, what is most unsettling about some religious doctrines is the notion of unquestioned faith, where one must censor out any possible counter-evidence and ignorance is favored over knowledge simply because knowledge might be a threat to faith. Faith, if it is worth having at all, should be tested. According to the New Testament, even Jesus' own faith was tested in the desert.

If it survives such questioning, one's faith will presumably be stronger, not to mention more in touch with reality. If it doesn't, it may not be worth holding onto in the first place.

And the chief argument against what might seem to be a contrived and implausible television docudrama should be artistic or scientific, but not religious.

