

Adapted from a story by Hank Hyena

"It's fabulous," "I get to be Jesus at the Easter Fetish performance party. First I'm laid out on a pink marble slab, with only a wisp of loincloth about me. Then -- hallelujah! Resurrection!"

"You're too short," "I'd be better." (The best part I ever got in six Catholic pageants was Bartholomew, the geeky apostle.)

"Oh stop," "Listen -- slowly, I rise, for my very favourite part: 12 handsome men -- the apostles -- march in and kiss me all over my body."

"Why do you have to make everyone queer?" . "Last week you said Hillary was a dyke. This week you're homo Jesus."

"Tsk-tsk. You're acting so straight."

"I am straight."

"I'm sorry, but ... Jesus was gay. He's been in the closet for 2,000 years. But now he's out and he's glorious. My performance is historically valid."

"Brian, you didn't learn anything about Jesus at synagogue. I studied Biblical texts in grad school."

"Jesus was a fag. Case closed. Get used to it." A pause. "I read it on the Web."

"History isn't a computer-game fantasy, Brian. It's real."

I stomped home. As a classics nerd -- I adore ancient alphabets, mysterious cuneiform, fragments of shrivelled papyrus -- Brian's invert revisionism pissed me off. I'll destroy his queer notion, I decided -- I'll prove that he's wrong! I can translate the Bible from the original tongues, but --

I don't own a computer.

"Hey, honey? Can you help me?" I begged my modem wife. "I need to research something on You-Hoo."

"Yahoo!" (She winced). "What is it?"

"Brian says there's some dribble on his computer about Jesus being gay."

My wife swung through files; she tapped in keywords. Her Mac box spewed horrible sounds, like a robot grinding its teeth ...

Three entries fizzed into view. Two listings were irrelevant, and Mormon -- they've invaded cyberspace like it's the new Utah, have you noticed?

"Click, click." I pointed at choice No. 3.

My wife snapped open a posting, titled, "Was Jesus Gay? Missing Fragments from St. Mark's Gospel."

We bumped heads, leaning forward together. Our eyes bulged. The text claimed that a scholar from Columbia University named Morton Smith found manuscript fragments in a monastery near Jerusalem in 1958 that were allegedly excised from the original Mark.

The lost and found passage says:

"The youth, looking upon him (Jesus), loved him and beseeched that he might remain with him ... they went into the house of the youth ... And after six days, Jesus instructed him and, in the evening, the youth came to him wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God."

"They did it!" (giggles).

"It's not explicit," I said. "But it doesn't sound like **my** Confirmation."

My wife's an ex-lesbian with the same "outing" fervour as Brian.

(shrieks) "2,000 years of oppression! What hypocrites!"

"Quiet!" (bellow, clutching my throbbing skull). "Civilisation is crashing in front of me -- I need to concentrate!"

I pedalled my bike to the library; I flung myself into the stacks. I know Dewey's decimal system like I know my own name -- I found Smith's thesis, "Secret Mark," in less than two minutes.

The "evidence," I discovered, was less concrete than the Web site insinuated. Indeed, the path meandering from Morton's fragment to the original Gospel is so labyrinthine it would give Bhor-heys (Borges) (1) a wet dream. Follow this, if you dare: The "Secret Mark" passages are scribbles penned in the endpapers of a 17th century book. They're enclosed in a text that identifies itself as a copy of a letter sent from Clement of Alexandria (circa A.D. 185) to "Theodore." In the letter, Clement identifies "false passages" in the heretical Carpocratian Gospel of Mark (2). The all-nighter with the eager almost naked youth episode is authentic, claims Clement, because it's included in an expanded Markan Gospel that was revealed to advanced parishioners of the Alexandrine Church.

As you untie this Gordian knot (3), you realise its plausibility has more holes than Peter's fishing net. Errors, rumour, innuendo and forgery have had 1,600 years to chew on the manuscript's veracity. Adding to the murk is the fact that only Morton Smith has seen the manuscript -- the monastery archives have been mysteriously closed ever since.

I bicycled home, eager to telephone some theology wonks. I knew they'd be happy to leap into the bully pulpit in this New Testamental debate.

First, Columbia University: the lair of the antichrist himself.

The secretary said...

"I'm sorry," "Morton Smith died in 1993."

"Drat," "The gadfly is gone."

Next call: University of California-Berkeley's director of religious studies --

"This is Birger Pearson."

His voice was lugubrious, weighed down by eons of knowledge. A bottomless, philosopher's groan, buried in the solitary search for Truth.

"Is the Morton Smith discovery authentic?" I asked.

"His position regarding the letter fragments has been entirely discredited in scholastic circles. And ... he had a vested interest in maintaining ... that position."

"You mean ... Morton Smith was gay?"

"Yes."

"What about Jesus' sex life?"

"That is something that cannot be absolutely known. It is a conundrum that will never be solved."

"Yeah, but ... what's your guess?"

"In Matthew 19:12, Jesus says, 'There will be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.'"

"Yikes! You think Jesus was celibate?"

"Yes."

The next scholar I interviewed was Dr. Walter Wink, a member of the esteemed research contingent "The Jesus Seminar." His 11 books express his political concerns. For example, in "The Powers" trilogy he examines social institutions and the evil and good they perform.

Wink also discredited Morton Smith's fragment, describing him as "a closeted gay -- due to his time period -- who became a bitter atheist. There's speculation that 'Secret Mark' was his way of getting revenge on the church."

When queried about Christ's passion and lust, Wink proposed that "Jesus might have been like Ralph Nader, an individual with relentless drive who sublimated all his sexual desires because he was totally preoccupied with the Kingdom of Heaven."

It began to dawn on me: Closeted Morton sees Jesus sleeping with youths, activist Walter regards him as Naderesque, contemplative Birgen embraces a celibate Messiah -- is Jesus just a mirror where we glimpse our idealised self?

I ate lunch hurriedly -- two sardine sandwiches. Like other ex-mackerel snappers, I always eat fish when I feel sinful. A guilty return to the no-meat-on-Friday penance.

Fortified, I returned to my examination of Jesus' libido. I telephoned William Hagan, my advisor in grad school. He's a former Jesuit who is now happily married - to a woman.

"Hi, Bill. I never asked you -- do you think Jesus had sex?"

"Absolutely. The Gospels indicate that Jesus was intimate with Mary Magdalene. She anoints him after his death -- then, Jesus appears to her first, after the Resurrection. Jesus says, 'Mary, don't touch me now!' This implies a physical relationship. I believe they had children, too. There's a sect that still claims blood lineage from Jesus and Magdalene."

"Wow, Bill, thanks. But ... uh ... do you think Jesus was gay, too?"

"Never heard of that theory."

The queer Jesus notion felt lonely and limp; no straight male scholar was willing to touch it. It took a woman, Mary A. Tolbert from the Pacific School of Religion, to stir vital life back into the proposition. Dr. Tolbert maintained,

"There are problems regarding the authenticity of Morton Smith's letter, but ... it sounds like Clement, stylistically."

"You mean ... Jesus did it? He performed a gay act?"

"Homosexuality's a concept that didn't exist in Biblical culture."

"Elucidate, please," I sniffed, pretentiously.

"Sexual relations," she explained patiently, "weren't based on gender preference. Sex only happened between 'dominants' and 'submissives.'"

"You're saying -- 'tops and bottoms' preceded hets and gays?"

"A free man could have sex with a woman, a slave, or a boy. That would be natural."

"So ... You're saying -- Jesus was a 'dominant' stud?"

"No, Jesus reversed the traditional behaviour. He did things that are termed passive or womanly, dishonourable in male society. He washed his apostles' feet. He preached, 'Blessed are the meek.' Jesus urged men to give up power. He presented a radical model of being a man."

"So ... was he gay or not?"

"I told you -- the concept didn't exist."

When I hung up the phone, my eavesdropping wife asked,

"She's a feminist, right? What'd she say?"

"She thinks Jesus can't be gay and he can't be straight, but his behaviour indicates he's a 'bottom.'"

"Oh!" My wife laughed. "Is that what he meant when he said, 'Turn the other cheek'?"

"Pig," (I snorted) "I'm going back to the library."

Last time I was there, I forgot to comb the shelves in the "Gay and Lesbian" section. This time, I scanned those tidy rows for the early 200s -- Philosophy & Religion.

A bold title snagged my glance: "Jesus Acted Up" by Robert Goss. This manifesto lists scholars who subscribe to the gay Jesus theory. Hugh Montefiore, for example, an Anglican trailblazer who shocked Oxford in 1967 when he informed a conference of his opinion. And, Robert Williams, author of "Just As I Am: A Practical Guide to Being Out, Proud, and Christian," with its spicy chapters like "Jesus Had a Penis," "Jesus the Sissy" and "God Likes to Party."

I telephoned Dr. "Bob" Goss the next morning; he's assistant professor of comparative religion at Webster University in St. Louis.

"Why," I asked, "are all the U.S. scholars who claim Jesus is gay also gay themselves? Why can't I find a straight academic who agrees with you?"

(He snorted.) "There's a tremendous amount of homophobia in U.S. religious departments. Scholars fear our position will lead to professional suicide."

"OK," I continued. "You think Jesus was gay, so -- who's the boyfriend? Is it John, the 'beloved' apostle?"

"The Gospel never defines John as the 'beloved' -- that's just a theory. I believe the 'beloved' disciple was Lazarus."

"The guy Jesus raised from the dead?"

"Yes. Lazarus also receives the 'sexual baptism' in Morton Smith's document."

"Wait a minute, Bob. That Morton thing is vague."

"Oh, come on. A man who loves you comes into your bedroom and spends all night naked with you? That's a clear indication, I think."

"OK, OK. But what about the accepted Gospels? Anything there?"

"John 19:26-28. Jesus is dying on the cross, and it says, 'When Jesus saw his mother, and the beloved disciple standing by, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold thy son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold thy mother!" After this, Jesus knew all things were accomplished.' When my own lover died of AIDS, the identical thing happened. He said, 'Take care of my lover. Take care of my mother.' Gay men who've been through this, we intuit the intimacy between Jesus and 'the beloved.'"

"Gosh. Sorry. Anything else?"

"At the Last Supper, the 'beloved' lies on the inner tunic of Jesus -- that's the undergarment. They eat together, side by side. What's being portrayed here is a pederastic relationship between an older man and a younger man. A Greek reader would understand."

"Oh my. Like Plato's 'Symposium' -- Socrates and Alcibiades?"

"Exactly. Jesus lived in a Hellenistic society. Men entered a mentoring relationship with older men, in the pederastic model of learning."

I can't tell Brian he's wrong, because maybe he's not. Jesus has the flexible strength of all great heroes in literature; he represents myriad things to innumerable people. Wannabe-celibates can bind their restraint to the eunuch passage in Matthew. Heteros can enjoy suggestions that Magdalene and Messiah were frisky. Gays get two choices: Jesus, the radical bottom or the penetrating mentor. There's enough innuendo to satisfy everyone.

A sexually ambiguous Jesus is perfect, really. Everybody can claim him; no one is excluded. He's the ideal leader, ironically, for a sexually tolerant religion.

Unfortunately, few of his followers see him as anything other than their own libidos writ large.

- (1) Jorge Louis Borges – (“Jorge Luis Borges” is pronounced “HOR-hay LWEES BHOR-hays) Argentinean Author of “The Forking Path”
- (2) **The Carpocratian Mark.** After Mark's death, Carpocrates, the founder of the Carpocratian faith group, added his own fictional material to the Secret Gospel. He distributed the forged "gospel," claiming it to be the true Gospel of Mark. The Carpocratians were one of many faith groups that comprised the early Christian movement during the second century CE.
- (3) The **Gordian Knot** is a metaphor [metaphor](#) for an intractable problem, solved by a bold stroke ("cutting the Gordian knot"). The [myth](#) it refers to is associated in [legend](#) with [Alexander the Great](#).