

## BCS Bait & Switch

One of my goals in exposing the problems often associated with John Martignoni's teachings is to make sure I do so in a kind manner. Not only are we as apologists directed by the Bible to witness kindly and gently to others, I know that Christ died for John, just as He did for me. John deserves respect, and I try to impart this. It isn't always easy to do, not because I might actually be hurtful, but because anytime a person's deeply held beliefs come into question, it's natural for that person (and those who follow that person) to take offense. That's why I thoughtfully considered the title of this article before I wrote it, but I decided to use it anyway, because it describes one of John's techniques so well.

The title "Bait & Switch" came to mind when I read Martignoni's response to a follower of BCS who wrote in and asked why the Catholic Church teaches that Jesus had no brothers or sisters, when the Bible clearly says He did. John gave the typical Catholic response, that the ancient Hebrew, and Aramaic languages had no word for "cousin," so evidently the implication is that the writers were forced to use the words brother and sister to describe people who were actually His cousins, or other relatives. Martignoni says:

*"We need to realize a few things here about these "brothers and sisters": #1, there was no word for cousin, or for nephew or niece, or for aunt or uncle in ancient Hebrew or Aramaic -"*

If we look closely, we can see where John Martignoni's apologetic breaks down, and how if he follows this line of reasoning, he's left without a Bible, because it loses its integrity under his interpretation.

Martignoni cites Mark 6:3:

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon, and are not His sisters here with us?”

This passage causes a problem for those who believe Mary was a perpetual virgin, because it references Jesus’ brothers and sisters, an impossibility if Mary was “ever virgin.” John claims that because there was no word for the term “cousin” in the ancient Hebrew, or Aramaic, we *must* assume the ancient scribes were forced to use the words “brother,” or “sister,” even though they were referring to cousins, or other relatives of Jesus. What we need to keep in mind is that the underlying text of the New Testament is in Greek, not Hebrew, or Aramaic. We also need to realize that Greek is the language God chose to communicate the New Testaments to us. There is indeed a word for “cousin,” in Greek ~ *anepsios*. We see it used in the book of Colossians (4:10) to describe the relationship between Barnabas and Mark.

Even so, let’s assume that John has a point, and that the word “cousin” was not available to the ancient writers for whatever reason. The question then becomes, would they have not been able to communicate the difference between a brother and a cousin? Obviously this makes a difference, because if they couldn’t communicate the concept of a cousin, it changes the entire meaning of the text. Given the importance of the accurate transmission of Scripture to the ancient scribes of the day, it would have been a concern for them, and should be for us.

If we look at Ezekiel 11:15, we see the writer distinguish between a brother, and a "relative," with ease:

*"Son of man, your brothers, your relatives, your fellow exiles and the whole house of Israel..." (NASB).*

It doesn't make sense that the writers, inspired by God to write the Scriptures, decided to distinguish between a brother, and a relative in Ezekiel, and are able to communicate it, but then they fail to do so in the books of Timothy, and Matthew, and Luke, when the Greek *did* have a word for cousin.

We also need to look at another assumption that many Catholics make, and that is that Aramaic was the main language of the day when Jesus carried on His ministry. This is not at all a sure thing. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars had come to a consensus that the Hebrew language was no longer employed as a spoken language in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The idea was that it had been replaced by Aramaic. This theory is no longer accepted and has fallen out of favor. There's growing archaeological evidence that Hebrew was indeed still being used as a spoken language in New Testament times. It's likely that Martignoni's position is that Jesus spoke Aramaic because it best serves his purpose, a language that Martignoni says has no word for cousin.

One theory among scholars is that Hebrew was the main tongue, Aramaic was used for communication with others in the middle east, and Greek was used to communicate with those in the eastern Roman Empire. In fact, when Jesus was on the cross, He uttered the words, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani" which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But we are told in the book of Mark that those present didn't understand Him, thinking instead that he was calling out for Elijah. If Aramaic was at least one of the main languages used to communicate, why wouldn't they have known what it meant? (Reference Mark 15:33-34).

The main point is that Martignoni uses the Old Testament to make his case, and this is completely wrong. He leads the questioner to believe that because the ancient Hebrew and/or Aramaic languages had no word for cousin, that the translators of the book of Mark were confined to using the terms “brother” and “sister” interchangeably when referring to other relatives, and here we have the bait & switch.

There’s another thing to consider: in Mk 6:3, the very verse Martignoni cites, we need to see that he doesn’t finish the Scripture passage. The rest of the passage reads...”And they were scandalized in regard of Him”(Douay-Rheims Bible.) They were scandalized in regard of Him presumably because it was known that Mary became pregnant before she married Joseph. This fact would have scandalized the *immediate* family – Joseph, and Jesus’ brothers and sisters, not Jesus’ cousins.

Because Martignoni picks and chooses convenient snippets of the Bible to make his various points, mistakes are often made. Good Christian apologetics demands that passages be taken in total, and that context is observed. I believe this is one of the reasons Martignoni is against taking Scripture alone for truth, because if he does, it would work against so many misconceptions he tries so hard to hold on to. The problem for Martignoni is that he must conform to the Catholic teaching of the perpetual virginity of Mary, a doctrine that is not Biblical. It is this requirement that causes the controversy, and makes it impossible for him to accept the plain teaching of the Scriptures with regard to Mary’s physical relationship with Joseph. We must also remember that if Mary and Joseph had indeed resisted a physical relationship with one another, they would have necessarily denied the holy sacrament of marriage, in which physical consummation, along with the continued honoring of the marriage covenant would have been imperative.