

**Mary Magdalene:
Her Image and Relationship to Jesus**

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Linda Elaine Vogt Turner
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APPROVAL

Name: Linda Elaine Vogt Turner
Degree: Master of Arts (Liberal Studies)
Title of Project: Mary Magdalene:
Her Image and Relationship to Jesus

Examining Committee:

Chair: Dr. June Sturrock,
Professor Emeritus, English

Dr. Michael Kenny
Senior Supervisor
Professor of Anthropology

Dr. Eleanor Stebner
Supervisor
Associate Professor of Humanities, Graduate Chair,
Graduate Liberal Studies

Rev. Dr. Donald Grayston
External Examiner
Director, Institute for the Humanities, Retired

Date Defended/Approved: December 14, 2011



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ABSTRACT

The ambiguous figure of Mary Magdalene first appears in the Christian Gospels—most importantly as a witness to the Resurrection—and subsequently in mystical writings of Gnostic origins. Her true relationship to Jesus, and to other women in the Gospels, has sparked controversy since the early days. This project examines these controversies in light of present-day debates about the role of women in the church. To that end I consider her role in contemporary popular culture, such as in Dan Brown’s novel *The Da Vinci Code*, and films such as Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*. I then outline the early canonical and non-canonical writings in which she appears, and finally examine how contestants within the various faith traditions have framed her nature and role. Was she a reformed prostitute, or Jesus’s lover, or a female aspect of the Saviour himself, as the Gnostics seemed to claim? It emerges that the multifaceted image of the Magdalene has been used to send a variety of messages concerning gender, power, and the nature of redemption. I conclude that she is best considered as the female counterpart of Christ, and as such provides an inspiring example for women of our own day because of her simultaneous embrace of both worldly love and spiritual transcendence.

Keywords: Mary Magdalene, Jesus, Christianity, Popular Culture

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all the ‘Maggies’ who endured penurious exile and marginalization as domestic slaves in the Magdalen Laundries because of Christian societal values that deemed them “loose women” and a threat to Christian families. I want this work to stand as a testimony to women and men who dare to love beyond cultural boundaries without fear of condemnation and lonely exile. More importantly, I want this work to inspire people to challenge the injustice, the silence, the gossip and the fear that keeps people in unloving, broken, or abusive relationships. But most of all, I want this work to inspire people to choose the better part, the part that allows them to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God.

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Huge thanks goes to the GLS alumni, the staff, and the professors. Their help and encouragement and their dedicated commitment to the academic enquiry of thinking about passion and thinking about reason contributed to my choice for this project. Lastly, I want to thank my children, my family, and my friends who sacrificed time with me so that I could write yet another paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	viii
List of Tables	ix
Glossary	x
1: Introduction	1
1.1 Christological Controversy	1
1.2 Goal and Position	11
2: Popular Culture	13
2.1 Dan Brown: The Da Vinci Code.....	13
2.2 Margaret Starbird: The Woman with the Alabaster Jar.....	17
2.3 Lynn Picknett: Christianity's Hidden Goddess	22
2.4 Hippolytus and Early Church Traditions	25
2.5 Franco Zeffirelli: Jesus of Nazareth.....	28
2.6 Martin Scorsese: The Last Temptation.....	30
2.7 Mel Gibson: The Passion of the Christ.....	31
2.8 Susan Haskins: Myth and Metaphor.....	33
2.9 Concluding Thoughts	34
3: Canonical and non-canonical Texts	37
3.1 Canonical Texts.....	37
3.1.1 The Gospel of Luke.....	38
3.1.2 The Gospel of Matthew.....	44
3.1.3 The Gospel of Mark	48
3.1.4 The Gospel of John.....	50
3.2 Concluding Thoughts	55
3.3 The Non-Canonical Texts.....	58
3.3.1 The Gospel of Phillip.....	59
3.3.2 The Gospel of Thomas	60
3.3.3 The Gospel of Mary	60
3.3.4 The Pistis Sophia.....	63
3.3.5 The Thunder: Perfect Mind	65
3.4 Concluding Thoughts	65

4: Contestants: Faith Traditions.....	67
4.1 Roman Catholic Tradition.....	68
4.1.1 Catholic Encyclopedia: St. Mary Magdalen.....	68
4.1.2 Rosemary Radford Ruether.....	69
4.1.3 Jane Schaberg and Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre.....	72
4.2 Protestant Tradition.....	80
4.2.1 William Barclay and the Kilmore Stained Glass.....	80
4.2.2 Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel.....	84
4.2.3 Lucy Winkett.....	85
4.2.4 Bishop John Shelby Spong.....	87
4.3 Gnosticism and the Greek Orthodox Tradition.....	88
4.3.1 Elaine Pagels.....	89
4.3.2 Prof. Dr. Chrysostomos of Myra.....	92
4.3.3 Karen King.....	93
4.4 Modern Devotees and New Age Tradition.....	96
4.4.1 Barbara Walker.....	97
4.4.2 Leonard Swidler and Stevan Davies.....	99
4.5 Concluding Thoughts.....	100
5: Conclusion.....	103
5.1 Introduction.....	103
5.2 The Contesting Views.....	105
5.3 Evidence from the Apocrypha.....	106
5.4 Evidence from the Canonical Texts.....	107
5.5 Popular Culture.....	110
5.6 Concluding Thoughts.....	111
6: Bibliography.....	115
Appendices.....	120
Appendix A: Text Tables.....	121
Appendix B: Email Correspondence with J.S. Spong.....	131
Appendix C: Handwritten Correspondence from J.S. Spong.....	134

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Da Vinci, Leonardo. The Last Supper.....	15
Figure 2: Tintoretto, J.R. Christ in the House of Martha and Mary.....	20
Figure 3: Adam, S. Mary Hath Chosen.....	83

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Mary Magdalene as the Scarlet Woman.....	121
Table 2: Crucifixion and Resurrection Accounts	123
Table 3: Only time Gospel explicitly names Mary Magdalene outside the passion accounts.....	124
Table 4: Texts typically left out of the discussion of the texts in Tables 1-3.....	125
Table 5: Gnostic Texts.....	127
Table 6: Hebrew (Old) Testament Texts.....	129
Table 7: Research Gap	130

GLOSSARY

- Christology: The branch of theology relating to Christ
- Conflate: Blend or fuse together (esp. two variant texts into one)
- Mariology: The branch of theology relating to Mary, the mother of Jesus
- Salvation: Profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (Protestant)
Acknowledgement and cooperation of transgressors to work with God to make amends and receive forgiveness (Roman Catholic)
- Theotokos: The One who bore God, who gave birth to God the Word made flesh, and so popularly addressed and regarded as the Mother of God

1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Christological Controversy

In the fall and winter of 1991 and 1992 in the streets of Paris two posters featuring Mary Magdalene were used to attract visitors to the Louvre and to the Musée du Petit Palais. The Louvre poster presented Mary Magdalene as a nude woman covered by long curly hair and the Petit Palais poster depicted Martin Schongauer's "Noli me tangere" engraving of Mary Magdalene with her alabaster jar (Haskins 381-383). While visiting Paris in the winter of 2004 and 2005, my eye was caught by a bookstore display not far from the Louvre that featured Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, the opening scenes of which are set in the Louvre itself (Brown 17). *The Da Vinci Code* took the old Grail legend featuring Mary Magdalene and used it as an invitation to enter on a quest to "find the lost sacred feminine" that it claims the church has "virtually eliminated" (Brown 321-322).

Brown's claim has drawn worldwide attention to Mary Magdalene and her role in the Gospels, particularly her relationship to Jesus Christ, and it has renewed centuries of Christological controversy. Mary Magdalene has become a multifaceted symbolic figure in contemporary disputes concerning the role of women and the authoritative power they hold in the historical and modern church. Who Mary Magdalene was matters especially in the context of how Jesus related to her. Many people want to know: Who was she? Was she merely one of many female disciples accompanying Jesus? Have traditional

roles and sexual morality defined her and kept her from being recognized as Jesus's counterpart, his equal? What is the historical reality within the stories told about her? Can that even be determined? What evidence is there? This project explores these complex issues, and outlines what the various participants in this debate believe to be at stake. By way of introduction, I first provide a brief overview of the nature of that debate and the evidence behind it.

Twelve scriptural passages variously identify Mary Magdalene as a woman of seven expelled demons; as a woman who witnessed the Crucifixion among a throng of other women; and as a woman who personally spoke with the Resurrected Christ.¹ These twelve texts, which I outline in some detail below, are the only canonical texts that explicitly identify Mary as Mary Magdalene. Yet, western popular culture and Roman Catholic tradition have conflated the Magdalene of these twelve scriptures with other women, also mentioned in the Gospels, who anointed Jesus with an expensive jar of fragrant oil, and have thereby promoted the belief that Mary Magdalene and these women are one and the same (Winkett 20). One of these anointing women is identified as a sinner, but not named (Luke 7.39), and the other anointing woman is identified as Mary, the sister of Martha who owns a home in Bethany, not Magdala believed to be the hometown of Mary as suggested by her surname (Luke 10.39; John 11.1, Pope).

So modern scholars, in both the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions, now maintain that this conflation of Mary Magdalene is based on a false

¹ See Luke 8. 2; Matt. 27.56; Matt. 27.61; Matt. 28.1; Mark 15.40; Mark 15.47; Mark 16.1; Mark 16.9; Luke 24.10; John 19.25; John 20.1; John 20.18.

assumption that portrays her negatively, as an adulterer or a penitent whore (Winkett 20). Popular culture and some Christian commentators have exploited this negative composite to establish a contrast with the saintly chaste Virgin Mary, venerated as the Mother of Jesus (Warner 235-236).

These two contrasting stereotypes associated with the name Mary are problematic today because many believe that Mary's virginity, in contrast to the Magdalene's sexuality, reflects an outdated belief that sexual intercourse pollutes women (Warner 235, 338). Therefore non-canonical literature is being re-examined to better understand Mary Magdalene's image in contrast to Mary's virginity. This research is heightening the controversy about Mary Magdalene's image because it reveals that early Christianity tended to conflate Mary Magdalene with Mary Theotokos, popularly addressed as the mother of God in the west.

For example, in a 4th century Christian commentary, Cyril the bishop of Jerusalem portrays Mary Magdalene as a virgin and conflates her with Mary, Jesus's mother. Cyril explains that the parents of Mary the mother of Jesus were born in Magdala, and this is why Mary the mother of Jesus assumed the identity of Mary Magdalene (*Discourse on Mary Theotokos*). In another of Cyril's works found in *The Apocryphal New Testament*,² the Virgin introduces herself as other popularly known Marys. She says, "I am Mary Magdalene, because the name of the village wherein I was born was Magdalia. My name is Mary of Cleopa...I am Mary of James, the son of Joseph the carpenter" (qtd. in Warner 345).

² Cyril's work found in the Apocryphal New Testament is the *Twentieth Discourse*.

Matthew's and Luke's nativity stories distinguish Mary, the Mother of Jesus, from Mary Magdalene by situating her hometown in Nazareth.³ However, bestselling authors Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, in their book *The First Christmas*, interpret these nativity stories as parables that use symbolic language (33). Borg's and Crossan's symbolic conflation of the birth narratives with the resurrection narratives pushes modern readers to go beyond the factual account of the Christian nativity story. It allows for the conflation of Mary Magdalene's identity with the spiritual rather than the biological birth mother of the man called Jesus. Furthermore, recently discovered apocryphal works, such as Cyril's and several gnostic texts, support this conflation of the two seemingly different Marys. They create a composite figure called Mary that draws upon the identities of both the Magdalene and the Virgin. However, many people oppose this conflation. They want to sort out the Marys in keeping with established scholarly beliefs and practices.

Resisting scholarly interpretations that decouple the images of the two Marys, the website *Mary as Goddess, Mary as Bride* has posted the gnostic work entitled *Thunder: Perfect Mind*, specifically to honour Mary Magdalene. This work states "I am the first and the last...the whore and the virgin... the mother and the daughter...the bride and the bridegroom...I am the one who is called Truth" (Blanca; *Nag Hammadi* 297). This website claims that this evidence, together with other gnostic and apocryphal sources, suggest that early Christians believed that Mary Magdalene was the incarnation of the Goddess, the great mother of all.

³ See Matthew 1.18-25 and Luke 1. 26-38.

Therefore, it is claimed that the Magdalene was venerated as the Mother of Jesus until the organized church officially created two separated characters in the Middle Ages to stem the veneration of Mary Magdalene (Blanca). Among this website's references are Elaine Pagels, Margaret Starbird, Barbara Walker, and Marina Warner (Blanca).

Marina Warner, who has written extensively on the Virgin Mary, claims that the story of the virgin birth recorded in Luke's and Matthew's gospels originated as a mythic tale. Warner explains that the custom of women taking vows of virginity was a common pagan practice, widespread throughout Syria, that Hebrew culture abhorred because in Warner's view, ancient Mediterranean culture viewed virginity as a sign of a woman's autonomy to accept or reject the sexual advances of lovers of lovers (32-46). Warner's research lends support to those who believe that Mary Magdalene was autonomous as were temple prostitutes (Blanca), free to make, accept or reject sexual advances without fear of divine condemnation or retribution. And of course, it adds more controversy to the discussion.

Later in the same chapter of Luke's Gospel that explicitly identifies "Mary as the one (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out," Jesus's ambiguous words add more fuel to the fire. Here Jesus says, "...my mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice" (Luke 8.2, 21). A metaphorical interpretation of this verse could be used to buttress the claim that the gnostic *Gospel of Mary* "said all three Marys of the canonical books were one and the same" (Walker 614). However, the gnostic

text does not explicitly and undisputedly say that. According to Stephen Shoemaker, the gnostic Mary's identity has not been indisputably decided (*A Case of Mistaken Identity* 30). Yet, in an article speaking to Shoemaker's article, Antti Marjanen claims that the *Manichaean Psalm-Book Mary (Magdalene)* clearly identifies Mary Magdalene as Martha's sister and contains features of the *Gospel of Mary* as well as the canonical Gospel of John (35, 41). Therefore, evidence from ancient popular culture exacerbates the controversy of Mary Magdalene's image and her relationship to Jesus.

Complicating the controversy of Mary's historical identity and role in the church today is the fact that, for the most part, western mainstream Christianity has moved away from an allegorical or mystical interpretation of scripture. It has adopted a literal and rational interpretation to prove that the events recorded in the New Testament canon "really" happened (Spong, *Liberating the Gospels* 18). It has moved away from conflating Mary Magdalene with Martha's sister Mary of Bethany and Mary the Virgin.

Mainstream Christianity, liberal Protestantism and Roman Catholic social justice campaigns, in light of all the apocryphal material now available, maintain that they are trying to restore Mary Magdalene's image in keeping with modern societal values and sound biblical scholarship (Lloyd; Haskins 392). Therefore, mainstream biblical scholarship now renounces centuries of western interpretive tradition that has conflated Mary Magdalene with the unnamed sinner woman and Mary, Martha's sister. The Roman Catholic Church is said to be the original source of this erroneous conflation of Mary and popular culture is blamed for

perpetuating it (Haskins 392; Winkett 20; Moltmann-Wendel 64). Some mainstream voices now argue that the traditional western conflated image of Mary Magdalene is outdated and responsible for the societal slur given to women who are sexually active outside marriage (Lloyd; Winkett, 20).

Other voices question this revision. In light of all the gnostic and apocryphal texts that conflate the Marys, confidence is waning in the mainstream program to reimage Mary Magdalene's conflated Gospel role because of that supposed societal slur. For instance, in a non-denominational Church of God publication,⁴ David Lloyd asks, "Is [Mary Magdalene's] new image a truer likeness than the old?"

In 1910 Hugh Pope, a Roman Catholic scholar, wrote the biographical entry *St. Mary Magdalen*, now available on-line for the New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, in support of the old, historical conflated view of Mary Magdalene. Pope's entry deserves careful consideration because it underscores the significance of forgiveness in Christianity that modern scholars may be missing in their eagerness "to repaint Mary to conform to modern agendas" (Pope; Lloyd).

Pope argues that conflating Mary Magdalene with the women of the anointing stories is fundamental to understanding the Christian teaching of forgiveness (*St. Mary Magdalen*). He begins by presenting the traditional Roman Catholic view. Then he outlines the differing positions of the Greek Orthodox,

⁴ Vision: Insights and New Horizons is an on-line publication sponsored and funded by the nondenominational community, the Church of God who claims it has no social or political agenda <http://www.vision.org/visionmedia/page.aspx?id=115&submenu=77>

Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions that have historically caused disunity among Christians:

Mary Magdalen was so called either from Magdala...of Galilee, or possibly from a Talmudic expression... meaning an adulteress. In the New Testament she is mentioned among the women who accompanied Christ and ministered to Him (Luke 8:2-3), where it is also said that seven devils had been cast out of her (Mark 16:9). She is next named as standing at the foot of the cross (Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:56; John 19:25; Luke 23:49). She saw Christ laid in the tomb, and she was the first recorded witness of the Resurrection. (*St. Magdalen*)

Hugh Pope identifies Mary Magdalene's role differently from the Greek Fathers, who as a whole, distinguish the three persons:

- the "sinner" of Luke 7:36-50;
- [Mary], the sister of Martha and Lazarus [of Bethany], Luke 10:38-42 and John 11
- Mary Magdalen. (*St. Magdalen*)

He contrasts the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic views, saying that, "most of the Latins hold that these three were one and the same" (*St. Magdalen*). According to Pope, the Latin position identifies Mary Magdalene firstly as the "sinner" woman of Luke's Gospel who may have been a forgiven adulteress who anointed Jesus in the home of Simon; secondly as Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who anointed Jesus in Bethany; and thirdly as the first penitent and redeemed "sinner" witnessing the Resurrection. Pope acknowledges that the Latin view is not universally accepted in the West.

The main point of disagreement between the Greek, the Latin and the Protestant traditions stems from a disagreement as to how to collect and

consider evidence; however, Pope adds a further theological dimension to the debate:

It is the identification of Mary of Bethany with the "sinner" of Luke 7:37, which is most combated by Protestants. It almost seems as if this reluctance to identify the "sinner" with the sister of Martha were due to a failure to grasp the full significance of the forgiveness of sin.... (*St. Magdalen*)

This reluctance to "identify the 'sinner' with Mary the sister of Martha" is a profound statement. One's readiness or reluctance to see Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene as Luke's sinner may be dependent upon one's understanding of sin, redemption and forgiveness. This is important because Roman Catholics and Protestants have historically held differing views concerning salvation, how people are saved from their sins, and the nature of sin itself (O'Neil). According to O'Neil's entry on "Sin" in the New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, many Protestants believe sin is not a deliberate transgression of the Divine Law because people do not voluntarily sin. People sin because they are human, and people do not have to do anything to receive forgiveness except confess their faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore it is claimed that a sinner is someone who does not profess their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour (O'Neil). Roman Catholics disagree; they believe that people can wilfully disobey Divine Law, and yet, Christians and non-Christians who acknowledge their deliberate transgression, can receive salvation by doing good works. They can cooperate and work with God to make amends and receive forgiveness (O'Neil).

The New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia is no longer representative of the Roman Catholic or Protestant positions that have been rethinking their doctrines

of faith to reflect modern societal views. In the above-mentioned Church of God publication, David F. Lloyd reports that modern scholars now contend that there is not enough evidence to support the view that Mary Magdalene was the sinful woman with the great love for Jesus. Lloyd portrays those who do support this view as conspiracy theorists or radical feminists. He claims they transform Mary Magdalene into a high priestess and conflate her with Mary of Bethany to fit their political agendas and theories, many of which entertain the idea that Mary Magdalene was either Jesus's mistress or his wife (Lloyd). Conversely, in the words of Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong, any idea that Jesus and Mary were lovers "would fly in the face of the moral values espoused by the church..., and it would deeply violate our understanding of Jesus as incarnate Lord and the Holy Sinless One" (*Born of a Woman* 189). Therefore it is not surprising that the Roman Catholic Church quietly changed its position in 1969 (Lloyd). In line with the Greek Fathers, and in an effort to diffuse political tensions, the Roman Catholic Church now asserts that Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and the unnamed woman who anointed Jesus in the presence of Simon were three different women (Pope; Lloyd).

Popular culture however, is resisting the revised Catholic position concerning the image of the Magdalene and her relationship to Jesus. Books such as *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar* (Brown; Starbird) and movies such as *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *The Passion of the Christ* are evidence of this resistance (Tatum). This resistance to the Roman Catholics' changed position is heightening the controversy surrounding the image

of Mary Magdalene. This is especially so as lay people become aware of non-canonical sources, popular publications, websites and television shows that query the belief that Mary Magdalene was the woman that Jesus loved (Starbird; Picknett; Nahmad and Bailey; Blanca; Bellevie; Bock; Ehrman).

We therefore find ourselves in the midst of a complex debate in which the various contenders are advocating positions based on their reading of the evidence and the theological and moral implications they draw from it. This project seeks to characterize that debate and the evidence on which it is based.

1.2 Goal and Position

The purpose of this project is therefore to examine the western cultural phenomenon that promotes Mary Magdalene as a sexually active woman despite scholarly assertions and denials from the mainline traditions. My primary goal is to understand why western popular culture, here seen as an instrument of social criticism, has conflated and continues to conflate Mary Magdalene's image with other named and unnamed women in the Gospel.

In Chapter Two I outline the contested views within popular culture and their ramifications. Chapter Three examines and discusses the canonical and non-canonical evidence behind a controversy being fought on multiple fronts: in formal academic debate, in the media, and on the web. Chapter Four presents and summarizes the views of the major faith traditions featured in the contemporary debates concerning Mary Magdalene and her relationship to Jesus. Chapter Five concludes by adopting the position of those who conflate

Mary Magdalene with the adulterous woman and the ever-virgin Mary. Mary is acknowledged as the “Sinner Woman” who challenges the church to recognize those who dare to stand up to tyranny. This matters because many people believe Mary and Jesus were sexually involved and had an illicit affair, an adulterous encounter. Yet religious authorities maintain that this would be impossible because neither Jesus nor Mary Magdalene were married. Therefore many people refuse to believe Jesus was in fact a sexually active being and, as I argue, fail to see how acknowledging by name the woman he loved is central to their Christology.

2: POPULAR CULTURE

This chapter discusses contesting views within contemporary popular culture concerning Mary Magdalene's role and identity, most notably Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. I begin with a discussion of Brown's thesis and then examine the work of Margaret Starbird and Lynn Picknett; I also look back to the early church father Hippolytus, since he—as well as Starbird and Picknett—conflates Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany. In my view, coming to terms with the relationship between these two women is one of the most important interpretive problems posed by the canonical texts. Following this examination, I discuss three post 1969 films featuring Mary Magdalene, then turn to the views of Susan Haskins, a lay Roman Catholic scholar and critic of popular culture. I conclude with some general remarks about the nature of this debate.

2.1 Dan Brown: The Da Vinci Code

Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* "is a worldwide bestseller" that Columbia Pictures brought to a larger audience in 2006 (Brown cover). Brown's novel popularized the idea that the Roman Catholic Church has deliberately kept the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene a well-guarded secret to quell Goddess worship (384, 411). While others, such as Margaret Starbird and Lynn Picknett, hold that view, Brown popularized this controversial idea on a grand scale. He equated Mary Magdalene with the coveted Holy Grail of folklore, accepted that possibility as true, and then wove it into an exciting mystery story

unravelling by his main characters (329-340). At the heart of *The Da Vinci Code* is the idea that Constantine concocted a Jesus of history to reinforce the power structure of the Roman Catholic Church as it broke away from gnostic traditions (Brown, 172, 340; Pagels, 41-45). This idea is revealed through a conversation between Langdon and Sophie, the hero and heroine of Brown's book:

Sophie remained silent... 'The Priory believes that Constantine and his male successors successfully converted the sacred from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity by waging a campaign of propaganda that demonized the sacred feminine, obliterating the goddess from modern religion for ever.' (172)

Sophie... turned to Langdon. 'The Holy Grail is a person?' Langdon nodded... 'Legend tells us the Holy Grail is a chalice – a cup. ...legend uses the chalice as a metaphor. ...the ancient symbol for womanhood and the *Holy Grail* represents the sacred feminine and the goddess, which of course has now been lost, virtually eliminated by the Church.' (320-321)

Through further dialogue, Brown explains why the Holy Grail got lost:

'I'm sorry, when you said the Holy Grail was a person, I thought you meant it was an actual person.' 'It is,' Langdon said. 'And not *just any person*,' ... 'And if we adjourn to the study...it would be my honour to show you Da Vinci's painting of her.' (323)

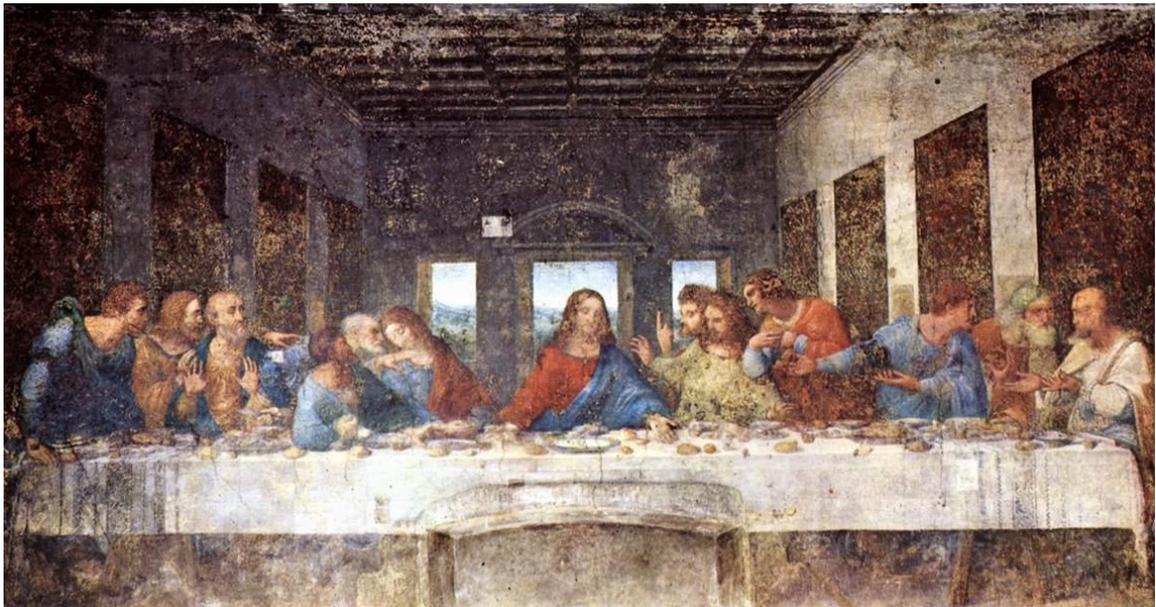
In the study, Brown's characters discuss Da Vinci's last supper:

'[T]he early Church needed to convince the world that the moral prophet Jesus was a *divine* being. ...earthly aspects of Jesus' life had to be omitted.'... 'Unfortunately for the early editors, one particularly troubling earthly theme kept recurring in the gospels. Mary Magdalene.' ... 'More specifically, her marriage to Jesus Christ.' ... 'It's a matter of historical record,' ... 'Da Vinci was certainly aware of that fact. *The Last Supper* practically shouts at the viewer that Jesus and Magdalene were a pair.' (329)

The historical record that Brown draws upon is the Grail legends and the *Gospel of Phillip*. Brown draws his readers' attention to the effeminate person in

Da Vinci's painting who sits to the right of Jesus facing out, forming a three person cluster. According to Brown, this woman is Mary Magdalene and her clothes are the mirror opposite of the central figure Jesus. (329). Brown's Teabing character traces the contour between them. Immediately, Brown's Sophie sees an "indisputable V shape at the focal point of the painting," and recognizes this as the Grail symbol and female womb that Langdon had drawn earlier (329).

Figure 1: Da Vinci, Leonardo. The Last Supper



Source. Da Vinci, 1498.

Building mystery, Brown informs his readers about mistaken conspiracy theorists, about the passages in the *Gospel of Phillip* and the *Gospel of Mary* that suggest Jesus had a romantic relationship that upset the apostle Peter. Brown then brings the reader back to the Roman Catholic "Saint Peter, the Rock on which Jesus built his Church," to reinforce the idea that Peter was sexist and

jealous of Mary. Brown supports the feminist claim that Mary, not Peter, was meant to be Jesus's successor. He then claims, through Langdon, that the "Magdalene was recast as a whore in order to erase evidence of her powerful family ties," and puts forth the theory that the marriage of Mary Magdalene and Jesus "fused two royal bloodlines" to create a kingdom as great as Solomon's (333-335). He has Sophie ponder the idea that Mary Magdalene carried the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ. "But how could Christ have a bloodline unless...?" Langdon smiled softly. "Unless they had a child" (Brown 336).

These central ideas have sparked controversy and questions. Darrell L. Bock in his book *Breaking the Da Vinci Code: Answering the Questions Everybody's Asking*, says that the real code behind all the controversy and questions is Jesus Christ (9,159). Bock is a New Testament scholar and his view typifies the interplay between popular culture and scholarship. For Bock, Jesus, not *The Da Vinci Code*, is the source people should turn to for these answers because Jesus and the New Testament reveal Mary Magdalene as his disciple, not his wife. Bock explains that she better serves her community as a disciple, and as such makes a better witness to the risen Jesus (167). In addition, he presents Mary as one of seven women with the same name in the New Testament:

1. Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 1. 30-31)
2. Mary of Bethany (John 11.1)
3. Mary the mother of James but not the Lord's brother (Matthew 27.56)
4. Mary the wife of Clopas (John 19.25)
5. Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12.12)
6. One otherwise unidentified Mary (Romans 16.6)

7. Mary Magdalene distinguished with reference to Magdala (Luke 8.2). (Bock 15)

Brown presents Mary Magdalene as the female counterpart to Jesus—his Queen and the mother of his children (335). In contrast, Bock presents Mary Magdalene as a servant with reference to Magdala as opposed to Bethany, the hometown of Martha.

2.2 Margaret Starbird: The Woman with the Alabaster Jar

Margaret Starbird's *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar* (1993) preceded Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* by ten years. In *The Da Vinci Code* (Brown 339), Brown acknowledges Starbird's book, along with another of hers, *The Goddess in the Gospels* (1998). Central to Starbird's claim is that Mary Magdalene was the wife of Jesus—and as such “represents—par excellence—the feminine face of God and its incarnation in the female half of creation” (*Bride in Exile* 110).

Starbird holds a graduate degree from the University of Maryland. Her Roman Catholic beliefs were shaken with the highly criticized publication of Michael Baigent's, Richard Leigh's, and Henry Lincoln's *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (1986) that claimed Jesus had married Mary Magdalene. She set out through her studies in comparative literature, medieval studies, linguistics, and Scripture studies, to refute it, but instead found more evidence and more reason to believe it (Starbird, *Alabaster Jar* xx). John Shelby Spong, an Episcopal bishop who has himself written on Mary Magdalene, endorses her 1993 book, stating that Starbird is a “seeker after truth, not a defender of doctrine.” He continues:

She seeks to recover the long-suppressed, and not infrequently emotionally opposed, feminine side of the Christian story. Hers is an exciting narrative probing regions of thought long neglected.
(Cover)

Looking to the myths of Mary Magdalene as indications that Mary Magdalene actually took the Gospel to France, Starbird asserts that traces of truth remain in the names of the people and places encrypted in local legends and festivals (*Alabaster Jar* 60). For example, she refers to the centuries old festival celebrated in the town of Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer between May 23 and May 25 in honour of Saint Sarah:

Close scrutiny reveals that this festival, which originated in the Middle Ages, is in honor of an “Egyptian” child who accompanied Mary Magdalen, Martha, and Lazarus, arriving with them in a small boat that came ashore at this location in approximately A.D. 42.
(*Alabaster Jar* 60)

Starbird suggests that people assumed that the name Sarah, which “means ‘queen’ or ‘princess’ in Hebrew,” was black or dark-skinned because she was Egyptian (*Alabaster Jar* 61). Starbird then incorporates this story and festival celebration with Hebrew Scripture passages from Zechariah, Micah, Lamentations and the Song of Songs (*Alabaster Jar* 61-64) to introduce the idea that Mary bore a female child named Sarah, fathered by Jesus, after she had fled to Alexandria following the crucifixion and resurrection (*Alabaster Jar* 61-64). It is argued that Sarah, like the princess of Lamentations 4.8, “is symbolically black” and that therefore the Magdalene, the mother of Sarah, is also symbolically black (*Alabaster Jar* 61). Starbird maintains that it is likely that this myth and the many European shrines of the Black Madonna were formed to protect Mary and Sarah

and to convey the carefully guarded secret that Mary was Jesus's wife (*Alabaster Jar* 61-64). With this understanding, Starbird maintains that Mary and her child became the "Sangraal [the Holy Grail], which Joseph of Arimathea safely brought to the coast of France" (*Alabaster Jar* 64).

Starbird's *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar* leans heavily on evidence historically considered heretical, such as the beliefs of the Cathars, the Albigensians, the Freemasons, and the Knights Templars. However, it provides historical evidence that popular European Christianity connected Jesus and Mary Magdalene romantically as well as spiritually in spite of the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church to quell such beliefs as heresy (71-84). In a more recent book, written after Brown's *Da Vinci Code*, Starbird elaborates upon the beliefs of the Cathars, claiming that Pope Innocent III ordered the slaughter of the entire town of Béziers on July 22, 1209 because "the heretics claimed that Saint Mary Magdalene was the concubine of Jesus Christ" (*Bride of Exile* 107).

However, she promotes Mary Magdalene as the wife of Jesus, not his concubine, and declares that, even though the Inquisition tried to eradicate all such heresies, the "great heresy surfaced in art and artifact—in watermarks, paintings, [and] tapestries—and in fairy tale and folklore... and ...the trumps of the earliest tarot decks" (*Bride in Exile* 108). She insists that "certain artists knew and continued to perpetuate the secret tradition" that she believes she has uncovered (*Bride in Exile* 108). One such artist is Jacopo Robusti Tintoretto and his famous painting of *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Tintoretto, J.R. Christ in the House of Martha and Mary



Source. Tintoretto, 1570.

Starbird asserts that this painting contains “numerous allusions to the secret union” of Jesus and Mary of Bethany:

In Tintoretto’s painting, Mary is seated in an odd position facing Jesus. The odd posture is similar to that of a woman sitting on a birthing stool, and her right hand is cupped in an ancient symbolic invitation for sex. With his fingers, Jesus is apparently forming a vesica piscis, the archetypal symbol of the goddess of love and

fertility, associated by gematria with Mary Magdalene herself!
(*Bride in Exile* 109)

Much of her evidence in support of her theory that Mary Magdalene was the lost Bride of Christ is based upon the symbolism of the blade and the chalice and the vesica piscis (*Alabaster Jar* 97; *Magdalene's Lost Legacy* 4,140). The blade, a Λ , is the archetypal symbol for the male. The chalice, a V, is the archetypal symbol for the female (*Alabaster Jar* 97). Accordingly, she says, the earth is out of balance and in an ecological crisis because humanity reveres the blade and has lost sight of the chalice, the holy feminine in its religious tradition (*Alabaster Jar* 97-100). Starbird claims that humanity's search for the holy chalice or Holy Grail is as important today as it once was. The paradigm of a bachelor son and a virgin mother is not what the ancients had in mind when they looked to Jesus as the fulfilment of the millennial prophecy that would "heal the wasteland and cause the desert to bloom" (*Alabaster Jar* 97-100). For Starbird, it is not enough to celebrate Mary Magdalene as an apostle or a faithful follower of Jesus. Rather people need to restore her as the Eternal Bridegroom's "Sacred Partner and Archetypal Bride" to heal the earth (*Bride in Exile* 110; *Alabaster Jar* 179). "To claim that the historical Mary Magdalene had a spiritual union with Jesus while denying her the status of spouse" makes her "a dependent/subordinate friend" (*Bride in Exile* 110).

Starbird's claim relies upon the conflation of the anointing stories found in Matthew 26.6-13; Mark 14.3-9; Luke 7.36-50; and John 12.1-8. Although she cannot prove that Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene were the same person, she is convinced that she was (*Alabaster Jar* xxi). In addition, Starbird criticizes

the widely held belief that Mary came from Magdala, claiming that the word Magdala is a Hebrew epithet meaning 'tower' or 'magnificent' and accepts the prophetic idea, expressed in Micah 4, that Mary Magdalene is the Magdal-eder, the watchtower of the flock, the daughter of Zion whose "former dominion will be restored" (*Alabaster Jar* 50-51).⁵ It is argued that the idea of Mary Magdalene's sin was that of prostitution is not supported by scripture. Rather, she suggests that Luke's Gospel [and tradition] may have misinterpreted the actual anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany as the ritual acts of a priestess in the service of the Great Goddess "Ashera", as if Mary and her behaviour were sinful. She suggests this because some of the ancient prophets renounced and deplored goddess worship as sinful, as acts of prostitution, and the cause of Zion's exile written about in Micah, Zechariah, and Lamentations (*Alabaster Jar* 29, 50-51).⁶

2.3 Lynn Picknett: Christianity's Hidden Goddess

Occult and heresy lecturer, Lynn Picknett, has also examined the Grail legends, the gnostic texts and other apocryphal literature in her book, *Mary Magdalene: Christianity's Hidden Goddess*, for the express purpose of trying to discover more about Mary Magdalene and her relationship to Jesus (xv).

Picknett develops an alternate theory about the Grail actually being the

⁵ See Appendix A, Table 6.

⁶ Lay authors, Claire Nahmad, and Margaret Bailey agree with Margaret Starbird, claiming that Jesus married Mary Magdalene; however other Magdalene devotees disagree. They assert that Mary Magdalene could have been Christ's lover and the "Virgin" [Mary] because the ancient love goddesses worshipped as Virgin were unmarried, but not celibate. Rather the ancient title of virgin signified that a woman [had no husband and therefore] had the autonomy to have several lovers (Blanca). The idea of a purely spiritual marriage to the Divine Jesus is popular with Magdalene devotees because it demonstrates the union of the human soul [as personified by the Magdalene] with God [as personified by Jesus] (Blanca).

disembodied head of John the Baptist (216), and the beloved disciple Lazarus being a homosexual male named John (52). Her work is controversial. Yet her research does challenge traditional assumptions about Mary Magdalene and adds to the controversy concerning her relationship to Jesus. Picknett sees Mary Magdalene as the star of the Gnostic texts whom Jesus loved “so much that he often kissed her on the mouth” (xiv-xv). The slaughter of the people of Béziers on Mary Magdalene’s feast day, July 22, 1209, is central to Picknett’s search for the nature of Mary’s relationship to Jesus. According to Picknett, many of the people of Béziers were Cathars and held gnostic beliefs, but the real reason for their demise was the fact that they refused to recant their belief that Mary Magdalene was Jesus’s concubine. It is asked, “What made the townsfolk of Béziers so convinced of this heresy that they gave up their lives—and the lives of their children—rather than recant?” (40).

Picknett does not think there is enough evidence in the scriptures to warrant such devotion, so she suspects that the Cathars were in possession of forbidden gnostic texts that substantiated their claim (xiv; 40). Moreover, she believes that the town’s death is indicative of the Roman Catholic Church’s need, in order to hold onto his apostolic power, to quell heresy and to promote Peter, rather than Mary Magdalene, as the first disciple to see the risen Christ (44).

Picknett claims that recent attempts by the Roman Catholic Church to assert Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany to be two separate women are politically motivated. The Vatican has used the conflation of Mary Magdalene to its advantage when women threatened its power. It envisioned the Magdalene as

a “hysterical penitent,” and when women did not repent and deliberately rebelled against church authority, the church sent them to the “Maggie” laundries as “slave girls.” It is claimed that the Vatican is using the conflation to its advantage again. It has persuaded the church to accept their corrected idea that Mary is “not a sinner” and “not the same as Mary of Bethany” (Picknett 60-61):

In both cases the men of the Vatican successfully made this potent woman into the archetypal female eunuch, and the irony is that many of the more liberated female Catholics have been persuaded that it is a good thing that she is no longer associated with Mary of Bethany! They see this as progress, when in fact it is nothing of the sort. (Picknett 60-61)

For Picknett like Starbird, Mary Magdalene was probably identical with Mary of Bethany (60), “a lover of Jesus and his spiritual equal, if not his superior” (241). Modern Roman Catholics are quick to say that Mary came from the town of Magdala, but Picknett points out that the town of Magdala did not exist at the time of Jesus (62). The town now associated with Magdala was called Tarichea and actually “nowhere in the New Testament does it spell out where Mary [known as the Magdalene] comes from” (62). Further to this point, Picknett mentions that the Gospel author who describes ‘Mary (called Magdalene)’ does so using a form that differs from the form chosen to describe “Simon of/from Cyrene” (62). Picknett agrees with Starbird that Magdala could be an epithet meaning ‘tower of great one’ and offers yet another possibility, namely that there was a large Jewish town in Egypt called Magdolum. If Mary came from there, it is argued that she could have been black and very likely a goddess worshipping priestess, which would provide sufficient cause for Jewish men of that era to think ill of her (64-66).

Picknett's views are critical of religious men abusing their power. She is, however, anxious to avoid any racist implications that might be detected in her own theory. In *Mary Magdalene: Christianity's Hidden Goddess*, she comments upon the "...idea that the children of Jesus and the Magdalene created a semi-magical royal line in Europe..." (xiii):

Although it is possible, even likely, that Mary did have children, any idea that argues that some people are inherently better than others because of a physical trait (in this case genes) is rather too close for comfort to the concepts used by the Nazis....Being 'holy' because of your blood group or genetic inheritance is but a short step away from declaring that people with different characteristics are inferior, less 'human'. The Magdalene story... should not depend upon the bloodline theory. (xiii)

Picknett opens her book by lambasting the church for labelling sexually active young women or pregnant girls, Magdalens or "Maggies," and sending them off to the Magdalen laundry (2). Like Lucy Winkett, Picknett charges priests with sexually abusing many of the "Maggies" and getting away with it (Winkett 20; Picknett 9).

2.4 Hippolytus and Early Church Traditions

The conflation of these various Marys has a long tradition behind it. Early church tradition conflated Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the Sinner Woman whose sins were blotted out, and made perfect through her love for Jesus. The third century commentator Hippolytus, and others in this early period, also assumed the conflation (Morrow 19-20). But debates continued until the sixth century before it was accepted. Commentators debated the conflation of Mary Magdalene with the anointing stories because Hippolytus equated her with

the Shulamite woman of the Song of Songs (Haskins 63-66).⁷ The Shulamite woman was a bride searching for her bridegroom in King Solomon's garden, and Hippolytus equated her with both Martha and Mary, whom he saw as beloved sisters who go looking for Jesus as the Messianic Bridegroom in the garden on Easter morning (Haskins 63-66; Starbird, *Alabaster Jar* 28; Starbird, *Bride in Exile* 40).

Hippolytus' association of Mary Magdalene with the woman of the Song of Songs gave rise to the celebration of Mary Magdalene's feast day on July 22nd, one week before Martha's feast day, during the Roman Catholic Mass (Haskins 66; Starbird, *Alabaster Jar* 28). From the eighth century, every July 22nd, worshippers celebrated "the love of the Bride for the Bridegroom" as Mary Magdalene's "passionate and undying love for Christ" and "allegorically as the love of the Church for Christ" (Bellevie 334; Haskins 66). They celebrated this love with the reading of verses from the Song of Songs and intercessory prayers linking Mary Magdalene with Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (Bellevie 334; Haskins 66; Starbird, *Alabaster Jar* 28). Particular verses in the Song of Songs illustrate this passionate love of a Bride for her Bridegroom:

Let him kiss me with the kisses of this mouth...delicate is the fragrance of your perfume, your name is an oil poured out...I am black...it is the sun that has burnt me. My mother's sons...made me look after the vineyards. (Song of Songs 1:5-6)

Other verses confirm the Bride's passion for the Bridegroom and the jealousy and scandal it would bring should they kiss openly:

⁷ See Appendix A, Table 6.

Where will you lead your flock to graze...at noon? ...[The Bride says] My beloved is a sachet of myrrh lying between my breasts. ... Why are you not my brother...I could kiss you without people thinking ill of me...[The Bridegroom says] set me like a seal on your heart. ...For love is strong as Death, jealousy relentless as Sheol. (The Jerusalem Bible, Song of Songs 1.7-13; 8.1-6)

Early Coptic tradition also conflated Mary, the mother of Jesus, with Mary Magdalene (Adam B. 46-47). A commentary on Mary Theotokos (God Bearer) by Cyril, the bishop of Jerusalem, depicts “one of the earliest Coptic traditions of Mary’s dormition” (death). Historians date it from before the sixth century. In this commentary, Cyril explains that Mary Magdalene is a virgin. He links the two Marys of scripture by explaining that the parents of Mary the mother of Jesus were born in Magdala, which is why Mary the mother of Jesus upon approaching death assumed the identity of Mary Magdalene, telling the [other] virgins that from that moment on, she was their mother (*Discourse on Mary Theotokos*).

In another early sixth century Greek narrative bearing witness to the “Bethlehem traditions” of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God, St. John the Theologian calls her the ever-virgin Mary and Our Lady. However, as he recounts the details of her death, he links her with the woman Christ said the disciples would remember for her perfume every time they preached the Gospel. St John says:

[T]he apostles carried the couch, and laid down her precious and holy body in Gethsemane in a new tomb. And, behold, a perfume of sweet savour came forth...and all knew that her spotless and precious body had been transferred to paradise. (*Book of St. John: Concerning the Dormition*)

In addition, in an early sixth century Latin manuscript, Melito the bishop of Sardis links Mary the mother of Jesus to the kissing passage associated with Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of Phillip. Line 17 reads, “kissing her, the Lord went back, and delivered her soul to the angels, that they should carry it into paradise” (Melito of Sardis).

It is claimed that, by the Middle Ages, Roman Catholic worshippers contrasted Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus with one another in an effort to control sexuality (Haskins 157-163). They held Mary Magdalene up as the “paradoxical ‘beata peccatrix’ (blessed sinner) and the ‘catissima meritrix’ (most chaste prostitute) who had been converted through her great love for Christ” (Haskins 134-137). As the “Beata Peccatrix,” Mary Magdalene was the stereotypical everywoman, a figure of vanity, adorning herself to arouse lust—but one who repented. Her holy counterpart, the Virgin Mary, was the good Christian woman who exemplified modesty and did not dye her hair or use perfume or cosmetics to arouse lust (Haskins 157-163). Central to this traditional view is the idea that faith in and love for Jesus is transformative. This traditional view is also reflected in Franco Zeffirelli’s film, *Jesus of Nazareth*, to which I now turn. Contemporary cinema rings the changes on the interpretive possibilities implicit in the story of Mary Magdalene.

2.5 Franco Zeffirelli: Jesus of Nazareth

Franco Zeffirelli’s 1973 *Jesus of Nazareth* not only portrays Mary Magdalene as a forgiven prostitute, it also portrays her as Luke’s sinner forgiven for her great love as the woman who anoints Jesus (Tatum 140). The movie ends

with Mary Magdalene going to the disciples who are in hiding. They dismiss her testimony as fantasy. According to the American biblical scholar Jane Schaberg, the angered Magdalene “growls, ‘Was his death a fantasy?...Why should he not appear to me? [Then coldly] He told me to tell you, and I have done so.’ She flings back the door, and slams out.” Peter’s disbelief turns to belief and, according to Schaberg, the “Magdalene’s message about an empty tomb” disappears because Peter takes her message and reduces the significance of the resurrection to forgiveness (*Mary Magdalene Understood* 65).

Schaberg resists the reduction and appropriation of the Magdalene’s message by Peter. She says:

Big deal. [Peter’s forgiven], we’re all forgiven, and the Magdalene is gone. Her function has been to bring a message to men who matter. She confronts, she leaves; they appropriate her belief; they go on. No one has asked her to stay; no one goes after her; her absence is not mourned; no one in the movie gives her a thought when she’s gone. In the final moments of the film, Jesus comes to the disciples; they gather around him and are sent out to make disciples. (*Mary Magdalene Understood* 65)

Schaberg interprets Mary’s empty doorway scene in the movie as Mary’s escape from the oppressive tomb of a hierarchical religion. With her criticism of Peter, Schaberg suggests that he and other men can “exit from a tomb that is not (yet) empty” if they would acknowledge Mary’s leadership and realize a more egalitarian society (*Mary Magdalene Understood* 66; 75).

However, the final moments of the movie place an emphasis on Jesus returning and speaking with the disciples, asking them to receive the Holy Ghost. Yes Mary is gone. In my view, that is the point. Mary is no longer an ordinary

woman. She has been transformed as the Light coming into the world through the windows. This Light is the wisdom of God, and differs from the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1.20-30). God's wisdom is the Spirit of Creation. Through God's wisdom all things were made and all who receive this Light and believe in its name will become the children of God, born of God (John 1.1-13). This is the other Comforter, the other Counselor, who Jesus promised to them (John 14.16). Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation* takes the idea of comforter a bit farther.

2.6 Martin Scorsese: The Last Temptation

Martin Scorsese's film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which is based upon Nikos Kazantzakis's 1955 novel, appeared in theatres in 1988 (Tatum 179,188). The Roman Catholic Church in the United States rated the film morally offensive (Tatum 191). In this film, Jesus breaks his engagement to Mary Magdalene, thereby shaming her and "forcing her, dishonoured into prostitution" (Schaberg, *Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* 72). According to biblical scholar and teacher on religion and film, W. Barnes Tatum, the second part of *The Last Temptation*, surrealistically identifies Mary Magdalene the prostitute as "the woman taken in adultery" (183). Furthermore, Tatum claims that part three of the film contains the most "controversial vision sequence...between the second and third of Jesus' last words from the cross. Here Jesus experiences his 'last temptation' to forsake his call" and marry Mary Magdalene (183): Hanging on the cross Jesus imagines what his life would have been like had he married Mary Magdalene. Through the help of his guardian angel, he imagines that Mary Magdalene would have died in childbirth. However, through his imagined grief the angel tells him that all women

are Mary, so he returns to Mary the sister of Lazarus and her sister Martha. They comfort him and he enjoys a family with them (183).

In my view, had Jesus given in to the idea of marrying Mary Magdalene, Mary Magdalene would have died an ordinary woman. She would never have realized her great calling as the Light and Comforter of all comforters, the Holy Spirit.

2.7 Mel Gibson: The Passion of the Christ

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* conflates Mary Magdalene with the woman caught in adultery (Schaberg, *Gibson's Mary* 70). It divides the role of "beloved" into three, Mary his mother, Mary the Magdalene, and John, but Gibson does not link Mary Magdalene and Jesus romantically (Schaberg, *Gibson's Mary* 73). Biblical scholar Jane Schaberg is highly critical of Gibson's treatment of Mary Magdalene. She charges Gibson's traditional pre-1969 theology as inadequate and misleading because Gibson deliberately ignores strides made by feminist theologians to correct the Roman Catholic description of Mary Magdalene as "Penitent" (Schaberg, *Gibson's Mary* 70). Gibson conflates the Magdalene with the woman caught in adultery, yet fails to give her a "strong and central role in the movie as a prominent witness of the Crucifixion, burial and empty tomb" (70). Instead, according to Schaberg, Gibson gives the mother of Jesus more prominence by giving her more close ups (*Gibson's Mary* 74). Furthermore, Gibson is said to have created a divine family using the Gospel of John. However, like "ancient Syriac traditions about the empty tomb," Gibson replaces the witness of "Mary Magdalene with Mary the mother of Jesus" (73).

To Schaberg, “Gibson’s film, like many paintings of the Crucifixion, privileges an abridged Gospel of John over the Synoptic Gospels...to edge out Mary Magdalene...and to whom no words are spoken” (*Gibson’s Mary* 74).

The Passion of the Christ is the most recent film about Jesus (Tatum 225). Evangelical Protestants in the United States received it enthusiastically even though it reflected Mel Gibson’s Catholicism, and the Roman Catholic Board of Bishops in the United States gave their tacit sign of approval by merely rating it an adult film, not an offensive one (Tatum 223-224).

Watching the adultery scene, I noticed that people cast stones at Jesus’s feet. But it was Mary Magdalen who was wounded and who reached out to his feet. He then gave her his hand and lifted her up. When Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of Jesus take the spiritless body of Jesus off the Cross, it is Mary the Mother of Jesus who comforts him. She cradles him in her arms as a mother would a baby and caresses his cheek as a lover would. The strong relationship of the two Marys throughout the film, as Schaberg has noted, leaves me with the impression that Gibson wanted his audience to see the two Marys as one.

Having considered these various ‘takes’ on the identity of Mary Magdalene in popular literature and film, I now turn to a more conservative and sceptical voice.

2.8 Susan Haskins: Myth and Metaphor

Susan Haskins is a lay Roman Catholic scholar who has examined “such matters as the role of women in the early church, gnosticism, ecclesiastical misogyny, medieval piety, prostitution and the ministry of women” (ix). Her book *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (1993) depicts how popular culture through literature and art has represented the image of the Magdalene down through the centuries. Haskins argues that Mary Magdalene’s image embodies the “perceptions of every era” and has been refashioned again and again to suit the needs and aspirations of the times” (ix). Critical of art, legends, and myths that have embellished and conflated the canonical texts, Haskins lambastes the early church for branding Mary Magdalene a prostitute, and western art and literature for continually reinventing her image.

She blames Hippolytus and Pope Gregory for first confusing her image with Mary of Bethany, and then later with Luke’s Sinner (63-97). She turns to Gnostic texts to support the idea that Simon Peter was jealous of Mary (41-42), and to medieval monastic beliefs concerning sex and marriage (142-144) to illustrate how misogynist views, supported by popular culture, are largely responsible for the enduring image of Mary Magdalene as a “repentant whore” (57, 398). According to Haskins, the “Gnostics incorporated the Jewish myth of Hokhmah, symbol of divine Wisdom, into their system” (57). Magdalene’s “repentant whore” image was the “alter ego of the fallen Sophia, the creator of the world,” the Gnostic heroine, the Pistis Sophia, a symbol of “divine Wisdom,”

and this fallen image surpassed and replaced Mary Magdalene's divine Wisdom image (57).

Haskins criticises modern novels and movies that still promote Mary Magdalene as a prostitute, a "scarlet-cloaked" woman "with loose hair," in juxtaposition with the image of the Virgin Mary, the passive virgin and mother." According to her, they base their characterization and plot on myths and legends that have nothing to do with sound biblical scholarship:

Most exploit the legendary aspects of her life – Luke's sinner, the Gnostic writings, apocrypha, and the Golden Legend – repeating the same formulae but with different emphases...her...sexuality has come to represent the liberated woman..., and her myth has been recreated...she is a rebel...she might even have had a child by Christ... (400)

Haskins dismisses myth and popular story-telling in favour of modern biblical scholarship to convey her vision of the "true Mary Magdalene as the disciple by the cross and the herald of the New Life" (400). She writes that, while cultures need myth, the myths surrounding Mary Magdalene are detrimental because they reinforce sexism (400).

2.9 Concluding Thoughts

Brown's claim that the church has lost sight of the feminine face of God is contentious. To support his claim Brown argues that the church deliberately cast Mary as a whore to quell goddess worship and to legitimate Peter's claim as Jesus's successor. Brown questions Peter's legitimacy by recasting Mary as a chaste wife and mother. This recasting limits her power to that of a married woman. Early church tradition conflated Mary Magdalene with Mary the Virgin

and also conflated her with the Sinner whose great love for Jesus blotted out her sin. Hippolytus conflated both Mary and Martha as Christ's Bride. This produced controversy for the early church and suggests that Mary's love for Jesus may have been contested, while Martha's was not, because the Shulamite woman was the woman who wanted to kiss him without people thinking ill of her (Song of Songs 8.1).

The folklore and art that Brown draws upon give Mary power. It makes her the coveted Grail, but this power is not legitimate. As Bock, Starbird, Picknett, Schaberg, and Haskins point out, artists, writers, and the powerful have used the ambiguity surrounding the naming of Mary for personal and political advantage. Hippolytus and early church tradition placed an emphasis on the personal testimony of both Mary and Martha. Modern novels and films such as Zeffirelli's, Scorsese's, and Gibson's exploit Mary's image for profit. But it is the idea of depicting Mary as a prostitute or an adulterer that offends modern viewers. This depicts Mary's power as coming from her penitence, her sexuality, and her fantastic personal testimony, rather than her ability to understand and witness to the Resurrection in a credible manner as a legitimate teacher equal to Jesus. Novelists, trained biblical scholars, lay scholars, occult scholars, church fathers, traditions, and film makers have appropriated her story, in the words of Jane Schaberg, "to edge Mary Magdalene out" and prevent her from preaching (*Gibson's Mary* 74) to the disciples as the Holy Spirit, Jesus's successor.

These varied images of Mary Magdalene are very much embedded in the controversies of our own time concerning abuse of power and the role of women

within the church. In this context history and historical revisionism become a political weapon. But what can a careful consideration of the sources themselves tell us? It is to that question that I turn in the next chapter.

3: CANONICAL AND NON-CANONICAL TEXTS

3.1 Canonical Texts

In the canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, only twelve scripture passages explicitly identify a Mary as Mary Magdalene. Matthew, Mark, and John name and place Mary as Mary Magdalene only in the climax, during the Crucifixion and Resurrection scenes. Conversely, Luke names and places Mary as Mary Magdalene before as well as during the Crucifixion and the Resurrection scenes.⁸ Yet Luke makes no explicit mention of Mary Magdalene in his sequel to his Gospel, *The Acts of the Apostles*.⁹ He does however mention the name Mary twice in that book.¹⁰

The omission of any explicit mention of Mary Magdalene in Acts is important. Luke devotes one-half of this text to the journeys and teachings of Paul [which corroborate Paul's letters] (NRSV Introduction, *Acts of the Apostles*). Moreover, Paul's letters are the oldest Christian documents available today (NRSV 151). Luke's first reference in *The Acts of the Apostles* identifies Mary as the mother of Jesus and places her among Jesus's brothers and the other women who had joined together in prayer (Acts 1.14). Luke's second reference

⁸ See Appendix A, Table 2.

⁹ There is no explicit evidence that Luke the companion of Paul wrote the Gospel known as Luke as well as the volume known as *The Acts of the Apostles*. However, tradition has always held that Luke identified in Col. 4:14 and 2 Tim 4.10 as Paul's companion is its author (Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, Leicester, England: Apollos, 1990). Modern scholarship is divided on this claim (Raymond. E. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (New York: Anchor Bible, 1997).

¹⁰ See Appendix A, Table 4.

identifies Mary as the mother of John also called Mark and places her among many people gathered for prayer (Acts 12.12). Underlining Luke's emphasis on Mary as the mother of Jesus and of John called Mark, rather than Mary called Magdalene, is the fact that Paul's letters make no explicit reference to the latter (NRSV, 117; 151). The only reference to a Mary appears in Paul's Letter to the Romans, where Paul writes "Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you" (16.6).¹¹

Although historians date Luke's Gospel after Mark's and Matthew's (NRSV, The Gospels), this chapter opens with Luke's Gospel because Luke is the author of two New Testament texts placing and naming a woman or women called Mary. Moreover, it is Luke's Sinner Woman and his explicit naming of Mary called Magdalene before the Crucifixion and Resurrection accounts that differentiate his Gospel from the others and cause much of the controversy.

3.1.1 The Gospel of Luke

Luke's references to Mary Magdalene are thus highly significant. She is introduced in chapter 8, verse 2, but is not mentioned again until chapter 24, verse 10. This omission creates a long silence and it is not clear why.

Luke 8.2-3 reads:

...Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's

¹¹ See Appendix A, Table 4.

household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Luke distinguishes Mary from the other women whom Jesus had cured of evil spirits and diseases and who travelled with him and the twelve disciples. He specifically states that seven demons had come out of the woman called Mary the Magdalene, but does not explain why he felt it necessary to include the names of Joanna and Susanna. Luke places the name Joanna with the Magdalene and adds the phrase “Mary the mother of James” chapters later in the empty tomb scene (Luke 24.10).¹² He also includes the name Joanna in a list of male ancestors of Jesus in Luke 3.27.¹³ But Luke does not mention the name Joanna or the phrase ‘Mary the mother of James’ anywhere else. Nor does he mention the name Susanna again.¹⁴

However, Luke 8.2 reveals that Mary called Magdalene travelled with Jesus, had her own means to do so, and had overcome seven demons troubling her. The concluding verses of the previous chapter may be important to the

¹² In the Greek text of Luke 24.10, Luke places the name the Magdalene before the name Maria, then adds the Greek word “kai” before the names Joanna and Maria the mother of James. Strong’s concordance entry 2532 says kai is a conjunction word meaning and, also, both, even, indeed, likewise ... Thus the text could be read “it was the Magdalene Maria also (called) Joanna, Susanna, and Maria the mother of James” and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

¹³ In the King James Version of Luke 3.27, Luke 8.2, and Luke 24.10, the English form of the name Joanna appears in all three places. Yet the Zondervan Greek text uses the male form of the name Joanna in Jesus’ genealogy (Luke 3.27) and uses the female form when the name Joanna is linked to the Magdalene (Luke 8.2 and 24.10).

¹⁴ The name Susanna appears in the New Testament only in Luke 8.2 See <<http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/translationResults.cfm?Criteria=Susanna&t=NIV>> The name Susanna however appears in the Roman Catholic Old Testament. See the New Jerusalem Bible, the Book of Daniel, chapter 13. Here Susanna is depicted as a woman who is falsely accused of adultery. The prophet Daniel redeems Susanna’s good name by cross examining the witnesses, thereby revealing their lies and restoring the truth.

contextual understanding of this verse.¹⁵ Luke may have intended his readers to assume that this unnamed woman of Luke 7 who Jesus praised for her great love and faith was Mary called the Magdalene from whom seven demons had come out.

The story of the unnamed woman of Luke 7 unfolds like this. A Pharisee, who Jesus addresses as Simon, invites Jesus to dine with him. When a woman appears at Simon's house with an alabaster jar of perfume and begins to cry and wet Jesus's feet with her tears, kissing them, pouring perfume on them, and wiping them with her hair—Simon thinks to himself: "If this man [Jesus] were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." In response to Simon and his thoughts, Jesus tells a parable about a moneylender who forgives two men their debts. Jesus then asks Simon which debtor would love more, the one forgiven a little amount or the one forgiven the larger amount? Simon answers, "The one who was forgiven the larger amount." Jesus then turns toward the woman and says to Simon. "Do you see this woman? ... I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7.36-47). Here Jesus personally confirms this woman's many sins. He also acknowledges her capacity to love, to forgive and be forgiven. At the same time, he dispels any malicious or troublesome thoughts held by her or Simon and the other guests.

¹⁵ It is also important to know that the system of separating sacred text into chapter and verse is a relative modern invention (Smith 19). The original text would have had no such division. The original list identifying Mary as a woman called Magdalene would have merely appeared in the 17th verse following the beginning of the story that identified the woman anointing Jesus as a sinner.

He says to her in front of Simon and the other guests, “Your sins are forgiven...Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7.48-50).

Significantly, in the verse immediately following the verse above, Jesus and his companions also go [in peace] from town to town (Luke 8.1). Then in the following verse, Luke identifies and establishes Mary (called) Magdalene as a woman from whom seven demons have come out. The seven demons have stopped troubling Mary. She is free to travel in peace and to use her own means to help Jesus and those travelling with them (Luke 8.2).

The next time Luke names any women is in Luke 10.38. In this latter story, Jesus and his disciples come “to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him” (Luke 10.38). Then Luke says, “She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said” (Luke 10.39). The next verse reveals that Martha is worried and disturbed because Mary has left all the work of providing hospitality to Jesus and his travelling companions to her. So Martha complains to Jesus, saying, “Lord, don’t you care, that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” (Luke 10.40). Luke then calls attention to Martha’s name or her role as the Lady of the house by having the “Lord” say, “Martha, Martha...you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10.41-42).

The next time Luke identifies any woman by name is Luke 24.10. Here Luke names Mary Magdalene, first among others. “It was Mary [called] Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them [the

apostles] who told this to the apostles” (Luke 24.10). This verse is ambiguous. It can read as if Mary Magdalene was also called Joanna and Mary the mother of James, or it can be read as if Joanna and an additional Mary are other notable women forming a larger group of women who associated with the apostles.¹⁶ However, Luke makes no explicit mention of Martha from Bethany or her sister Mary in this verse depicting the Resurrection.

Yet in the last three verses of Luke 24 that names Mary Magdalene and concludes Luke’s Gospel, it is pointed out that Jesus returns to Bethany (Luke 24:50-53). In this story, Mary is not explicitly called the Magdalene, but while Mary sits at Jesus’s feet, Jesus declares to Martha, the owner of the house, that “Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10.42). It seems logical therefore to assume that Luke conflated Mary of Bethany with Mary Magdalene, even though he does not explicitly say so.

In contrast, Luke’s Gospel opens by identifying the woman who gave birth to Jesus without sexual intercourse as Mary and mentions her by name 15 times in the first 119 verses of the Gospel. In these initial accounts of Luke’s Gospel, the angel Gabriel speaks with the woman named Mary in Nazareth, a town in Galilee. Gabriel tells her that God has favoured her to give birth to the son of God whose kingdom will never end (Luke 1.27-33). Mary asks Gabriel how this can be because she is a virgin. Gabriel responds that nothing is impossible for God and Mary chooses and accepts her divine calling by replying. “I am the Lord’s servant” (Luke 1.38). Then, during a visit to Judea at the home of

¹⁶ See Appendix A, Table 2.

Elizabeth, she sings a song declaring how her soul magnifies the Lord (Luke 1:46- 55). Elizabeth is a barren woman of advanced years whom God chooses to give birth to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus (Luke 1.5-25).

The only other woman Luke names in his Gospel is the prophet Anna. Anna appears together with a man called Simeon who blesses the newly born Jesus in a story that tells how Mary, together with her betrothed husband Joseph, presents the newly born Jesus in the temple (Luke 2.22-38). After Mary and Joseph present Jesus in the temple, they return to Nazareth (Luke 2.39).

Luke 2.39 is the last time the name Mary appears until it reappears in Luke 8.2 and again in Luke 10.39. More importantly, Luke does not explicitly mention the Mary, self-identified as a virgin, or the Mary the mother of Jesus anywhere else in his Gospel. Rather the Mary that Luke explicitly mentions in his concluding chapter is Mary (called) Magdalene. So Luke may have conflated Mary the self-identified virgin giving birth to God's incarnation with Mary called Magdalene. On the other hand, Luke may have written the Gospel to dispel such a conflation. Some early Christian commentaries tended to conflate Mary Magdalene with Mary Theotokos, the mother of God (*Discourse of Mary Theotokos*). Others did not. They saw Mary the virgin mother of God as the ideal woman incapable of sin and Mary Magdalene as the sinner woman in need of repentance (Warner 32-33; 225). This exegetical debate and uncertainty continues today and it exacerbates the controversy of Mary Magdalene's sexuality (Warner 226) especially as some people refute (Picknett 31,40) and

others reinforce the notion that sexual intercourse outside marriage is a sin (Spong, *Born of a Woman* 189).

3.1.2 The Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew explicitly mentions Mary Magdalene three times. The first mention comes in chapter 27.56.¹⁷ Here the text identifies Mary Magdalene as one of the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee. “Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and [Joseph],¹⁸ and the mother of Zebedee’s sons” (Matthew 27.56). It is not clear if there are two Marys here or if this text is adding information about Mary the Magdalene. With the placement of commas, this text reads as if Mary is the mother of James and [Joseph].¹⁹ But then again, perhaps it once read as if Mary Magdalene was Mary the mother of James and [Joseph] and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.

Although Matthew only mentions the name Mary Magdalene three times in the last two chapters, he mentions the name Mary five times in the first two chapters and one more time in the middle of his Gospel (Matt. 1.16; 1.18; 1.20; 1.24; 2.11; and 13.55). In the opening two chapters, Matthew introduces Mary as the woman who conceives and gives birth to Jesus miraculously through the power of the Holy Spirit, and Joseph is identified as the man who takes her as his wife (Matt. 1.18-1.20). In Matthew 13.55-56, people are confused about the identity of both Jesus and Mary. The text reads, “Isn’t this

¹⁷ See Appendix A, Table 2.

¹⁸ The NIV and the KJV read *Joses*. But the NRSV and the Zondervan Greek read *Joseph*.

¹⁹ See Princeton Theological Seminary, Professor Emeritus, Bruce M. Metzger’s 1992 article *Persistent Problems Confronting Bible Translators*, section heading “The Punctuation of the Text” published on line at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_trans_metzger3.html

the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? The next verse reads, "Aren't all his sisters with us?"²⁰

The second mention of Mary Magdalene in Matthew comes in chapter 27 verse 61.²¹ In the Greek version, this second mention of Mary Magdalene differs from the first. English translation places her opposite someone named the "other" Mary outside the tomb of Jesus. Yet it is odd that the Greek spelling of "Mary" the Magdalene here differs from the spelling of the first mention of Mary Magdalene in Matthew 27.56, four verses earlier. In the first mention of Mary the Magdalene Mary is spelled, Maria. (Zondervan, Matt. 27.56). In the second text an "other" variation of the name Mary is used—Mariam. The English translation however, assumes there are two Marys sitting opposite each other. The Greek text reads. "And there was there Mariam, [called] "the" Magdalene and "the other" Maria, sitting opposite the tomb" as if Mariam the Magdalene was also called using the other Latin name, Maria, as is the case in the first mention of the Magdalene in Matthew 27.56. The first mention of the name Magdalene is preceded by the Latin name Maria. It is not until the second and third naming of the Magdalene that Matthew links Magdalene's name with the Greek name Mariam, another variant of the same name (Matt 27.61; Matt 28.1).

The third time Matthew's gospel mentions Mary Magdalene, the author precedes the name Magdalene with the Mariam variant and follows this naming

²⁰ Note: The NIV names Joseph as a brother of Jesus whereas the KJV names this brother Josés.

²¹ See Appendix A, Table 2.

with the other Latin variant, Maria. The English text then replaces Mariam and Maria with Mary and translates the Greek to support the idea that Maria and Mariam are two different women instead of two name variations identifying the same woman. “After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mariam [called the] Magdalene and the other Maria [the other Latin variation of her name] went to look at the tomb (Matt.28.1). Subsequent Greek verses seem to corroborate the idea that two different women each named Mary went to the tomb because after an earthquake, the stone guarding the tomb rolled away and an angel of the Lord appeared, sat on the stone, and told “the women” not to be afraid (Matt 28.5). However in an earlier verse, Matthew notes that many women had followed Jesus from Galilee and were “watching from a distance” during an earthquake that opens up many tombs resurrecting many holy people (Matt 27.53-55).

Prior to modern edited versions this text may have read as if the angel was reassuring these women “watching from a distance” as well as the one woman called Magdalene outside the tomb. Later versions may have edited the text to reflect the popular view that there were two Marys or to dispel the confusion created by those calling the Magdalene, Mariam and others Maria. The Greek name Mariam and the Latin name Maria were other forms of the Hebrew name Miriam (Good 8). According to exegetes, the two different forms of Miriam are confusing (Derrett 163;Good 6-8). Therefore they cannot be sure who the angel or who Jesus saw outside the tomb. They may have seen two women with similar names and then again they may have seen only one

because, in the widely accepted Greek manuscript of John's Gospel, Jesus calls the Magdalene, Mariam, while the Narrator calls her Maria (Good 8; Derrett 163).

In the first two chapters, when Matthew uses the name Mary, he uses the Maria variant to identify Mary the mother of Jesus (Zondervan, Matt.1.16; 1.18; 1.20; and 2.11). Yet when Matthew uses the name Mary in Chapter 13, he uses the Mariam variant. In this reference, people ask, "Isn't his mother's name [Mariam]" (Zondervan, Matt. 13.55).

Matthew's gospel does not name any women other than the four women listed in Jesus's matrilineal genealogy and Herodias, the sister in-law of Herod the Tetrarch, who put John the Baptist's head on a plate. However, Matthew's gospel singles out the woman who anoints Jesus with an alabaster jar full of very expensive perfume and identifies her as someone the disciples must remember every time they hear the Gospel preached (26.13).

Matthew places the anointing in Bethany at the home of a man known as Simon the Leper. Matthew does not name or identify this woman as a sinner. Nevertheless, the disciples criticize this woman for her prodigal misuse of her perfume and this criticism troubles her. Jesus rebukes them saying:

Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me...By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed...what she has done will be told in remembrance of her. (Matthew 26.6-13)

Matthew's gospel concludes as Jesus commissions the disciples to obey everything that he has told them to do (Matthew 28.20). This would include

remembering the woman who had anointed him in Bethany. It makes sense then that Matthew's resurrection account discloses this unknown woman as Mary Magdalene. It also makes sense that Matthew's resurrection account would speak to the ambiguity around Mary's relationship to Jesus (13.55). People thought Mary was Jesus's mother. Others thought she was the mother of James, Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons. So with the two variant forms of Mariam and Maria used interchangeably, it is clear how the confusion began and why it continues today. Yet by seeing how Matthew used them in the Greek text, it is obvious he thought of Mary Magdalene as Maria and the other variant Mariam. It seems safe to assume that because Matthew explicitly named the Magdalene using both forms of her Mary name, he saw her as all possible Marys. It is therefore likely Matthew was one of the early Christians who conflated the Magdalene with Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary the mother of all Jesus's brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, there is no explicit evidence to support this assumption.

3.1.3 The Gospel of Mark

Mark's Gospel explicitly names Mary Magdalene four times. Each time, the Latin spelling Maria is used and all four times occur after the death of Jesus. The only time Mark's Gospel mentions Mary the mother of Jesus is before his death, in the context of a query about their identities. Although Matthew used the Mariam variant for this exact same query, Mark uses the Maria variant. The English text reads: "Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, and

Judah[s], and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” (KJV, Mark 6.3).²²

Two times Mark mentions Mary Magdalene’s name it appears along with that of Mary, the mother of James and Salome (Mark 15.40, Mark 16.1). One time Mark places Mary Magdalene’s name with Mary the mother of Joses (Mark 15.47), and in another case Mary Magdalene is named in connection with the seven demons: “When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons” (Mark 16.9).

The very first time Mark names Mary Magdalene is after Jesus goes to Golgotha to be crucified (Mark 15.40).²³ This verse names her as one of the women observing the crucifixion from a distance. The second time Mark mentions her he claims that Mary Magdalene observed the burial of Jesus’s body (Mark 15.47). The third time Mark mentions her he claims that she had observed the Sabbath, and so came on the first day of the week to anoint Jesus (Mark 16.1).²⁴

In Mark the woman who anoints Jesus in Bethany is not named, and her story resembles Luke’s and Matthew’s:

While [Jesus] was in Bethany, reclining at the table of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. (Mark 14.3-9)

²² Modern translations such as the NIV have exchanged Joseph for Joses.

²³ Golgotha means place of the skull. Several artists such as Georges de la Tour, El Greco, and Phillipe de Champaigne depict Mary Magdalene with a skull (Starbird, *Bride in Exile* Plate 2, 19 and 20; Picknett *Jacket* painting).

²⁴ See Appendix A, Table 2.

After this anointing Jesus rebukes the disciples for having scolded her for her extravagant and headstrong behaviour:

Leave her alone...Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want...She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare my body for my burial...Wherever the gospel is preached...what she has done will also be told in memory of her. (Mark 14 .6-9)

The first of three verses that explicitly name Mary Magdalene occurs in Mark 15.40. It makes sense that Mark's Gospel would record and reveal the name of this woman so that every time people heard the Gospel, they would remember the beautiful thing she did.

3.1.4 The Gospel of John

John's Gospel only mentions Mary Magdalene three times, in the Crucifixion and Resurrection accounts.²⁵ John first places her at the end of a list of women near the cross (John 19.15). The second time he names her when she goes to the tomb (John 20.1). And the third time, he says that she went to the disciples with the news that she had seen the Lord and that he had spoken to her (John 20.18).

In verses 10 through 17 Jesus appears to Mary alone outside the tomb. In these verses, John does not link Mary's name with the Magdalene. Verse 10 says that the disciples went home, but Mary remained outside the tomb crying. The Greek text uses Maria. Yet when Jesus calls her "woman" in verse 15, John's readers can rightly assume that it is the Magdalene who is sometimes

²⁵ See Appendix A, Table 2.

called Maria and other times Mariam. Mariam then turns to Jesus in the same verse and calls him “Rabboni,” which in Aramaic means ‘Teacher’ (John 20.16). John uses the Mariam variant that Jesus the Rabboni had used, which can be taken to reinforce the claim that Jesus called her Mariam and told her to tell the disciples all that he had said to her (John 20.18).

The women’s identities linked with Mary Magdalene in John 19.25 are Jesus’s mother and his mother’s sister, and Mary the wife of Clopas. John uses the Maria form for the Mary(s) in this verse. Apart from this verse and the other subsequent verses that John links to Mary Magdalene, the only time John names women is in the town of Bethany where, in chapters 11 and 12, he places Martha with her sister Mary.

In the first verse of Chapter 11, John tells us that the village of Mary and her sister Martha is Bethany. In verse 1 he uses the Maria form. Subsequently in verse 2, John tells the reader that this Mary is the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. John uses the Mariam form in verse 2 and in the subsequent verses, even though he used the Maria form in the preceding verse (John 11.1-2). In verse 3, the sisters send for Jesus because their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus loves, is sick. In verse 5 John tells the reader that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. In this verse, John does not explicitly name Martha’s sister as Mary. Neither does the Greek text. Both the English and the Greek place Martha before her sister in the list of people Jesus loved, and leave Martha’s sister unnamed. Nevertheless, readers assume from the preceding text that the unnamed woman in this verse is the

woman previously identified as Maria in verse 1 and Mariam in verse 2 and 5, because in the following chapter Mariam anoints Jesus.

Although Martha is mentioned 8 and Mary 9 times, the central theme of Chapter 11 is the death and resurrection of Lazarus. While Jesus is in Bethany however, Martha and Mary interact and converse with Jesus, and John links their story to another version of the woman with the alabaster jar:

Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served...Then Mary [Mariam] took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume....But one of his disciples...objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? (John 12.1-5)

Jesus replies to this objection saying "Leave her alone...It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial" (John 12.7).

John seems to use the name Maria and Mariam interchangeably as if by accident. But I think it is deliberate. He uses the name Mariam here in chapter 12. Then days later after Jesus says, "Leave her alone...it was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial," John uses the name Maria to depict the woman left alone outside the tomb crying (John 20.10), who Jesus calls Mariam (John 20.16).

In the following chapter, Jesus appears to the disciples but the disciples do not at first realize it (John 21.1). Earlier in chapter 20, Jesus appeared in front of Mary Magdalene and she did not realize it (John 20.14). When Jesus addresses her using the impersonal name 'Woman,' she does not realize that the

person speaking with her is Jesus. Yet when he addresses her with the Hebrew personal name, Mariam, she turns and realizes that it is Jesus who is speaking.²⁶ He tells her not to cling to him, but to go to the disciples and tell them the news that he is returning to his father and her father... (John 20.15-17).

As previously mentioned, John identified Martha, her sister Mary, and Lazarus as disciples whom Jesus loved (John 11.5). John then placed Mary Magdalene alone outside the tomb and described her running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, saying, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have put him!" (John 20.1-2). Subsequently, in both chapters 20 and 21, when John refers to the disciple whom Jesus loved, John or John's editor uses male pronouns to refer to the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 20.3-5; 21.7). John 19.26 had placed the beloved disciple with Jesus's mother:

Jesus saw his mother there, [near the cross] and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From this time on, this disciple took her into his home." (John 19.26)

In addition, in John 21.20, we are told that the disciple whom Jesus loves is the one who "leaned back against Jesus at the supper," but he does not explicitly name the beloved. So the identity of Mary and the beloved in this passage adds more complexity to Mary's identity and relationship to Jesus.

John's Gospel introduces Jesus's mother in the first verse of chapter 2 following a passage in chapter 1 that explains how God's children are born of

²⁶ See 1 Corinthians 13:12-13.

God, not of “natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will.” (John 1.13). Chapter 2 features the miracle of the water becoming wine at the wedding of Cana (John 2.1). With this miracle, it seems as if John is reinforcing, the idea from the previous chapter, that God’s birth, is a spiritual one, and so readers should think of this woman at this wedding as Jesus’s spiritual mother, rather than his biological mother. Then in chapter 3, it is recounted how Nicodemus, a Master teacher of Israel, visited Jesus by night and how Jesus revealed the mystery of the Spirit to him (John 3.1-17). Following this discussion John introduces the Samaritan woman whom Jesus speaks with at a well (John 4.7). Jesus initiates the conversation by asking the woman for a drink of water. The woman and Jesus talk back and forth and Jesus concludes the conversation with the revelation that the one speaking with her is he, [Messiah called Christ] (John 4.7-26). Verse 9 informs the reader that the religious authorities forbid Jews and Samaritans from having any social intercourse with one another. So when the disciples return they are surprised to find him speaking with her, but no one asked him what he wanted from her (John 4.27).

The next time John places a woman with Jesus is in chapter 8. This account follows a scene in which Nicodemus, the master teacher of Israel who had spoken with Jesus (the prophet) secretly at night, suggests that the teachers and the Pharisees set up a test to see how much the prophet identified by the mob as the Christ knows about the Law (John 7.41-52). After this suggestion,

everyone goes home (John 7.49-53)²⁷ and Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak, Jesus appears in the Temple (John 8.1). As Jesus begins to teach, the teachers and the Pharisees bring in a woman caught in adultery. After the teachers and the Pharisees question Jesus “in order to find a reason to accuse him” they retreat one by one realizing their own sin. Jesus then tells the woman to “go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8.11).

The next time John names a woman is in Bethany, the village of Mary and Martha whom Jesus loved. Therefore, even though the earliest manuscripts excluded the adultery passage, it eventually made its way into the canon (Zondervan 292). Moreover, because the earliest manuscripts are considered more reliable (Zondervan 292), this text intensifies the controversy about the conflation of Mary Magdalene with the woman caught in adultery. John’s Bethany account naming Martha and Mary as the two women whom Jesus loved takes on even more significance, not less.

3.2 Concluding Thoughts

The Gospel texts do not dispel the ambiguity surrounding Mary Magdalene’s role and her relation to Jesus. There is enough agreement between the texts to conflate the woman called Mary with the Virgin, the unknown woman, Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Mary the mother of Jesus’s brothers and sisters. All these different depictions of the woman called Mary sow confusion. This confusion is even pointed out in Mark’s

²⁷ According to Zondervan Publishers, “the earliest and most reliable manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not [include] John 7.53-8.11” [the woman caught in adultery story] (292).

Gospel with the crux question: “Who is Jesus?” “Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of ...? Aren’t his sisters here...?” Matthew’s Gospel asks a similar question. Still, both authors place an emphasis on Mary called the Magdalene in their climaxes, as do Luke and John. It is possible that, in an effort to synthesize the various gospels and oral traditions, the Gospel writers or compilers intended Mary Magdalene to be conflated with all possible Marys, as did Cyril in *The Apocryphal New Testament* (qtd. in Warner 345). It is possible that Jesus knew many women named Mary and it is possible people were simply asking how a man with such a simple background and an ordinary family could be capable of such great and wonderful deeds. But in Mark, Jesus’s identity as the anointed Messiah was made a secret (Mark 8.27-30). Therefore it is possible that this secret was upheld in the other Gospels and extended to Mary’s identity as well (Good 6-8).

The woman with the alabaster jar who anointed Jesus is featured in every Gospel and so is the town of Bethany. Pre-1969 Roman Catholic tradition conflates this woman known to the town of Bethany with Mary Magdalene. Some modern scholars now maintain that this conflation is false (Winkett 21; Schaberg and DeBaufre 59), even though Matthew and Mark’s Jesus makes a point of saying: “What she has done will be remembered wherever you proclaim the Good News”. It seems more likely that Matthew and Mark would name her and give her a prominent role in testifying to the Good News of the Resurrection as Mary Magdalene. On the other hand, John’s Gospel includes two additional encounters with Jesus that feature a nameless woman. One of these encounters

presents the woman as a Samaritan having forbidden relations with Jews and the other as a woman caught in the act of adultery. So, if exegetes insist on conflating Mary Magdalene with the unknown woman who anointed Jesus based on the logic that Jesus wanted her to be named every time the Good News was preached, it seems logical to me that exegetes conflating Mary Magdalene with John's adulterous woman would also conflate her with the woman from Samaria, as Lucy Winkett's equation illustrates in the next chapter.

This is a problem for some modern believers because the Samaritan tells Jesus that she does not have a husband (John 4.17). Jesus responds. "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is quite true." The woman replies. "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet" (John 4.18-19). The fact that she had no husband seems to weaken the conflation with the adulterous woman. But it does not, especially for those exegetes who believe Jesus was married and had an affair or those who assume that because of her many marriages she was a divorcee challenging Jewish authority. In the three synoptic Gospels, Jesus taught that divorce and remarriage was adultery (Matthew 19.9; Mark 10.1-12; Luke 16.18). Traditional exegesis saw her personal life as adulterous. And because she was a Samaritan, it saw her as a representative of a nation historically judged and condemned by Jewish prophets as an "adulterous" nation (Webster 135).

Therefore many scholars and lay people are turning to the Apocrypha and Gnostic texts for more evidence to see how and why the early Christians conflated Mary Magdalene with the anointing woman and other women.

3.3 The Non-Canonical Texts

Of the non-canonical material available for study today, five texts in particular have heightened the controversy about Mary Magdalene and her relationship to Jesus. These are: *The Gospel of Phillip*,²⁸ *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Gospel of Mary*, *The Pistis Sophia*, and *Thunder: Perfect Mind*. These texts feature a woman who may or may not be the historical woman called Mary, and called Magdalene.

These documents have only recently been published. They belong to the gnostic tradition that the early emerging church considered heretical. *The Pistis Sophia* was purchased by the British Museum in 1795. *The Gospel of Mary* was discovered in Egypt in the late nineteenth century, but it was not published until 1955. *The Gospel of Phillip*, *The Gospel of Thomas*, and *Thunder: Perfect Mind* are part of *The Nag Hammadi Library*, discovered in 1945. The Nag Hammadi manuscripts consist of thirteen books and are fifteen hundred year old Coptic translations of gnostic texts, originally written in Greek (Pagels xi-xiv). Scholars disagree as to when the original Greek texts were written. But because these texts feature a woman named Mary, and because they are gnostic and merely Coptic translations of Greek texts that cannot be located or authenticated, the Magdalene controversy has intensified.

²⁸ <http://www.metalog.org/files/philip.html>

3.3.1 The Gospel of Phillip

The Gospel of Phillip intersperses the name Mary in its discourse three times as the disciples discuss Jesus's teachings among themselves. The first time follows a discussion concerning the validity of Mary's conception as a virgin by the Holy Spirit:

Some said, "Mary conceived by the holy spirit." They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. When did a woman ever conceive by a woman? Mary is the virgin whom no power defiled. She is a great anathema to the Hebrews who are the apostles and [the] apostolic men. (*Nag Hammadi* 143)

The second time follows a discussion about how the perfect conceive and give birth to the grace within one another through kissing one another on the mouth. The Wesley W. Isenberg translation reads as if Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Jesus's mother were very definitely three separate women, each named Mary (*Nag Hammadi* 145). Yet, the Ecumenical Coptic Project translation reads as if "Mariam" was three persons in one—assuming the role of wife, sister, and mother—the companion to Jesus (*Metalogos*).

The Isenberg translation separating the three reads:

There were three who always walked with the lord: Mary his mother and her sister and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion. His sister and his mother and his companion were each a Mary. (*Nag Hammadi* 145)

The Ecumenical Coptic Project translation conflating the three reads:

There were three Mariams who walked with the Lord at all times: his mother and [his] sister and (the) Magdalene— this one who is called his Companion. Thus his (true) Mother and Sister and Mate is (also called) 'Mariam'. (*Metalogos*)

The third time *The Gospel of Phillip* places the name Mary into the discourse follows a discussion about Wisdom. The text reads:

The wisdom which (humans) call barren is herself the Mother of the Angels...And the Companion of the [Christ] is Mariam the Magdalene. The [Lord loved] Mariam more than [all the (other)] Disciples, [and he] kissed her often on her [mouth]. The other [women] saw his love for Mariam, they say to him: Why do thou love [her] more than all of us? (*Metalogos*)²⁹

3.3.2 The Gospel of Thomas

The Gospel of Thomas mentions the name Mary twice. The first time Mary asks Jesus a question about discipleship, he responds that disciples are like children. The second time comes at the end of the book, after Jesus asks:

What then is the [sin] that I have committed...But when the Bridegroom comes forth from the Bridal-Chamber, then let them fast and pray... whoever shall acknowledge father and mother shall be called the son of (a) harlot. (*Metalogos* 104-105)

In the final conversation number 114, Simon Peter says, “Let Mariam depart from us, for women are not worthy of the life.” Jesus says: “Behold, I myself shall inspire her so that I make her male, in order that she also shall become a living spirit like you males” (*Metalogos*).³⁰

3.3.3 The Gospel of Mary

The Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church has published *Excerpts from The Gospel of Mary* on-

²⁹ This text is numbered 59, but the numbering throughout this translation differs from the Isenberg translation. The annotations accompanying this text, link the reader back to Proverbs 8.12, 32 and 24.26; Luke 7.35, *The Gospel of Phillip* line 40, Song of Songs 1.2, 6.9 and *The Gospel of Phillip* lines 35 and 36.

³⁰ The annotation accompanying this text says that this line is exquisitely ironical, since ‘spirit’ in Aramaic—the original language of the logion—is feminine.

line. This on-line publication says that the first 6 pages of the 12 page Coptic papyrus are lost. However, the publishers conclude that this Gospel features Mary Magdalene as a leader of the early church. They also place cross references with canonical Gospel texts in brackets to reinforce their claim (Women's Division <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/bible/contents.html>).³¹

According to the Women's Division, this Gospel opens as Peter asks, "What is the sin of the world?" Jesus replies, "Sin as such does not exist, but you make sin when you do what is of the nature of fornication, which is called 'sin.'" The publishers cross-reference Peter's question with John 1.29 where John the Baptist acknowledges Jesus and says, "Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Then Jesus, in *The Gospel of Mary*, goes on to discuss the suffering that sin causes. Jesus concludes saying, "Peace be with you [cf John 14.27]. Receive my peace for yourselves and go and preach the Gospel of the Kingdom [cf. Matt 4.23; 9.15; Mark 16:15]." The disciples then grieve and mourn saying, "How can we...If even he was not spared, how shall we be spared?" Then Mary stands up and delivers a speech and "their hearts change for the better" (Women's Division <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/bible/contents.html>). With these cross-referenced passages, the Women's Division reinforces Jesus's commission to proclaim the Gospel to bring peace—and shows Mary doing just that. Furthermore the cross-reference of Matthew 9.15 reminds people that Jesus referred to himself as the Bridegroom whose attendants mourn when he is taken

³¹ See Appendix, Tables 1, 2 and 5.

away from them, like the disciples who grieve and mourn in the cross-referenced passage of *The Gospel of Mary* above.

As this version of *The Gospel of Mary* continues, Peter acknowledges that Jesus loved Mary more than the other women [cf John 11.5, Luke 10.38-42] and asks her to tell them what she and Jesus discussed. Mary does so. She also reveals seven participants of wrath (darkness, desire, ignorance, the arousing of death, the kingdom of the flesh, the wisdom of the folly of the flesh, and wrathful wisdom). After this, she declares that she has been saved "from the fetter of the impotence of knowledge." Andrew does not believe her and Peter opposes her. The conversation continues:

Peter also opposed her in regard to these matters and asked them about the Savior. "Did he then speak secretly with a woman [cf. John 4:27], in preference to us, and not openly? Are we to turn back and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?" Then Mary grieved and said to Peter..."Do you think that I thought this up myself in my heart or that I am lying concerning the Savior?" Levi answered and said to Peter, "Peter, you are always irate. Now I see that you are contending against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you to reject her? Surely the Savior knew her very well [cf. Luke 10:38-42]. For this reason he loved her more than us [cf. John 11:5]. (Women's Division)

The cross-references in the Gospel of Mary link Mary Magdalene with the Samaritan woman in John 4.27; Martha's sister, Mary in Luke 10.38-42; and Martha's sister whom he loved in John 11.5. The seven wrathful participants that Mary reveals are not cross-referenced. They seem to stand out on their own as the seven demons of Luke 8.2 and Mark 16.9 who were cast out of the Magdalene.

In contrast, *The Nag Hammadi* print version translated by George W. MacRae and R. McL. Wilson does not provide any cross-references with canonical texts. However, in its introduction, Karen King says that the “confrontation of Mary with Peter” is “a scenario [that is] also found in the Gospel of Thomas (*Nag Hammadi* 524).³² She adds that *The Gospel of Mary* portrays Mary Magdalene, “the Savior’s beloved, [to be] possessed of knowledge and teaching superior to that of the public apostolic tradition” (*Nag Hammadi* 524).³³

3.3.4 The Pistis Sophia

The Pistis Sophia is not part of *The Nag Hammadi Library* collection. The English translation comprises 148 chapters, a preface, an introduction and a postscript (Gnostic Library). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine every instance in which *The Pistis Sophia* explicitly mentions Mary Magdalene, but her name appears in 12 chapters. Mary, named as the mother of Jesus, appears only 3 times, in chapters 59 and 61. These instances are important to the understanding of Mary Magdalene’s relationship to Jesus because in these instances, Mary the mother of Jesus appears to be talking back and forth with Jesus and someone called the “other Mary” or “the other” speaking with him, also called Mary. The annotation accompanying this text states that Mary is explaining the incarnation of Jesus (Chapter 62, 104). Chapter 62 suggests that these two Marys, now considered separate entities, may have been once considered one

³² King also adds that this “confrontation” is found in *The Gospel of the Egyptians* and *The Pistis Sophia*.

³³ King takes a critical look at the apostolic tradition in relation to Mary Magdalene in her book *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle*. Thus, I discuss the ideas she presents in this book in the next chapter.

and the same—the “eternal other” who speaks with Jesus and thereby brings him to life.

During the dialogue in the *First Book of Pistis Sophia*, Jesus calls his mother, Mary, at the end of chapter 61. Mary then identifies herself in the following chapter as being the mother of Jesus, and one of the spirits, either grace or truth, who kissed “the other” when they met. Therefore the other spiritual being [who Jesus calls Mary] comes forward:

The other [being] Mary came forward and said: "My Lord, 'Grace and truth met together,' —'grace' then is the spirit who hath...the spiritual and material bodies of Jesus" (*The First Book of Pistis Sophia*: Chapter 61, 102).

The other, called Mary, continues interpreting scripture:

'Grace' then is the godly spirit who hath come upon thee...and which hath made proclamation concerning the regions of Truth. [Scripture] hath said again: 'Righteousness and peace kissed each other,'--'righteousness' then is the spirit of the Light... And it came to pass, when Jesus had heard Mary speak these words, he said: "Well said, Mary, inheritress of the Light." (*The First Book of Pistis Sophia*: Chapter 62,104)

With this praise and acknowledgment, Mary, the mother of Jesus, comes forward once more, falls down at Jesus’s feet and kisses them, saying:

My Lord, my son and my Saviour...pardon me that I may once more speak the solution of these words. 'Grace and truth met together,'-- it is I, Mary, thy mother and Elizabeth, mother of John whom I met. Grace then is the power in me ... which thou art...Truth...is the power in Elizabeth, which is John... (*The First Book of Pistis Sophia*: Chapter 62,104)

Mary continues to explain the incarnation of Jesus, who is grace and truth incarnated (John 1:14). She makes a further assertion that as righteousness and

peace kissed each other the day when John baptized Jesus, they also kissed when Jesus took the [angelic] form of Gabriel and spoke with her in her material form as Mary (*The First Book of Pistis Sophia*: Chapter 62, 104).

3.3.5 The Thunder: Perfect Mind

The gnostic poem, *The Thunder: Perfect Mind*, personifies the voice of a woman and uses many “I am” statements to describe herself. The following few verses provide a sample:

For I am the first and the last.
I am the honoured one and the scorned one.
I am the whore and the holy one.
I am <the mother> and the daughter.
I am the members of my mother.
I am the barren one
 and many are her sons.
I am she whose wedding is great,
 and I have not taken a husband. (297)

From the first century, Jesus has been called the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last (Rev. 1:8; Hassett). Therefore it is important for this study to note that *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* poem embodies a female voice asserting herself as this symbol of all life that also personifies all women, including the whore. Her assertion openly challenges Simon Peter’s claim that women are not worthy of life (*The Gospel of Thomas*; *The Gospel of Mary*).

3.4 Concluding Thoughts

The Gospel of Phillip, *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Gospel of Mary*, *The Pistis Sophia*, and *Thunder: Perfect Mind* do not add anything decisive to the

discussion of who Mary is with respect to the incarnation of God in the man identified as Jesus. Bits of information carefully picked from each of the texts can be woven together to support either the conflationary view of three or more Marys as one composite figure, or the multiplicity view of three or more Marys, each separate and unique. The claim that the Holy Spirit is female is an interesting point, but the fact that the disciples disputed the idea that Mary could conceive by a female adds more uncertainty as to her identity. This claim in light of the other apocryphal texts seems to suggest that Mary is the Holy Spirit, the incarnation of the feminine aspect of God and the mother of Jesus. But the disciples rejected this claim as erroneous. The kiss mentioned in *The Gospel of Phillip* is suggestive of romantic intimacy because of the unease it causes Peter. But this is inconclusive in light of *The Pistis Sophia* that claims that the Spirit of Righteousness and Peace kissed each other and brought forth the Divine Incarnation. Yet *Thunder: Perfect Mind* definitely asserts a feminine voice claiming to embody all women as the symbol of life itself that tradition identifies with Jesus (Hassett).

We have encountered a set of documents rich in interpretive possibilities and potential conflicts about the role of Mary Magdalene and the other female figures that the texts identify; that potential has been fully realized, as the next chapter will show.

4: CONTESTANTS: FAITH TRADITIONS

In this chapter, I will identify four major areas of controversy about the identity of Mary Magdalene and discuss some of the participants in that debate. It will be seen that a central issue is that of religious authority, and that this issue is bound up with the question of conflation, and the belief that Jesus is the incarnation of the Father, who is all-powerful and sinless. Some believe that conflating Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the Sinner Woman has not given women the choice to exercise full religious authority in the church, as representatives of the incarnate Christ in the world. Therefore, concerned scholars in each of the faith traditions are reconsidering all the evidence in the hope of reimagining Mary Magdalene as a positive role model.

I begin with the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions because feminists in these traditions assert that Mary Magdalene's conflated image results from an erroneous assumption made by 6th century male commentators. Then I follow up with an examination of the Gnostic and Greek traditions to illustrate how others believe the controversy to have originated because of a conflated divine archetype that transcends the Virgin and the Whore stereotype, and therefore challenges male authority.

4.1 Roman Catholic Tradition

Since the sixth century, and until 1969, the Roman Catholic tradition officially taught that the sinful woman of Luke's Gospel, Martha's sister Mary of Bethany, and Mary Magdalene were one and the same person. It officially honoured her as a saint with a liturgical church service every year on July 22 (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 59-60; Starbird, *Alabaster Jar* 28). In 1969, Roman Catholicism officially conformed to the Eastern Orthodox and Protestant view that Mary Magdalene was a faithful follower of Jesus who should not be confused with Mary of Bethany or the sinful woman of Luke's Gospel (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 59). However, although Mary Magdalene and Martha are still honoured as saints with a feast day, no new provision to honour Mary, Martha's sister, has been made (Starbird, *Alabaster Jar* 28). And now, even though the service held on Mary Magdalene's feast day has been reduced from that reserved for the most important of saints (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 59-60), many people still equate Mary Magdalene with the woman who anointed Jesus. Therefore, there is persistent interest in her sexuality and her image as a whore (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 60).

4.1.1 Catholic Encyclopedia: St. Mary Magdalen

As evidenced by the 1910 Roman Catholic encyclopaedic biographical entry on Mary Magdalene, Catholic scholarship asserted that Mary of Bethany, the sinner and great forgiven lover, and Mary (called) Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, were the same woman (John 11.2; Luke 7.47; Luke 8.2). This entry identifies the Luke 7 story as the obstacle that keeps Roman

Catholic, Protestant and Greek Orthodox Christians in controversy over the identity of Mary Magdalene. As noted in the introduction, this entry's author, Hugh Pope, argues that conflating Mary Magdalene with the women of the anointing stories is fundamental to understanding the Christian teaching of forgiveness. He further argues that it was the point of contention between Roman Catholics and Protestants.

4.1.2 Rosemary Radford Ruether

Rosemary Radford Ruether, is an eco-feminist, a Roman Catholic and, until her retirement, was professor of theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Her opinion is highly respected in theological circles and she has published a succinct overview of the Magdalene controversy in the National Catholic Reporter (1-3). She asserts that the historical tradition used the four anointing stories to identify Mary Magdalene as the woman who anointed Jesus, even though none of the stories "identified" the woman as Mary Magdalene. Ruether takes the position that both Mark's and Matthew's stories, which predate Luke's and John's, do not name the anointing woman or identify her as a sinner, and describe the anointing of Jesus's head, not his feet, as a sign of his impending death, not as a sign of forgiveness. She also maintains that, even though John's story describes the anointing of Jesus's feet and identifies the anointing woman as Mary of Bethany, not Mary Magdalene, this story is in keeping with Mark's and Matthew's earlier versions as a sign of Jesus's pending death. It is Luke's version (Luke 7.36-50) that tells the story about Jesus's forgiveness, rather than his death (1-3).

It is maintained that modern New Testament scholarship has corrected this earlier traditional assumption and revealed that Mary Magdalene is not the woman who anointed Jesus on his head or on his feet. Mary Magdalene is merely one of the women followers of Jesus who Jesus cured of an illness characterized by “seven devils,” as described in Luke 8.1-3. She is the recipient of healing, not forgiveness (Ruether 1-3). Accordingly, Ruether reads the New Testament as if Mary Magdalene is the leader of a group of women disciples who remain at the foot of the cross and at the burial tomb who try to anoint the body of Jesus upon his burial, only to find that he is no longer dead (2). Although Ruether claims that John’s anointing story does not identify the anointing Mary with the Mary surnamed or called Magdalene in the resurrection scene, she rounds off her summation of New Testament scholarship by drawing upon it:

John’s Gospel depicts Mary Magdalene in a personal encounter with the risen Christ, followed by her testimony to the other disciples. Thus Mary Magdalene stands in the New Testament as first witness of the resurrection, the one who testifies of the risen Lord to the male disciples. (3)

The primary purpose of Ruether’s article is to assert that there has never been a church “conspiracy against Mary Magdalene” to “falsify” or defame her as a positive role model for Christian women and their ministry: “for the first five centuries of the church no writer misinterpreted Mary Magdalene as a prostitute” (3). Exception is taken to contemporary women who assume that the defamation of Mary Magdalene came about “as an Orthodox effort to counteract the high role played by Mary Magdalene in the Gnostic communities.” She says that “there is no evidence” that the early church leaders were aware of such gnostic claims (2).

But there is evidence the church had a “high regard for Mary Magdalene” up until the end of the sixth century (Ruether 2). According to Ruether, Hippolytus gave Mary Magdalene the title “apostle to the apostles” (2). It was Pope Gregory I who started her defamation by confusing her with the “unnamed sinful woman of Luke 7” (Ruether 2).

According to Ruether, this identification of Mary Magdalene with the sinner of Luke 7 gave way to the identification of Mary Magdalene as a repentant prostitute, whose former sinfulness Pope Gregory contrasted with that of the Virgin Mary, Jesus’s mother (2). Ruether maintains that Pope Gregory’s conflation of Mary Magdalene with the sinful woman of Luke 7 was a mistake and was in no way a deliberate attempt to “remove [Mary Magdalene] as a ‘role model’ for women’s ministry.” Rather Ruether explains, it was instead done to help Christians understand the complexities of the New Testament Marys by positing a simple dualism: the ever-virgin mother and the repentant sinner (2).

Ruether says “this view was never followed by the Eastern Christian church tradition,” and explains that this tradition sees all “these women disciples as representatives of the New Eve, the church,” and despite Pope Gregory’s misinterpretation, the medieval church in both Western and Eastern traditions constructed legends that increased Mary Magdalene’s popularity as a role model for women (3). Ruether points out that one Eastern tradition held that Magdalene became a martyr when she “joined with Mary, Jesus’ mother, and John in Ephesus,” while another Eastern tradition depicts Mary Magdalene “going into the desert as a hermit, [to become a] role model of women’s hermetic life” (2). In

contrast, it is claimed that, until the Renaissance, legends in the West united Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany to sanctify her as a role model of conversion and repentance (Ruether 3). In this view, Renaissance art “delighted in picturing the erotic, half nude female body” and painted Mary Magdalene exploiting this “artistic type.” Ruether contends that it is this half naked erotic image of Mary Magdalene that has “come down in our own cultural imagination” despite efforts in the late 19th century when New Testament scholars “began to realize that there was no scriptural basis for the identification of Mary Magdalene with the repentant sinner of Luke 7” (3).³⁴

Ruether concludes her article with the assertion that this late 19th century New Testament scholarly realization is the correct view and it has taken until the beginning of the 21st century to become popular as women reinterpret Mary Magdalene in order to claim her as a role model for female preachers and ministers. She insists that “in the process of reinterpreting Mary Magdalene for today, church tradition should not be reduced to a hostile conspiracy against her.” Nor should the process discount the rich historical background informing church tradition (3).

4.1.3 Jane Schaberg and Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre

Jane Schaberg, a Roman Catholic and trained American biblical scholar, collaborating with a Protestant New Testament scholar Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre in 2006, rewrote her 2004 *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* for a

³⁴ See Appendix A, Table 1.

non-specialist audience so as to bring more people into conversation with each other about Mary Magdalene in history and tradition (7-15).

The Schaberg Johnson-DeBaufre collaboration depicts how history has conflated and used New Testament texts to explain Mary Magdalene's personal experience of the risen Lord. Their work is an example of how convoluted and detail-oriented these debates have become. Like other biblical scholars, they criticize popular culture for keeping the image of Mary Magdalene as a repentant whore alive. They cite modern novels such as *The Da Vinci Code* and films such as *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *The Passion of the Christ*, and then denounce them as works that merely promote the themes of lust and love (34), insisting that they are just modern attempts to exploit Mary Magdalene's conflated image (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 34).

It is conceded that the conflation of the demon-possessed person identified as Mary Magdalene, with the women in seven other stories³⁵ is creative (40-41).³⁶ But they maintain that these seven stories are not about Mary Magdalene and insist there were three different women who anointed Jesus, and seven or eight different Marys, including Mary Magdalene and his mother (38). They claim that the desire to create a biography for Mary Magdalene confused the three anointing women with other loyal women followers of Jesus. People wove the texts together, finding strands of similarities, so that these disparate

³⁵ The seven stories include the three versions of the anointing stories (Mark 14.3-9; Matthew 26.6-13; John 12.1-8; and Luke 7.36-50) plus four other stories; the story of Christ in the home of Martha and Mary (Luke 10.38-42); the unidentified bride (John 2.1-11); the unidentified Samaritan woman (John 4.4-42); and the unidentified woman caught in adultery (John 7.53-8.11).

³⁶ See Appendix A, Table 1.

texts threaded together and read like a novel, resolved the tension caused by Mary Magdalene's sudden "out of nowhere" appearance outside the tomb (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 38-41).

Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre examine the four major writers of the second and third centuries: Tertullian, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Origen (45-46). They reveal that these early Christian writers, and even the surrounding non-Christian population, considered Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany (the sister of Martha and Lazarus), and Luke's sinner to be the same person, and were thereby instrumental in promoting the conflation. Tertullian defended Jesus's bodily resurrection in John 20.11-18, which features Mary Magdalene's face-to-face encounter with the risen Christ, by arguing that the touch of the sinner woman proved that Jesus was not a ghost, but a person of substance whom she loved and with whom she wished to remain connected (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 45-46). Hippolytus then took this love argument and linked Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany, and with the "sensuous lover of the Song of Songs, and also the original temptress of biblical tradition, Eve" (Schaberg and Johnson-Debaufre 46). According to Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre, Hippolytus' sermon caused later people to confuse and conflate the original tempter, the snake, with Eve:

The sermon depicts Martha and Mary seeking Christ in the garden (as Mary Magdalene does in John 20). The women [both] represent the woman in the Song of Songs who searches for her lover and finds him. In these women, the sin of the first Eve is corrected by their obedience. "Eve has become apostle." The women are "apostles to the apostles." (46)

They claim that by the fourth century, John's account of Mary's encounter with the risen Christ, and the "touch me not" verse of John 20.17,³⁷ had intensified the controversy of the resurrection debate. Emphasizing this verse, the church fathers discussed such questions as: Was Jesus a man? Did he physically rise from the dead, and did he speak with Mary Magdalene (46) so that, in the words of Gregory Nyssa (qtd. in Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 47), "she might set straight again by her faith in the resurrection, what was turned over by her transgression." It is concluded that "Mary Magdalene's story" ... "like the story of Eve" ... became "the story of all women" (47). They see the sixth century sermon of Pope Gregory the Great "as the conflation in all its glory when Mary Magdalene, the 'sinner' of Luke 7, and Mary of Bethany are presented as the same woman" (47). They claim Gregory used it to quell prostitution and to keep people free from sexual sin and demonic possession (48). Accordingly, it is suggested that Pope Gregory chose the Magdalene as the saint of penitence, rather than Peter, because he thought women were weaker and more susceptible to demon possession and carnal sins. They further suggest that it was Pope Gregory's sermon that caused the Magdalene's legend to blossom and become "as much about shaping medieval male monastic spirituality and worldviews as about commenting on women's sexuality, sinfulness, and redemption" (48).

³⁷ John 20.17 in the NIV reads: "Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers, and tell them, "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." The Greek interlinear texts reads: Says to her Jesus: Not me touch, for not have I ascended to the Father...."

Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre acknowledge that the official view in both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism was changed in 1969 to adopt the Eastern Orthodox view that identifies Mary Magdalene as distinct from Mary of Bethany and the sinful woman of Luke (59). But they also point out that the idea that Jesus and Mary had a sexual relationship has endured down through history, despite attempts by the church to correct it:

The Catharists or Albigensians (twelfth and thirteenth centuries) held that she was Jesus' concubine. Martin Luther (early sixteenth century) assumed that they had a sexual relationship... Erotic themes appear in ...art, novels, and poetry (60).

It is contended that, despite the "well-meaning gender politics" of modern treatments of Mary Magdalene that conflate Mary Magdalene texts with the anointing woman texts, "making Mary Magdalene into Jesus' wife or lover seems just another attempt to make Jesus a real human man and complete the process of Mary's redemption from whore to legitimate woman" (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 62). Moreover, these modern treatments use the Magdalene to "think about Jesus, and about men in general" (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 62).

Agreement is found with those feminist biblical scholars who view Jesus as a "marginalized man who in his career and execution struggles against oppression" and as such represents both genders [in his divine incarnation] as "Sophia-God" who includes both marginalized women and men (62). Therefore, they further the idea that "Jesus does not need Mary Magdalene to make him a real man" (62). He changes society's "understanding of what a 'real man' is" by disrupting the "boundaries between male and female," by showing concern for

children, by washing his disciple's feet, by comforting and weeping with those who mourn, and by wanting violence to end (62).

They are critical of *The Gospel of Thomas* and those who cite it as evidence that Mary Magdalene was Jesus's equal because they do not like the idea that Mary could become "worthy of life" by becoming male (74). They view "the goal of woman 'becoming male'" as reinforcing "traditional gender hierarchies of male over female" (75). Therefore, it is argued that the true goal of the enlightened soul is to become identical to Jesus. For them, however, Jesus is a Christological figure who wears the body of the female divine and is therefore both male and female. He models how not to let one's gender [and sexuality] define one's person (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 75).

Schaberg differs from Johnson-DeBaufre in that she does not discount Mary Magdalene being a faithful witness with the other women to the crucifixion and the resurrection (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 140). But she does present a new theory based on the Old Testament story of Elijah, the Song of Songs text used in the Roman Catholic Mass on the Magdalene's feast day, and the Gnostic texts. With these texts, she suggests that Jesus's appearance to Mary Magdalene in the garden was not a display of undying "romantic" love, but rather a sign that Jesus had revealed her as his friend, not his erotic lover, and had chosen her over Peter as his successor, as Elijah chose Elisha in 2 Kings (140-141).

Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre suggest that the early Christian community for which John wrote his Gospel may have had "anxieties" about ritual

cleanliness and or women touching men in priestly communities promoting an ascetic lifestyle (140). They suggest however, that in the new egalitarian community marked by Jesus's death and resurrection, Mary's touch would not have been a threat. Rather the first disciples would have viewed her touch and his response of "do not touch/hold onto me" as Mary's desire to have a never-ending relationship with Jesus, "whatever the cost in terms of anguish" (140).

Nevertheless, it is claimed that "Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene was 'short-circuited' by dominant views in Christianity" (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 144). John's "insertion of Peter and the beloved disciple into the narrative" upstaged her. The faith of the beloved disciple became superior to Mary's because the beloved disciple saw the grave cloths where the body had lain and believed he had risen from the dead (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 145; John 20. 9; John 21. 24). Weeping, Mary did not recognize or acknowledge that the person speaking with her was the Rabboni and the risen Lord until he acknowledged her (Schaberg and Johnson-Debaufre 145; John 20.17). Then Mary fades from view as the disciples receive the Holy Spirit (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre 145).

Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre think that *The Gospel of Phillip* and *The Pistis Sophia* are "indicative of women demonstrating leadership roles," but Mary's absence from the final scenes of John signals conflicts over such leadership" (82-83,146). It is claimed that *The Gospel of Mary* demonstrates that Mary Magdalene may have been considered a prophet and Jesus's successor so that "prophetic succession" would replace "apostolic succession" (151). They

interpret the ambiguity of the evidence of the kiss in *The Gospel of Phillip* as suggesting that Mary was a model gnostic, that Jesus's kiss was confirmation of her acceptance of him and her understanding of his teaching (81-82). As a model gnostic, Mary "showed others the way", even "dressed as a man," (Schaberg and Johnson-Debaufre 82). However, they point to specific evidence from *The Gospel of Thomas* and the first century *Apostolic Church Order*, to show that the gnostic Mary may never have realized a commission as the Apostle to the Apostles. This evidence reveals how Peter and John marginalized her and other women believing them unworthy of life and excluded them in the Eucharistic ministry of Jesus on the grounds that they were not "permitted to stand at the last supper" (84-86).

Schaberg and Johnson-Debaufre argue that interpretations that emphasize Mary as a woman who loved Jesus and stress that she looked on him as someone more than a beloved friend diminishes both love and Mary (141). Schaberg in particular prefers an ambiguous reading of Mary's sexuality and prefers to "let it remain ambiguous whether or not she and Jesus were lovers" (153). Because, as Schaberg explains, she does not want to see Mary as simply a heroine in a love story or a lone hero imparting special personal religious knowledge of Jesus to the disciples. She wants to avoid confining Mary to "any type of relationship with Jesus"...to "see her in her own right" and to see her sexuality as "part of her creative wholeness" and ours too (153).

4.2 Protestant Tradition

These debates reflect a theological tension centred on gender roles and the question of what constitutes an apostle. Many women within Protestant Christianity feel that male Bible commentaries have kept Christian women such as Mary Magdalene from leadership roles, especially “ordained” apostolic roles because of their gender (Moltmann-Wendel 3, Winkett 20 and Brock 3-7).

4.2.1 William Barclay and the Kilmore Stained Glass

During the 1970s William Barclay, an influential Protestant, enthusiastically promoted Mary Magdalene as the scarlet sinner, even though the Roman Catholic tradition had recanted this position the year before.³⁸ His publishers touted him as “the world’s best-selling religious author” (*Jesus of Nazareth* cover jacket). He was also a radio and television presenter, Church of Scotland minister and Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at the University of Glasgow. Barclay wrote the text to accompany film stills for the popular 1970s Franco Zeffirelli Hollywood production *Jesus of Nazareth* that relied heavily upon his New Testament translations (*Jesus of Nazareth* jacket). Barclay’s 1975 commentary on the Gospel of John maintains that “[t]radition has always had it that Mary was a scarlet sinner, whom Jesus reclaimed and forgave and purified” (*Daily Study Bible* 265).

Barclay’s commentary on Luke 10 states that:

Jesus loved Martha and Martha loved him, but when Martha set out to be kind, it had to be her way of being kind which was really being

³⁸ See Appendix A, Table 1.

unkind to him whose heart cried out for quiet. Jesus loved Mary and Mary loved him, and Mary understood.” (*Daily Study Bible* 142)

The scene Barclay depicts makes Martha the homemaker of this Bethany scene: Jesus is the man of the house who has come home expecting peace and quiet, and Martha is not giving it to him. Jesus, like a straying husband, then turns his affection to Mary who knows just what he needs.

As previously noted, Barclay was a Church of Scotland minister. He was convinced that Mary of Magdala was the scarlet woman in love with Jesus. Barclay was also convinced that people learn by looking at pictures (*Jesus of Nazareth* 7). Keeping these things in mind, it is interesting to note Stephen Adam’s stunningly beautiful stained glass window displayed in the Church of Scotland’s Kilmore Church on the Isle of Mull (Figure 3).

Here the artist depicts the Luke 10 domestic scene of Martha and Mary in Bethany putting the scarlet cloak on Jesus, not the woman who loves him. The artist, in keeping with the beliefs of the Church of Scotland, shows the woman as the one Jesus loved and “reclaimed, forgave and purified” by placing Jesus’s hand in hers in a sacred stained glass window (Barclay, *Daily Study Bible* 265). The details of this window clearly associate this woman with Mary, the sister of Martha, because below the window, a placard displays the words “Mary Hath Chosen” referencing the words Jesus spoke to Martha in Luke’s Gospel (10.42).

In this Scottish window, Mary’s choice is a living example for other people to follow. But here Mary is pregnant and could thereby be linked to Mary the mother of Jesus if it were not for the placard with its reference to Jesus’s words

spoken to Martha. So, despite prevalent Protestant beliefs that separated Mary Magdalene from Luke's sinner woman, Barclay and the Kilmore Church window clearly conflated Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and further conflated her with the woman whose sin was forgiven because of her great love for Jesus.

Figure 3: Adam, S. Mary Hath Chosen



Source. Adam, 1905.

4.2.2 Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel

Artists and commentaries, such as Barclay's on the Gospel of Luke, that support the portrayal of Mary as a woman in red—a scarlet sinner—often depict Martha as someone who was just too busy with housekeeping to take the time to give Jesus the understanding and the attention he needed (Barclay, *Daily Study Bible, Gospel of Luke* 141-142). This depiction angers and offends Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, an eminent German Reformed feminist theologian. In her book, *The Women around Jesus: Reflections on Authentic Personhood* (1980, Engl. Trans. 1982) she writes:

When I think of 'Martha', a picture from a children's Bible comes to mind. In it, Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to him, while in the background Martha is leaning against the kitchen door with an evil, mistrustful look on her face. (18)

Of particular offense to Moltmann-Wendel is how the church has used Mary Magdalene's role as a penitent to denounce the traditional woman's homemaking role (19). She rejects the conflation of Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany because it has elevated Mary at the expense of Martha (64). We have therefore forgotten about Martha:

She enjoyed a long life in the tradition of the early church and in pictorial art. According to an ancient legend, Martha, who persevered until Jesus disclosed himself to her as the resurrection and the life and restored her brother to life, overcame a dragon – a dragon who was the embodiment of evil, the demonic and the old order. In the Middle Ages she was often painted as the proud housewife, with a fettered dragon stretched out at her feet. (27)

Readers are reminded that it was Martha, not Mary, who was the “first to hear that Jesus is the resurrection and the life”³⁹, and as such was the woman who restored “to women their lost sense of themselves in the church.” Martha is no ordinary homemaker. Martha is the “housewife” who “conquers the old order in the guise of a dragon” (Moltmann-Wendel 28).

While critical of popular culture as it concerns Mary Magdalene, Moltmann-Wendel reminds her readers to pay attention to the biblical Mary (64). She observes that the Bible depicts Mary Magdalene as someone with an unusual friendship with Jesus whom Jesus healed and called to preach the good news (76).

4.2.3 Lucy Winkett

Lucy Winkett, an ordained Church of England priest, most succinctly describes how what she perceives as the modern error came about of conflating Mary Magdalene with the great sinner and the great penitent depicted as Mary of Bethany. She believes that there has been a false equation of Mary of Bethany with Mary of Luke 10, with the anointing accounts of John 12, with the sinner of Luke 7, and the woman at the Well of John 4:

The false equation Mary of Magdala = woman with ointment = woman at the well = loose woman = prostitute has produced the composite figure Mary Magdalene. (21)

³⁹ Moltman-Wendel is referring to John 11.25-27.

The Roman Catholic Church is seen as the original source of the error and popular culture as perpetuating it (21). In a keynote address marking “St. Mary Magdalen’s Day” in July 2000 (20), Winkett stated that:

The man generally credited with sanctioning this piece of Biblical imagination was Pope Gregory the Great...in 591 in Rome... In 1969, the Roman Catholic Church officially overruled Pope Gregory’s interpretation but it dominates Western interpretation and tradition and still does. (21)

What particularly angers Winkett is the fact that the church has made Mary Magdalene synonymous with the ‘fallen’ woman, the reformed prostitute, and then has failed to defrock celibate priests who have fathered children with women thus compromised and deemed “fallen” (20):

Mary Magdalene has given her name to homes for fallen women, to the Magdalen laundries; popular as workhouses for, among others, women pregnant with the children of priests (with all the attendant imagery of sin and stain)...

The penitent sinner, the reformed prostitute, has been the prevailing characterization of Mary...in the context of a grateful fallen woman, probably in love with Jesus, devoted to him and devastated by his death, as a deserted lover would be. (20)

Winkett’s reluctance to conflate the two Marys with the sinner woman of Luke and the woman at the well underscores an understanding of Christian forgiveness as a one sided process, where Jesus is the sole forgiver who is without sin. Thus, if this is true and Jesus is the blameless one who forgives the sinner, the false equation that Winkett perceives takes on a political significance that needs to be addressed.

4.2.4 Bishop John Shelby Spong

John Shelby Spong is a prolific author and an Episcopal Bishop living in Newark, New Jersey. His many books have challenged the sexual values of traditional Christianity, and his name has become “almost synonymous with religious debate and controversy” (Todd H3). According to Spong, any idea that Jesus and Mary were lovers “would fly in the face of the moral values espoused by the church... and it would deeply violate our understanding of Jesus as incarnate Lord and the Holy Sinless One” (*Born of a Woman* 189). At the same time, he agrees with Margaret Starbird’s claim that Mary Magdalene and Jesus were married (185-189). Curious to know more, I wrote him an email letter⁴⁰ in September 2010 and asked him to comment further upon the idea of a married Jesus.⁴¹ He replied that he hoped that Jesus was married and that there is evidence to support it, although it is not conclusive. Furthermore, he said that he thought there is strong evidence to support the belief that the Magdalene was the same person as Mary, the sister of Martha, but he viewed “most of the later Magdalene traditions as myths and folklore.”⁴² I wrote him again and asked him why he hoped Jesus was married and why he had not considered Martha whom Jesus also loved as the wife of Jesus. Spong then replied that he hoped Jesus was married because in his experience marriage is “the most wonderful

⁴⁰ In this email I told him I wanted some additional information from him for my master’s project. His permission to cite this correspondence is implicit in his responses.

⁴¹ Personal email correspondence 9/17/2010 Appendix B.

⁴² Personal email correspondence 11/8/2010 Appendix B.

relationship human beings can have.”⁴³ In answer to my query about Martha filling the role as Jesus’s wife, Spong responded that:

Martha is so minor a figure in the N.T. that I don’t take her seriously. Mary is also minor unless she is the same as Mary Magdalene and then she is the major woman in the Jesus Story. I think the idea that Jesus was married to Martha, and had love for her sister Mary is right out of Cecile B. DeMille!⁴⁴

Spong upholds marriage as the most wonderful relationship human beings can have, but he is not willing to consider how married women have traditionally chosen roles such as Martha’s. To say that her role is minor, he overlooks an opportunity to support traditional choices. Furthermore, he states that Mary’s role is minor unless it is conflated with Mary Magdalene’s who he hopes was married to Jesus. It is John’s text that says Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary (John 11.5). Therefore Spong’s comment about Jesus loving both Martha and her sister Mary being something only a movie producer would dare assert is telling. Spong either made a major blunder or he has slyly set the stage for the next movie.

4.3 Gnosticism and the Greek Orthodox Tradition

The gnostic texts heighten the controversy about Mary’s role and relationship to Jesus because of their content and because Christians calling themselves orthodox, beginning in the late second century, called those who disagreed with them heretics, especially gnostic Christians and their writings (Pagels xxiii-xxiv). The emerging majority view made every effort to rid the

⁴³ Personal email correspondence 11/8/2010 Appendix B.

⁴⁴ Handwritten correspondence 11/10/2010 Appendix C.

church of heresy and destroyed their beliefs whenever possible. What has survived has become the focus of research for church historians such as Elaine Pagels. Until the recently discovered apocryphal texts, the most notable being *The Nag Hammadi Library* collection discovered in 1945, scholars had a limited understanding of Gnosticism from the written attacks made against them (Pagels xi, xxiv). Many of the texts attributed to women, including large portions of the gnostic *Gospel of Mary*, no longer exist (Pagels xxiv-xxxii; Moltmann-Wendel 5). While the few texts that have survived are being used in contemporary debates to show that Jesus loved Mary Magdalene, they are also being used to counter that idea, and to claim that the disciples objection to the “kiss,” is evidence of the ongoing struggle for legitimacy that continues today as women seek ordained priestly roles.

4.3.1 Elaine Pagels

Historian Elaine Pagels is the author of *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979) the first major book on Gnosticism. She supports the view that Mary Magdalene is the historical figure featured in the gnostic texts and finds them interesting because they display a diversity of beliefs held by early Christians, some of which orthodox Christians of antiquity abhorred (xxxviii). She says that the rediscovery of the “controversies that occupied early Christianity sharpens our awareness of the major issue in the whole debate, then and now: What is the source of religious authority?” (181).

The Gnostic Gospel of Philip hints at an erotic relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus (Pagels 21; *Nag Hammadi Library* 148). Pagels suggests

that this intimacy “may indicate claims to mystical communion” similar to the “mystics of many traditions” that “chose sexual metaphors to describe their experiences” [with God] (21-22).

Pagels confirms that evidence of the veneration of a “feminine power” exists in various secret gospels, revelations and mystical teachings published in early Christianity (68). Yet, she says that as early as the year 200, virtually all the feminine imagery for God had disappeared from mainline Christian tradition (68). She points out that literary people of popular culture, such as William Blake, still had access to gnostic writers even though the Pope had declared Gnosticism a heresy (68,179).

Pagels offers a reason for the orthodox dominance that declared Gnosticism and the veneration of the female as heresy. She explains that Christianity’s earliest traditions professed a faith in the God of Israel, who unlike many of his contemporary deities “of the ancient Near East,” did not share his power with a female divinity and was not the “divine Husband or Lover of any” divinity (57).

Speaking to this idea of God and Gender, Leonard Swidler, the founder and editor of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, says in his 1979 publication *Biblical Affirmations of Woman* that, while God was to be beyond gender, God was nevertheless genderized:

Although the Hebrew tradition early perceived God to be transcendent, beyond limitations, including sex, it nevertheless persisted in referring to God in terms and images that included sexuality. (21)

Swidler explains that the early Hebrew tradition “often speaks of God in masculine—and feminine—images, although it also continues to affirm God’s transcendence of sexuality...following ...what the Hindus call the path of *neti neti* (not this, not that)” (21).

Elaine Pagels points out that the negative consequence of orthodox dominance was that “by the late second century the orthodox [and some gnostic communities] came to accept the domination of men over women as the divinely ordained order,” as evidenced by *The Gospel of Thomas* (79). *The Gospel of Thomas* presents Jesus as saying, “I myself shall lead [Mary] in order to make her male so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males” (Pagels 80; *Nag Hammadi* 138).

Pagels says orthodox Christianity survived as a dominant religion because it demanded conformity to male authority and, as it grew more organized and popular, gnostic Christians became a suppressed minority (83,178). Orthodox Christianity offered an “institutional framework that gave ...religious sanction and ethical direction.” Gnostic Christianity offered the “restless inquiring person” a “solitary path of self discovery” (Pagels 178). While it was too diverse to survive, parts of it never disappeared:

The concerns of gnostic Christians survived only as a suppressed current, like a river driven underground. Such currents resurfaced throughout the Middle Ages in various forms of heresy...then [again] with the Reformation... But the great majority of the movements that emerged from the Reformation... remained within the basic framework of orthodoxy established in the second century. (Pagels 179)

Whereas doctrinal conformity defined orthodoxy, diversity of teaching and choosing a different path defined heresy (Pagels 28). As Christianity spread to Germany, Spain, Gaul, Egypt and Africa, disagreements concerning orthodox affirmation of feminine elements and the acceptance of women as active participants in the life of the church arose between Clement and Tertullian (Pagels 82). The male consensus ruled Clement's position as heresy and ruled in favour of the adoption of Tertullian's position:

It is not permitted for a woman to speak in the church, nor is it permitted for her to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer [the eucharist], nor to claim for herself a share in any masculine function—least of all, in priestly office. (qtd. in Pagels 83)

So according to Pagels, the issue then and now is “the source of religious authority” (181). The active participation of women as priests is still a source of contention (Pagels 83; Limouris 10). “In 1977, Pope Paul VI, Bishop of Rome, declared that a woman cannot be a priest “because our Lord was a man” (Pagels 83).

4.3.2 Prof. Dr. Chrysostomos of Myra

In 1988 the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Myra, Prof. Dr. Chrysostomos, convened an Inter-orthodox Symposium in Rhodes, Greece, to examine the “Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and Question of the Ordination of Women” (Limouris 10). Chrysostomos concluded his opening address with these words: “We are gathered here...to engage in the very important task...to restate the impossibility of the ordination of women from the perspective of the Church's doctrine” (Limouris 11). Chrysostomos claimed, as did Pope Paul VI, that the

“ordination of priesthood is a male one, because it represents the witness and sacrifice of the incarnate Christ” (130).

So it appears, as Elaine Pagels has argued, that the major issue then and now is the source of religious authority (181). If lay and clergy, in the Eastern and Western churches, view Mary Magdalene’s witness and sacrifice as ordinary and inferior to the incarnate male Christ, the possibility of women ever obtaining the religious authority of a bishop will remain a dream.

With this in mind, I think attempts in the Western church to separate Mary Magdalene from the sinner woman, to re-align its Mariological beliefs with the Eastern church, is a political strategy of the bishops to keep their power.

4.3.3 Karen King

Karen King is the first woman to hold the prestigious Hollis Chair appointment at Harvard Divinity School. Her area of academic expertise is early Christianity and Gnosticism. Her view supports those Magdalene Devotees who claim that Mary Magdalene and Jesus had a purely spiritual marriage, that their union demonstrates how the human soul unites with God (Blanca). According to King’s interpretation of the gnostic *Gospel of Mary*, Mary is the Apostle to the Apostles (79).⁴⁵ She is the counterpart of Jesus who ascended into the Divine Realm and became a true human being through acknowledgement of the self, through the opposition of false powers and the resistance of passions such as

⁴⁵ See also Claire Nahmad and Margaret Bailey, 188-189.

anger, desire, lust, greed, and envy (King 79). As the counterpart of Jesus, Mary would be successor and the equal of the incarnate risen Christ.

Karen King's 2003 book *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* interprets fifth century Coptic fragments of *The Gospel of Mary* discovered in 1896, first published in 1955, and third century Greek fragments published in 1938 and 1983. King examines how this early Christian Gospel provides insight into Jesus's and Mary's teaching through the examination of the Gospel of Mary in light of traditional teachings of Jesus, Paul's letters, John's Gospel, Apostolic teaching, and Christianity's history (King 8-12). According to King, these post-resurrection fragments expose the view that Mary of Magdala is a prostitute as theological fiction. Throughout these fragments Mary is the only one who understands how to achieve inner peace and how to preach the gospel without the fear the disciples have of sharing the same suffering and fate as the Saviour (King 3-4,109).

Much of King's book focuses on complex theological issues rather than the actual relationship of Mary Magdalene and the risen Christ. Ultimately though, King asserts that Mary's Gospel promotes the idea that the soul can overcome its separation from God by overcoming violence and passion (81). The human soul can ascend to the Divine Realm and become a true human being by self acknowledgement and by opposing the false powers and resisting the passions of the lower world (King 79).

King presents the idea that after Jesus's death and resurrection, the disciples were worried and afraid because the world had not "spared" the

Saviour, so they could not see how the world would “spare” them. She discusses how Mary takes over the Saviour’s role as comforter to comfort and restore harmony among the apostles by kissing them “tenderly.” In return Peter calls her “sister and acknowledges that the Savior had a special affection for her” (83). King asserts that there was a contest for leadership between Mary and Peter (148-149,187), and highlights the disciple Levi, who refused to believe that the Saviour loved Mary more than the other disciples (King 88), and Peter’s refusal to believe that Jesus loved her more than any other male disciple (King 88-89).

King criticizes the canonical Gospel of John for weakening Mary’s role as Jesus’s successor by portraying her as someone who mistakenly saw Jesus as the Gardener, then in another not quite right way as the Rabboni—at which time Jesus told her not to touch him—before she finally got it right and affirmed him as Lord (130-133). In the end King concludes that Mary was a leader of both men and women and a prominent disciple (148-187). King attributes this prominence to the fact that Mary was a woman who held fast to the vision of the glorified Jesus in spite of the contest with Peter, and because she was the only person who could personify all the required roles in *The Gospel of Mary* to convey the meaning of the Saviour’s message (148-187). King criticizes and renounces the portrait of Mary as a repentant whore promulgated through art and literature in Western European culture (148-149,187).

In King's *Apostles* chapter she upholds the idea that the epithet "Magdalene" signified that Mary was from the town of Migdal⁴⁶ and cites the association of Mary Magdalene with Luke's unnamed sinner who anointed Jesus as being the first step to further confuse Mary with Mary of Bethany, the adulteress in John 8, and the woman with six lovers in John 4 (148-153). It is suggested that, by burdening Mary Magdalene with this additional four-fold character composite, church fathers were able to label Mary a repentant whore and use it to explain why Mary and women down through the centuries were unworthy to teach or touch Jesus's resurrected body. The view that regards women primarily in terms of their sexuality, not their spirituality, was thereby reinforced (King 152).

4.4 Modern Devotees and New Age Tradition

Modern devotees of Mary Magdalene include radical feminists, advocates for the ordination of female priests, New Age and neo-Gnostic believers and conspiracy theorists (Lloyd). Whereas many of these devotees are convinced that Mary was Jesus's equal partner and married to Jesus as his sacred bride, only some devotees, such as Margaret Starbird, believe that Mary gave birth to his child and that the church has deliberately concealed this truth (Blanca, *Alabaster Jar* xx-xxi).⁴⁷ Others such as Lynn Picknett refute Starbird's earthly bride assertions, but join with her in saying early Christianity drew upon the Song

⁴⁶ Starbird disagrees with King (*Alabaster Jar* 51-51), as does Picknett. The town of Magdala did not exist during the first century (Picknett 62).

⁴⁷ See also Claire Nahmad and Margaret Bailey.

of Songs to celebrate the Roman Catholic mass with Mary Magdalene as the Bride in the Song of Songs, not the Virgin Mary (104; Blanca).

4.4.1 Barbara Walker

Some modern Magdalene devotees take a more mystical approach to the interpretation of scripture and turn to gnostic teachings to win converts to their cause to honour the gnostic Mary as a liberating archetype that transcends the Virgin and the Whore stereotype (Blanca). For example, Barbara Walker is a radical feminist researcher and author of several books emphasizing the sacred roles that women have manifested throughout history. In her *Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, she writes about Origen:

Origen showed a mystic devotion to Mary Magdalene, confusing her with the Goddess by calling her “the mother of all of us,” and sometimes Jerusalem, and sometimes The Church (Ecclesia, another title of the Virgin). Origen claimed Mary Magdalene was immortal, having lived from the beginning of time. (614)⁴⁸

Walker gives Mary the same religious authority as God. She claims that evidence contained in *The Gospel of Mary* and other ancient texts pertaining to Goddess worship suggest that the early Christians worshipped Mary Magdalene as a goddess (614). Walker also claims that Mary the Virgin was “only another form of Mary the Whore, the triple Goddess Mari-Anna-Ishtar, the Great Whore of Babylon who was worshipped along with her savior-son in the Jerusalem temple” (614). Walker says that in the 7th century “Pope Sergius instituted an annual procession to the old temple of the prostitute-goddess Libera, changing the

⁴⁸ Walker points out that the early Greek Church considered Origen a saint until the gnostic elements in his writings caused the Greek Church to declare him a heretic (614).

temple's name to Santa Maria Maggiore: Most-Great Holy Mary" (614). Walker admits that this evidence does not make clear which Holy Mary Pope Sergius meant, the Magdalene or Mary the Virgin. So she suggests that he "merged the two of them as primal feminine power" (614).

It is further claimed that the Roman Church in the Middle Ages openly worshipped Mary Magdalene as the Virgin and the Whore. That claim is supported by the fact that Pope Julius II established a brothel in Rome to sustain the Holy Sisters of the Order of St. Mary Magdalene, as if the Magdalene sisters of the Order were equal to the prostitutes that supported it. Secondly, Walker offers the fact that Pope Innocent III "favored Rome's collegia of prostitutes, called virgins, unmarried women" and "publically announced that any man who married one of them would be specially praised in heaven" (615).

The sacred whore image does not upset Walker. She claims that the ancient world revered temple prostitutes as "healers of the sick" and that like Jesus "even their spittle could perform cures" (820). More importantly, Walker debunks the popular perception of virgin as a person who abstains from sexual activity. To equate Mary Magdalene with Mary the Virgin Mother is to give Mary Magdalene the autonomy of ancient goddesses such as Pallas Athena, the "Mother-goddess of Athens" who was worshipped as "Holy Virgin" despite the fact that she had "several consorts" (Walker 74,763).

4.4.2 Leonard Swidler and Stevan Davies

According to Leonard Swidler, a professor of Interreligious Dialogue and Catholic Studies at Temple University, women such as Thecla disguised themselves as males throughout the Apocryphal Acts and performed miracles such as the raising of dead men (318). Swidler says that, prior to the doctoral dissertation of Stevan Davies in 1978 at Temple University, biblical scholars had not seriously considered the possibility of female authorship for canonical texts (317).

Until general acceptance for the possibility of the existence of more cross-dressing female authors such as Thecla (dressed as men) can be detected in the canon (Swidler 321), the gnostic texts give people a viable alternative to traditional Christianity (Pagels 80,181). Nevertheless, according to Swidler, the Roman Catholic Church listed Thecla as a saint “until 1969!” (320), and until the 14th century commentators took the apostle Junia named in Romans 16.6-8 also to be a female (299). Swidler comments that, “it is odd that it is only in more modern times that Christian writers have strained to take away Thecla’s sainthood and make [the apostle] Junia into a male name”. He blames misogyny (299).

Ann Brock argues in her book *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle* that the question of apostleship and legitimate leadership originates from Paul’s definition of an apostle. “In Paul’s claim to apostolicity and legitimation, two aspects emerge as essential: 1) witnessing an appearance of the risen Christ, and 2) receiving a divine call or commission to proclaim Christ’s message” (Brock 6).

Whereas John's Gospel seems to legitimate Mary Magdalene as an apostle, Luke's Gospel seems to exclude her because it makes no explicit mention of Jesus speaking with Mary Magdalene or Junia directly (Brock 162).

Swidler and Davies raise interesting points. Explicit evidence may exist outside of John's Gospel to support Mary Magdalene's apostolic authorship. They say that the male identity given to her by Jesus, as evidenced by the *Gospel of Thomas*, may exist somewhere in the New Testament as well, and Christians may need to re-read it with this and the case of Junia in mind to find Mary Magdalene's apostolic male name.

4.5 Concluding Thoughts

Mary Magdalene's role has been conflated, compared, and contrasted with Mary the mother of Jesus as well as other women down through the centuries. Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox traditions revere Mary as the mother of God. But many women question the validity of this claim because within the church hierarchy Mary the mother of God does not have the same power and reverence as God the Father. For some contemporary women the major barrier for religious authority stems from this inequality. Jesus came as the incarnation of God the Father who is sinless and all powerful. Thus to conflate Mary with the Magdalene who is further conflated with the sinful woman of Luke 7 and the loose woman with multiple partners causes problems for modern people. It emphasizes the sinless nature of Jesus and makes a woman of questionable sexual morality the first person Jesus redeems and forgives upon

the resurrection. This emphasis on a person's sexual morality implies sex is sinful unless confined to one's legitimate spouse in marriage.

Efforts to promote a positive role model for women as priests have reimagined Mary Magdalene by detaching her image from that of a reformed sexual libertine. Yet, as Pagels' historical evidence and the current Eastern Orthodox beliefs suggest, this may be a power ploy to obtain and keep power. A renewed interest in *The Gospel of Thomas*, and its claim that Jesus made Mary male so that other women could make themselves male to enter the divine kingdom (*Nag Hammadi* 138), takes on more significance. The idea that women are not worthy of life demonizes them. It makes them subordinate to divine males who have the power to control them and their bodies.

Mary Magdalen has been depicted as one of many women Jesus healed from demon possession. It makes her the recipient of healing, while in her ancient image as a temple prostitute she healed people herself and had control over her own body. She was free to choose or reject sexual partners. Moreover, in her old image as a "sinner," she stood openly opposed to the ancient patriarchal system that gave men the freedom to have multiple wives and sexual partners and condemned women with more than one husband as loose (John 4.16-18; Winkett 21). Yet feminists criticize conservative theologians and popular culture alike for conflating Mary Magdalene with the "sinner" and the woman who troubled and worried Martha because this conflation has been falsely applied and used for political advantage. However, we need to remember that Jesus spoke to Martha's worry by saying, "Mary hath chosen" and [her choice] will not be

taken from her.” Therefore, how one chooses to see Mary and the “sinner” informs one`s own answer to the question of whom Mary and Jesus are in relation to each other. That is what I take to be a central issue here, and in the conclusion I will state my own views on that perennially vexed question, accompanied by a brief overview of the road we have travelled.

5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

Having examined the evidence and considered the contesting views, I am not convinced that, apart from her aspect as the “sinner woman,” Mary Magdalene’s image needs reimagining. Traditional images of the forgiven adulteress, the penitent sinner, and the one healed of seven demons all have merit. Of course these images have been used against women; but, for the most part, popular culture as an instrument of social criticism has used and continues to use Mary Magdalene’s sexuality and her conflated image as the adulteress to remind church and culture that love is physical, costly, and risky. In an effort to respond to the emerging needs of the modern world, mainstream faith traditions are rethinking their Christology. My view is merely such a response. It demonstrates how Christianity, as a living faith tradition, can speak to me, and others, differently, according to how each of us chooses to see Mary and the “sinner.” In my view, our choice informs our answer to a central Gospel question that asks who Mary and Jesus are in relation to each other. In this conclusion I present my own views on this subject, and a brief review of the journey travelled to arrive at them.

I believe that, to bring the church into the modern world, we all need to take a closer look at the early traditions and the internal logic of the texts that conflate Mary Magdalene with the other Marys, and with the unknown sinner of

the Gospel. This synthesis presented a challenge to Jesus's disciples and it still does today. Scholars and lay people alike need to revise a bias that recognizes only the male Christ. That bias justifies the exclusion of women from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox priesthood, and is buttressed by the claim that Mary's primary role was that of Theotokos. Once the possibility of both a female and a male messianic leader is allowed for, the controversy of who Mary is in relationship to Jesus can resolve itself. We need to see how patriarchal language, syncretism, and chauvinism have kept us from perceiving that Mary Magdalene is the female incarnation of God—Jesus the Woman. And as such, Mary, in her symbolic role as Theotokos, brings Jesus the Woman and her divine male counterpart, Jesus the Man, into the World in an eternal partnership. She does this both literally and metaphorically, by choosing to embody the fallen female image of God, in order to disclose and correct a systemic injustice that pitted male, female, Jew and Gentile against one another over theological and social issues, marginalizing and sacrificing the needs of the individual in favour of the needs and desires of the majority.

The biggest stumbling block to this view of Mary Magdalene is not language or chauvinism. It is the conflation of Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the sinner woman. People are reluctant to conflate Mary Magdalene with the sinner woman, especially if she deliberately chose to transgress divine law. Perhaps they need the female incarnation of God to be pure and sinless like their perception of the male Jesus. Or perhaps they do not understand the profound significance of forgiveness that blots out sin. Or

perhaps they do not understand how and why a female whose image magnifies God's image became the most blessed sinner and the most blessed of all women, the mother of Jesus—the incarnation of God. Yet separating Mary Magdalene from centuries of traditional teaching that conflates her image with that of the sinner is not the solution. It only serves to rob her of her metaphorical power. Mary Magdalene can be seen as the most blessed sinner because she chose to disclose her sin. In modern terms, this was an act of civil disobedience. Her power comes from allowing herself to be caught in the very act of adultery. This deliberate violation of divine law, with the intent within the framework of the then prevailing patriarchal family system, demonstrates her personal autonomy. The miraculous reunion of Jesus and Mary Magdalene following the Resurrection, forgives and vindicates them both and allows both of them and all of us to stand as the Risen Christ. In their role as the Risen Christ, they call us to work together to change the world for the better.

To illustrate how I arrive at this point of view, I turn to each of my thesis sections and point out how the traditional view of Mary Magdalene conflates her with the sinner, and also places her at the Resurrection to vindicate Sophia, the wisdom of God (Matthew 11.19; Luke 7.35; 1Corinthians 1.24,30) .

5.2 The Contesting Views

The contesting views range from those who see Mary Magdalene as an adulterer and sacred prostitute to those who want to completely disassociate Mary Magdalene from both of these images. Various feminist scholars have put forth the idea that Mary Magdalene needs to be seen as a person in her own

right rather than someone merely famous for her liberated sexuality, and biblical scholarship is trying to do so. However, politics and the fight for religious authority have played a big part in editing the Bible. Therefore, biblical scholarship cannot be implicitly trusted to present an inerrant view as to who Mary Magdalene was in relationship to Jesus. Some modern Biblical exegetes want to separate Mary Magdalene from the sinner woman and Martha's sister to make a case for the ordination of female priests. However, disassociating Mary from these women presents problems. The homemaker role exemplified by Martha and the role exemplified by the woman defying Divine Law are devalued.

The idea of Mary Magdalene as the "penitent" sinner is partially responsible for all the "Maggies" who have been mistreated over the centuries because people cannot see the sinner woman as the female Jesus. The belief that Jesus incarnates solely as a male incapable of sin, let alone penitence, is a stumbling block that keeps the church from fulfilling its mission to live the Good News of the Resurrection, that Christ is risen, that the Breath of God has returned to Christ's body, and people have proof that God does not forsake or leave those who dare to love. Evidence from the apocrypha and the canonical texts can shed more light on this.

5.3 Evidence from the Apocrypha

The "kiss" in the Gospel of Phillip and the idea of a Bridegroom in the Gospel of Thomas suggests that many saw Mary Magdalene as the Bride, the chosen companion whom Jesus loved more than his disciples (*Metalogos* 28). *The Gospel of Thomas* states that the "Bridegroom comes forth from the Bridal

chamber” and that all “those who acknowledge the Father and the Mother will be called the Son of a Harlot” (*Metalogos* 29). This statement implies that the Bridegroom has illicit sex with a woman in the bridal chamber and this makes her a harlot. However, *The Gospel of Thomas* also reveals that the disciples are upset with Jesus for kissing the woman, yet they see her as being unworthy of life. To solve this problem *The Gospel of Thomas* has Jesus declare that he will stop thinking of her as a female, that he will think of her as male (*Metalogos* 104-105).

This solution may appear as if it reinforces gender hierarchies of male over female, but in my view, it models a penitent ideal that could motivate modern exegetes looking for “the teachings” of the Magdalene, as the counterpart to the male Jesus, to consider the possibility that Jesus and Mary Magdalene laboured as the mother and father of Christianity openly as penitent sinners. It also suggests that Mary Magdalene wrote and taught new believers using a male pseudonym.

5.4 Evidence from the Canonical Texts

The canonical texts provide support for the conflation theory despite the fact that Mary Magdalene is not explicitly mentioned in the conflated texts. The Gospel texts do not dispel the ambiguity surrounding Mary Magdalene’s role and her relation to Jesus. Nevertheless, there is enough agreement between the texts to conflate the woman called Mary with the Virgin, the unknown woman, Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Mary the mother of his brothers and sisters. These different depictions of the woman

Jesus called Mary cause confusion, and two of the Gospels actually point this out (Matthew 13.55-56; Mark 6.3). Yet, Mark's Jesus makes his identity a secret and both Mark and Matthew place an emphasis on Mary called the Magdalene in their climaxes, as do Luke and John. Therefore, it is very possible that the Gospel writers or compilers intended Mary Magdalene to be conflated with all the Gospel Marys, not just Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, so as to synthesize their Gospels with oral accounts of the Acts of the Apostles and with various legends that exaggerated, embellished and altered the facts; from this point of view, the aim was to help diverse audiences understand the prophecy concerning the Anointed One. It is possible that Jesus knew many women named Mary. It is also just as likely that Mary knew many men named Jesus because Jesus was also a common name at that time.⁴⁹ The fact that Mary was a popular name is inconclusive evidence.

As the evidence makes clear, the woman with the Alabaster Jar who anointed Jesus is featured in every Gospel and so is the town of Bethany. Luke's Gospel depicts Martha as the housewife and the owner of the house in Bethany and states that upon the Resurrection, Jesus brought the disciples back to Bethany to bless them before ascending into heaven (Luke 24.51). John's Gospel names Mary as the Anointing Woman and places her in Martha's house in Bethany. Pre-1969 Roman Catholic tradition conflates the woman with the Alabaster Jar with Mary Magdalene and this tradition is supported by the internal logic of the scripture. More importantly, Matthew and Mark's Jesus makes a

⁴⁹ See Jesus: the Origin of Jesus in the New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08374x.htm>

point of saying: “What she has done will be remembered wherever you proclaim the Good News”. Therefore, it seems probable that Matthew and Mark would name her and give her a major role at the conclusion of their Gospels that testify to the Good News of the Resurrection.

Furthermore, John’s Gospel includes two additional encounters with Jesus that feature an unknown woman. One of these encounters presents the woman as a Samaritan woman having forbidden relations with Jews, and the other as a woman caught in the very act of adultery. So if Mary Magdalene is conflated with the unknown woman who anointed Jesus based on the logic that Jesus wanted her to be named every time the Good News was preached, it is logical to assume Mary Magdalene is also John’s unknown adulterous woman and the unknown woman from Samaria who traditional exegetes viewed, because of her multiple marriages, as adulterous and as the representative of an “adulterous” nation.

John the Evangelist recorded the theological conversation Jesus had with the woman he met at a well in Samaria. Then, four chapters later, John describes how the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in the very act of adultery into the temple demanding that Jesus stone her as Moses had commanded (John 7.53-8.5). Therefore, any woman openly defying the marriage and adultery law without being stoned to death would have acquired a name for herself and become a living legend as did Mary Magdalene.

However, there is more to this story. You need to be married to commit adultery. So if neither Jesus nor Mary Magdalene were married, and had they had sexual relations, it may have been looked down upon, but it would not have

been adulterous. But, the woman's co-respondent is not explicitly identified, and people down through the centuries have suggested that her co-respondent was Jesus. Moreover, Jesus judiciously refuses to condemn her and then tells her to "go and sin no more." With this judicious command he clearly identifies her as the sinner, and orders her to repent. The fact that he is so sure of her guilt, causes me to think he was married and her co-respondent. She then goes to Bethany and anoints him with her perfume, which leads to his betrayal and arrest. In my view, it is possible but unlikely that this anointing woman is a different woman.

5.5 Popular Culture

Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* has certainly sparked the most recent wave of interest in Mary Magdalene's sexuality, but marrying Mary Magdalene to Jesus does not resolve the concerns raised by the contestants of the conflation theory. Dan Brown, Margaret Starbird, and Lynn Picknett do present some interesting evidence conveying the idea that throughout history many have romantically linked Mary Magdalene with Jesus. However, biblical scholars are adamant that Jesus and Mary were not married to each other, and the idea persists in popular cinema that Mary Magdalene was an adulterer and a whore.

Gibson's vivid portrayal of Mary Magdalene as the woman caught in adultery serves to remind the church that loving one's neighbour is physical and risky. With his close ups of the mother of Jesus, he reminds people that love of neighbour is like a mother's love. Love for neighbour, like a mother's love for a

newborn, comes with worry and problems. But one does not have to marry one's neighbour or view them as a subordinate child to love them.

Had Jesus married Mary Magdalene, the marriage laws of that era would have subordinated her. She would have chosen to dutifully share the household tasks with Jesus's beloved Martha as his second wife or concubine. However, keeping Jesus celibate is also problematic. It allows Jesus to be a polygamist with many spiritual wives subordinate to the senior wife and ultimately to him.

Marrying Jesus to Mary does not explain why the kissing and the fragrant anointing in the home of Simon was such a memorable event. The kiss and the forgiveness of this kiss strongly imply that she had a romantic love for Jesus and marks them both as adulterers.

In my view, the fact that Mary Magdalene actually spoke with Jesus face to face upon the Resurrection is a testimony that their great sin of adultery was forgiven. By openly standing in violation of unjust rules governing social intercourse, Mary Magdalene and Jesus free themselves and their followers to openly defy laws and social convention that prevent people from loving their neighbour. In other words, they free each other and their disciples from demons and evil spirits who seek to conquer and subordinate them to unjust and hateful laws and practices.

5.6 Concluding Thoughts

Mary Magdalene is popular culture's multifaceted poster girl—the lady in red, the nude with the long curly hair, the penitent harlot, the Bride with many

husbands, and the honoured virgin mother of a new faith tradition who brought humanity to this time in history. Popular culture in conjunction with the Apocrypha and the non-canonical gospels is bringing new insights and new interpretations to the mainstream about the nature of Jesus and his relationship to women, Mary Magdalene in particular. Therefore the mainstream faith traditions are rethinking their Christology to meet the needs and values of modern women. My view does this and demonstrates how Christianity as a living faith tradition can speak to me and others differently, according to how each of us chooses to see Mary Magdalene in relation to Jesus.

In my view, Christians need to elevate Mary Magdalene and envision her as the penitent who bravely went forth into the world as a witness to the victory she and Jesus won for humanity. Death did not separate them. They rose to a new day and were given a new opportunity to form a relationship that did not worry or burden Martha unfairly. In gnostic terms, the Resurrection gave Mary and Jesus the opportunity to show how justice and peace could kiss each other.

Popular culture resists biblical scholarship that confines Mary Magdalene's role to that of disciple. Dan Brown's tantalizing idea of a married Jesus set in the context of a murder mystery is pure story telling genius. It sells while it stirs up controversy. It brings the idea of Mary's love affair to the public's attention and gets renowned theologians, historians, and lay scholars talking about and investigating Mary Magdalene's role and relationship to Jesus. Web sites have sprung up declaring Mary Magdalene the Goddess who was both a whore and a

virgin. And Mel Gibson has obstinately portrayed Mary Magdalene as the woman caught in adultery, countering Brown's assertions.

Both Gibson's film and Brown's novel illustrate the theological perspective that popular culture possesses and transmits. Popular culture through its media brings the truth to people's hearts and minds that simple explicit facts found in textbooks cannot. Movies are like religious icons and stained glass: They bridge the gap between the divine world and the earthly. They allow the biblical scholar and the prophet to inform and communicate with each other and each other's faith communities.

It is time to declare a truce between popular culture and academia. It is time to openly declare Mary Magdalene popular culture's prophetic messiah who spoke with the messianic teacher face to face testifying that she and he shared the messianic role and they both defied the Law of Moses and social convention to free people from tyranny. Popular culture can and does inform people and equips them to lead and to stand up to tyranny. By insisting that Mary Magdalene was in love with Jesus, popular culture brings the stones to the feet of Jesus and pushes people to accept the truth, Jesus and Mary were the couple caught in adultery. Their response, accepting the Cross and all the pain it brought both of them, shows their faith in God the Father's forgiveness. Neither one ran away or hid the truth and, as the Resurrection shows, they lived through it. Death did not separate them, but it changed them. They stopped thinking of each other in exclusive terms, as someone to marry or conquer. Rather thinking of each other as neighbours, they set about to change the laws, traditions and

practices that enslave and oppress people, keeping them unknown and unworthy of life.

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- The Zondervan Parallel New Testament in Greek and English. Michigan: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1986.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Text Tables

Tables, 1 through 7 below gather the scripture evidence that popular culture has historically had access to and includes the newly discovered Gnostic texts. The Tables frame what would have been available to the early Christians producing the stories and illustrations handed down historically through popular culture because, in the words of Barclay, “the eye-gate has always been stronger than the ear-gate” (Jesus of Nazareth Introduction). A picture or a table in this case allows the eye to study the subtle connections picked up by the “ear-gate” and transmitted through the oral tradition or popular culture. For example, in Table 1 the text does not name the Woman at the Well Maria, Mariam, or even Mary. However, the text does say she is from Samaria. From the surrounding texts pulled together in this table, one can more easily see how an unknown woman of mixed cultural heritage discussing messianic theology with a Rabbi in Samaria could give rise to the idea that the Woman from Samaria was loosely speaking Maria (John 4:9), and why early Christians conflated her with the Magdalene.

Table 1 lists the texts traditionally associated with Mary Magdalene that Hugh Pope identifies with and which Winkett identifies as the false equation: “ Mary of Magdala = woman with ointment = woman at the well = loose woman = prostitute” = Mary Magdalene.

Table 1: Mary Magdalene as the Scarlet Woman

Text	Synopsis	Location
Luke 7.36-50	A woman (with unbound hair) anoints Jesus. Simon identifies her as a sinner. Jesus confirms this, forgives her and tells her, her faith as saved her and to go in peace.	Home of Simon, a Pharisee
Luke 8.1-3	Afterwards, Jesus goes...the twelve were with him as well as Mary called Magdalene, from whom 7 demons had gone out	Cities & villages
Luke 10.38-43	Jesus visits with Martha and Mary in Martha’s home—Martha complains...Jesus says, Martha, Martha, you are worried...Mary has chosen the better part	Bethany
Luke 16.19-31	Jesus tell the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, a poor man with sores [leprosy]	Home of Pharisee
Matt 26.6-13	An unnamed woman anoints Jesus 2 days before the Passover [the Crucifixion]	Bethany: at Simon the Leper’s
Mark 14.3-9	An unnamed woman anoints Jesus 2 days before the Crucifixion	Bethany: at Simon the Lepers
John 2.1-11	Jesus and the Mother of Jesus identified as “woman” change water into wine at wedding.	Cana
John 4.4-39	Jesus asks an unnamed, woman of Samaria who has had 5 husbands and one lover for a drink	Well in Sychar
John 4.9	Jews do not associate with Samaritans (eat, drink or talk with Samaritans)	Samaria
John 4. 21-23	Jesus declared, Believe me, woman, believe me a time is coming, and has now come, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...”	Samaria— Noon

Text	Synopsis	Location
John 4.25	The woman said, "I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. "When he comes, he will explain everything to us."	Well at Noon in Sa Maria
John 4.26	Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he"	Well--Noon in Samaria
John 8.1-11	Jesus [forgives] refuses to condemn the woman caught in adultery, and tells her to go and sin no more	2 mi. from Bethany
John 8.5	Law of Moses commands the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees to stone women caught in adultery	2 mi. from Bethany
John 11.1-2	Mary, identified as a sister of Martha and Lazarus and the woman with unbound hair who anointed Jesus	Martha's in Bethany
John 12.1-8	Mary Anoints Jesus – 6 days before [the Crucifixion]	Lazarus` in Bethany

Upon careful examination of the texts in Table 1, it is clear that none of the texts in the list explicitly identify any woman as a loose woman or as a prostitute. Nevertheless, the Woman at the Well text does show how onlookers catch Jesus and the Woman in the very act of sinning (John 4:9). Jesus sins, transgresses expectations defined for him as a rabbinical teacher of the Law, the Torah. "The Torah including the Ten Commandments... consists of 613 commandments consisting of 365 prohibitions and 248 mandatory commandments" (Ouaknin 98).

In John 4, Jesus associates with the Samaritan woman, openly transgressing the Talmudic ceremonial law that forbids the intimate sharing of personal things like cups of water with Samaritans. He has intimate relations with her. They share a drink. Therefore, they transgress, or sin.

Then, in John 8, Jesus forgives a woman caught in adultery, the act of having illicit social relations. He refuses to condemn her. With no person left to cast the first stone and acknowledge the sin, he had no proof she committed adultery. Yet he tells her to go and sin no more, implying that he has proof she sinned, committed adultery. Here again is evidence that Jesus transgresses the Law of Moses that commanded the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees to stone women caught in adultery (John 8:5).

Look again at Luke 7. The text does not identify a specific law or prohibition the woman has transgressed. Nevertheless, Jesus is personally sure the woman has sinned many times and he forgives these sins, unabashedly pronouncing her great love for him and demonstrating his great love for her (Luke 7:47).

Reluctant critics examining the anointing texts point out that small discrepancies can be noted, such as how the Luke 7 anointing occurs in Simon the Pharisee`s home in Nain, not Simon the Leper`s home in Bethany, two days before the crucifixion (Matthew 26), not 6 days, as in the Lazarus` home anointing (John 12, Bride in Exile 46). They also point out that the Woman at the Well lived in Samaria, not Magdala or Bethany (Winkett 23) as if she could not have lived in more than one place during her lifetime.

Historical critics however, counter this reluctance with evidence claiming that no historical evidence outside the gospels substantiates the existence of Bethany or the Samaritan city of Sychar where Jesus and the Woman of the Well met at Noon alone (Acharya 1999, 39). In addition, Magdalene devotees point to the Wedding in Cana and the Woman at the Well as examples of Jesus`s spiritual marriage that gives the conflated Magdalene , with all her personifications, and women coming in her image and likeness, "new wine," personal autonomy (Blanca; Starbird, *Woman with Alabaster* Jar 55). Thus, these historical claims about the cities,

presented in Table 1, weaken the claims of those against the conflation model that establishes Mary as a woman who travelled about from town to town, interacting with the man called Jesus.

Table 2 shows how modern translations that break Mary into two Marys and then into several Marys may have once been conflated. For example in Matthew 27: 61, the Greek transliteration says, “and there was, there, Mariam, the Magdalene and the Other, Maria sitting opposite the grave” (Zondervan 99).

Approaching this text, upholding the one Mary conflation belief that some Magdalene devotees maintain, it is therefore possible to read the English text and similar texts as Mariam [called the Magdalene, the other, and Maria] was sitting opposite the tomb.

Table 2: Crucifixion and Resurrection Accounts

Text	Synopsis	Location
Matt 27.56	Among them [watching] was Mary ([called] Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses [and called] the mother of Zebedee’s sons	Place of the Skull
Matt 27. 61	Sitting there was Mariam [called] Magdalene and [called also] the other and also Maria	The tomb
Mark 15.40	Mary [called] Magdalene and [called] Mary the mother of James and of Jose and Salome	Place of the Skull
Mark 15.47	Mary [called] Magdalene and [called] Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid	Entrance of tomb
Mark 16.1	Mary [called] Magdalene and [called] Mary the mother of James and Salome brought spices so [others coming] might anoint him	Entrance of tomb
Mark 16.9	He appeared first to Mary [called] Magdalene out of whom 7 demons had been expelled	Entrance of tomb
Luke 23.46	Father, into your hand I commend [the] spirit	Cross
Luke 24.9-12	When they [the women] came back from the tomb, they told all these things ...to the others. [But] it was Mary [called] the Magdalene, Joanna [and] Mary the mother of James and the other who told this to the apostles...	Somewhere Outside tomb
Luke 24.34	It is true! The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon	Jerusalem
John 14.26	The Counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you	Last Supper
John 16.8	The Counselor will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement.	Last Supper
John 19.26	When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"	Cross
John 19.30	Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up [the] spirit	Cross
John 19.25	Near the cross...stood his mother and [Martha] the sister of his mother Mary [called] the wife of Clopas and [called] Mary	Near the Cross

Text	Synopsis	Location
	Magdalene	
John 20.1	Maria [called] Magdalene went to the tomb (Zondervan 335)	The tomb
John 20.2	So she [Maria] came running to [Martha] the other disciple Jesus loved (Zondervan 335)	Outside the tomb
John 20.11	Maria stood outside the tomb crying (Zondervan 337)	Garden
John 20.16	Jesus said to her Mariam (Zondervan 337)	Garden
John 20.16	She turned toward him and cried out..."Rabboni!" Which means Teacher	Garden
John 20.17	Jesus said, "Don not hold onto me...Go...and tell them, "I am returning to my Father and your Father..."	Garden
John 20.18	Mariam the Magdalene went to the disciples with the news (Zondervan 337)	
John 21.1-12	Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias...the disciple whom Jesus loved said... "It is the Lord"...Simon Peter wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) jumped into the water, dragged the net ashore...full of large fish—153...Jesus said, "come and have breakfast..."	At the Lakeshore

Table 2 details the texts that name Mary and other women during the Crucifixion and Resurrection accounts. Modern reluctance places an emphasis on these texts to distinguish Mary Magdalene from Mary of Bethany and other women such as Mary the wife of Clopas to show how Jesus loved all women equally. More importantly modern exegetes stress how grateful women followed him to the Cross, witnessed his final hours; and "probably" witnessed his resurrection before the male disciples (Moltmann-Wendel 1, 5-6; Haskins 7-10; Schaberg 262). Nevertheless, the texts in Table 2 reveal how the English name Mary had two distinct forms in the Greek text, Maria and Mariam. Furthermore, it shows how with the placement of commas Maria, the Magdalen, can be Mariam, the Magdalene, and also the sister of Martha, as well as a mother and a wife to more than one man including Zebedee and Clopas (John 20.1-18, John 19.25, Mark 15.40). Finally, it shows how titles and gender can include and exclude a great number and cause people to doubt that the Woman speaking "face to face" with the Rabboni was the One coming in the name of Lord, inviting them to breakfast.

Table 3 cites the only time the New Testament explicitly names Mary and calls her the Magdalene outside of the Crucifixion and Resurrection accounts.

Table 3: Only time Gospel explicitly names Mary Magdalene outside the passion accounts

Text	Synopsis	Location
Luke: 8.1-3	Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;	Throughout every city

The fact that this text says seven devils went out of Mary called the Magdalene causes problems because Pope Gregory in 591 saw these devils as seven "vices" (in Haskins 96). Nevertheless, even modern interpretations are problematic. The modern interpretation that equates Mary Magdalene as being "the madwoman in Christianity's attic," credits the healing of this disorder to Jesus and makes her the grateful, recipient of his saving power or transformation (Schaberg

Resurrection of Mary 79, Higgins 3). Yet note this is the second verse of Luke Chapter 8 and in the last verse of Luke Chapter 7 verse 50, Jesus says to the woman, early exegetes saw as Mary Magdalene, anointing him. “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.” Jesus does not say. “I have healed you, now go.” Thus, when reluctant exegetes insist that Mary Magdalene was not the anointing woman of Luke 7, they rob Mary Magdalene of her own autonomous faith. They subordinate her as his disciple, not his counterpart that teaches along side of him, controlling her own possessive demons or vices (See Picknett 61).

Table 4 shows Gospel texts that are not generally included in discussions of the texts listed in tables 1 through 3. They are presented here primarily to help the reader gain a richer understanding of the interconnection of all texts—including the Gnostics cited below—and secondly to focus in on key Gospel texts that implicate Jesus as the co-respondent of the chosen person, Latin speaking people called ‘Red,’ and whom modern exegetes presume is male.

Table 4: Texts typically left out of the discussion of the texts in Tables 1-3

Text	Synopsis	Location
John 8.48	Later in the Adultery Chapter, The Jews accuse Jesus of being a Samaritan and being demon possessed.	2 mi. from Bethany
John 8.59	They pick up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself	Bethany
John 11.5	The narrator declares that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus	Bethany
John 11.6-8	Lazarus was sick...he said...”Let us go back to Judea [Bethany]” “But Rabbi,” they said ...”the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?” [Bethany]	Bethany
John 11.21	After Martha accused Jesus of letting Lazarus die...	Bethany at Martha’s
John 11.26	Jesus said to [Martha] “I am the resurrection...Do you believe this? “Yes, Lord	Bethany at Martha’s
John 11.28	[Martha] went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here...asking for you.”	Bethany at Martha’s
John 11.32-35	Mary fell at his feet...Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews ...along with her also weeping...Jesus wept	Bethany at Martha’s
Acts 1.14	They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers	Upper Room in Jerusalem
Acts 12.12	...he [Peter] went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mary where many people had gathered and were praying	Jerusalem
Mark 15.21	Simon, the father of Rufus (Red) is forced to carry the cross..	Place of the Skull
Rom 16.8	Paul instructs the Romans to greet Mary	Letter, 25 years later
Rom 16.13	And to greet Rufus (Red) chosen in the Lord	Letter, 25 years later

Text	Synopsis	Location
Rom 16.16	And to greet one another with a holy kiss	Letter, 25 years later
Luke 7.45	This woman...has not stopped kissing my feet	Simon's home
Luke 22.48	Are you betraying...with a kiss?	His arrest
Matt 26.48	Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him	His arrest
Matt 27.28	They put a scarlet robe on [Jesus]	His arrest
Luke 1.29-35	Mary was greatly troubled at his words..But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God"... "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you...So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."	Nazareth
Mark 6.1-3	Jesus went to his hometown...began to teach...many were amazed...they asked..."Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?"	Jesus's hometown
Matt 13.56	"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us?"	Jesus's hometown
Luke 24.50-53	When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they...returned to Jerusalem...	Bethany and Jerusalem

The texts in Table 4 open with the adultery chapter and point out, that in that same adultery chapter, the authorities accused Jesus of being a Samaritan and a demoniac just like Mary Magdalene and thought he should die by stoning in the same manner as the woman caught in adultery. The table also reveals that Jesus loved Martha immediately following the adultery scene and that Martha accuses Jesus of letting Lazarus die while he was hiding (John 8:59, John 11: 5-8, 21). It also reveals that the Lord chose a person called Red (Romans 16:13). This information about Red comes to the Roman Church via a teaching letter that instructs people to greet Red and to greet each other with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16). This is curious because the only people ever seen kissing in the Gospel accounts are the woman of Luke 7:45 and Judas who kissed Jesus and caused his arrest, precipitating the Crucifixion (Matthew 26:48, Mark 14:44, Luke 22:48). Another interesting thing to note in this table is that Mark names Simon as Red's father and the anointing scene in Luke 7 that traditionally fathers the idea of Mary Magdalene as a "scarlet" woman is in the home of a man called Simon. More to the point, the kissing scenes precipitate the placing of the cloak of scarlet on both Mary Magdalene in popular culture and Jesus in scripture (Matthew 27:28).

Modern attempts to isolate and remove Mary Magdalene from the scene in Simon's home subordinate Mary Magdalene to Jesus as one of his disciples. Tradition, by giving her the cloak of scarlet like him, could enable people of faith to see Jesus and Mary Magdalene as the Son [Descendant People] of Man who rise together forgiven as the Son [the Samaritan and the Jewish People reconciled at long last] of God. Forgiven and reconciled as one renewed Holy body, people of faith could usher in a new era that worship in Spirit and in Truth and offer this truth to all worshippers (Table 1 John 4: 23), ritually remembered by kissing in Church (Table 4 Romans 16:13). However, tradition uses patriarchal language and people of authority such as Bishop Spong see Jesus as the sinless male who extends forgiveness but is in no need of receiving it

(Appendix B). In addition, attitudes about Jesus’s superior divine nature hinder people from seeing both the woman Jesus called Mary and the man she called Rabboni as the Messiah and the Risen Christ.

Table 5 presents some of the recently discovered Gnostic texts that have added to the controversy of Mary Magdalene’s apostleship and her relationship to Jesus. For example, the Gospel of Phillip entry clearly reveals the Magdalene as the Saviour’s companion. However, here in contrast to the Luke 7 anointing account, the Saviour kisses the Magdalene (*The Nag Hammadi 148*) and like the Gospel narratives, the Gnostic writers seem to conflate Mary with other personifications that reveal her physical characteristics. They describe her as being “the first and the last...the whore and the holy one...the wife and the virgin...the barren one and many are her sons” (*The Nag Hammadi 297*).

Table 5: Gnostic Texts

Text	Synopsis	Location
The Thunder: Perfect Mind	I am the first and the last...the honoured one and the scorned one...the whore and the holy one I am the wife and the virgin I am [the mother] and the daughter I am the barren one and many are her sons...	<i>Nag Hammadi 297</i>
Gospel of Phillip	Some said, “Mary conceived by the holy spirit.” They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. When did a woman ever conceive by a woman? Mary is the virgin whom no power defiled. She is a great anathema to the Hebrews who are the apostles and [the] apostolic men. (Nag Hammadi143)	<i>Nag Hammadi 143</i>
Gospel of Phillip	There were three Mariams who walked with the Lord at all times: his mother and [his] sister and (the) Magdalene— this one who is called his Companion. Thus his (true) Mother and Sister and Mate is (also called) ‘Mariam’.	<i>Metalogos translation of Nag Hammadi 145</i>
Gospel of Phillip	The wisdom which (humans) call barren is herself the Mother of the Angels...And the Companion of the [Christ] is Mariam the Magdalene. The [Lord loved] Mariam more than [all the (other)] Disciples, [and he] kissed her often on her [mouth]. ¹ The other [women] saw his love for Mariam, ² they say to him: Why do thou love [her] more than all of us? ⁵⁰	Ibid. 148
Gospel of Phillip	As for the Wisdom who is called “the barren” she is the mother [of the] angels and companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene [...] loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her [often] on her [...] the disciples said to him why do you love her more than all of us	<i>Nag Hammadi 148</i>
Gospel of Phillip	The savior answered and said to them Why do I not love you like her?	Ibid. 148

⁵⁰ This text is numbered 59, but the numbering throughout this translation differs from the Isenberg translation. The annotations accompanying this text, link the reader back to Proverbs 8.12, 32 and 24.26; Luke 7.35, the Gospel of Phillip line 40, Song of Songs 1.2, 6.9 and the Gospel of Phillip lines 35 and 36.

Text	Synopsis	Location
Gospel of Philip	If a marriage is open to the public it has become prostitution...let her show herself only to ...the sons of the bridegroom. ...let the others yearn ...to enjoy her ointment...	Ibid. 158
Gospel of Philip	The mysteries of truth are revealed...the bridal chamber ...is the holies of the holies...revealed	Ibid. 159
Gospel of Mary	...he departed but they were grieved...How shall we go to the gentiles and preach the gospel of the kingdom...if they did not spare him how will they spare us	Ibid. 525
G of Mary	Mary stood up and greeted them...	Ibid, 525
G of Mary	Do not weep...be irresolute, for his grace will protect you...praise his greatness for he has made us into men...	Ibid. 525
G of Thomas	Simon Peter said to them let Mary leave us for women are not worthy of life...	Ibid. 138
G of Thomas	Jesus said I myself shall lead her...to make her male so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males...	Ibid. 138
G of Thomas	Every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom...	Ibid. 138
First Book of Pistis Sophia	The other [being] Mary came forward and said: "My Lord, bear with me and be not wroth with me. Yea, from the moment when thy mother spake with thee ...my power disquieted me to come forward and like-wise to speak the solution of these words." Jesus said unto her: "I bid thee speak their solution." Mary said: "My Lord, 'Grace and truth met together,'--'grace' then is the spirit who hath...the spiritual and material bodies of Jesus	Chapter 61, 102
First Book of Pistis Sophia	The other [,]Mary further interpreteth the same scripture from the baptism, of Jesus...'Grace' then is the godly spirit who hath come upon thee...and which hath made proclamation concerning the regions of Truth. [Scripture]hath said again: 'Righteousness and peace kissed each other,'--'righteousness' then is the spirit of the Light...'Peace' on the other hand is the power of Sabaōth...'Truth sprouted forth out of the earth,'...which sprouted forth out of Mary, thy mother, the dweller on earth..... When Jesus had heard Mary speak these words, he said: "Well said, Mary, inheritress of the Light."	Chapter 62, 104
First Book of Pistis Sophia	My Lord, my son and my Saviour...pardon me that I may once more speak the solution of these words. 'Grace and truth met together,'--it is I, Mary, thy mother and Elizabeth, mother of John whom I met. Grace then is the power in me ... which thou art...Truth...is the power in Elizabeth, which is John...	Chapter 62, 104

The general tenor of the rest of the texts in Table 5 implies that the knowledge that gives light to the disciples is a sacred marriage and yet like any marriage the sacred marriage is private, and revealing the marriage or the Bride in public, denigrates the marriage as an act of prostitution. Consequently, Gnostic disciples might have viewed the actions of the woman kissing Jesus and anointing him with her fragrant ointment in Simon's home as an act of prostitution. However, the

fragments from the *First Book of Pistis Sophia* complicate things and cause one to ask the age-old question who is Jesus's mother? Is she a historical person giving birth to Jesus in an ordinary physical way, or is she the female incarnation of Jesus who inherits and brings the light to the world.

Table 6 compiles some Hebrew testament passages that Christians call the Old Testament that may refer to a messianic bride or queen (Starbird, *Woman with the Alabaster Jar* 39-53).

Table 6: Hebrew (Old) Testament Texts

Text	Synopsis	Location
Zech 9.9-10	Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See your king comes to you...on a colt, the foal of a donkey...Your King will make peace among the nations.	
Zech 14.4	On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem	Bethany
Micah 4.8	As for you, O watchtower [Magdal-eder] of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem."	
Lam 4. 2-8	How the precious sons of Zion, once worth their weight in gold, are now considered as pots of clay...Their princes were brighter than snow and whiter than milk, their bodies more ruddy than rubies...But now they are blacker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets.	
Sgs1. 5-7	Dark am I, yet lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem...Do not stare at me because I am darkened by the Sun...Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock and where you rest your sheep at midday.	
Sgs1.13-14	My beloved is a sachet of myrrh lying between my breasts. My beloved is a cluster of henna flowers.	
Sgs 2.4	He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.	
Sgs 3.11	Come out, you daughters of Zion, and look at King Solomon wearing the crown, the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced.	
Sgs 4.8	Come from Lebanon, my promised bride.	
Sgs 4.9	You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace	
Sgs 4.16	Beloved Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.	
Sgs 5.1	Lover I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. ... Friends Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers.	

Text	Synopsis	Location
Sgs 8.1	If only you were like a brother...Then no one would despise me	
Sgs 8.3	His left arm is under my head and his right arm embraces me	
Sgs 8.6	Place me like a seal over your heart...love is as strong as death	

This table lists some of the verses from the Song of Songs. According to its Introduction, “it is a series of love poems” (Jerusalem Bible 991). Lover and loved are united, then divided, then sought, and finally found (Jerusalem Bible 991) According to Jewish rabbis it is an allegory. “The relationship of lover and beloved is that between God and Israel...The writers of the early church, with the exception of Theodore of Mopsuestia, adopted the same explanation, though with the them the allegory becomes one of Christ and his church” (Jerusalem Bible 991).

Table 7 reveals further gaps in the research that confirms how Jesus died. He gave up the Spirit (John 19:30). It also confirms Hugh Pope’s point that repentance and forgiveness carries profound significance that people are reluctant to accept (Luke 24.47) and brings the spot light back to Bethany, the community where Martha kept house. The ascension ceremony that officially marked Jesus’s forgiveness, his rising back into heaven, took place in Bethany (Luke 24. 50-51). This table also brings in texts that show how the disciples were to stay in Jerusalem until they were “clothed” in power, highly suggestive of being invested with the “scarlet robe” that Jesus wears in the Kilmore window lifting up words Jesus spoke to Martha (Figure 1). Bishop Spong sees Martha as a minor character (Appendix B), but Hippolytus named her and Mary as the Bride, the beloved woman of Song of Songs (Haskins 63). See Tintoretto’s *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (Figure 2).

Table 7: Research Gap

Text	Synopsis	Location
John 19.30	He bowed his head and gave up [the] Spirit	The Cross
Luke 24.47	Repentance and forgiveness is to be proclaimed	Jerusalem
Luke 24.49	Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power	Jerusalem
Luke 24.51	[Jesus] led them out to Bethany...blessed them...and was taken up into heaven.	Bethany
Rev 22.17	Jesus... the Spirit and the Bride say Come and let everyone who hears say, “Come.”	The new Jerusalem
Luke 8.21	[Jesus] replied, “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.”	

Concluding Table 7, is a passage from Luke chapter 8, the same chapter that Luke names Mary “called the Magdalene” whom seven demons had gone out. This passage names Jesus’s mother as those “who hear God’s word and put it into practice,” (Luke 8: 21). It lends support for the claim put forth by Magdalene devotees who claim the Magdalene was the Virgin Mother, the autonomous Spirit of Christianity (Blanca). This same passage also lends support to the Kilmore image of the pregnant Mary of Bethany, making the best choice to hear God’s word and put it into practice by worshipping in Spirit and in Truth. See also Table 1 (John 4: 23).

Appendix B: Email Correspondence with J.S. Spong

From: CMSCTM@aol.com
Sent: Tuesday, September 21, 2010 5:13 PM
To: gbt.jazzpriestink@shaw.ca
Subject: Re: Gordon Turner

Dear Linda:

Thank you for your letter. I was sorry to hear of Gordon's death from his son and I immediately asked for Eileen's address to write her, when his son told me of the divorce and remarriage. I am not in the judgment business. People do what they do because they are who they are. I'm happy that you and Gordon had four good years together.

I presented Magdalene as the probable wife of Jesus in "Born of a Woman." I hope he was married. I think there is evidence so support it, though not conclusive. I think there is a possibility that Magdalene and Mary, the sister of Martha, may be the same person. That too is problematic, but I think a strong possibility. Most of the later Magdalene traditions I view as myth and folklore.

Best wishes in your research.

Jack Spong

In a message dated 9/17/2010 12:27:29 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time, gbt.jazzpriestink@shaw.ca writes:

Dear Jack,

Last year Gordon died suddenly when he and I were on vacation in Mexico. He drowned while snorkelling with a friend while the friend's wife and I were chatting on the beach. Needless to say the last year has been a difficult one, putting Gordon's estate in order and dealing with the loss of my beloved daily companion. **[Snip personal information deleted]**

The very last theological conversation Gordon and I had involved the question of whether or not Mary and Jesus were married to each other. Gordon felt sure that if they were lovers, they would be married. Conversely, I showed him Tintoretto's painting of Christ in the House of Martha and Mary in light of Margaret Starbird's theory of the vesica piscis and the grail signs v and ^ . But I argued, Tintoretto's Martha was the Bride and Mary was the woman (the beloved fish) caught by Christ's beloved Martha.

Through my research I came across your opinion of Jesus and Mary's relationship in your Born of a Woman. You said that any idea that Jesus and Mary were unmarried lovers "would fly in the face of the moral values espoused by the church..., and it would deeply violate our understanding of Jesus as incarnate Lord and the Holy Sinless One" (189). Gordon agreed with you.

My thesis of course must deal only with evidence and contested opinions, reserving my opinion on any particular version of Mary Magdalene's story for the conclusion. Thus I would like to hear more about your opinion concerning Mary and Jesus' relationship. Has your opinion changed since you wrote Born of a Woman? Did I get the right book? I'm in the process of moving and either Gordon or I had a copy of this book (Gordon had several of your books), but it must be packed. I can't find it to go double check. If your opinion hasn't changed or if I have

misinterpreted your opinion, could you elaborate a bit more from a personal point of view. I would greatly appreciate it.

In closing, I hope this email finds you well and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely, Linda Turner
l.e.turner@shaw.ca

From: CMSCTM@aol.com
Sent: Sunday, November 21, 2010 3:15 PM
To: gbt.jazzpriestink@shaw.ca
Subject: Re: Gordon Turner

Dear Linda:

My husband has written a reply by hand. Could you please let me have your regular mail address.

Thank you.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Best wishes,

Christine Spong

In a message dated 11/8/2010 4:16:27 P.M. Eastern Standard Time, gbt.jazzpriestink@shaw.ca writes:

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your thoughtful response.

I have recently moved out of Gordon and my city apartment to a house in the suburbs and so have been away from my research for well over a month.

I do have a few questions for you. 1. Why do you hope Jesus was married? 2. Why wouldn't Martha the sister of Mary whom Jesus also loved be a more probable contender for the role as Jesus' Bride? In your book *Born of a Woman*, you stated that the Church has strong views on the Sinless nature of Jesus. So I'm guessing that any suggestion that Jesus was married to Martha might question how Jesus could also love her sister Mary and maintain his "Sinless nature.

However, by commending the Spirit into the hands of the Father, Jesus performs a saving act of obedience. He gives the Spirit up and commends Her (his Spirit) to the Father to save Martha (his Bride) and the people who meet in her home. Upon the resurrection, Mary (the Spirit of Jesus) tries to tell the disciples that she has been reunited with Jesus in an acceptable (non-touchable, non-clinging) collegiate manner and that Jesus' Bride, his beloved disciple, now trusts Jesus and his Spirit to speak with each other openly. The pain and ordeal of the Crucifixion lingers in the air. The Rabboni and the Woman standing alone weeping in the Garden outside the Tomb have been given a second chance to have an open and honest relationship. Even though Mary had previously professed her great love for him and clung stubbornly to him through her tears even after his disciples scolded her, ignored her, and looked down upon her as someone incapable of recognizing Jesus as her Lord or laying claim to Jesus' crucified body,

Mary stubbornly stands outside the tomb. The fact that the Rabboni recognizes Mary's presence outside his tomb and adjacent garden and speaks with her, telling her not to touch him intimately or to cling to him, strongly suggests that the Rabboni's and Mary's transmuted love (agape) is part of the Divine's plan for Emmanuel and Humanity's Salvation.

I would love to hear more from you, Jack.

Sincerely,
Linda Turner

Appendix C: Handwritten Correspondence from J.S. Spong

John Shelby Spong

24 Puddingstone Road • Morris Plains, NJ 07950

14-10-10

Dear Linda

In response to your letter -

① I hope Jesus was married because in my experience it is the most wonderful relationship human beings can have.

② Martha is so minor a figure in the N.T. that I don't take her seriously. Mary is also minor unless she is the same as Mary Magdalene and then she is the major woman in the Jesus story. I think the idea that Jesus was married to Martha, but had love for her sister Mary is rejected by Cecile B. DeMille!!

③ In your last if you have merged what were independent gospel traditions Community his Spirit is Luke. Martha. Mary & Lazarus are John. Mary at the tomb is John. I do not think there is any history in John. Just interpretation. That's most of

direct (973) 538-9825 fax (973) 540-9584 email Johnsspong@aol.com
columnist BeliefNet.com

Make a good Novel - I don't think I

will pass any new Testament school
as credits -

Hope this helps -



[Faint, mirrored handwriting, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text is illegible due to its lightness and orientation.]