Independent Reading Course

Research Paper

Mary Magdalene, Partner or Prostitute: An in-depth study of the transformation of Mary Magdalene in church history

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Introduction

The theme of this paper is *Mary Magdalene: Partner or Prostitute*. My intention is to prove the following three points: firstly, Mary Magdalene was most likely the partner of Jesus and rightful heir as First Apostle (Brock, 175); secondly, that for political reasons, the Early Christian Church negated this relationship and Mary's significant role in the "Easter" revelation and systematically transformed her into the Prostitute (Haskins, Myth and Metaphor), and lastly, as attested by the volumes of scholarly, contemporary and popular works available today and despite what the Church has done over the centuries there appears to be in Western culture a very real and tangible need to understand and fascination for Mary Magdalene in regards to her authentic history and role in the formation of Christianity.

I will prove these three hypotheses by examining the primary sources found in the four canonized New Testament Gospels[1] and four Gnostic texts[2]. I will also examine historical, sociological and contemporary scholarship on the development of the Jesus movement, the early church and interpretations of the four Gospels and the four Gnostic texts. I will also examine how some of the theological-political constructs of the Christian Catholic Church from its early development to the time of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604 C.E.) (Chadwick, 9-73) consciously transformed Mary Magdalene from Jesus' Partner into a Prostitute (Schaberg, "How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore").

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[1]I am using **-** Metzger, Bruce M. and Murphy, Roland E., (eds.). The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha – New Revised Standard Version. New York: Oxford University Press. 1994. Gospels of Luke 8:1-3, 24:1-12, Matthew 27:56, 61, 28:1-10, Mark 15:40, 47, 16:1-9, John 19:25, 20:1-18.

[2] I am using **-** Robinson, James M., (gen. ed.). The Nag Hammadi library in English. USA: HarperCollins. 1990. Gospels of Mary 521-527, Philip 139-160, Thomas 124-138 and The Dialogue of the Savior 244-255.

Additionally, I will examine current popular fictional and non-fictional works that assert the resurrection of Mary Magdalene, her position in the Christian story and her authority.

It should be noted here that for the purpose of this paper, I will treat the biblical characters of Jesus of Nazareth (the "Christ") and Mary Magdalene as historical people, all the while recognizing that as mythological figures, Jesus and Mary represent archetypical spiritual symbols and legends that transcend time.

I shall be using the following 'map' in exploring my thesis: **1)** Mary Magdalene as "Partner" (Women in Judaism and the Jewish Jesus movement – 4 B.C.E to 150 C.E.) **2)** Mary Magdalene's systematic transformation – "One of Many" and "The Prostitute" (150 C.E. – 650 C.E.) **3)** Mary Magdalene - **"**The Many Legends" (650 C.E. – 1900 C.E.) and **4)** Mary Magdalene - "In the 20th and 21st Century: A Resurrection Beyond the Institutional Church" (Schaberg, Resurrection, 300). In this manner, I will weave scholarship from several disciplines, primary texts, contemporary and popular materials. This weaving will methodically and logically lead to completing the circle from where I began, to prove that Mary Magdalene belongs beside Jesus as his Partner and First Apostle.

Finally, before the conclusion of this paper I will put forth my own assertion that regardless of the past actions of the Christian Catholic Church and the subsequent split into various Christian denominations, the spiritual healing and quest for the relevance of Christianity in the world today can be achieved by embracing the other half of the "Easter" Story – The Divine Feminine (Husain, 16). This aspect can be fulfilled through the character and role of Mary Magdalene as Jesus' equal and lawful heir as First Apostle to the Christian Community.

I. Mary Magdalene as "Partner" in the Jesus Movement (4 B.C.E – 150 C.E.)

Social and Historical Context of the Movement:

According to New Testament scholar and theologian Burton L. Mack, Jesus of Nazareth was a young charismatic leader of a renewal movement within the religious tradition of Judaism. He was a 'rabbi' (teacher) of wisdom as well as a preacher and prophet who delivered an eschatological message. Jesus as a Jewish "prophet" sought a radical transformation of Judaism within Judaism (57-80). Social-historian Ekkehard Stegemann tells us that Jesus traveled within the land of Israel (Palestine). His many followers were part of the predominately Jewish society of Palestine (Judea) (3). The land in which Jesus and his followers traveled was in the vicinity of the Lake of Genesaret (Sea of Galilee). This area was part of the Mediterranean world controlled politically, militarily, economically, socially and culturally by the Roman Empire and its many emperors and rulers (Stegemann, 2-13).

Under the centralized control of Rome, cities and rural areas throughout the empire were structured as advanced agrarian societies. Rural agricultural production, production of goods in cities, trade, forced labour and religious and political taxes were all imposed by the local and central governments within these societies and controlled by a small number of elite members (Stegemann, 3-13). Scholar and historian, Henry Chadwick states that, "Foreign domination and the poor economy of Palestine led to a general emigration of Jews all over the Mediterranean world" (10). The Jews, for the most part, maintained that they had their own authority – God and the Torah, and this belief created difficulties for the Roman fiscal authorities; however, as long as political taxes were still paid to the Roman Empire, Jews were allowed to keep their religious

traditions (Chadwick, 10-11). Nevertheless, with the constant outside cultural, political, economic, social and religious pressures to conform, Judaism had many splinter groups (sects) within its tradition. According to scholar Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, "The Jesus movement in Palestine was an alternative prophetic renewal movement within Israel …"(100). She explains that prior to 70 C.E. and according to the Jewish historian, Josephus, many Jewish movements and apocalyptic prophets preached and traveled the region seeking to reenact the hopes of the Exodus by baptizing and encouraging repentance. These groups sought to realize the hopes of Israel by returning it to its glory under a Kingly/Messianic rulership, ending the Roman occupation, high taxes and suffering of its people (111-113). Stegemann states that many of these renewal movements within Judaism were calling for internal reform; relief for the citizens from the burden of religious taxation (temple taxes) and an end to the widespread corruption amongst the priestly class (99-125). The Jesus movement was seen as such a renewal group.

Women as Followers at the time of Jesus:

The four canonical New Testament Gospel stories and recently discovered and translated early Gnostic writings, inform us that among Jesus' followers there were many women. Consistently and most notably there was a woman known as Mary of Magdala (Magdalene) (Haskins, 3-10). However, to understand why women including Mary Magdalene became followers of Jesus', a brief attempt to understand something of the position of Jewish women in their tradition is necessary; given that by all accounts, Mary Magdalene was a Jewish woman.

There is conflicting scholarship concerning Jewish women, their spirituality and practice. It is difficult to obtain an accurate picture of Jewish women in their tradition; however, feminist scholar, Johanna Stuckey makes clear, "That women attended synagogues and were deeply involved in synagogue life is clear from a wide range of evidence from the Greco-Roman period. Numerous inscriptions document women's roles as synagogue patrons; they financed the construction of synagogues and paid for their enhancement. As a result, some female patrons received the title 'Mother of the Synagogue.' In addition, a number of women functioned as synagogue officers and leaders. Ancient evidence demonstrates that women held the offices of elder and they also served as heads of synagogues (Kraemer 1993:106, 120-121; Brooten 1982: 27-55)" (30). As mentioned, we find Jewish women to be patrons of movements, synagogues and teachers within their culture and we learn from *Luke's Gospel* that Mary Magdalene, along with other women, provided for Jesus and his disciples out of their own resources (8:1-3). However, there are some rabbinic writings that indicated that women did not participate much in the life of the synagogue and even suggest that women were kept in seclusion (Stuckey, 30-31). Further, we are told that the *Mishnah*, "the code of Jewish law", written in the first and second century C.E. by male rabbis and based on the Torah, "makes clear that woman's place is inside marriage and that a woman in transition, not yet married or, for whatever reason, exiting a marriage, is dangerous: as Carmody puts it, 'women on the loose, unplaced, are likely to be loose women'" (Carmody as cited in Stuckey, 31).

Nevertheless, what is known from several feminist scholars[3] and exegesis is that women had a significant presence in the Jesus movement, were active in his movement, provided from their own means and were from different strata in society although "the exact nature of women's involvement in the movement is debatable" (Kraemer, 130-135). In addition, Stegemann explicates that, "…any attempt to reconstruct the participation of women in the charismatic Jesus movement is dependent on a narrow foundation in the sources. The New Testament contains only four texts (Gospels) that *directly* involve the participation of women in the Jesus movement … Further, there are women who are mentioned by name in the Gospel stories and Mary Magdalene (=woman from Magdala) is the only woman follower of Jesus who is connected with a particular place in Galilee … is not characterized by her relationship to a man (husband, father, son). This could indicate that she joined the Jesus movement as an unmarried, (independent) woman. In general, she plays a prominent role among women followers in that she is always named first in the lists of names …" (378-381). I would assert therefore, that with the existence of writings such as those found in the *Mishnah*, Mary's nature as an unmarried independent woman, who joined the Jesus movement, would later be equated by early Church theologians with being 'loose and dangerous.'

The New Testament Gospel stories include four miracles in which women were healed by Jesus. He talked to women in public, taught them and ate with them especially those in the lower stratum of society (Stegemann, 382-384). However, it is unclear exactly why women joined the Jesus movement. Fiorenza speculates that Jewish women were called by Jesus into an opportunity for full participation in his renewal movement

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[3] I am referring to feminist scholars such as, Brock, D'Angelo, Fiorenza, Kraemer, Levine and Schaberg (et. al.).

and that women were called into a 'discipleship of equals' (151-154). As well, Ross Shepard Kraemer states that "Members of the new movement simultaneously rejected the classification systems typical of high grid: this includes the hierarchy of priesthoods (Jewish and otherwise), the hierarchies of Roman social class structure, and the hierarchies of gender" (141).

The rejection of the hierarchies found in the socio-cultural and religious experiences of women would have been enough to encourage them to join the Jesus movement. In addition, in order to understand Mary's role and position within the Jesus movement it is necessary to examine exactly what was recorded about her. Recognizing that New Testament scholarship has determined Paul's letters c. 45-57 C.E. (and not the letters in the Pauline tradition c. 70-90 C.E.) to be the earliest writings in the New Testament canon (Durling & Perrin, 131, et. al.), they tell us nothing of Mary Magdalene since he did not mention her at all (Kraemer, 128-130). However, New Testament scholars such as Susanne Heine argue that while Paul did not write specifically about Mary Magdalene, he does advocate, through his letter to the Galatians (3:28) that men and women hold equal status in Christ's sight (82-99). The primary sources known and used extensively by Christians - the four canonical New Testament Gospels and those less familiar to Christians – the four Gnostic 'Christian' texts will now be examined for the evidence they provide in determining the role and significance of Mary Magdalene.

The search for Mary Magdalene - The Primary Sources of the New Testament:

Scholar and early Christian Church historian Chadwick informs us that a Roman procurator condemned Jesus to death by the common Roman practice of crucifixion and that all but a few of his followers scattered. The followers who remained to witness

Jesus' death were mostly women (22-23). In the years that followed Jesus' death many documents, stories and letters circulated and were written down by a variety of fractured groups within and outside of the Jesus movement. Chadwick explains that in a political, socio-religious attempt to unify the diversity of beliefs surrounding Jesus (the 'Christ') and his followers, the developing Orthodox Church decided a common authoritative text was required (Chadwick, 41-45). The twenty seven books that make up the canon of the Christian New Testament were chosen by the Orthodox Christian Apostolic Fathers (East and West) over three centuries and the formation of the canon reached its climax in the late fourth century under a great deal of controversy, debate, council assemblies and violence (Durling & Perrin, 129-131). In this process a great number of written documents and letters such as Gnostic writings, were rejected, declared as heresies and ordered destroyed (Chadwick, 32-73).

The four canonical Gospel accounts to be examined here were those that survived the selection process. They are known to Christians as Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. Feminist scholars such as Fiorenza encourage caution by all who read and interpret Scripture, by reminding us that biblical writings do not provide the reader with what actually, historically took place but are reflections and interpretations of a particular religious (social and political) experience and its significance to a specific community (Fiorenza, 68-72). In addition, according to the apologetic Women's Bible author Elizabeth Stanton, the biblical writings are not neutral, but are (and have been) used as a political weapon against women's struggles for liberation and that the Bible bears the imprint of men – not women (Stanton as cited in Fiorenza, 11-13).

Keeping this in mind, biblical art historian and researcher Susan Haskins provides insight to these texts in relation to the importance of Mary Magdalene. She notes "From the gospels, however, we can at least deduce her importance to the evangelists themselves and therefore, to the small Christian community in the century following their leader's death … judging from the way she is introduced by name first, she seems to have been the most important woman follower" (9).

The author of *The Gospel According to Mark* is unknown. However, New Testament scholars uphold that this Gospel is written by a Jewish Christian, for a Jewish audience and composed circa 66-68 C.E. The consensus amongst scholars is that *Mark* is the earliest account of the four Gospels and that *Matthew and Luke* used the Marcan text as a source in writing their Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, teachings/ministry, crucifixion, resurrection and post-resurrection appearances (Durling & Perrin, 99-104). It must be noted that the authors' of *Matthew* and *Luke* Gospels are also unknown. They have their own socio-religious roots and differing audiences for whom they are writing their accounts (Introduction to each Gospel, Oxford *NRSV*).

The author of *Mark's* Gospel allocates eleven verses in his account to Mary Magdalene (15:40, 47; 16:1-9). While *Matthew* assigns twelve verses (27:56, 61; 28:1-10) and *Luke* devotes fifteen verses (8:1-3; 24:1-12). According to redaction and source criticism scholars, *The Gospel According to John* is a later text written circa 90-100 C.E. and is judged to be vastly different from the three synoptic Gospels (Durling & Perrin, 405-417). Durling and Perrin say, "Many, perhaps most scholars have become convinced that the differences are so great and the likenesses so small, that John and the synoptics simply shared some of the same materials from oral tradition" (413). Yet, here in this

vastly different Gospel account, Mary Magdalene still appears and is given prominence in the resurrection testimony; *John* devotes nineteen verse to her (19:25; 20:1-18). Professor and scholar Jane Schaberg summarizes, "In all four Gospels, the Magdalene participates in Jesus' Galilean ministry; she follows him to Jerusalem; she mourns at his crucifixion and on the first Easter; she goes to his tomb and finds it empty. Except in the Gospel of Luke, she is said to have been sent with a commission to proclaim to the disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead. According to three accounts in Matthew 28:1-10, John 20:14-18, and Mark 16:9 (the Marcan addition), she is the first to whom the risen Jesus appears. In short, Mary Magdalene is the primary witness to the fundamental data of early Christian faith" ("Whore", 32).

Given that Mary Magdalene appears in all four Gospel accounts, is specifically named by all of the evangelists and is named first in listing those who remain with Jesus during his crucifixion, his burial and in three out of four accounts is spoken to directly and given a commission to the other disciples by the resurrected Jesus, many scholars such as Ann Brock argue that Mary Magdalene is the rightful heir as First Apostle because of her status as the 'Apostle to the Apostle' (Brock, 1-3). Brock explains that apostolic authority was of key importance to having status in the early developing ecclesiastical Church and that "it insured that the one carrying the gospel message was a bona fide messenger" (1). Furthermore, apostolic authority developed upon three sets of criteria. First, a true apostle was a disciple/follower who physically traveled with Jesus and knew him. Second, a true apostle received a resurrection appearance (2-3). Third, a true apostle received a divine commissioning to proclaim Christ's message (6). These criteria's served as an authentic link between the individual and Jesus. As Brock

explicates, Paul, known as 'Saint Paul the Apostle,' only had two of the three criteria and claimed apostolic status while Mary Magdalene had all the criteria but for political and gender reasons, Mary was dismissed as an apostle by the male-dominated early Church (7-13). Brock also points out that the Apostle Peter had all the criteria. We see direct rivalries between those who supported Peter's apostolic authority and those who supported Mary's position in the Gospel accounts of *Luke* and *John*. For example *Luke* elevates Peter's status and diminishes Mary's and *John* elevates Mary's status in the community whilst Peter's is diminished. This clearly indicates to the reader that conflict existed of some sort between these two key followers of Jesus and that it remained a major issue for the institutional Church for centuries (Brock, 19-103).

Mary Magdalene found in "other" Primary Sources - Gnostic Texts:

Significant rival groups to early orthodox Jewish-Christians and to the early Church were known as 'Gnostics'. These varied groups produced their own writings – which are not unified and which had been ordered destroyed by the emerging Church (Chadwick, 33-41). These Gnostic groups had one understanding in common. They all claimed a 'secret or special knowledge' concerning Jesus, God, Creation and an individual's personal destiny, though the 'secret knowledge' itself differed amongst the sects of Gnostics (Chadwick, 35).

New Testament and Early Church scholars had speculated for centuries on the exact nature and socio-historical roots of the rival groups that were alluded to in the Gospels and in Paul's letters as well as writings from early Apostolic Fathers such as Irenaeus of Lyons, Justin Martyr, Clement of Rome, Polycarp and others (Chadwick, 33-41). While many of these Apostolic Fathers wrote in defense of issues raised by these

rival Gnostic groups and their leaders, the writings produced from these groups were largely unknown as a result of their forced destruction. As Elaine Pagels tells us, these Gnostic texts circulated until the middle of the second century at which time they were denounced as heresy by orthodox Christians. By the time of Constantine's conversion in the fourth century, possession of any books denounced as heretical was a criminal offense (xvii-xix). However, a discovery was made in 1945 at Naj Hammadi in Upper Egypt that yielded copies of original writings from heretical Gnostic groups. These documents had not been destroyed as ordered, but were placed in jars, sealed and buried by members of Gnostic communities (Library, 22-26). The translation and publishing of these texts offers readers insight into the role and position held by Mary Magdalene outside Orthodoxy.

Within the totality of writings that appear in The Nag Hammadi Library, only four discovered and translated texts are examined here for their interpretation of the role and position attributed to Mary Magdalene. These texts are known as, *The Gospel of Thomas* (124-138), *The Gospel of Philip* (139-160), *The Dialogue of the Savior* (244-255) and *The Gospel of Mary* [Magdalene] (521-527).

Scholars and historians who have contributed to the examination and translation of these documents consider them to be primary sources created by very diverse groups of Gnostics (Library, 2-22). Of these four documents the earliest is said to be *The Gospel of Thomas*, written circa 50-60 C.E. It is a collection of sayings (114) of Jesus, a large number of which have parallels in the New Testament Gospels (Library, 124-125). In this text Mary Magdalene is an equal disciple along with the men and is a messenger (Haskins, 35). In *The Gospel of Philip,* dated circa 250 C.E. (Library, 140) Mary

Magdalene is specifically named as the most important of the three women who were always with the Lord: Mary is also called Jesus' companion (Haskins, 35). There is speculation on the dating of this third text, *The Dialogue of the Savior.* Some scholars date it in the second century while others argue for it being written in the first century (Library, 244-245). In this text, Mary Magdalene is seen as the woman who "knew All" and "who reveal[s] the greatness of the revealer." She is also an intimate interpreter of the Saviors message to the male disciples (Haskins, 35). Finally scholars date, *The Gospel of Mary*, as a second century text (Library, 524). In this text, Mary Magdalene is clearly in charge of the disciples and interprets messages and teachings from the risen Christ. Mary obtains her "authority from her closeness to Christ, a relationship which Peter acknowledges when he says, 'Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of the women'" (Haskins, 36).

Schaberg summarizes these four Gnostic writings nicely in relation to what they contribute to the role and position of Mary Magdalene in these communities. She says "These Gnostic works preserve a tradition about a rivalry, or conflict, between the Magdalene and Peter or other male disciples. When she [Mary] is challenged by Peter, Jesus (or in one instance, Levi) defends her. Neither silenced nor excluded, the Magdalene speaks boldly and powerfully, entering into dialogue with the risen Jesus and comforting, correcting and encouraging the male disciples. She is a visionary, praised for her superior spiritual understanding and often identified as the intimate 'companion' of the Savior" ("Whore", 51-52).[4] However, Pagels cautions readers' interpretations about

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[4] I concur with scholarship having taken a course on Gnosticism (3457) at York University, summer 2004 and studied the Gnostic texts I am examining in this essay. The course director was Professor Patrick Gray. I do recommend reading Elaine Pagels book The Gnostic Gospels for an excellent introduction to the Gnostic texts and beliefs and how they differ from Orthodoxy.

the relationship between Jesus and Mary by emphasizing that, "The hint of an erotic relationship between [Jesus] and Mary Magdalene may indicate claims to mystical communion; throughout history, mystics of many traditions have chosen sexual metaphors to describe their experiences" (18).

Nonetheless, other scholars summarize the position of Mary Magdalene found in these Gnostic texts by stating that they believe Mary Magdalene functioned in Gnostic circles not just as a "female" follower of Jesus' but that she had great importance as a leader in the community and was a source of prophecy, revelation and had [apostolic] authority (Schaberg, Brock, et. al.).

In brief, what is known from scholars is that Mary Magdalene is the only woman to appear in the four New Testament Gospels and the four Gnostic texts surveyed here. Her appearances in the Gnostic texts are in striking contrast to those of the New Testament Gospels (Haskins, 31). Yet, her importance is evident in all of the texts. Mary Magdalene is connected in a very intimate way to Jesus as a prominent follower within his movement, is the primary witness to his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, is seen to be an intimate companion to the Savior, a comforter to other disciples (males included), a visionary and one who has authority to speak, teach and proclaim a message about Jesus the Christ. The recognized conflict and rivalry between Mary Magdalene and Peter and other male disciples would, as will be seen, have larger political implications for her and women in the early Church (Schaberg, Resurrection, 200-203).

Time magazine journalist David Van Biema summarizes these implications by explaining that with the Papacy tracing its roots to the Apostle Peter and with the well known conflict concerning authorized succession to Jesus claimed early on by two

different groups – Peter's and Mary's, the early Church Fathers had to settle the issue. He goes on to say that Gnostic texts, Mary's position and status in Gnostic communities and Gnostic thinking had to go. The canon began to take shape in order to exclude such texts and he points out that as Schaberg asserts, "… it was a power struggle and the canonical texts that we have [today] come from the winners" (4-5).

Currently, there is conflicting scholarship concerning the meanings of some of the discovered and translated Gnostic writings (Pagels, Heines et. al.). Haskins points out, "It has been suggested that Peter's antagonism towards Mary Magdalene may reflect the historical ambivalence of the leaders of the orthodox community towards the participation of women in the Church" (39). An examination of early Church history will reveal that these texts, canonical Gospels and Gnostic writings, were all used by the early Church Fathers and other churchmen to intentionally and systematically transform Mary Magdalene over five centuries from her place as a 'Partner' to Jesus in his movement, into a repentant 'Prostitute' with no apostolic authority. The latter part of this papers investigation will illuminate the depth of the threat that women's leadership – modeled after Mary Magdalene, had on and continues to have on the patriarchal Christian Church.

II. Mary Magdalene's Systematic Transformation 150 C.E. to 650 C.E.:

Mary Magdalene's identity becomes associated with many "others":

Mary Magdalene's transformation began to occur as documents and letters were written by Church Fathers and others, concerning the leadership roles of women in the Jesus movement. I shall now present a very brief history explaining some of the documents, events and contributors in order to glimpse the larger picture of the systematic transformation of Mary Magdalene.

Fiorenza provides an in-depth and extensive explanation on the first and second century development of house-churches where women held leadership positions, provided financial support, hospitality, food and other possessions from their own means to many traveling Christian missionary preachers (168-170, 246). She explains that the 'discipleship of equals' that was found and practiced in these Christian house-churches attracted slaves and women to the Jesus movement but also created difficulties in the patriarchal households of Greco-Roman and Jewish society (251).

When examining the late first, early second century document known as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* we find a woman missionary (Thecla) traveling, preaching, baptizing alongside and independent of Paul. Thecla not only baptizes others, she baptizes herself. Paul is concerned about her traveling alone without being accompanied by a man and he worries for her safety against men in the region.[5] This document demonstrates that women were clearly very active in claiming their leadership rights and proclaiming the Christian message in the early Jesus movement.

Some feminist scholars explain that during the late first century the Church Fathers became active in disseminating their writings to ensure that Church leadership was clearly understood to be only a male activity. An example is provided by Haskins; Clement of Rome writes a letter to the congregation in Corinth circa 90 C.E. (*The Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, also known as *I Clement*). There is a dispute within the congregation concerning 'gender' leadership roles within this community. Clement makes it clear that only "men" can provide leadership according to the bishops and written church rules (50). As Chadwick tells us by the end of the second century, the

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[5] This document was studied and discussed in the course <u>Making of Christianity and Christendom</u> (3459) at York University on Sept 17, 2003. The course director was Professor Patrick Gray.

African Church Father, Tertullian is actively writing documents that are concerned with proper moral behaviour, conduct and with a fervent desire to eliminate all pagan customs and belief systems (90-91). Haskins elaborates on what this means for women when she says that Tertullian writes in response to questions he had received about women's leadership in the church; "It is not permitted for women to speak in 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 – not to mention any priestly office …and that doing so will shame their menfolk" (51).

According to Chadwick, Tertullian draws heavily on the work of Irenaeus of Lyons (83). He explains that Irenaeus saw that in order to successfully eliminate Gnostic thinking and successfully oppose its doctrines, orthodox scripture had to be drawn together into an authentic form as the basis of the foundation for the "one true Church" (82). Haskins explains the impact this had on women when she states that Irenaeus "noted that women were particularly drawn to heretical sects" (51) and therefore, if the works from these heretical sects were eliminated, women's authority could be greatly challenged, as happened to the celebrated Gnostic prophetesses Prisca and Maximilla (51-52).

Early Christian origin scholar, Ann Brock, tells us that Hippolytus, a late second century and early third century Christian bishop of Rome bestowed the title of "Apostle to the Apostles" on Mary Magdalene in a document he wrote entitled "Mary Magdalene as Major Witness to Jesus' Resurrection" (1-3). However, Chadwick explains that Hippolytus' successor, Callistus, opposed a good deal of Hippolytus' ideas and

consequently Hippolytus retained very little influence in the circle of orthodox bishops (88-89, 262).

Though this title was suppressed in orthodox circles, it would be revived and used by the authors of many legends in the middle ages (Schaberg, Resurrection, 65-99). Haskins argues that the title was understood by women and men in second and third century communities and that it can be seen in the artwork they left behind (54-56). She goes on to explain that excavations done in the last century by archeologists on ruins of 'house-churches,' dating between 232-300 C.E., show carved into the plaster of main walls in these 'homes,' Mary Magdalene holding up a burning torch in her right hand and leading others (55-56). She further points out that many early first, second, and third century pieces of art, frescos and wooden door panels (now housed in museums around the world) depict Mary Magdalene in a leadership position, as well as being greeted on Easter morning by the risen Christ (57-64). Clearly, some communities understood Mary Magdalene to be the 'Apostle to the Apostles'.

By the late third century and into the fourth century we see that the Apostolic Church Fathers began to impose a common system of teaching and praxis on the scattered Christian communities in order to bring them together (Chadwick, 50-55). During this period in history the financial resources of the Church in Rome had grown dramatically. It could not own its own property but Constantine legalized bequests to churches (of property) through an individual's will (Chadwick, 57-59). Also, Christians were in the Roman senate and in other high offices of the Empire and with the growing influence of the Church Fathers on Constantine, not to mention the Church's growing financial wealth, it was only a matter of time before Orthodox Christianity became

legalized. In fact Constantine declared it the official religion of the Roman Empire in 325 C.E. (Chadwick, 57-156). With the Church's influence in the Empire now secure, "… it was the policy of the triumphant Church after the pact with Constantine to destroy all writings of the heretics … With the disappearance of these 'heretical' writings, Mary Magdalene, heroine of the Gnostics, chief disciple, 'companion of the Savior,' his 'spouse, consort and partner', vanished too, to re-emerge in orthodox eyes … more significantly for the history of Christianity, and women, more enduringly as a repentant whore" (Haskins, 54).

As Fiorenza explains it is in this triumphant period of the fourth century that the Church Fathers continued writing documents in opposition to women in leadership positions. She notes such a document, the *Apostolic Constitution,* which "declares categorically: 'We do not permit our women to teach in the church, but only to pray and listen to those who teach'" (304). Fiorenza continues by pointing out that during this period the early Church Fathers had also concocted documents and 'orders' such as 'the so-called *Apostolic Church Order*'. Fiorenza explicates that this document is set out (in Gnostic form) to be a discussion between the male disciples Peter, Andrew, John and James and Mary Magdalene concerning whether women could preside over the Eucharist. This document purposely created by the Church Fathers uses Mary's own voice to reject the ministry of women (306-307).

Mary Magdalene officially becomes 'One of Many' and the 'Prostitute':

In the third century, Origen, the biblical scholar and theologian blends for the first time, the identities of Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany (Martha and Lazarus' sister). This blending would later create a model in which women should only lead a

contemplative life (Haskins, 20). Schaberg argues that the third and fourth century Church Fathers further contributed to the misrepresentation of Mary Magdalene's identity. She states that, "…with over thirty references to her [Magdalene] by Ambrose, Jerome, the Cappadocians, Chrysostom, Augustine and others, almost all direct references to John 20 [14-17] a clear obsession on the part of these Church men had taken hold"; their obsession – Mary's attempt to touch or hold onto Jesus (Resurrection, 86). Also, statements such as those made by Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-395) further distorted Mary Magdalene's status to a "fallen" women among early Christian followers; "the Magdalene is Eve, not her antithesis: She is the first witness of the resurrection, that she might set straight again by her faith in the resurrection, what was turned over by her transgression" (Schaberg, Resurrection, 86-87). This link to Eve is explained by Haskins in noting that during this same period the Church Fathers were wrestling with the doctrines of Evil, Jesus' divinity and Original Sin. They looked to *Genesis 2:4b-25* in Hebrew scripture and to Eve for their answers to Evil and Original Sin (64-78). Haskins says the Church Fathers could not afford to label Jesus' mother with Original Sin because she bore 'God/the Savior'. By equating human sexuality with Sin these churchmen concluded that the moral opposite was embodied in Virginity. The "Virgin" Mary was elevated and Mary Magdalene, full of Sin, linked to Eve and the "Fall" was debased (Haskins, 77-78). Further, "John Chrysostom (c. 347-407) proclaimed Mary Magdalene to be completely unsuitable in character to be first witness" (Schaberg, "Whore", 51).

In addition, scholars and researchers concur that documents, sermons, letters written by the Church Fathers, throughout the second, third and fourth centuries, purposely focused on the story in *Mark's* Gospel where Jesus is said to have cast out

'seven demons' from Mary Magdalene (16:9). They interpreted and wrote extensively on this story and attached a meaning equating Mary's 'seven demons' with 'sexual sin' (Haskins, 11-12). Yet, as Haskins points out, "nowhere in the New Testament is demoniacal possession regarded as synonymous with sin … after all, no implications arise out of the story of the man possessed of 'unclean spirits/devils' (Luke 8:26-39) nor in that of the demoniacs whose 'devils' went into the swine (Matt. 8:28-34)" (12-13).

The Church Fathers steadily began circulating their writings associating Mary Magdalene with other negative characters found in the New Testament Gospels. In 403 C.E. Amphilocus, bishop of Iconium, names the sinner in Luke's gospel "a prostitute". Then in 408 C.E. Syrian theologian, Severinus of Galala, preached a sermon declaring Luke's sinner to be a "faithful prostitute" (Haskins, 88). Therefore, some theologians were able to align Mary with Luke's "sinner"- now a repentant whore, while others blended Mary with Luke's "Mary of Bethany" (Schaberg, "Whore", 35). Furthermore, Schaberg points out that male theologians, over time, blended Luke's "sinner" – a repentant whore, with the unnamed woman in *Luke's Gospel* who anoints Jesus' feet, and the unnamed woman in *Mark* and *Matthew's Gospel* who anoints Jesus' head in preparation for his burial, thereby connecting Mary Magdalene with these unnamed women in the Gospel stories (Schaberg, "Whore", 36-37).

Churchmen, by the end of the fifth century had created a great deal of confusion concerning the nature of Mary Magdalene by their various 'theological' positions. The assorted 'theological' positions that created confusion were settled in the sixth century. Pope Gregory the Great (590-604 C.E.) delivered his homily XXXIII (33) on *Luke's* Gospel, in Rome on Friday 14th September 591 C.E, in which he specifically addressed

the 'identities of the Magdalene' (Haskins, 93). His homily methodically combined Mary Magdalene with Luke's "sinner" - a repentant whore, Mary of Bethany (Martha and Lazarus' sister) and the unnamed women in the Gospels of *Luke, Mark and Matthew* ("Whore", 51). Gregory's homilies on Mary Magdalene would become extremely popular in the eight and ninth centuries for Holy Week services (Haskins, 94). They were in more demand than St. Augustine's and did effectively become "stock-in-trade" during the Middle Ages (Haskins, 94). The distortion, conflation and new legend for the identity of Mary Magdalene were now complete and remained in place for almost fourteen hundred years.

As demonstrated, the Church Fathers, with the elimination of the Gnostic texts, had only the stories in the four canonical Gospels to deal with pertaining to Mary Magdalene's identity, position and status. The Gospel texts held a wealth of stories for interpretation by these churchmen where women and the Magdalene were concerned. By claiming their authority to interpret these texts through succession to the Apostle Peter, along with the legalization of Christianity and by gaining political influence throughout the Roman Empire, the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Christian Orthodoxy dominated by male successors was assured (Haskins, 86).

Consequently, for political, theological and social reasons, the works produced over five centuries intentionally questioning the Magdalene's character proved successful in marginalizing and silencing women (and men) who would claim their authority to teach and preach through an apostolic succession to Mary Magdalene (Fiorenza, 304-307). The Church Fathers purposely and thoroughly suppressed and removed the Magdalene's status and position from 'Apostle to the Apostles', first witness, chief

disciple, partner and companion of the Savior – known by many early Christian communities, into simply 'one of many' women who followed Jesus. Then by documenting and circulating their deliberate and methodical blending of Mary Magdalene's identity with 'questionable' women in the Gospel stories, creating a link as the "second" Eve, equating her 'seven demons' and the 'touch/holding of Jesus' at his resurrection appearance with sexual sin and fornication, the Church Fathers had effectively transformed the Magdalene from the 'Apostle to the Apostles' and a rightful heir to apostolic succession, into the most infamous redemptive 'Prostitute' in Christian history (Haskins, 94).

III. Mary Magdalene - "The Many Legends" (650 C.E. – 1900 C.E.):

Maintaining the legend and enhancing it:

Following the split in 451 C.E. at the Council of Chalecedon between the Western and Eastern Orthodox Christian churches (Chadwick, 205-206) the legends of the Magdalene took on innumerable enhanced forms (Schaberg, Resurrection, 87-99); I shall discuss several below.

The Eastern Orthodox churchmen did not believe that Mary Magdalene was a combination of all three characters blended by the Western Church Fathers but that the three characters were distinct and different. However, the Eastern Orthodox churchmen aligned Mary Magdalene with a fifth century prostitute-actress legend they knew well, 'Mary of Egypt'. Furthermore, while the 'Mary of Egypt' legend flourished in the East, 'The Provencal' legend was the most influential of the Magdalene legends in the West. This legend became blended with the popular 'Golden Legend' written by Jacobus de Voragrine (d. 1278) the Dominican archbishop of Genoa. As Schaberg summarizes,

"Between 875-900 C.E., legendary materials circulating in Europe about Mary Magdalene took two forms: the *vita eremitica* (blending her with the desert hermit Mary of Egypt) and the *vita apostolica* (her evangelization of Gaul). Eventually these were blended into the *vita apostolico-eremitica* (in the eleventh century), forming the 'crazy quilt of a vita' included in the Legenda aurea, the Golden Legend and lively materials for sermons in the later middle ages" (Schaberg, <u>Resurrection</u>, 87-88).

During the middle ages Mary Magdalene, in the character of Mary of Bethany, previously combined by the third century Church Father and theologian Origen, provided the legendary model for the redemptive contemplative life of women such as, Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich and Brigitta of Sweden and others (Haskins, 173-176). However, as Haskins explains that, "The women included here had several stereotypical tendencies, or characteristics in common: in their pursuit of holiness, some rebelled against parental wishes, some made vows of chastity and adopted penitential practices at an early age and had a hatred and fear of sexuality which is clearly voiced in their *vitae*; they all practiced extreme forms of penitential asceticism, fasting, carrying out extraordinary and sometimes disgusting feats of self abasement, had ecstasies and visions, diabolical visitations and many suffered debilitating illnesses" (179). This extreme ascetic life-style for women had come about because of the patriarchal Church's obsession about human sexuality (Schaberg, <u>Resurrection</u>, 85-86). The Church had established its model of repentance for women through the legend it had created about Mary Magdalene, who "became a manageable and controllable figure and effective weapon and instrument of propaganda against her own sex" (Haskins, 94).

Hence, the Magdalene, in the middle ages, represented two kinds of women; the ideal female mystic and the repentant whore who gives up a life of sin and who rejects her former ways and is taken under the protection of the Church (Haskins, 166). Haskins elaborates on some of the legends circulating, predominately in the Western tradition; "In the Middle Ages, two major reasons were given for Mary Magdalene's lapse into sin, both of which reflected ecclesiastical preoccupations. The first, that Mary Magdalene was born the beautiful daughter of a rich and illustrious father [according to the Golden Legend of 1276, she is born of 'right noble lineage'] … The second reason … was related in the popular medieval legend of her alleged marriage to St. John the Evangelist (the wedding at Cana). The idea that John the Evangelist was the bridegroom at Cana is found first in a preface to St. Augustine's writings. In the seventh century Bede made the same identification …" (Haskins, 154-55). By the mid-twelfth century, this legend was further embellished by a sermon given by Honorius Augustodunensis. He describes Mary as "that 'Mary of Magdala castle' who 'betrayed by her husband, fled to Jerusalem' to become a 'filthy and common prostitute' and who 'regardless of her birth, and of her own free will, founded a brothel of sin, a temple of demons and seven devils entered her'" (Haskins, 155).

Schaberg provides a summary concerning the purpose the Church had for maintaining twelfth and thirteenth century legends in this way, "The Magdalene becomes … associated with charitable activities directed at women. Her legends inspire hospices for old women, at-risk girls, other marginals; and reformatories, convents and other institutions for her specialty – repentant prostitutes" (Resurrection, 104). This in turn meant that women received "the paternalistic help of the church, under the leadership of

men who created/promoted/acquiesced in the ideology of lustful male and tempting female, the Magdalene in the imagination of the church was offered the paternalistic help of Jesus." She further reminds us that "We need to view the developing Magdalene legends in the contexts of the toleration of prostitution in the twelfth century, its institutionalization in the fourteenth and fifteenth, and its condemnation in the sixteenth and beyond" (Resurrection, 105).

Nevertheless, in the twelfth century the Christian crusaders fervor to recapture the Holy Sepulchre created a deepened interest in Christ's Passion and Mary Magdalene (Haskins, 189). The medieval poet, Petrarch, expressively restores Mary Magdalene's image as the most important female disciple and intimate follower of Christ by calling her "the sweet friend of God" and by observing "the close relationship between Mary Magdalene and Christ [which] allowed her to take up her gospel character as witness to the crucifixion and resurrection." Further the twelfth-century poet Pierre de Celle declares "Out of a prostitute, Christ ha[d] made an apostle" (Haskins, 189). By the thirteenth century, those who suffered with Christ at the Cross became of great interest. Mary Magdalene through poetry and reinterpretation became, "the lover, mourner and weeper … the woman who loved Christ most and whom he loved most, the 'blessed lover of Christ', 'beloved disciple' and 'apostle of the apostles' …" (Haskins, 190).

Competing against twelfth and thirteenth century poets, the legend of the Magdalene's unworthiness and fallen nature is further fuelled by the writings of one of the best known Christian mystics, St. Thomas Aquinas. "Using the example of Mary Magdalene and other women at the crucifixion, he justifies women being eliminated from preaching" and ordination by stating "that although they have seen the risen Christ first

because of their great love, their subordinate position prevented them from announcing publicly that they had seen him" (Haskins, 175). Haskins explains that Aquinas' words would carry influence in the centuries that followed; "Thomas further argues that because Mary Magdalene did not actually see Christ rise, her witness to the resurrection was in some way diminished" (175).

Other popular legends emerged during this period in history. They were embellished and pervasive, and they have also been passed down through the centuries. Legends such as; Mary submitting to thirty years of penance - lived out in a cave, Mary's 'seven demons' representing her madness ('Mad Mary'), a marriage (at Cana) between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, Mary's arrival in the south of France – post 'mock' crucifixion and pregnant with Jesus' child, secret information and documents about the Magdalene and Jesus - held by various secret societies such as, the Knights Templar, the Cathars, the Rosicrucians and the Masons, to be released at some later date in history (Schaberg, Resurrection, 101). Scholars like Jane Schaberg along with popular fictional writers agree that these legends created in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, were vehicles used to awaken people to the political patriarchal hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church and to shake the Christian tradition to its foundation by attempting to first, trace the bloodline of Jesus and the Magdalene to a legitimate heir (to Christianity) and second, prove the flesh and blood existence of a very human Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene (Schaberg, Resurrection, 100-102).

In the sixteenth century during the time of the Protestant Reformation, one voice emerged that claimed a significant relationship existed between Mary Magdalene and Jesus; the kind of relationship that could have been a marriage. That voice was Martin

Luther's (Schaberg, <u>Resurrection</u>, 100). Though, a century following the Reformation, Catholic dogma had merely been replaced with Puritanism and Protestant ethics and these dogmas would continue to "exert influence over and coloured the image of [the] Madonna and [the] Magdalen" (Haskins, 314). By the eighteenth century in Victorian England, deepening and divisive religious and social ideals of the place of women brought a resurgence of the Magdalene as a 'fallen' sinning woman; the Magdalene had become synonymous with the "Great Social Evil" - prostitution (312). From the late-eighteenth century, work and home life had become separate in Victorian society. "Home was a haven for the man to be cared for by an 'ideal' English wife … chaste mother to the patriarch's progeny … her prototype, the Virgin Mary" not the Magdalene (Haskins, 315).

In summary, many legends about the Magdalene were developed over the centuries and only a few have been discussed here[6]. The many legends were however, all fashioned from a common thread – the primary legend concocted by the Apostolic Church Fathers of the Eastern and Western Orthodox traditions - the legend of the repentant 'Prostitute'. The enormous power and use of each legend waxed and waned according to the political, socio-religious needs of the day. The legend of the Magdalene as the 'Prostitute' became the most pervasive, not only for Christian women but for all women in society.

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[6]See the work of Susan Haskins, <u>Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor</u>. She has an enormous amount of detail in her book concerning more legends not discussed in this paper. As well, her book contains extensive detail on centuries of art work depicting Mary Magdalene in her numerous 'legendary' roles – which are not discussed in this paper but worth reading about.

IV. Mary Magdalene – "In the 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ Centuries" – Beyond the Church:

Veneration and Resurrection:

Scholars in the twentieth century have discovered new information regarding the Magdalene. In 1945 with the discovery and subsequent translation of Gnostic texts found at Naj Hammadi, Egypt, hold a wealth of information about the Gnostic movements, early Orthodoxy and the roles of disciples and apostles, chiefly, Mary Magdalene. Another significant event took place in 1969. As a Time Magazine article (2003) summarizes, "Three decades ago, in 1969, the Roman Catholic Church quietly admitted what critics had been saying for centuries: Magdalene's standard image as a reformed prostitute is not supported by the texts of the Bible" ("Saint or Sinner?", 1). Interestingly Haskins provides an example of one such early Christian critic, "…in the sixteenth century Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples ruffled the until-then untroubled waters of consensus by daring to suggest that Mary Magdalen was a separate character from Mary of Bethany and Luke's sinner and [he] was duly excommunicated for his pains" (23). Moreover, with the present acknowledgement of error, Mary Magdalene has become a source of veneration amongst some Catholic followers. In contemporary Catholicism at least two known movements are afoot. First, "In 1986, the German Catholic women's organization, the *Gruppe Maria von Magdala* was formed. Its goal is the achievement of equal rights for women in the Church, including the right to be ordained" (Haskins, 391). Second, "a network of neo-Magdalenites [Call to Action and Furturechurch] coordinate celebrations around the world on her [Magdalene] feast day – 22 July" ("Saint or Sinner?", 5). At these celebrations, "backyard services are being conducted, complete with opening

hymns, blessings over the bread and wine, readings about the Magdalene from the Gospels and homilies … all conducted by women" (5).

People in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have demonstrated by their insatiable curiosity and fascination, significant interest in resurrecting and obtaining knowledge about Mary Magdalene. The countless contemporary and popular cultural works such as; film – The Last Temptation of Christ, Jesus of Montreal, Dogma, Stigmata; poetry – D.H. Lawrence's Why does She Weep?; popular fictional novels – The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail, The Da Vinci Code, journalistic work and scholarship (some cited in this paper), attest to the yearning of the population for a broader Christian theology. Though most of these works are admittedly based on the two main legends surrounding the Magdalene, the reformed prostitute or wife and mother of Jesus' child (Schaberg, Resurrection, 100-102), there are growing movements and bodies of work dedicated to resurrecting Mary Magdalene in her own right, found in part in the works cited in this essay.

In summary, as Bishop John Shelby Spong of the Episcopalian church writes, "For most of the two thousand years of history since the birth of our Lord, the Christian church has participated in and supported the oppression of women. This oppression has been both overt and covert, conscious and unconscious. It has come primarily through the church's ability in the name of God to define a woman and to make that definition stick. … Patriarchy and God have been so deeply and uncritically linked to gender by the all-male church hierarchy that men have little understood how this alliance has been used to the detriment of all women" (1). This conscious oppression can be witnessed as late as 1987 when Pope John Paul II supported a document proclaiming that "Women will never

be priests in the Roman Catholic Church because Jesus did not choose any women to be his disciples" (Spong, 6).[7] In that same year, the Pope strengthened the Virgin Mary's standing by "declaring a Marian Year: devotion [solely] to the Virgin" (Haskins, 388). Subsequently, the quest for knowledge and a fuller understanding of the Magdalene has moved beyond the boundaries constructed by the Christian Church and has become part of popular culture and academic study in the twenty-first century.

Concluding Remarks and Summary:

In the twentieth century archeological discoveries began to uncover finds dating from the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods that revealed symbols most pervasive and powerful – the Female Goddess/Sacred Feminine (Husain, 8). In her work The Goddess, Husain discusses the many manifestations of the Goddess and the Divine Feminine. In particular she tells us that "…male attempts to control religion were only partially successful: although frequently slandered and outlawed, Goddess-worship has survived into the modern world, often by the most circuitous and surprising routes" (20). We know from works like When God Was A Woman, that Jewish male theologians and priests (predominately from the Levite tribe) attacked the popular Goddesses worshipped by communities that surrounded them (Stone, 196-197). Given that Christianity's roots were Jewish, it was easy for Christian theologians to obtain documents and Jewish opinion about the Goddess and to resume the attack on the Divine Feminine (Stone, 196-197) by linking worship praxis to "acts of the devil" (Husain, 39). With Christian doctrines espousing the separation of the body from the spirit and equating the female with the profane, many cultures around the world had their goddess and female deities subsumed

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[7] Amusingly, Spong notes that it would be wise to remember and perhaps remind the current Pope (John Paul II) that Jesus did not choose any Polish men to be his disciples either – Born of a Woman, p. 7.

into Christian ideas. Husain provides an example, "Roman goddess cults were a rich source for a nascent Christian faith anxious to establish its own calendar of popular feasts and festivals. Christianity appropriated some of the most popular Roman holidays, reinterpreted them in an attempt to purge them of their pagan associations" (37).

The Church Fathers obsession about human sexuality and sin had them look to stories slandering Goddesses. An example is the story of Ishtar in which "Ishtar is identified with wickedness and corruption and named the 'Great Whore' (as is Babylon the city of which she is the ruling deity)" (Husain, 101). These stories provided a wealth of material for reinterpreting Christian female archetypes. As this paper has shown, the Apostolic Church Fathers had to separate the spirit from the flesh in their doctrines of purity and salvation (the Madonna vs. the Magdalene) and "the most obvious way of attacking the female divinity was by attacking her priestesses … and by denying the sanctity of sex, which played such an important role in Goddess worship … Temples were no longer places of joyful worship, but of penance and fear … The Goddess and her representatives were condemned as being profane" (Husain, 100-101).

However, as Husain maintains, throughout the world today and in many Catholic countries, Goddess movements, new and revived, embrace the many disguised forms of the divine/sacred feminine through the celebrations of pagan festivals (such as, summer/winter solstice etc.) (150). Groups of worshippers find that the celebrations and services provide "not only the liberty to choose different styles of worship, but also offers concepts of human beings as a part of Nature" (Husain, 151-159).

It is my opinion, through the research I have done, that our collective unconscious has and continues to embrace the sacred/divine feminine in its various forms and has

made it survive over millennia. Today we witness the resurgence of the divine feminine in various Goddess worship movements, literature and praxis around the world (Husain, Stone, et. al.). Today we observe the fascination and increased hunger for the female Divine, through the volumes of contemporary works concerning Mary Magdalene, her role and position in the formation of Christianity.

The weaving of the sacred/divine feminine and an accurate role of Mary Magdalene would offer Christianity, in the twenty-first century, a divine feminine 'partner' to the divine masculine Jesus. This would be a more complete story and manifestation of the Sacred. This partnership would present Christianity with an opportunity to resurrect itself. In the twenty-first century, there is an extra-ordinary opportunity to create a new broader Christian theology that encompasses the Divine Feminine, a theology modeled on Mary Magdalene. To miss this opportunity due to the holding on of power and control by well entrenched, corrupt, hierarchical-patriarchal institutions will only continue to render the Christian Church irrelevant through the mid-twenty-first century and beyond.

As I have demonstrated, it is a fact that Mary Magdalene appears in all four canonical New Testament Gospels and four Gnostic texts. I have attempted to prove that for social, political and patriarchal reasons the Apostolic Church Fathers deliberately and systematically negated any links to the existence of a significant relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The Church Fathers transformed the Magdalene from a 'Partner' and lawful heir as First Apostle (Brock, 1) into the most famous repentant 'Prostitute' in Christian history, by creating the legend that would remain attached to her identity for over fourteen hundred years. This transformation was essential to developing

the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the male-dominated Christian Church, where "Mary Magdalene … was hidden [and transformed] because of an open and not fully appreciated secret and its implications, at Christianity's core: that the male disciples fled and the women did not" (Schaberg, Resurrection, 9).

As I have noted while the Apostolic Church Fathers, many male theologians and male priests, popular works, myth makers and legend chasers have all had something to say about Mary Magdalene what remains undisputed is her continual appearance in so many primary, secondary and contemporary works. As shown in this paper, it is clear that through the last two-thousand years the Magdalene emerges again and again and that Western culture has shown a growing interest in her and in an unconscious and conscious link to the archetype of the Goddess/Divine Feminine. Mary Magdalene remains the constant thread and primary link to the "Easter" story, to Christianity's foundation – the resurrection of Jesus Christ and to a human Jesus of Nazareth. As Ernest Renan, French philosopher and theologian (1823-92) said "The glory of the resurrection belongs, then, to Mary Magdalene. After Jesus, it is Mary [Magdalene] who has done the most in the founding of Christianity" (as cited in Haskins, 325).

Mary Magdalene can no longer be seen as the legendary repentant 'Prostitute' produced by the Apostolic Church Fathers. The New Testament Gospel texts do not support this creation. Nor can she be authenticated as the well-wished for and much speculated 'Wife/Partner' of Jesus and mother to his lineage. I would suggest that the fervency of the Apostolic Fathers and other churchmen to debase Mary Magdalene, to eradicate any Gnostic materials that honoured her or mentioned her in a positive manner,

in and of itself, suggests that there was some form of relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene that they needed to negate.[8]

Perhaps Mary Magdalene can now most rightly "… stand completely on her own as her own person" (Haskins, 393). For men and women today inside the diversity of Christian churches, who call themselves 'a Christian' (in some way), or perhaps through a 'Society of Outsiders' (Schaberg, Resurrection, 21), Mary Magdalene's richness can hold the promise of being a unique, inspiring and incarnate aspect of the Divine.

As I have asserted, if Christianity is to be relevant through the twenty-first century and beyond, those concerned with disseminating and hearing the authentic history of Mary Magdalene, as 'Apostle to the Apostles', as First Apostle or First Priestess for Christianity, must help her take her rightful place *beside* the Christian incarnate aspect of the masculine divine, Jesus of Nazareth. This placement is not one of worshipping or deifying, but is rather a model for leading, teaching, preaching and being part of a community seeking spiritual renewal and wisdom. This change will provide Christianity (or some yet unnamed religion) with a model for Divine wholeness and provide a new paradigm founded on recovering Jesus' 'discipleship of equals,' one which the world needs.

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[8] Interestingly, in March 2005 the Vatican and Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone (the most likely successor to Pope John Paul II) have publicly criticized Dan Brown's book The Da Vinci Code. This book has been on the best sellers lists around the world for the past 2 years, has sold to-date 25 million copies around the world and appears in 44 languages. The Archbishop strongly encouraged Catholic bookstores to stop selling this book and wants it removed immediately from their bookshelves. He stated that this book is "a sack full of lies and is insulting to the Christian faith" (www.timesonline.co.uk/article/vatican). The Archbishop is telling Catholics "not to buy this book and not to read this book because this [book] is rotten food that should not be consumed." (www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/vatican). As both news organizations have noted "It is extremely rare for such high Church officials to criticize a work of popular fiction."

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