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The Magdalene Legacy

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Saint or Sinner?

The First Lady

In the New Testament Gospels, various female companions of Jesus are cited on seven occasions.[1] In six of these lists, Mary Magdalene is the first named. The seventh entry gives Jesus' mother as first in the ranking,[2] and elsewhere Mary Magdalene is featured alone.[3] In her relationship with Jesus, she is introduced as a woman who 'ministered unto him',[4] and she makes her final Gospel appearance as the first person to speak with Jesus after his Resurrection at the tomb.[5]

In the literature of the early Christian era, it is plain that Mary Magdalene held a special place in the life of Jesus and in the hearts of his followers. In later times, however, the Church bishops decided that Mary must have been a whore. Ostensibly this was because one of the biblical references classifies her as 'a sinner'.[6] This, in the minds of the bishops, signified a woman of loose virtue. But in the very next Gospel verse, Mary is said to have been a woman of substance and one of Jesus' personal sponsors.

Later in the Gospel accounts, Mary Magdalene is seen as a close companion of Jesus' mother, accompanying her at the Crucifixion. Prior to that it is stated that Jesus loved Mary.[7] So, for what possible reason did the Church of Rome turn against this devoted woman, vilifying her name for centuries? Did the bishops really believe that a female sinner must necessarily be a whore, or was this simply an excuse related to something else they preferred to conceal?

In the following pages, we shall consider the overall legacy of Mary Magdalene – her biblical portrayals, her appearances in non-canonical

Gospels, her life as it was recorded by chroniclers, her clerical and academic status, her depictions in the world of fine art, and her relevance in the world today.

Mary's position is in many ways unique in that, despite her apparent supportive role in the Christian story, she emerges as one of its primary figures. As stated in some of the Gospels that were excluded from the New Testament, Mary Magdalene was 'the woman who knew the all' of Jesus. She was the one whom 'Christ loved more than all the disciples', and she was the apostle 'endowed with knowledge, vision and insight far exceeding Peter's'.

Restoration

My first personal close encounter with Mary Magdalene occurred in the 1980s. I was then running a picture restoration studio, and was a conservation consultant for the Fine Art Trade Guild in London. A painting entitled *Penitent Magdalene* came in for cleaning and repair – an 18th-century Italian work from the Bologna school of Franceschini Marcantonio. In a past restoration attempt, it had been crudely stuck (lined) onto a secondary canvas from which it had to be removed (*see* plates 3 & 4).

As part of a picture preservation course I was running at the time, I wrote up the details of this particular restoration in the Guild *Journal*. But, at that stage, my interests were in the physical aspects of the restoration procedure, rather than in the subject matter of the painting. It was not until later, when I was inspecting photographs of the completed work, that I began to wonder about certain features of the image itself. The Magdalene was portrayed with jewellery and a mirror, and yet was entitled *Penitent Magdalene*, which seemed rather incongruous. Holding her hair with one hand, and a pearl earring with the other, she looked content enough, and there was nothing to convey that she was in any way repentant. So, why the title?

What I discovered, on checking the painting's provenance, was that its documented title, *Penitent Magdalene*, was rather more a genre classification than a title given to it by the artist. To him, it had simply been a stylized portrait of Mary Magdalene.

Genre categories are common in the world of pictorial art since, although artists often signed or personalized their paintings, they did not normally write titles on them. Romantic titles were generally attributed later by owners, galleries and dealers – titles which the artists would perhaps never have known in their lifetimes. The *Mona Lisa,* by Leonardo da Vinci, is a good example. She is known by that name in the English-speaking world, but is known in France (where she hangs in The Louvre) as *La Joconde,* and in Italy as *La Gioconda.* (We shall return later to this fascinating Renaissance masterpiece.) Another more recent example is James AM Whistler's painting, entitled by him *Arrangement in Grey and Black,* but which since his death has become commonly dubbed *Whistler's Mother.*

Paintings of Jesus fall into a series of familiar categories, and not too often outside them. They begin with 'The Nativity', which subdivides into such themes as 'Adoration of the Shepherds' and 'Adoration of the Magi'. They continue with 'Madonna and Child' portraits and scenes of 'The Rest on the Flight to Egypt'. Then there are depictions of Jesus' 'Presentation in the Temple', followed by various other high-point scenes throughout his ministry to the Crucifixion, Resurrection and subsequent Ascension.

A number of romantic portrayals exist too, such as Jesus with his lantern in William Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* (1853), and John Spencer Stanhope's *The Wine Press* (1864). But such paintings are still firmly based on Gospel tradition: 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12) and 'I am the true vine' (John 15:1). The great majority of Christine depictions are related to recognizable Gospel events, but with Mary Magdalene the scenario is different. Many of the popular subject areas depicting her have nothing whatever to do with any events related in the New Testament, and among these is the enigmatic 'Penitent' classification.

A majority of religious artists painted or drew Mary Magdalene at some stage, and she appears frequently in sculpture, stained glass and other media. She is, in fact, one of the most depicted of all classical figures. There are numerous portrayals of her at the cross and at the tomb, with a favoured scene of Magdalene and Jesus being the *Noli me tangere* ('Do not cling to me') drama from John 20:17.[8] In addition, images of the Penitent or Repentant Magdalene abound, even though they are quite unrelated to Mary's appearances in the Bible. In these scenes, she is generally alone at a dressing table, or in the solitude of a wilderness grotto. The recurring props of these scenes include a mirror, a candle, jewellery, a skull and a book.

Jewellery and mirrors were made popular during the 17th-century baroque era and the Italian school of Luca Giordano. They were introduced to symbolize Mary's renouncement of earthly vanities. In opposition to vanity, the candle and book represent the importance of light and knowledge, and the skull (*see* plate 2) is synonymous with the inevitability of death.

The most favoured and constant item in Magdalene artwork – the object that makes her personally distinctive, especially when seen in the company of other women – is an ointment jar. Mark 16:1 explains that when Mary Magdalene arrived with others at Jesus' tomb, they 'brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him', but the jar does not relate to that scene in particular. It is essentially pertinent to the most poignant of all events, when Mary anointed the head and feet of Jesus at the house of Simon in Bethany, shortly before the Crucifixion.

Despite all historical convention, and notwithstanding popular tradition from the earliest times, the Church of Rome long maintained that Mary Magdalene, the sinner, was not the same person as the Mary who performed the anointing. They insisted that Jesus would never have been anointed by a sinner. There were, however, two different anointings. These will be referenced in due course but, to counter that particular clerical opinion for the time being, the first anointing (Luke 7:37–38) is clearly stated to have been performed by the 'sinner' at the house of Simon the Pharisee.

When dealing with the second anointing of Jesus at the house of Simon the leper, John 11:2 stipulates just as emphatically that it was done by the same woman as before. Simon the Pharisee and Simon the leper were one and the same, but, more importantly, so were Mary the sinner and Mary of Bethany. Pope Gregory I (590–604) had argued this; artists and chroniclers were always convinced of it and, finally, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*[9] acknowledged the fact in 1910.

In artwork, therefore, the alabaster ointment jar has been Mary's constant symbol of recognition, and it has been used by artists in whatever circumstances of her portrayal. It appears with her at the cross and at the tomb, sometimes in her penitent solitude, generally in paintings of Mary with Martha of Bethany, and always in representations of the Messianic anointings.

The key artistic genre classifications for Mary Magdalene are, therefore: 'At the foot of the Cross' (including the 'Deposition' scene), 'At the Tomb' (including the 'Lamentation' and 'Resurrection' sequences along with '*Noli me tangere*'), and the earlier anointing rituals which are generally grouped as 'At the House of Simon'. There are also many straightforward portraits, which fall into a category known as 'The Alabaster Jar', while another favourite is 'Jesus at the House of Martha'. In addition, and equally prolific, are the non-biblical Penitent and Repentant depictions. But there are others, which similarly have nothing to do with the canonical Gospels. Among these groupings are 'Mary Magdalene in Provence' and 'Magdalene carried by the Angels', along with various imaginary scenes of 'Mary Magdalene and Jesus'. There are some alternative classifications (often allegorical) but in essence we are looking at around a dozen or so subject themes for thousands of individual representations.

Mary Magdalene eventually made her saintly appearance in the Church Calendar as recently as 1969, with a feast day on 22 July. This feast day had actually been acknowledged in the West since the 8th century, and there are 187 ancient church dedications to her in England alone.[10] Yet it was not until the late 20th century that her canonical status was formalized, although the Roman Missal (which

determines Latin Rite liturgy) still rejects the fact that Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany are synonymous.

The 1969 amendment to Mary's canonical status was based on the presumption of her repentance – a penitence that was deemed to have prevailed for long enough. Apparently, she repented for having been a prostitute, but nowhere in any scriptural text did it ever say that Mary was a prostitute. So we come back to the question posed earlier: Why did the Church elect to demean Mary Magdalene in the first place? Something about her presence in the life of Jesus obviously bothered the bishops greatly. As we shall discover, this was indeed the case, but it was only bothersome because the Church had been designed as a celibacy-based, male prerogative institution. This, in turn, was specifically because of a Magdalene influence that somehow threatened to undermine a hybrid Christianity.

Seven Devils

To substantiate their maligning of Mary, and to place her in an apparent state of repentance for wantonness, the clerics associated her with another Gospel character with whom she had no relationship whatever. It was felt necessary to have an explainable transition of some sort from Mary the sinner to Mary the companion of Jesus' mother. The only acceptable way for this to have occurred was if Jesus had forgiven Mary Magdalene for her shameful sin. In this regard, there was a conveniently unnamed woman whom Jesus did forgive for loose behaviour, and so Mary was identified with her. She was the woman who, in John 8:1–11, was 'taken in adultery', and whom Jesus did not condemn, but bade her 'go, and sin no more'. There was not the slightest connection between Mary Magdalene and this woman, but the strategy was considered good enough and Mary, the supposed adulteress, was said to have repented.

A further association between this woman and Mary Magdalene was made by virtue of the sequence in Luke 7:37–49 when a sinful

woman anointed Jesus' feet at the house of Simon the Pharisee. The Gospel relates that Jesus said to her, 'Thy sins are forgiven'. But, as we have seen, the Gospel of John states that Mary of Bethany and the woman who performed this first anointing were one and the same. Hence, in setting up the fabricated 'penitent' state for Mary Magdalene, the Church did indeed acknowledge that Mary Magdalene was Mary of Bethany. What makes no sense at all is that, in every other respect, the bishops denied this association, notwithstanding its positive clarification in John.

Now things have taken an even stranger turn and, since April 1969 when Mary Magdalene's sainthood was formalized, the Missal determines that there were three separate Marys: Mary the sinner, Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene. So the woman they canonized was not, in practice, the 'penitent' Mary after all! This, of course, begs the question: Why then is Mary Magdalene listed as the patron saint of repentant sinners?

The 1969 action now brings the Western Church of Rome into line with the Eastern (Byzantine) Orthodox Church, which has long maintained that there were three Marys. But, if that were the case, it is curious that just about every Magdalene icon of the Eastern Church depicts Mary holding the alabaster ointment jar. This is, in fact, contrary to Eastern doctrine since it clearly implies that Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany were identical.

What do Protestant Christians think in this regard? It all depends on which of the many Protestant branches one asks. In fact, the whole thing has got into a dreadful tangle, with Catholics and Protestants alike now more confused than ever. This is all because Mary Magdalene poses such a problem that, whatever doctrinal strategies are imposed to manipulate her position, they all self-destruct because she cannot be fitted into a box where she does not belong. Neither can she be ignored because the Gospels make her involvement with Jesus and his family perfectly clear.

Despite all the attempts to dub Mary with a whoredom that has no foundation, there is only one comment in the Gospels concerning her

supposed sin. It is given at her introduction in Luke 8:2, and is repeated in the Resurrection sequence of Mark 16:9. All that is said is: a) Mary was a 'woman out of whom went seven devils', and b) she was a woman 'out of whom he [Jesus] had cast seven devils'. That is the extent of it. There is nothing related to adultery or prostitution. So, what did it mean? Who or what were the seven devils?

In the year 591, Pope Gregory I gave an historic sermon which included references to Mary Magdalene. It was in this address that he confirmed Mary the sinner and Mary of Bethany to be one and the same, as detailed in John 11:2. But in the course of this, he also tackled the subject of the 'seven devils', coming to the conclusion that they represented the seven Capital Sins (the 'deadly vices' as they are more commonly called). Mary was guilty, he intimated, of pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed and sloth – all seven! It is a wonder that she ever recovered, and just as well that Gregory did not accuse her of the Mortal Sins as well!

In taking a clear look at the subject of the seven devils, the first thing to consider is the community relevance of the Greek name 'Mary' (from the Egyptian, Mery, meaning 'beloved', and seemingly equivalent to the Hebrew, Miriam). Similar Egyptian names include Meryamon (Beloved of Amon) and Merytaten (Beloved of Aten). Other European variations of Mary are Marie and Maria.

In the Gospel era, as in the Greco-Egyptian culture, 'Mary' was not so much a name as a distinction. This is why there were a number of Marys associated with Jesus. Although nominally apparent in the New Testament, the non-canonical *Gospel of Philip* makes particular mention of this: 'There were three who always walked with the Lord ... his sister and his mother and his consort were each a Mary'.[11] The name was a conventual style of the era, and is still used by many nuns in convents today, placed before their baptismal names to become Sister Mary Louise, Sister Mary Theresa and the like. Mark 6:3, for example, is generally presented with Jesus as the 'son of Mary', but when correctly translated it reads, 'son of the Mary'.

Marys were raised in a chaste monastic environment within specific holy orders, and they were subject to strict regulations that applied until they were chosen to be betrothed. Prior to this, Marys were under the authority of the Chief Scribe, who was classified as the Demon Priest Number 7. Ranking in seniority from Number 1 upwards, the seven demon priests were established as a symbolic opposition group to those priests who were considered to represent the seven lights of the Menorah (the seven-branched candlestick of Jewish tradition). It was the duty of the seven demon priests to supervise and keep watch on the female celibates – just like the Devil's Advocate, who probes the background of potential candidates for canonization in the Roman Catholic Church today. Upon marriage, however, the women were released from the charge of the seven demons (or devils), which meant in effect that the rules of celibacy no longer applied.[12] What we glean from this is that, when the seven devils 'went out' of Mary Magdalene, she was being released from conventual ties in order to marry.

Magdalene Heritage

While on the subject of names, we should also look at the name Magdalene. It is sometimes spelt Magdalen, and has the European variants Maddalena and Madeleine. It is commonly suggested that Magdalene derives from the place name Magdala, and they do indeed have the same root in *migdal*, meaning 'tower'. But this is not reason enough to determine that Mary came from Magdala. We are told only that she joined the ministry of Jesus in Galilee (roughly speaking, the region north of modern Haifa).

Magdala was a fishing town on the Sea of Galilee, just north of Tiberius. Noted also for its flax weaving and dyeing, Magdala was a wealthy, bustling trade centre in Gospel times. It is mentioned in Matthew 15:39, although it is rendered in some Bible editions as Magadan. But in the older Gospel of Mark 8:10, the place name

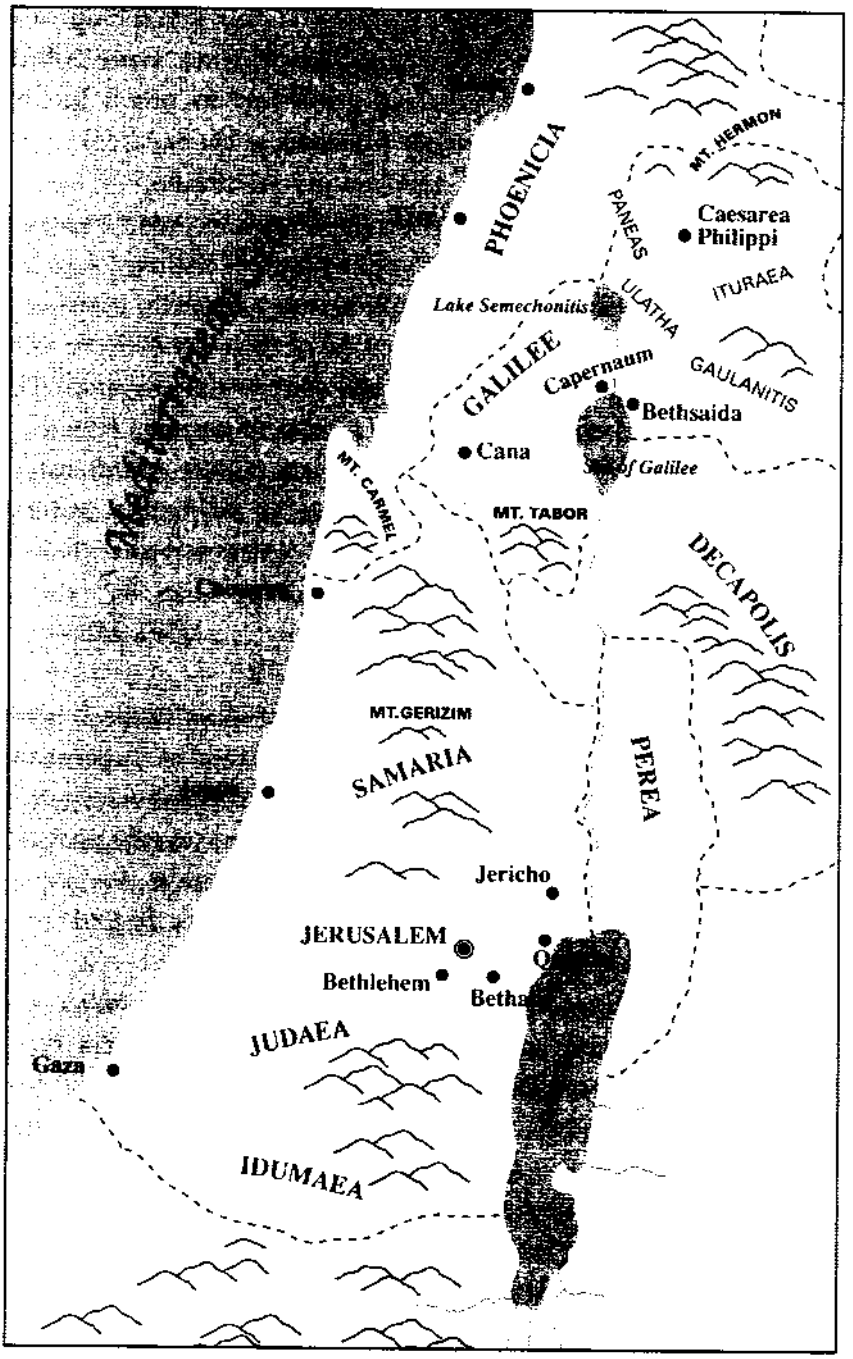
Dalmanutha is used in this context.[13] There are no ruins of any real significance there today, just scraps of a paved road, the remains of some Roman baths, and a building foundation. The impoverished site is now known as el-Medjel.

Magdala was a centre for processing fish as well as for fishing, and the Jewish *Talmud* uses the longer, more correct name, Magdal Nunaiya, meaning 'Fish Tower'. The historian Flavius Josephus was Commander of Galilee during the unsuccessful Jewish Revolt against the Romans in AD 66, and he wrote of Magdala using the alternative Greek name Taricheae. In his 1st-century *Wars of the Jews*, Josephus recorded that around 40,000 people lived there at that time.[14] Subsequently, he related, about 6,500 of them were slaughtered in the great land and sea battles that ensued against the Roman troops of General Flavius Titus.[15]

As with Magdal Nunaiya, many other Gospel locations are cited with different names. This can lead to confusion at times, but arose by virtue of a multicultural linguistic tradition with places named in Hebrew, Greek, Syrian, Latin, or even by way of descriptive local custom. In Matthew, Mark and John, for example, the Crucifixion site is named as Golgotha, whereas in Luke it is given as Calvary. Both names (Hebrew, *Gulgoleth;* Aramaic, *Gulgolta;* Latin, *Calvaria*) derive from words that mean 'skull', and the meaning of the place name, as given in all the Gospels, is straightforward: 'a place of a skull'.

The Sea of Galilee was originally called Chinneroth (Hebrew: 'lyre shaped') as in Joshua 11:2. It was also called the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1), and the Sea of Tiberius (John 2:1) from which its modern name, Bahr TubarÎya, derives.[16]

Although the Palestinian regions of Galilee, Samaria and Judaea were under Roman occupation in Gospel times, previously they had been subject to controls from Egypt, where the Greek pharaohs of the Ptolemaic dynasties, down to Queen Cleopatra VII, had reigned from 305 to 30 BC. Greek was, therefore, very much a language used in Jesus' time, along with a version of old Mesopotamian Aramaic and, of course, Hebrew. Flavius Josephus was a Hasmonaean Jew, trained



The Gospel Lands

for the Pharisee priesthood, but he often used Greek terminology, and Greek was the language of the original Gospel texts. There is little doubt, however, that the Magdalene name had its origin (as did Magdala) in the Hebrew word *migdal* (meaning tower or castle).

When Jacapo di Voragine,[17] 13th-century Archbishop of Genoa, wrote up the *Life of Mary Magdalene* from Church records,[18] he stated that Mary 'possessed the heritage of the castle of Bethany' – or the tower (*migdal*) of Bethany as it should be more correctly translated. But there never was any significant castle or tower at Bethany, and, in any event, titular Marys were not allowed to own property.[19] The heritage described by Jacapo actually related to personal status – a high community station (castle/tower) of community guardianship, as in Micah 4:8, the *Magdal-eder* (Watchtower of the flock) – and it is to this social position that the Magdalene distinction refers.[20] Thus it is significant that, at Mary's introduction in Luke 8:2, she is described as 'Mary, called Magdalene' – that is, 'Mary, called the Watchtower'.

Rather than coming from Magdala, the more likely Galilean home of Mary Magdalene was the nearby coastal town of Capernaum, where Jesus began his early ministry.[21] The great marble synagogue at Capernaum (which still exits as an impressive ruin) was the province of the Jairus priests in dynastic descent from Ira the Jairite, a chief priest of King David.[22] This priestly line originated with the Old Testament sons of Jair[23] in the time of Moses.

According to Jacapo (1229–1298), Mary Magdalene's father was called Syro (or Syrus). As Syro the Jairus, he was the Chief Priest (subordinate to the Jerusalem High Priest), and Mary makes her first biblical appearance as the daughter of the Jairus, whom Jesus raised from death in Matthew 9:18–25.[24] This form of initiatory raising from figurative 'death' (darkness) into the degree of community 'life' (light) was part of an ongoing instructional process called The Way, and was performed at the age of twelve. In the Jairus' daughter sequence, Mark 5:42 confirms this, stating: 'And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years'.

Jacapo further explains that Syro was a Syrian nobleman, whose wife Eucharia (Mary's mother) was of royal kindred. He further states that the Magdalene 'was born of right noble lineage, and parents which were descended of the lineage of kings'. In a much earlier manuscript of Archbishop Rabanus Maurus, Eucharia is more fully detailed as a descendant of the Royal House of Israel.[25] That was not the Davidic House of Judah, but the priestly Hasmonaean House of the Maccabees,[26] who reigned in Jerusalem from 166 BC until the Roman occupation from 63 BC under General Pompeii.

Academia

The work of Jacapo di Voragine, entitled *La Légende de Sainte Marie Madeleine*, exists within his greater compilation, the famous *Légenda Aurea* (Golden Legend). Two centuries after the author's death, this was one of the earliest books printed at Westminster, London, by William Caxton in 1483. Previously published in French and Latin, Caxton was persuaded by William, Earl of Arundel, to produce an English version translated from the European manuscripts. It is a collection of archival chronicles detailing the lives of selected saintly figures, and was highly venerated in religious society. Notwithstanding the more general undermining of Mary Magdalene's community status by the bishops, the work was given public readings on a regular basis in medieval monasteries and in some churches.

The Benedictine scholar, Rabanus Maurus (776–856), was Archbishop of Mayence (Mainz) and Abbé of Fulda, the greatest seat of learning in the Frankish Empire in the days of Charlemagne. Rabanus was renowned as the most learned sage of the era, and it was said that, in matters of scriptural knowledge, canon law and liturgy, he had no equal.[27] His great work, *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, was composed as fifty chapters, bound into six volumes of richly illuminated manuscript. It incorporated much that was held on record about Mary back in the 4th century when the Church of Rome was founded

by Emperor Constantine to supersede the earlier form of Nazarene Christianity. The book begins:

> The contemplative life of the most blessed Mary Magdalene, named with the highest reverence as the sweetest chosen of Christ, and by Christ greatly beloved.

In the early 1400s, a monastic copy of the Rabanus manuscript was discovered in England at Oxford University. A few years later, in 1448, Magdalen Hall – now Magdalen College – was founded at the University by William of Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester and Chancellor of England for King Henry VI. Dedicated to Mary, the College was among the first to teach science, and the *Magdalene* manuscript is still held there today.

Earlier, the Rabanus work had been referenced in the *Chronica Majora* of Matthew Paris (*Matthaei Parisiensis*).[28] He was a monk at the Abbey of St Albans who collated the writings of his Abbot, John de Celia, from around 1190. The Rabanus manuscript is also listed in the *Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Historia literaria Basilae*[29] at Oxford.

In the 1470s, shortly after the Magdalen foundation at Oxford, an educational hostel for Benedictine monks at Cambridge was rebuilt under the patronage of Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, to become Buckingham College. Subsequently, lay students were admitted as well as monks. Then, in Tudor times, the College came into the possession of Thomas, Lord Audley, as a result of Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries. He dedicated the College to Mary as The College of Saint Mary Magdalene in 1542. At that stage, Lord Audley contrived a way to differentiate, in audible terms, between his College and that of its sister institution at Oxford. By introducing his own name into the equation, he decided that the Magdalene College at Cambridge should be pronounced 'Maudleyn', and the tradition prevails to this day.[30]

In phonetic terms, there was an earlier precedent for the nominal corruption in that Mary had previously appeared as Mary Mawdelyn

in *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1438) – 'Have mend, dowter, what Mary Mawdelyn was, Mary Eypcyan, Seynt Powyl, and many other seynts that arn now in hevyn'. Well known to Lord Audley, this spiritual diary of a Norfolk visionary is reputed to be the first published autobiography in English. Despite the author's illiteracy, for which the book subsequently attracted much criticism, it is a fascinating record of life in turbulent 15th-century England.[31]

And so, quite apart from England's numerous Mary Magdalene churches, the nation also boasts colleges dedicated to her at both Oxford and Cambridge universities. There is no doubt that, while the Church of Rome was doing its best to sideline Mary Magdalene, if not to blacken her name entirely, she was greatly revered in England's monastic circles – from the Benedictines of Oxford to their brothers in St Albans.

It was much the same in France, where Rabanus Maurus was a Benedictine abbot, while in Italy Jacapo di Voragine was a Dominican. Even earlier, when the French Cistercian abbot, Bernard de Clairvaux, formalized the Order of the Knights Templars at the Council of Troyes in 1129, he instituted their Oath of Allegiance to Mary Magdalene. The French King Louis XI (1461–83) was insistent about Mary Magdalene's dynastic position in the royal lineage of France, and a particularly informative work entitled *Sainte Marie Madeleine* was produced by the Dominican friar, Père Lacordaire, soon after the French Revolution.[32]

It is against this background that we need to ask why the monastic scholars were at odds with the ecclesiastical clerics in their enthusiasm over Mary Magdalene. The answer is straightforward: the monks were academics and, although dealing with an ostensibly religious subject, their concerns were about documented record. The bishops, on the other hand, were concerned only with religious doctrine and, since they determined the doctrine, historical record was not a matter of importance for them. In fact, they endeavoured to force their doctrine on people by way of compulsory dogma when the *Congregatio Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) was introduced by Pope Gregory XV in 1662. He established the College of the

Propaganda of Cardinals, whose job it was to compel compliance with Church teaching. In this regard, the Church not only used propaganda, but also invented the word from a Church Latin root (*propagare:* to multiply) as in the propagation of plants – 'breeding cloned or like specimens from a parent stock'.

Fear and Trepidation

Where then does Mary Magdalene stand personally in all this? Was she truly important to the life and mission of Jesus, or was she just an incidental character?

From the Gospels, we gather that Mary was a constant companion and sponsor of Jesus. She anointed him with spikenard oil on two separate occasions, and had a close relationship with his mother and sisters. She supported them at the Crucifixion and went with them to Jesus' tomb, where she was the first to speak with Jesus after his Resurrection.

There is nothing remotely untoward or controversial in any of this. Indeed Mary's loyalty to Jesus and his family far outweighed that of the unpredictable Peter and other seemingly erratic apostles. She was a woman, of course, but that was not sufficient in itself to warrant the posthumous assaults on her by the Church. Jesus' mother was also a woman, and yet she became venerated. Apparently, there was far more to Mary Magdalene than is immediately obvious – something which left the bishops in fear and trepidation of her legacy.

Readers of Dan Brown's bestselling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, will know that his plot reveals Mary Magdalene not just as a beloved companion of Jesus, but as his wife. Also that they had a child and descendants – a secret that was said to have been guarded for centuries, to the present day, by an underground society of trusted initiates.

Some years ago, I introduced and discussed the subject of Jesus' marriage and offspring in *Bloodline of the Holy Grail*,[33] but not to the

extent of there being any secrets that were unknown to the Church. Logically, that aspect of the *Da Vinci Code* does not hold up if considered as fact rather than novelistic fiction. If the bishops had not known about Mary Magdalene's nuptial relationship with Jesus and her resultant motherhood, they would have had no reason whatever to vilify her memory. Like so many others, she would have remained an important, but incidental, character in the Christian story.

Yes, there were indeed historically supportive groups who championed the legacy of the Magdalene, but little of this was ever secret. Mary Magdalene posed a considerable threat to the Church. The bishops knew it, the monks knew it, organizations such as the Templars knew it, and many people at large knew it. The fact is that one does not need to access conspiratorial records or secret society archives to discover the truth of Mary Magdalene. Her story has long been in the public domain, and we can learn a great deal more about her by taking a closer look at the New Testament Gospels themselves.