

# Mary Magdalene and the Lost Sheep

## Preface

Since receiving my Ph.D. in Theology from the Franciscan School of Theology within the Graduate Theological Union on my fortieth birthday in the Year of Our Lord 1980, I have not had much opportunity or, perhaps unfortunately, much inclination to stay current with the writings of the scholars who focus on the Nag Hammadi documents (for the uninitiated, the early Christian documents in Coptic discovered in Egypt in 1948) and relevant matters. Most of them are (deservedly) full-time professors, with ample time and resources for research. I have not had that luxury. Hence perhaps in what follows I am reinventing a wheel. Nevertheless, since I think as a poet and novelist, and am not afraid to speculate beyond the boundaries that scholarship as such must respect, perhaps I can here offer some insights that might inspire future work.

In my somewhat regular blog on Patheos.com, I have been dealing with this and related topics. However, this essay demands footnotes, which blogs do not handle well. In addition, I think here I may be communicating with more of an audience who might be kind enough to offer me informed feedback, which I would greatly appreciate, especially if it enables me to correct errors, which I am not foolish enough to think are entirely lacking here.

## I. Retrieving the Myth of Jesus and Sophia

After reading and rereading the Nag Hammadi documents many times, I have realized there must have been a Gnostic myth of Jesus and Sophia.<sup>1</sup> It was a palimpsest over the historical Joshua and Miriam, just as the canonical gospels are, and it would have encoded the theology of the Marianite Christians, the name I am giving to the community in Alexandria apparently founded by Mary Magdalene after she fled from Judea to escape assassination by the Romans and their quislings. The evidence that such a community existed is the statement by Hippolytus that the Naasenes (which I propose was a scribal error for “Nazarenes”) had a mass of documents that Mariamne had received from James, the brother of the Lord.

We have only fragments of that story. Suppose we did not have the text of Genesis 2-3, the story of Adam and Eve, but only references to it, hostile paraphrases of parts of it, and so on. That’s what we face, despite the recovery of the Nag Hammadi library and similar documents. I have several times approached fragmentary information with the question, “What might this have looked like if the fragments were reassembled and the gaps filled in with plausible guesses?” Those experiments have worked out fairly well. I’m going to try it again.

My initial assumption is that Rabbi Joshua the Nazarene was a real human being, with a human father and a human mother. What was unusual about him was his Awakening experience, triggered when the Spirit entered into him at his baptism by John. Mk describes it as a subjective experience; no one else was aware of it. If so, that description must go back to what he told his

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<sup>1</sup> Although the Church Fathers used the word as a blanket term for all the “heresies” they were combating, there was apparently only one group that called themselves Gnostics, the one I herein call “Marianites,” who are the ones I usually mean—but I try to make the distinction clear I’m referring to the other, far more dualistic “Gnostics.” In general, all these “heretics” simply called themselves Christians.

followers. Afterward, he knew he was the “Anointed One,” that is, a man empowered by the Spirit as a prophet. He had been transformed; that is what the Awakening experience always does. He knew he had been endowed with the Spirit, whom he called his True Mother.<sup>2</sup> That spirit is symbolized in his story as a dove, which was sacred to the Queen of Heaven, to show that he was dedicated to the service of the Queen. (That the dove symbolized his future sacrifice is merely an opinion, not what Mk says. The dove had been kept as the sacrifice of the poor in the Jerusalem temple because doves had been sacrificed to the Queen of Heaven for many centuries before the temple was built.) I have been wondering if he believed that restoring her worship would restore the balance between male and female that had been lost in Judaism by the Deuteronomic Reform, that is, by the creation of Judaism as the state religion of the Kingdom of Judah, in which the Goddess of Israelite religion was proscribed.

Many modern varieties of Christianity have realized that believing the Ultimate Divinity to be strictly male/masculine makes no human sense. This insight is built into Genesis 1, which describes God (or the Gods, as is a legitimate translation of Elohim) as saying, “Let us create humans to be like us; let us create both males and females.” Jesus cites that verse in the argument over divorce as recorded in Mk. The “likeness” here is not intended to be a mere surface appearance. Rather, it proclaims that humans are like Gods in sharing in the fundamental nature of the divine, which is simultaneously male and female. (Whether the Divine Nature can be understood as androgynous, as it plainly is in the Gospel of Philip and other Coptic scriptures, is a different issue. Rather, the point is that the Divine Nature is *sexual*, not asexual.) Many of his sayings make sense as being about the Queen rather than the Kingdom (these words are a pun in both Greek and Hebrew) and as insisting that our sexuality is how we participate most fully in the Divine Nature. That may also be why he treated his men and women students as being equal, in complete opposition to the cultural customs of his times.

Aware of himself as an Anointed One, as a True Prophet like Moses, and as a Son of God (which in its original context meant merely what we mean by calling someone a “man of God”), he felt obligated to be observant, to fulfill all the commandments (as is bluntly stated in Mt), yet, believing he had been endowed with Rabbinic authority, he felt authorized to reinterpret those commandments. His debates with other Rabbis focus on such reinterpretation. As Robert M. Price has pointed out in his brilliant essay “Messiah as Mishnah,” his followers also felt empowered to do such reinterpretation. In Mt, he confers that Rabbinic authority on Peter. (I’m not sure he actually did that.) He absolutely did not ordain Peter as a bishop; the bishopric was not invented until the 80s. But I am fairly sure he conferred Rabbinic authority on both James and Mary.

There was one unambiguous commandment he did not reinterpret, but instead took very seriously, the first commandment that God gave to humans, in Genesis 1:28: be fertile and multiply. (It’s peculiar that specific line does not appear in the argument about divorce in Mk; it may have been censored.) This commandment, then as now, required a Rabbi to be married. The usual contortions about why Jesus could not have been married are, in my opinion, just special pleading. I propose that Jesus returned from the wilderness knowing that he had to fulfill that commandment.

One can easily see why the later misogynist church would have excised references to Jesus’ being married from the canonical gospels. I think the Marianite Christians did believe that the wedding at Cana was that of Jesus and Mary—but I have yet to find any clear statement of

such a belief. The Gospel of Philip, etc., seem to state only that Jesus and Mary were lovers, not that they were married. Well, that Genesis commandment does not say anything about being married; it just says to multiply. Further, being legally married to Mary would have made her his property, definitely an interpretation of Torah that he absolutely opposed.

Jesus would have faced a far more profound difficulty in seeking a partner. Given a concept of himself as empowered by the Spirit as a True Prophet, he would have needed a partner with an equivalent self-concept in order for them to be true equals. The Marianites clearly believed that Mary was the incarnation of Sophia, the creative energy of the divine. Could she have had such a concept about herself?

I have had to choose a name for the sort of experience Jesus apparently had after his baptism. The experience is rare enough that it has no commonly understood name. I have chosen "Awakening," because it is often called that in the Coptic documents, specifically an awakening in which one discovers or remembers one's true identity, which is neither identical with nor absolutely different from the Divine. I *know* that is how it feels, because that is what I felt in my own Awakening when I was 14. What the Gnostics *knew* was how that discovery of such a paradoxical self *felt*. That feeling could not be put into words; it was literally unsayable. Their cosmological speculations were NOT what they *knew*. The speculations were merely attempts to describe and explain how the Awakening experience could be possible.

Jesus may well have experienced a remembering of who he truly was, of who he had been before his mortal existence. He did not believe himself to be identical with the infinite, ultimate deity; he wasn't crazy, his closest followers did not think he was crazy, and, despite some appearances to the contrary, most human beings are pretty good at knowing whether another person is crazy or not. An Awakening destroys our ordinary illusions and thus produces sanity, not insanity.

Among the brilliant aspects of Ki Longfellow's *The Secret Magdalene* is her insight that both Jesus and Mary could have, perhaps must have, been Awakened, experienced the "Glory," and could thus be true equals. She describes Mary's Awakening as being spontaneous. But was it? There is another possibility, and Witches know what that is: the Great Rite. Wait, wait, that's not an impossible leap. It's a very plausible interpretation of what the Coptic documents actually say.

One key term in those documents appears about a hundred times, once even in the canonical gospels. It is the Greek term (transliterated as) "paston," usually translated as "bridal chamber" or "nuptial chamber," that is, the bed of the wedding night. However, looking in the unabridged Liddell-Scott Greek lexicon, which has provided me with many interesting facts, I find that "paston" also meant a temple of Dionysos, Demeter, and Persephone, that is, a temple of the Mysteries, that is, a place where initiations take place. In most uses of "bridal chamber" in the Coptic documents, the term refers not to a specific place, but to a certain kind of experience. It is sometimes used as a synonym for what we call "sacred sexuality," as is most clear in Irenaeus' description of how "Marcus" (whom the Gnostics themselves would probably have called something like "Saint Mark the Wonderworker") carried out an initiation. Irenaeus' description does sound like a prudish Evangelical describing a Wiccan "Great Rite in truth." I think the English that most closely approximates the flavor of the Greek is "sacred marriage," the *hieros gamos* of various ancient mysteries

I have made great use in writing (and, at least once, in a blessed moment in real life) of the fact that, at the moment of uninhibited climax, two people who are absolutely psychically open to each other can experience the merging of personalities, the "making the two into one,"

which destroys the illusion that we are totally separate individuals. Beyond that, such an experience can sometimes induce a full Awakening experience, destroying the illusion that we are totally separate from the Divine. I have argued elsewhere that in using that odd phrase,<sup>3</sup> and in emphasizing (Mk ) that “the two shall become one flesh” (a Semitic idiom for becoming one person), Jesus was referring to that sort of ecstatic experience.

I am trying to recover (or, true, perhaps invent) a myth that portrays Jesus and Mary as avatars of the Divine Lovers whose sexual joy creates and sustains the existence of our universe, our reality. The prudish, all who suffer from the endemic mental illness I have labeled Aphrodiphobia, will be horrified by such “blasphemy.” No, the blasphemy was the portrayal of Jesus as emasculated and of Mary as a whore. That was surely the sin against the Holy Spirit.

I propose that, upon returning from the “wilderness” after his baptism and Awakening, Jesus knew he had to find his counterpart, the Daughter of the Mother, in order to fulfill the first commandment. I propose that he knew—or perhaps he discovered by accident, as happened with me and Lilith—that he could Awaken her to remember who she truly was, Awaken her to her destiny, by means of the sexual initiation, that is, Awaken her to remember that she is Sophia. The evidence that some such event did happen is the evidence, although it is fragmentary and depends upon the assumption that the Marcosians were the heirs of the Marianites, that the Marianite Christians knew and used and taught this spiritual technology—and that too is why I now think that Mary, not Peter, probably was his true, authorized successor.

Just as after his baptism and Awakening Jesus knew he was a different person, Mary could have had a similar concept about herself. The later Marianites or their successors apparently codified Jesus’ experience of becoming a different person, a person anointed with authority, as “the Christ descending in the form of a dove and entering into him.” The parallel story about Mary, I suggest, could have said that Sophia, the embodiment of the creative energy of the Divine, the Mother of All, had descended upon and entered into Mary. One key statement is that

A mighty power in Heaven . . . came into the world and was called Mary.<sup>4</sup>

Important evidence that such a story existed consists of Irenaeus’ statements that:

Christ, descending into the world, found his lost sister Sophia, and clothing her with the light, they rejoiced in each other and celebrated the sacred mystery in the nuptial chamber as bridegroom and bride.<sup>5</sup>

Sophia will receive Christ as her spouse . . . that thus a conjunction may be formed between [Jesus] and Sophia [i.e., they shall celebrate the sacred marriage]. Jesus and Sophia are the bride and the bridegroom and the bridal chamber is the fullness of All.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Attested in both the Gospel of Thomas and Second Clement.

<sup>4</sup> Hennecke *et al.* I, 163, citing Cyril of Jerusalem as cited by E.A.W. Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*. Vielhauer says, “The Holy Spirit {is} the ‘mighty power in heaven’ and Mary {the Magdalene, NOT the BVM} is to be understood as the incarnation of the heavenly power.” There are other places where references to the Magdalene were changed to refer to Jesus’ mother.

<sup>5</sup> Iren. 1.30.12

<sup>6</sup> Iren. 1.7.1

Irenaeus' evidence in many ways is quite reliable. He knew, though probably not at first hand, the Gnostics in Rome in the 140s, about when Valentinus, Basilides, Marcus, and Marcella were all preaching there. Having been educated in rhetoric in Rome, he knew better than to create a "straw man" argument. We find confirmation of his summary in various of the Nag Hammadi documents:

Whenever Sophia receives her consort and Jesus receives the Christ . . . then the Pleroma will receive Sophia joyfully and All will be unified.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus's consort is the Great Sophia, who from the first was destined for union with him by the self-Begotten Father.<sup>8</sup>

The Sophia who is childless is the mother of the angels and the companion of the Savior.<sup>9</sup>

Sophia is also called Bride, because of the joy of her who gave herself to him in the hope of fruit from the union. . . . Sophia is also called Queen.<sup>10</sup>

Sophia is a holy Queen and a shining robe.<sup>11</sup>

Note that "Queen" may therefore in the gospels refer to Sophia.

Given Sophia as a central character in the myth, it began with the creation, since Proverbs describes how Wisdom, that is, Sophia, was the creative energy that brought all into existence. The dualistic Gnostics (some were not dualists at all), incorporating Platonism, believed that the creation of physical reality, and especially of our physical bodies, was a big, fat mistake. The Marianite Christians and their successors, who were observant Jews, in contrast, believed that our physical existence is an essential step in our spiritual evolution, a theology rediscovered by some modern churches. The Coptic documents contain several rewritings of the Adam and Eve story intended to correct its theology.<sup>12</sup> These dualistic stories say that humans were created by angels, who are ignorant, selfish, and hostile to Sophia. When they created Adam, he was senseless and could not walk, but Sophia breathed her Spirit into him—hence all humans are animated by the Spirit of Sophia.

Fragments of the Prologue to the myth include the following:

First Begetress Sophia, Mother of the Universe: some call her Love<sup>13</sup>. . . became the womb of everything, for it is She who is prior to them all.<sup>14</sup>

The will of the Father is always to produce and bear fruit. That Sophia should suffer was not the will of the Father.<sup>15</sup> . . . [It is] the Father's will [that] Sophia might bring All into union with the Light.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Val. Expo. 39 (these abbreviated names are all tracts in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*.)

<sup>8</sup> Sophia of Jesus Christ 228/101. This is an odd name. It may have meant not "the wisdom of Jesus," but instead "Jesus' Sophia" as a person.

<sup>9</sup> G.Phil. 63. I am grateful that the late Marvin Meyer pointed out this alternative translation of a key verse in this gospel.

<sup>10</sup> Tri. Tract 93

<sup>11</sup> Trad. Silv. 107

<sup>12</sup> "The Hypostasis of the Archons" (HA; it means "the reality of the rulers") and "The Origin of the World" (OW) are two different rescensions of an earlier document, somewhat like the two rescensions of the Clementines.

<sup>13</sup> Sophia of Jesus Christ 231/104

<sup>14</sup> Ap. Jas. 5

<sup>15</sup> Val. Expo. 36

<sup>16</sup> HA 87

Sophia stretched forth her finger and introduced Light into matter and pursued it down into the region of chaos.<sup>17</sup> . . . Sophia . . . created great luminous bodies and the stars in the sky to shine upon the earth and render signs of the times and seasons.<sup>18</sup>

Our sister Sophia is she who came down in innocence. . . .She was called Life/Zoe, the Mother of all Living.<sup>19</sup>

Sophia sent her daughter Zoe as an instructor in order to make Adam arise.<sup>20</sup> . . . The woman full of the Spirit came and spoke with him, saying, “Adam, arise.” When he saw her, he said, “It is you who have given me life. You will be called the Mother of All Living, for it is she who is my mother.” . . . The woman filled with the Spirit became the instructor and taught them . . . saying, “Your eyes will be opened and you will be like the Gods, recognizing good and evil.”<sup>21</sup>

When Adam and Eve became sober, they saw that they were naked and they fell in love with each other.<sup>22</sup>

Here eating the fruit of the tree of Gnosis is not a fall, but an Awakening; Gnosis is the gift that makes sex and love possible. Sobriety is often a synonym for Awakening in the Coptic documents, as in

Be sober and shake off your drunkenness, which is the work of ignorance.<sup>23</sup>

Jesus said, I found them all drunk, and I did not find any of them thirsty. My soul ached for the children of humanity, because they are blind in their hearts and do not see, . . . But now they are drunk. When they shake off their wine, they will change how they think.<sup>24</sup>

Even the hostility between the angels and Sophia is overcome:

Sabaoth . . . sang songs of praise to Sophia and her daughter Zoe. They caught him up and gave him charge of the seventh heaven. . . . Sophia placed Zoe on his right to teach him.<sup>25</sup>

## II. The Parable of the Lost Sheep

After my Awakening experience at age 14, which I have often discussed in past writings, when the Holy Spirit booted me out of the Church to save my life (that’s at least a concise way to summarize what happened), She set me the task of investigating all things religious for myself, a task I am still pursuing. Aside from an essay by Bertrand Russell on agnosticism, which gave me a label for myself (ironically, I now know that my Awakening had made me a Gnostic), my first major revelation was from a book I found in the tiny Tamalpais Valley branch library, a book entitled *Witches Still Live*, by one Theda Kenyon, a minor New York literary light in the 1920s

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<sup>17</sup> HA 94

<sup>18</sup> OW 112

<sup>19</sup> Attributed to Jesus in Ap. Jas. 23

<sup>20</sup> OW 115

<sup>21</sup> HA 89-90

<sup>22</sup> OW 119

<sup>23</sup> Teach. Silv. 94

<sup>24</sup> Pap. Oxy. 1, 11-22. = Tm 28. I think this is something that an inspired prophet could say.

<sup>25</sup> HA 95

and 1930s whom my mother might have known, hanging out on the upper East Side with the artsy crowd (she knew Rudy Vallee and Joan Fontaine).

Kenyon informed me about the *Burning Times*, which I had never heard mentioned in any sermon, but especially about Leland's *Aradia*, which she ably summarized. Learning about the legend of Aradia shattered what was left of my childhood world. Since I felt I had been emotionally abused by the Church I was raised in and had been taught mostly pathological nonsense, this antinomian gospel, proclaiming that the ultimate divinity is a Goddess, was liberating and seductive; my search for such a religion began then and led to my complicity in the creation of the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn a dozen years later.

Another revelation almost as exhilarating began with my reading of Richard Cavendish's *The Black Arts*, in which he summarizes some of the key "Gnostic" myths. His book led me to Grant's *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, because of which I knew to seize the complete set of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* that turned up about 1970 in Holmes Books, diagonally across the intersection of Third and Market from the offices of Scientific American Books, where I had the privilege of editing books by wonderful scientists, a few of whom became good friends.

I skimmed through the set (making good use of the index) to find all the passages that dealt specifically with the Gnostics and other "heresies" and began thinking about what I had found. The specific revelation that enchanted me was the powerful myth of the romance of Simon and Helen. I am sure they were real persons, but almost all we know of them is from the venomous propaganda that Irenaeus of Lyon wrote about them in his *Detection and Refutation of Knowledge Falsely So-Called*, written about 150 years after they had lived and certainly full of distortions. Irenaeus' passage on Simon begins from Luke's account in Acts and then piles negative assertions upon it. But even from Acts it is clear that Simon's preaching, like that of many other rebellious preachers (such as Dositheus) and ringleaders of that time, began well before he ran into Jesus' followers.

(It is important that Irenaeus adored the Gospel According to John and was the first to argue that all four canonical gospels should be kept by all congregations for reading on Sunday mornings. It is possible he remembered what Fr. Raymond Brown proved in his *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, that the Gnostics began as Johannine Christians, but schismed from what became the mainstream church over their belief that the innovation of the office of Bishop, with sole authority over their congregation, violated Jesus' endowing all the students with the Rabbinic power, as described in John 20.<sup>26</sup> I think that Irenaeus did not want to enshrine that historical fact and instead seized upon the figure of Simon Magus to portray as the founder of the Gnostic movement. Simon is hardly mentioned in the recovered Nag Hammadi documents.)

I decided to take all the fragments that quoted or paraphrased the writing of these various "heretics" (Hippolytus of Rome was the other most useful source), rewrite them back into what the writers might actually have said, and fit them together into a single "gospel" that Simon, I decided, might have written, even if he was essentially a fictional character. I thus constructed my "Gospel of Simon and Helen," much of which I have incorporated into my *Goddess Murder*

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<sup>26</sup> If it was Mary who was the beloved Disciple and the author or subject of the first edition of the Gospel According to John—and I do think she was some of that, as I have been discussing—that produces a very different story. Please note that the Bible scholars I respect agree that Jn as we have it is a rewrite, done perhaps to lessen its obvious Gnostic attributes.

novel. I think my “Gospel” makes out a better case for the validity of Gnosticism as a religious movement than they ever managed to make for themselves.<sup>27</sup>

Here let me share part of Simon’s “Revelation Discourse” from that “Gospel.” The context is that Simon had fallen in love with Helen, a “Sacred Slave” in the Temple of Astarte in Tyre, had bought her freedom, and had made her his companion in preaching his message. (Do note that translations that call her a prostitute are incompetent.) He proclaimed that Sophia, the true Creatrix, had been imprisoned in the body of Eve by the angels she had created and had been reincarnated over and over throughout history.

“Behold the Mother of All! At the end of these days she was manifest as a slave of your Goddess. She who was called Helen by Homer was the same who dwelled above before all creation, by whom all was created. She is with me now; she waited for my coming.

“She is the lost sheep; for her sake I came, to free her from her bonds and to offer men salvation from the angels by their recognition of me. Because the angels misruled the world, I have come, transformed into the likeness of their spheres and powers, to restore all things.

“She, who was a slave, is in her true spirit the Mother of all, from the Beloved Thought of the Light. And I tell you, in your spirit you are gods; you are all children of the Most High, of the Unknowable Light. You have only to know it, only to awaken to the Light within you, and you will know who you are and be free from all tyranny.”

Much could be discussed about all the threads that join here, but I will concentrate on the figure of the “lost sheep,” having realized that it may provide another key to unlock some of the puzzle about the actual history of these varieties of Christianity. The orthodox interpretation of Simon’s use of the “lost sheep” symbol is that he stole it from the canonical gospels—but that explanation cannot be true, being thoroughly anachronistic, and is based on many dubious assumptions. For one thing, Matthew’s version of the Lost Sheep parable, with ends with a pious application of it to church discipline, was not written until about 50 years after the lifetimes of Jesus and Simon. If Simon did learn some version of that story indirectly from Jesus, rather than devising it himself, he would have heard an early version from the first preachers of the Way. What might that version have been like?

The earliest version we have of that parable is in the Gospel of Thomas, in the layer composed about AD 50, two decades before the Gospel of Mark. Some Nag Hammadi scholars have deduced that a secondary layer was imposed on it about AD 140 by Encratites, who were what we might call Puritanical ascetics, most unlikely to have produced Saying 107 in Thomas, which reads,

Jesus said, “The kingdom [or Queen] is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them, the largest, went astray. He left the ninety-nine and looked for the one until he found it. After he had toiled, he said to the sheep, ‘I love you more than the ninety- nine.’”

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<sup>27</sup> I remember intense conversations with Professor Anitra Kolenkow at the Graduate Theological Union about the possibility of reconstructing lost documents from the available fragments. She insisted that she and other Nag Hammadi scholars had been doing just that. I realized that she and I had radically different concepts of what such a reconstruction ought to look like.



This saying's point is very different from that of the saying as used in Mt or Lk. In fact, the Thomas saying connects with passages in two other Nag Hammadi documents. The first is from the Gospel of Philip (63-64):

As for Sophia, called "Barren," She is the mother of the angels and the companion of the [Savior; She is] Mary Magdalene. [He loved] her more than the [other] students and used to kiss her [often] on her [mouth?]. The rest of the [students] asked him, 'Why do you love her more than us?' He replied, 'Why do I not love you like her?'<sup>28</sup> When a blind man and a seeing man are together in darkness, they are no different from each other. When the light comes, he who sees will see the light, but the blind one remains in darkness."

The clear implication here, if this is all one saying, is that Jesus loved Mary precisely because she was Awakened, whereas the other students—the Twelve—were not.

The other passage is in the Gospel of Mary (17-18): After Mary teaches the men mysteries they had not known, Peter asks,

"Did he truly speak with a woman without our knowing it, not openly [to us]? Are we to turn about and listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?" [Mary asks if Peter thinks she is lying.] Then Levi says, "If the Savior made her worthy, who are you to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us."

So, yes, Peter, it certainly looks as if he did prefer her to you and all the others; at least, that's what Mary's followers believed. In fact, it looks very much as if he could have meant Mary in the original version of the parable of the Lost Sheep.

How can such apparently irreconcilable stories be reconciled? How could the almost passionless Jesus and minimized Mary of the canonical gospels be reconciled with the blatant sexuality of the legend of Simon and Helen? Can the two stories be traced back to a common original, which must have been greatly different from them both?

The hermeneutic problem here is paralleled by that of the relationship between the Greek myths as codified by Hesiod and the Hebrew myths in Genesis and in a few other passages of the Torah, both dating to about 500 BCE. That there was any relationship at all was once not obvious, and reasoning backward did not work; you cannot push a string. But when the Akkadian myths dating to about 1500 BCE were recovered from sites such as Ugarit and Ras Shamra, then the evolutionary bifurcation became clear. As I argued earlier, if Jesus conceived of himself after his Awakening as a prophet empowered by the Spirit who was symbolized by the dove sacred to the Queen of Heaven and thus considered himself to be Her servant, could he have conceived of an Awakened Mary as a Lost Sheep, as a manifestation, incarnation, embodiment of that Queen? Yes, I dare to think so.

Where the Gospel of Philip (55) says that "Mary is the virgin whom no power defiled. She is a great anathema to the Hebrews, who are the apostles and apostolic men," this passage makes more sense as referring to the Magdalene and to Jesus' preference for her over the men; it does not make sense as referring to Jesus' mother. Further, the statement in Hypostasis of the Archons (92) that "Norea [the daughter of Zoe/Eve] is the virgin whom the forces did not defile" ties the statement from the Gospel of Philip into the theme of Mary as the incarnation of the

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<sup>28</sup> Most Nag Hammadi scholars connect all this as one pericope, but I think what follows here may have been an entirely different and separate saying.

imprisoned Sophia. I think the underlying implication is that she was not defiled precisely because Jesus rescued her first.

This is a difficult argument, full of uncertainties, but let me propose this:

Jesus fell in love with Mary, who had Awakened or whom he himself Awakened, and made her his companion, as the Gospel of Philip (59) says. He called her the Lost Sheep, called for the restoration of the worship of the Queen of Heaven, and preached that being in the kingdom of Heaven, in the presence of the Queen or the Divine, was an interior experience that anyone could have here and now—as is in fact still true. The Gospel of Thomas especially preserves sayings that reveal the latter insight:

3: Jesus said, "If your leaders say to you, 'Look, the (Father's) kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is within you and it is outside you.

51: His disciples said to him, "When will the rest for the dead take place, and when will the new world come?" He said to them, "What you are looking forward to has come, but you don't know it."

70: Jesus said, "If you bring forth what is within you, what you have will save you. If you do not have that within you, what you do not have within you [will] kill you."

113: His disciples said to him, "When will the kingdom come?" "It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here!' or 'Look, there!' Rather, the Father's kingdom is spread out upon the earth, and people don't see it."

After the destruction of Jerusalem, the excommunication of the Christian Jews, and the schism of the Johannine Christians who evolved into the “Gnostics,” the authors and editors of the canonical gospels gradually eliminated all hints of Jesus’ actual relationship to Mary; and later church fathers vilified her as a prostitute. In contrast, the Gnostics magnified their relationship into a legend, a myth, and an epic.

Perhaps this essay seems a bit radical. In fact, it is trailing behind current reality. Quite a few churches (none of which I am directly in touch with) have been founded during recent decades that worship Mary Magdalene as the incarnation of Sophia and as Co-Creatrix and Co-Redemptrix with Jesus. Many outsiders consider their theology to be utterly bizarre and baseless. Perhaps these churches might regard this essay as a gift, showing that their beliefs have a genuine historical basis and, logically, as great a claim to authenticity as those of the Church of Rome.

I do plan a future essay on the ways in which the gospels, rather than being considered inviolable Holy Scripture, were for a long time thoroughly tampered with.

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I have here, obviously, not included all the standard works of New Testament scholarship and history—but I have read a lot of them.