

Mary of Magdala: Apostle to the Apostles

A Leader and Teacher of Gnosis

Heather A. Turner
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Professor Cynthia Koepp
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Introduction

The *Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, an exciting and interesting book, continues to top the New York Times Bestseller List two years after its release. I hoped that the text would have historically accurate information and be a way to increase the public's knowledge of Mary of Magdala. Therefore, I decided to write a thesis concerning Mary of Magdala. Could a work of fiction detail the true life of Mary of Magdala? Did Dan Brown research and represent Mary of Magdala as early Christian saw her? Would the information contained in the *Da Vinci Code* stand up to ancient texts and to the knowledge known about early Christianity? These questions floated in my mind as I started to research. Upon looking at the sources used by Dan Brown I became appalled because not one of them included a primary document from the period. As a result, I decided to focus on what the scholars and primary documents have to say about Mary of Magdala as the first apostle of Jesus.

The research of Mary of Magdala depends on many discoveries that have taken place within the past century. Some of these discoveries include the *Nag Hammadi*, found in upper Egypt in 1945, and *The Gospel of Mary* and found in Cairo in 1869.¹ The discovery of these texts increase the

¹Lance S. Owens, *Introduction to Gnosticism and the Nag Hammadi Library*. The Gnostic Society Library,

knowledge of non-orthodox early Christian groups (predecessors of Catholics). Many groups and contrary interpretations of the Jesus tradition spring up shortly after the death of Jesus. Early texts such as *The Nag Hammadi* and *The Gospel of Mary* give key insight into some of these groups.

Due to the increase of early texts available in translation, many publications on the subject of Mary of Magdala as the first apostle appear. Prior to these discoveries, scholars continued a strong focus on the male voice in the New Testament. Many early biblical scholars tried to prove how no female voice occurred within the New Testament. Within the past twenty years, scholarship on Mary of Magdala emerges as a link to the female voice in the New Testament. For hundreds of years, men were the most obvious main characters. Difficulty exists when trying to discover the female voice in the New Testament and therefore remained untouched by scholars.

The identification of that female voice plays a key role in the three chapters I wrote. In them I will explore the idea of Mary of Magdala as an apostle of apostles who proved her worth as the first resurrection witness. First, in Chapter 1, I will show textual problems that exist when trying to use the Bible and Gnostic gospels as history. Much like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* illuminate scholars to the ideas of ancient Greeks, I see early

<http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl.html> (Accessed March 23, 2005).

Christian texts as windows into the lives of these early peoples. Many problems persist with the use of translations and copied texts, however, the positives far outweigh the negatives. By accepting the problems of ancient texts, one also learns the benefits.

In Chapter 2, I look at women's roles in the bible and ancient world. In order to understand the role of Mary of Magdala one must understand women's lives within the community of her origins. The Old Testament continues to be important to the community because early Christians remained Jewish. Therefore they originate from the Old Testament tradition. Within the chapter I look at Lilith, Eve, Deborah, Mary of Magdala, and Mary the Virgin and what it meant to be female in their communities.

Lastly in Chapter 3, I analyze textually Mary of Magdala and her role as a leader within the early Christian community. Using the Bible and Gnostic sources I detail the requirements for apostleship, tensions within the group between Peter and Mary of Magdala, and specific examples of Mary of Magdala as an apostle. Mary of Magdala emerges into early Christianity as the apostle of apostles or *Apostola Apostolorum*. As the first resurrection witness, she exhibits the most power as a leader within early Christian communities.

Chapter 1

The Bible and Other Ancient Texts as History

History is the witness that testifies to the passing of time; it illuminates reality, vitalizes memory, provides guidance in daily life and brings us tidings of antiquity.

~ Cicero, *Pro Publio Sestio*

Many problems arise when using the Bible and other ancient texts such as the Gnostic Gospels as historical sources. Some of these obstacles include question of in ascertaining the authorship, duplication/scribes mistakes, omission of texts, translation/consistency, reliability/number of texts, editors, and plagiarism. Conversely, Gnostic Gospels and the Bible help scholars to discover daily life as well as how people viewed and treated each other in antiquity. Regardless of all the inherent problems in using religious texts as history, much can be gained from their accurate use as one would use a fictional source such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Inanna and the Huluppa Tree*.

In the ancient world, duplication differed greatly from today's world of impersonal computer printers and xerox machines. Individual scribes copied by either using a master copy or a scribe dictated a text in a room of many scribes. Both processes posed problems: difficulties existed when trying to copying word-for-word because it resulting in skipping or repetition of lines. Issues also existed with dictation because standardization of

spelling and spacing were hundreds of years in the future.² Therefore scribes made errors accidentally and their mistakes became part of the texts regardless. The copying of texts moved from monasteries into a professional job and the correct reproduction became less important than the speed of completion.³ Furthermore, scribes amended texts to suit their own needs and would “fix” the text to their own ideas changing words here and there.⁴ Today, in order to have the least amount of errors, scholars look for the earliest versions of texts.

How did certain texts become part of the Bible while others faded into oblivion? Two camps existed during the early years of Christianity: Gnostics (contrary to the ideas of the Canon) and Orthodox Christians (Canon/Bible). Both groups wrote texts that dealt with issues that were important to them. Gnosticism described many groups, without a unifying ideology, with differing beliefs and practices than those accepted by the growing orthodoxical majority.⁵ According to Karen L. King, scholars

divided the earliest types (Christian heresies) into two groups: Jewish Christianity and Gnosticism. Jewish Christianity is characterized by too

²Books Arts Book, find

³Aland, Barbara and Aland, Kurt. *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, Ed., revised and enlarged, tr. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Erdmans, 1989), 55;70.

⁴Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

⁵*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 15th edition, s.v. Gnosticism

*much or too positive an appropriation of 'Judaism'; Gnosticism by too little 'Judaism' or too negative an attitude toward it. Orthodoxy is just right, rejecting 'Jewish error' but claiming the heritage of Scripture for its own.*⁶

They believed in the importance of gaining knowledge or *gnosis* and considered themselves a chosen elite who were able to understand a hidden and secret knowledge that was not available to all. For Gnostics, Jesus Christ failed to achieve the status of savior but instead arose as a teacher that possessed the hidden knowledge of God. Gnostic texts included *The Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Philip, The Gospel of Thomas, and Pistis Sophia*. Orthodox Christians believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the importance of relaying the message of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Orthodox means "an established theological system acknowledged by the majority of church leaders and laity had yet to occur."⁷ In the beginnings of the Christian Church the title of Orthodox cannot be used in its contemporary form as a variation of the Greek Orthodox Church. Here the title of Orthodox will be used to indicate the group that became the acknowledged majority after the first two and half centuries of Christianity. Non-heretical texts include those in the Bible and are also known as the accepted canon today. By taking both texts (Gnostic and Orthodox) in conjunction, scholars draw an accurate picture of the ancient world. With

⁶Karen L. King, *Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003), 155.

⁷Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 4.

the creation of a canonization of texts, Orthodox Christians attempted to destroy the Gnostic movement by calling their texts heretical (which means literally choice)⁸ and against the laws of the church. However, these heretical texts still exist and are still being translated.

The number of copies in existence today of both Gnostic and Orthodox Christian texts gives authority to those texts. With more texts, comparison of those texts can be accomplished to create the best representation of the original ancient text. In fact, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* continues to be expanded upon. Every year archeologists find more clay tablets which continue the story of Gilgamesh and fill in gaps in the story.⁹ Much like *Gilgamesh*, new variations and interpretations of the New Testament emerge and those texts include over 5,366 copies [Greek manuscripts alone (2nd Century - 16th Century)] with new discoveries every year.¹⁰ In comparison more than 600 copies of Homer's *Iliad* and eight copies of Herodotus' *History* still exist. The earliest document from the Bible extant today originates from 125. C.E. Scholars suggest the first texts appeared 100 or so years after the death of Jesus.¹¹ By viewing numerous copies one

⁸Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 4.

⁹Lecture, J. Hoffmann

¹⁰Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 27.

¹¹Western Illinois University, *Developing Biblical Literacy*. Western Illinois University, <http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfjks/207i4.html> (Accessed February 21, 2005).

may see the reliability of the story as one would appreciate a work of literature.

Another issue with texts includes consistency. Consistency relates to the duplication of texts because some of the problems result from the process of translation. Consistency means that a text agrees with other texts within the same period. Rules for sorting out the differences in texts include: What do the oldest manuscripts say? What do the majority say? What do the best say? Which reading is more likely? However, these questions still bring in human error and the opinions of the translator.¹² A scholar takes all the current texts that exist of Matthew and looks at them together to view similarities and differences. Also all the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are viewed together to see their similarities and differences. Authors of Matthew and Luke drew on the text of Mark. Therefore, scholars date Mark earlier than Matthew and Luke.

Translation also poses its own unique problems including the existence of original texts. An original manuscript of the Bible comes to scholars from copies of copies.¹³ Since so many versions of each text exist, translators have to search for the most authentic version of a text. The most accurate translation of a text leads to both understanding and

¹²Ilias Chatzitheodorou, *Problems of Bible Translation*. Translation Journal Vol. 5, No.4, Oct. 2001, <http://accurapid.com/journal/18bible.htm> (Accessed on February 21, 2005)

¹³Chatzitheodorou, *Problems of Bible Translation*.

misunderstanding of a text. Eugene Nida points out that "since no two languages are identical, there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence, there can be no fully exact translations. The total impact of a translation may be reasonably close to the original, but there can be no identity in detail"¹⁴

Problems of translation include contextual errors in grammar and language. For example, in Judges 1:14¹⁵ it says Acsah, daughter of Caleb, got off her donkey. Translation and interpretation of the text mean either she got off her donkey or broke wind. Hebrew in its written fails to use vowels and gives translators many problems. Therefore, the original meaning of a word can easily be lost because words can have more than one translation. Yaweh (a Hebrew form of God) exemplifies these problems because the translation could also be Yewah, Yiwuh, or any number of variations. Another problem with translations deals with grammar. In Ephesians 4:9 the noun *ges* (earth) means the lower, earthly regions or going into the lower parts of the earth.¹⁶ In English two past tenses exist in contrast to most other languages which have one.

¹⁴Lawrence Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader* (London, England: Routledge, 2000), 127.

¹⁵Bible, Judges 1:14

¹⁶ Roger L. Omanson, *Can You Get There from Here? Problems in Bible Translation*. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=975> (Accessed on February 21, 2005)

In the ancient world, plagiarism occurred frequently. The ancient definition and understanding of the term differed greatly from the modern definition. The contemporary definition of plagiarism is "a piece of writing that has been copied from someone else and presented as your own work."¹⁷ Copying or extracting information was extremely common and using or attributing your own work to another person reigned supreme within ancient religious communities. An author in a Pauline School might put Paul's name as author to write corrections or new interpretations of his ideas. The work would therefore be read and enjoyed because the reader believed it came from an apostle in this case. The synoptic gospels (*Gospels of Mark, Luke, John, and Matthew*) exemplify plagiarism. The author of Mark wrote his text first and Matthew and Luke drew on his text to complete their own.¹⁸ Neither Matthew nor Luke gave credit to the version of events that Mark wrote down.

Problems aside, gnostic and biblical sources together paint a detailed picture of life and times during the ancient world. By acknowledging each problem a historian views the prejudices and bias of the authors to uncover that detailed picture. Scholars of gnostic and biblical sources identify the life of early Christians by their choices of vocabulary. Homer's *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* show historians how Greeks viewed the world around them.

¹⁷Dictionary.com

¹⁸

One uses primary documents for their importance in understanding the people that wrote them. By reading and analyzing the earliest copy of a text scholars gain an understanding of a culture through its participants.

Chapter 2

Women's role in the Bible and in the Ancient World

*"What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet?"
~ William Shakespeare (Romeo and Juliet, Act II)*

Women appear like lightening in the sky within the Bible. Of three thousand people listed in the Bible only 170 are women.¹⁹ Therefore, for an author, usually male, to use a particular woman denoted their importance to the community as an example or role model. A woman given a name in an ancient text indicated prominence and power within the community. That woman played an essential role in society. Women such as Lilith, Eve, Deborah, Mary of Magdala and Mary the Virgin illustrate some of those rarely mentioned women. Only if her role becomes entwined within the society to become tradition would male authors' mention her existence.

Women in leadership positions demonstrate Jesus' challenge to the social conventions of his day. He acknowledges women as equals, honors and recognizes children, eats and converses with everyone from poor, to rich which attack common social conventions of the day of the patriarchal

¹⁹Carol Myers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer, *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (New York City, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 33.

family.²⁰ When looking at the unconventional and unconformist behavior Jesus exhibits in his short life, he participates in activities beyond traditional roles of both man and woman. His ministry creates, for a few women, the opportunity to participate in religious expression absent in other venues of life.

Although not specific within ancient texts, the leadership and public roles of women within early Christian and Jewish communities could not be easily ignored or erased. Early Christian priests performed services in the home. Women, therefore, became patrons to important priests, disciples, and bishops who ran their own house churches. Doctrines such as celibacy and ideas of strictly male priests did not yet exist. Therefore women had families and played a large role in the new religion.

One of the most important ancient woman characters comes from Sumerian/Babylonian mythology in *Inanna and the Huluppa Tree*. Within the text, Inanna described a demon-like creature, named Lilith, who decided to live in her (Inanna's) Huluppa tree. The tree eventually would be used by Inanna to create her throne legitimizing her power and reign.²¹ Hebrew mythology adopted her etiology to explain why newborn children

²⁰Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity*, (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 5.

²¹Diane & Samuel Noah Kramer Wolkstein, *Inanna queen of heaven and earth: Her stories and hymns from Sumer*, (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1983),

die without cause and complications in birth.²² Within Hebrew mythology Lilith becomes known as the first Eve and first wife of Adam who eventually assumes the role of consort to God. Lilith chooses to assert her own dominance rather than be dominated by Adam.²³ Lilith considers herself equal to Adam and does not feel that she should be on the bottom during intercourse (and therefore being dominated by Adam) and calls out the magical name of God causing her to escape. Some scholars believe that Lilith's call to God created the split of the androgynous into two separate beings.²⁴ The individual character of Lilith remained forever separate from that of Adam and therefore they could not exist together.

Lilith's official entrance into the biblical canon comes from Isaiah 34:14 which says, "The wildcat shall meet with the jackals and the satyr shall cry to his fellow, Yea, Lilith shall repose there and find her a place of rest."²⁵ The author used the name Lilith to connote the mythology surrounding Adam's first wife and her status as demon. Although the story of Lilith comes from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* in a non-canonical text, the

²²Patai, *Hebrew Goddess*, 212.

²³Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning*, Trans. Jacqueline S. Teitelbaum (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 369.

²⁴Alan Humm, *Lilith*. Dept. Of Religious Studies, U of Pennsylvania, <<http://www.hist.upenn.edu/~humh/Topics/Lilith/origin.html>> (accessed February 19, 2005).

²⁵Bible, Isaiah 34:14

lack of explanation states that the society knew the story.²⁶ The story later described Lilith as a beautiful, nude, slender figure with wings and owl-feet standing on two lions in an erect position denoting her own power. Her later status as demon gave her several pairs of horns and her tools of office included a ring and rod.²⁷ She looked much like a cherub and yet authors used strong and power language to describe her. She caused infertility and unsurmountable pain because of her inability to birth human children. The importance of children and childbirth within Jewish society stemmed from the large labor force needed for herding and agriculture. Therefore anyone who interfered with that process created an instant enemy of the culture. The "mother of life" or supplicant of Adam represented everything that Lilith detested in life.

However, enemies also have roles within a society and authors represented Lilith within the biblical texts as a demon. Depending on when and where a text speaks of demons a different connotations emerges. In fact as Hurwtiz writes,

Jewish demons occur under quite different names. One moment they are described as spirits (Ruchot), the next as pests (Masiqim) and the next as destroyers (Chabalim). They can be grouped under the collective name Shedim, sing . . . Shedim are either benevolent and helpful or - more frequently -

²⁶Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 65-69.

²⁷Rachel Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1967), 208.

*dangerous troublemakers.*²⁸

Therefore even though society views demons today as evil, ancient peoples viewed them differently depending on their individual beliefs at that time. Babies lived and died and the ancients needed a way to explain how and why it occurred. Today we understand the world in different ways due to modern science. Therefore, early peoples need explanations for the unexplainable.

Lilith become one of these explanations. However, Lilith evolves to become a manifestation of God; she also emerges as a force of vengeance from God on to the Jewish people. Any punishment against the Jewish people shifts into retaliation because they fail to following the laws of God. Lilith transforms from a vengeful demon into a messenger. Rather than embodying evil, she merely exists to serve her purpose without malice or ruthlessness. Whether evil or good, well into the late 18th century the impact of Lilith within religious consciousness remains extremely prevalent in Jewish mythology.

Lilith existed within many societies including Greek, Assyrian, Arab, Hittite, Babylonian, and Sumerian. Early on Lilith developed as a Great Mother figure who possessed the aspect of the devouring mother. Even today in Orthodox Jewish families the family will place amulets in the

²⁸Sigmund Hurwitz, *Lilith, the First Eve: Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon Verlag, 1980), 33.

maternity room to protect the newborn from ill-omens of which Lilith represents.²⁹ Aristophanes, in *The Symposium* proposes that dual bodies (male and female) originally existed as one being (androgyny) and broke into two bodies (male and female) that forever sought their other half.³⁰ Later scholars tried to show how the mythology attempted to explain early human history where both sexes were joined as one.

The opposite of Lilith arrives in the form of Eve made from Adam rather than as a separate entity. Eve bears children and becomes the mother of the human race whereas Lilith only creates demons who plague humanity; forced to dwell in the shadows. In contrast, Eve emerges as one who can give life and spirit to her children. In chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis God created everything including Adam, Eve, and the means of their supposed destruction in the fall of humanity that occurs in the Garden of Eden. Authors of the Old Testament blamed Eve for original sin and expulsion from the garden.

Consequently, Gnostics view the expulsion from the garden and original sin quite differently. Ancient Gnostics see Adam and Eve as aspects of a human person. According to Hoeller,

Adam [represented] the dramatic embodiment of psyche, or soul, while Eve stood for the pneuma, or spirit. Soul, to the Gnostics, meant the

²⁹Hurwitz, *Lilith, the First Eve*, 32.

³⁰ Plato, *The Symposium*, (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 22.

embodiment of the emotional and thinking functions of the personality, while spirit represented the human capacity for spiritual consciousness. The former [being] the lesser self (the ego of depth psychology), the latter the transcendental function, or the "higher self," . . . Obviously, Eve, then, [becomes] by nature superior to Adam, rather than his inferior as implied by orthodoxy³¹

As Holler explained, Gnostics believed in Eve as the awakener who possessed all the power because she attained the knowledge of good and evil. Gnostics sought the true divine knowledge and Eve became the conduit of that knowledge. Although she brought pain, she also brought divine knowledge in order to commune with the divine. In particular the symbol of the apple and the serpent represented very important gnostic symbols of knowledge. The serpent and fruit symbolized wisdom and immortality. Eve resembled wisdom because she made the choice to accept the fruit from the tree of good and evil.³² Although a fountain of light for Gnostics, Eve remained the bringer of original sin for early orthodox Christian groups.

Contrary to Eve, arised Deborah who plays the role of judge and prophet in Judges. The author of Judges writes,

Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their

³¹Stephan A. Hoeller, *The Genesis Factor*. Quest 2, no. 9 (1997): <http://www.gnosis.org/genesis.html>

³²Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth: The Magdalen's Origins and Metamorphoses* (Carbondal, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), 34.

*disputes decided.*³³

The passage shows the status of Deborah as judge and prophet, a place that no other person in the Old Testament holds.³⁴ As a prophet she showcases her talent which later gives her the role of judge. Prophets exist as intermediaries between humans and God and therefore everything that came out of their mouths also originates from God. Rulers, military commanders, and judiciaries together form the role of judges for ancient Hebrews. *Judges* details the many deeds of Deborah both militarily and politically. She won many battles against enemies of Israel.

However her role as prophet and judge links together to create a leader within her community. In *Judges* 5 she prophesies that the resolution of a battle would occur with the murder of the enemy by a woman in the enemy's camp. The truth of the prophecy gave her legitimacy as prophet and leader. If she fails in either prophecy or in leadership the authors of the text would neglect to mention her. The author of *Judges* states, "She is called 'mother of Israel.'"³⁵ The use of the word mother indicates that judges played a familial and public role in society. The adaptation of maternal or paternal language creates a title bestowing

³³ *Judges*, 4:4-5

³⁴ Meyers, *Women in Scripture*, 66.

³⁵ *Judges* 5:7

authority and familiarity in a society such as the matriarchs in Genesis.³⁶

God calls on anyone to lead his people regardless of want or need. Deborah remains one of the most powerful women in the Bible. She exhibited many of the characteristics of leadership that Mary of Magdala illustrated in the New Testament.

Like Deborah, authors of the New Testament and gnostic texts present Mary of Magdala as an extremely powerful person even though male authors attempted to erase her salient role. The apostle John gave the title of *Apostle of Apostles*³⁷ to Mary because of her close relationship with Jesus. Apostle of Apostles means that Mary of Magdala arose as a leader above the other apostles.

Mary of Magdala appears in the New Testament as an independent woman. Authors fail to attach a husband or any other relation to her. Contrary to Deborah, the author of Judges' uses Deborah's husband as a legitimization of her power within the tradition. Interestingly, authors omit any relation of Mary of Magdala and instead prefer her location of Magdala. Magdala refers to the town meaning "tower of strength" which adds to her power as both disciple and apostle.³⁸ The frequency of author's mentions of Mary of Magdala lead scholars to believe that she remains important long

³⁶ Meyers, *Women in Scripture*, 67.

³⁷ Brock, *Mary Magdalene: First Apostle*, 60.

³⁸ Meyers, *Women in Scripture*, 120.

after her death. Mary of Magdala arises as an influential woman.³⁹

According to Mark, Mary of Magdala exists within the Bible as the first resurrection witness. By witnessing the resurrection of Jesus her importance soars because of the fundamental importance of the resurrection to Christian beliefs. However, because of her gender she fails to become essential as a witness in Christian Theology. In addition, early in Christian history she becomes identified as a prostitute. Also, *The Gospel of Luke* states that Jesus exorcizes seven demons from her, further diminishing her status. Ancient authors used tactics of exaggerating the truth of facts concerning important figures that failed to support their agenda. Acts (8:2) describes women as having been cured from evil spirits and diseases instead of their possible true status as important followers and ministers of Jesus. In fact, Luke specifies that women minister to the men who are followers of Jesus.⁴⁰ The male apostles/authors need male characters to be more powerful in order to control the new religion in their favor.

In contrast Mary the Virgin exists within the New Testament as a glorified female. Mary the Virgin endures as the eternal virgin, a perfection

³⁹Katherine Ludwig Jansen. *Making of the Magdalene* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 21.

⁴⁰Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Reconstructing 'Real' Women from Gospel Literature." in *Women & Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, 117 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

that cannot be achieved by another woman. A normal Jewish woman (early Christians were still considered Jewish) could never live up to the expectations of a virgin and still be true to her family obligations. The Virgin Mary, an epitome of perfection in femaleness, persists in a society dependent on a constant increase in the population to survive. How can a society function if fulfilling societal obligations comes into conflict with retaining virginal perfection? If one glorifies the virgin and all girls remain virgins the human race ends. One either continues a virginal life or marries. By having children they continue the cycle of original sin and the virginal young girl becomes a sinful adult woman who fears and dreads growing up to be a functioning member of society.

The perfection of the Mary the Virgin fails to be realized within her own life. After the birth of Jesus, Mary the Virgin consummates her marriage to Joseph and bears him children. Matthew 12:46, Luke 8:19, and Mark 3:31 mention the existence of Jesus' siblings.⁴¹ The verses state that Jesus' siblings and the Virgin Mary visit Jesus when he preaches. Those brothers named include James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas and, although not mentioned, evidently sisters existed as well.⁴² The biblical record supports the existence of those siblings being children of the Virgin Mary and Joseph

⁴¹Got Questions Org, *Did Jesus have brothers and sisters (siblings)?*. Got Questions Ministry, <http://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-siblings.html> (Accessed on March 17, 2005).

⁴²Acts 1:14

and born after Jesus. However, the Virgin Mary's only power stems from her role as dutiful mother who supports Jesus during his many wanderings.

The Virgin Mary fails to speak or have any direct role in Jesus' ministry, but ironically becomes the most influential woman in the New Testament. With her steadfast faith and trust in God's will the Virgin Mary in conjunction with Mary of Magdala becomes the antithesis of Eve. The Virgin Mary did not commit original sin and remains a pure woman. Many scholars, on the other hand, remain certain that the Virgin Mary stands in a unique position to receive responsibility and intercession for those whom Jesus loved.⁴³ In fact, Brown concludes that, 'Mary is the new Eve, the symbol of the Church.' . . . Mary continues to represent Jewish Christianity . . . She represents the redeemed segment of the Jewish Christian Church that no longer exists."⁴⁴ The Virgin Mary represents everything that Eve never becomes. Eve along with Adam create original sin and the sinlessness of Mary the Virgin's life and birth of Jesus wipe away that sin.

As a result, the Virgin Mary exists as a model; however, women during the first and second centuries gain power in numerous ways. Because the early Christian church remains small and obscure during its first years of existence; the Romans feel that it resembles the mystery cults

⁴³Mary Rose D'Angelo, "(Re)Presentations of Women in the Gospels: John and Mark," in *Women & Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, 135 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴⁴D'Angelo, "(Re)Presentations of Women," 136.

(Isis, Mithras, and Dionysus) overriding its society. Romans misunderstood many of the tenets of the religion because of its differences between their religions. Christians fail to worship the godlike Emperor and the government persecutes them. During these early years, churches spring up in households. Women hold and control the household. As a result, they become the first priests, bishops, and other clergy. Christians accept women in leadership roles because it occurs within the realm of hearth and home. The new religion creates an alternative society that gives women the ability to be creators and leaders.

These leadership roles develop for women because during the first and second centuries Christianity remains a minority within a majority of pagans. Bart Ehrman defines Pagans as,

any of the adherents of the empire's polytheistic religions—that is, religions that worshiped many gods. And since everyone in the empire, with the exception of Jews and Christians, worshiped many gods, this included the vast bulk of the population.⁴⁵

Texts detail societal views of Christianity as another one of the thousands of mystery cults in Rome. The most important difference between mystery religions and Christianity lay in their insistence of worshiping their own God and no other.⁴⁶ By refusing to honor the gods, Christians defy the

⁴⁵Bart D. Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code: A Historian Reveals What We Really Know About Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5-6.

⁴⁶Of course Jews also fell under this category; however, because of their lengthy history they were excluded from any emperor worship.

government at its core because the Emperor's status as god demands worship from every citizen.⁴⁷ As a result, citizens believe that disasters in the empire occur because of the faithlessness of Christians. Pagans accuse early Christians of atheism because of their refusal to worship the emperor.⁴⁸ Church life centers in the home due to low numbers of believers and persecution.

Women, therefore, gain pivotal roles in those early house churches. Women contribute financially and spiritually in early Christianity. In *Romans*, Phoebe contributes financially and as a leader of her community. Women emerge as apostles, deacons, leaders of communities, prophetesses, and teachers. Paul uses words such as "fellow-laborers" and "sisters in the Lord" suggesting the equality between himself and women believers.⁴⁹ For Paul equality exists for everyone when he writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."⁵⁰ Paul paves the way early on for the inclusion of women.

Therefore if Christians remained a sect of Jewish faith protection might have been possible.

⁴⁷Laura Gathagan, Lecture. August 26, 2004, SUNY Cortland, NY

⁴⁸Alister E. McGrath, *"Athenagoras of Athens on the Christian God"* in *The Christian Theology Reader* (MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002),172.

⁴⁹Haskins, *Mary Magdalene*, 85-86.

⁵⁰*Galatians 3:27-28*

Substantial change occurs with the Edict of Milan enacted by Constantine in 313CE. The Edict of Milan gives toleration to all religions and the freedom to worship whichever god(s) they deem fit. Not long after, Christianity becomes the official religion of the Holy Roman Empire under Constantine. The legality of Christianity changes the makeup of churches. Legitimate Churches outside of the home spring up and mass conversion occurs. With the conversion of Constantine and by the end of the fourth century, Christians become the majority of the population.⁵¹

As the religion becomes more and more legitimate, the role of women declines. Churches no longer held mass in the home where women gain power. Constantine pushes the women out of the church and moves it into public life where men reside. He also creates the first imperial church council (Council of Nicea) to agree upon issues of doctrine and canon law⁵² of which women fail to be in attendance.

Of 170 women written about in the Bible, only a handful actually have a role in the New Testament. Mary of Magdala and Mary the Virgin illustrate the most powerful women in the New Testament. They exist as a formidable force for male scholars to combat their importance to the canon. Lilith, Deborah, Mary of Magdala, and Mary the Virgin remain examples of

⁵¹Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction*, 9-13.

⁵²Laura Gathagan, "*Medieval Society*." (History 329: Medieval Culture and Society: SUNY Cortland, Cortland. 26 Aug. 2004).

powerful women who exist beyond their traditional stations to play pivotal roles in their communities. Women although authors portray behind them scenes play an important role to the development of early Christianity.

Chapter 3

Mary of Magdala: Apostle to the Apostles

There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
~ Galatians 3:28

A resurrection witness, an apostle, and a leader, just a few of the roles that Mary of Magdala accomplished in her lifetime. History would remember her as whore, prostitute, and sinner with the early sermon by Gregory the Great⁵³ who linked her with the unnamed prostitute mentioned just prior to her entrance in the *Gospel of Luke*. In reality, she transcended traditional female roles in the ancient world, to become a teacher and preacher of her faith. Many ancient texts showcase the power and leadership that Mary of Magdala attained, including the synoptic gospels (*Mark, Luke, and Matthew*), the *Gospel of John*, and many Gnostic Gospels (*Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Philip, Dialogue of the Savior, and Pistis Sophia*). Through dialog and metaphor the texts describe apostleship and the resurrection along with Mary of Magdala's role.

I. Apostleship and its Requirements

First, both apostles and disciples existed together in the ancient world supporting each other. According to Karen Jo Torjesen, "Apostles were the traveling evangelists, whose work took them from city to city spreading the

⁵³Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction*, 161.

good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection." Disciples merely followed Jesus and did not have the permission to preach his message. Mary Rose D'Angelo supports Torjesen when she states, "The basic meaning of *apostolos* is 'emissary, one who is sent,' as opposed to disciple which means learner or follower; in Christian contexts 'apostles' refers to missionaries."⁵⁴ The word apostle originates from the Greek verb *apostello* meaning to send or the bearer of a message and can be found in secular Greek literature such as Herodotus and Plato.⁵⁵ Few would deny that Mary of Magdala became a disciple but the controversy exists of whether she also became an apostle. Leadership resided with a chosen few apostles given the special task of preaching to the people by Jesus whereas many thousands disciples followed Jesus.

Those chosen few who received from Jesus an appearance of the risen Christ and expressed permission to proclaim his message became apostles. Apostleship depended on the miracle and Mary of Magdala became the first.⁵⁶ Mary of Magdala arrived at the empty tomb of Jesus and received the commission from Jesus (According to the *Gospel of John*). The apostles then traveled and preached the word of Jesus.

⁵⁴D'Angelo, *Reconstructing*, 108.

⁵⁵D'Angelo, *Reconstructing*, 108.

⁵⁶ Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6.

II. The Texts – Mary of Magdala, the Apostle

The earliest surviving Christian texts are the letters of which Paul, therefore, become important when trying to find clues and evidence for defining apostleship. Paul does not become an apostle until after the death of Jesus. Paul claims his legitimacy of apostleship purely through a resurrection appearance. Paul writes, "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord."⁵⁷ His resurrection appearance gives the only proof for his experience and his community accepts. By his own definition, Paul ranks Mary of Magdala as an apostle by her resurrection appearance alone. He also writes further explaining his legitimacy for apostleship, in *Galatians*,

*For I did not receive it [gospel] from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.*⁵⁸

In both examples from Paul's letters apostleship comes from a resurrection appearance from Jesus and a commission to spread the news. Early

⁵⁷1 Corinthians 9:1-2

⁵⁸Galatians 1:12-17

Christian texts, including Paul add a few of the well-known followers of Jesus and portray them within a privileged position contrary to that of the rest of the group. For Paul, the community had yet to identify a group of only twelve apostles. Many apostles appeared to exist during Paul's lifetime because he mentions many in his letters.⁵⁹

Although the tradition of women apostles, for Christians, dates back to the Gospel of John and Paul's Letters, Thomas Aquinas condemns the addition of women apostles because he believes Jesus himself chose only men as apostles.⁶⁰ Jesus' teachings do not support that interpretation as the previous chapter proved. However, a long-standing tradition does exist of strong leadership from women including Mary of Magdala. Again, Paul states in Galatians, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."⁶¹ Without the distinction of male and female in the eyes of Jesus anyone can be an apostle and leader in the community. If women failed to have a place of distinction within the early church why leave Mary of Magdala as the first resurrection witness? Her fame existed farther than just in community and therefore leaving her out could never happen.

⁵⁹Brock, *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle*, 10-11.

⁶⁰Manfred Hauke and David Kipp, *Women in the Priesthood: A Systematic Analysis in the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1988), 425.

⁶¹*Galatians*, 3:28

The similarity of *The Gospels of Mark, Luke, and Matthew* results in *Mark* being one of the sources for *Luke* and *Matthew*. *The Gospel of John* also details an important resurrection story which scholars believe authors wrote independently of the synoptic gospels. First, in *The Gospel of Mark*, Mary of Magdala emerges as the first resurrection witness who Jesus entrusts to deliver the good news creating the first apostle. (Please see Appendix 1 for Resurrection Appearance text of the *Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John*.) The author of *Mark* places Mary of Magdala alone when speaking to Jesus which further legitimizes her importance. Mary of Magdala endures as a person worthy of an individual resurrection appearance. The call to take up the cross comes from *Mark* (8:34) and can be exemplified by Mary of Magdala because she takes it up first by telling the disciples of the resurrection appearance.

Contrary to *Mark*, *Luke* changes the scene and locates Mary of Magdala in the company of women who talk to an angel who tells them of the resurrection. As a result they tell the apostles. The goals of *Luke* can be ascertained from the selections he chooses to omit or add in the resurrection scene. Rather than having Mary of Magdala as the first resurrection witness, *Luke* puts Peter in the role as one of the first to see the resurrected Jesus (though he disguised himself, he showed himself to Peter first). Ann Brock says of *The Gospel of Luke*,

This significant difference provides the strongest evident for the thesis that the Gospel of Luke attempts to establish and defend the primacy of Peter

over the other apostles. The Gospel of Luke rather consistently differs from the other gospels by privileging Peter in its portrayal of the disciples.⁶²

The *Gospel of Luke* includes that Jesus drove seven devils out of Mary of Magdala. Why include that information? From what we know of *Luke*, any negative description of other apostles would further inflate the status of Peter and be a welcome addition. *Luke's* attempt to discredit Mary of Magdala appears to be a later extension to the original text. The *Gospel of Luke*, becomes the source of the 591 C.E. sermon by Pope Gregory the Great which made Mary of Magdala into a prostitute⁶³ through misinterpretation of *Luke*. *Luke* glorifies the importance of Peter, therefore, Mary of Magdala fails to participate in a resurrection appearance and receive a divine commission. *Luke* and other ancient authors use negative language and actions against Mary of Magdala because it decreases her legitimacy and power within the community. For different authors a certain apostle would be viewed in the most positive light (Peter) and other more negatively (Mary).

Conversely to *The Gospels of Luke and Mark*, *The Gospel of John* provides definite grounds for Mary of Magdala's apostleship. Mary of Magdala's role as supreme apostle comes from the *Gospel of John 20:18*, which calls her *Apostola Apostolorum* (i.e. *Apostle of Apostles*). *The Gospel*

⁶²Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*, 19.

⁶³Ehman, *Truth and Fiction*, 161.

of *John 20:18* states, "Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her." Although John does not use the phrase Apostle of Apostles exactly, the intent he conveys with words gives Mary of Magdala a place of honor within the community. *John* also fails to name the twelve apostles, however to find twelve apostles within *John*, one must include three women including Mary of Magdala.

However, the author never uses the specific term of apostle to describe anyone in the text. The account of the empty tomb and Jesus himself coming to Mary of Magdala gives credence to her high status in the community over the male apostles. Jesus says earlier to Mary of Magdala, "go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"⁶⁴ (20:17). For John, Mary of Magdala alone, received the first and full impact of the resurrected Jesus and he commissioned her to deliver the message to the other apostles. John creates strong female leadership models within his text. Contrary to Luke, who used women as silent in their acceptable roles in Roman imperial society rather than as leaders, John used terms such as "friends of Jesus" for women.⁶⁵ Terms such as those denoted a coveted role of discipleship if

⁶⁴Gospel of John, 20:17.

⁶⁵D'Angelo, *Reconstructing "Real" Women from Gospel Literature: The Case of Mary Magdalene*, 107.

not apostleship.⁶⁶

The Dialogue of the Savior bears witness as an example to female apostleship in a leadership role. Mary of Magdala exists as one of only three disciples who dominate the text. Very little of *The Dialogue of the Savior* still exists today. Like the *Pistis Sophia* mentioned later, Mary of Magdala asks the most intelligent questions and understands everything said. In fact, many times when Mary of Magdala speaks she interprets what Jesus said as opposed to questioning. As an example the text says, "She spoke this utterance as a woman who understood everything."⁶⁷ A woman who knew everything could not merely be thought of as a disciple. Mary of Magdala represents the most positive representation of a disciple in the text. She listens and interprets, and Jesus says that she "make[s] clear the abundance of the revealer."⁶⁸ An extremely important person, such as Mary of Magdala, participates in the group with the highest status possible (i.e. Apostle). The *Dialogue* remains an excellent representation of an early memory of an elect group of Jesus' followers that includes Mary of Magdala. Fourteen of twenty-seven questions come from Mary of Magdala which gives

⁶⁶D'Angelo, *Representations of Women in the Gospels: John and Mark*, 131.

⁶⁷Meyer, *Dialogue of the Savior*, 59.

⁶⁸James M. Robinson, *Dialogue of the Savior*. The Gnostic Society Library, <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/dialog.html> (Accessed February 22, 2005).

her a very prominent voice in the text.⁶⁹ Mary of Magdala dominates the *Dialogue of the Savior* signifying her importance in the early Christian community.

III. The Texts – Mary of Magdala vs. Simon Peter/Peter

Much like Plato's dialogues in structure, *The Gospel of Mary* identified Mary of Magdala as possessing *gnosis* (knowledge). She also acted as a teacher of knowledge revealed to her by Jesus who possessed all the *gnosis*.⁷⁰ Karen King wrote, "

The Gospel of Mary begins the tradition of animosity of Peter to Mary of Magdala (or Male Apostles vs. Female Apostles). The *Gospel of Mary*, the only existing early Christian gospel written by a woman, places Mary of Magdala just below that of Jesus, much to the distaste of Peter. She asks the most and wisest questions, as well as, having visions of Jesus. Although Jesus leaves the apostles, Mary leads the group from total despair by sharing a secret revelation Jesus gave her prior to his death. Jesus praises Mary's behavior because she remains stable at the sight of a divine being when normally people fear.⁷¹ Karen L. King gives a wonderful description of the of the role of Mary of Magdala within *The Gospel of Mary*,

⁶⁹Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*, 98-99.

⁷⁰Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, 35.

⁷¹ Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rose, CA: Polebridge Press, 1993), 32.

Mary is clearly portrayed throughout the *Gospel* as an exemplary disciple. She does not falter when the Savior departs. She steps into his place after his departure, comforting, strengthening, and instructing the others. Her spiritual comprehension and spiritual maturity are demonstrated in her calm behavior and especially in her visionary experience. These are once provide evidence of her spiritual maturity and form the basis of her legitimate exercise of authority in instructing the other disciples. She does not teach in her own name but passes on the words of the Savior, calming the disciples and turning their hearts toward Good. Her character proves the truth of her teaching, and by extension authorizes the teaching of the *Gospel of Mary*—and it does so by opposing her to those apostles who reject women’s authority and preach another gospel, laying down laws beyond which the Savior taught.⁷²

Everyone but Mary of Magdala despairs and her steadfast attitude saves the day. Mary’s first speech details the other disciple’s weaknesses: they grieve, they weep, they fail to trust.⁷³ The following passage describes the intelligence and status of Mary within the group. She steps into the role of leader as an apostle, equal to everyone, and not as a woman in the background without a say in the activities of the group. Not only does she reassure them, but she also details a secret teaching from Jesus that he imparted to Mary alone. The *Gospel of Mary* says,

After he had said these things, he departed from them. But they were distressed and wept greatly. "How are we going to go out to the rest of the world to announce the good news about the Realm of the child of true Humanity?" they said. "If they did not spare him, how will they spare us?" Then Mary stood up. She greeted them all, addressing her brothers and sisters, "Do not weep and be distressed nor let your hearts be irresolute. For his grace will be with you all and will shelter you. Rather we should praise his greatness, for he has prepared us and made us true Human beings." When Mary said these things, she turned their hearts [to]ward the Good,

⁷²King, *Gospel of Mary*, 73-74.

⁷³Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (NY: Continuum International Publishing, 2003), 171.

and they began to deba[t]e about the wor[d]s of the [Savior].⁷⁴

The other disciples give up at the departure of Jesus, wallowing in self doubt. Yet, Mary of Magdala shrugs any doubt away to bring the disciples back to Good and remind them of all that transpired.

In *The Gospel of Mary*, Mary of Magdala lightens and restores the disciples while Peter attacks the status of Mary within the group. Peter feels the need to dominate while Mary of Magdala continues to call him brother trying to sooth the situation instead of fighting.⁷⁵ Peter states, in the text,

Did he, then speak with a woman in private without our knowing about it? Are we to turn around and listen to her? Did he choose her over us? . . . [Mary responds], "My brother Peter, what are you imagining? Do you think that I have thought up these things by myself in my heard or that I am telling lies about the Savior?" . . . [To solve the argument Levi answers], "Peter, you have always been a wrathful person. Now I see you contending against the woman like Adversaries. For if the Savior made her worthy, who are you then for your part to reject her? Assuredly the Savior's knowledge of her is completely reliable. That is why he loved her more than us. Rather we should be ashamed. We should clothe our selves with the perfect Human, acquire it for ourselves as he commanded us, and announce the good news, not laying down any other rule or law that differs from what the Savior said."⁷⁶

Peter acts toward Mary as an enemy would because he feels threatened by her close relationship with Jesus. Evidently, within the early Christian group the problem of men and women came up frequently and this passage illustrates how some groups dealt with the issue. Peter continues to be the

⁷⁴King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 14-15.

⁷⁵Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 180.

⁷⁶King, *Gospel of Mary*, 17-18.

antithesis of the group that wrote *The Gospel of Mary*. *1 Corinthians 12:34* details Peter's ideas on the subject of women and says, "the women should keep silence in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, even as the law says." Why say a statement such as that unless women spoke and people heard them within the community? The *Gospel of Mary* showcases the gender struggles within some early Christian communities.⁷⁷

The Gospel of Thomas also deals with the issue of women within the Kingdom of God. Like the *Gospel of Mary*, Peter questions the role a woman can have in the community.

Peter said to them, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life." Jesus said, "Look, I shall guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you male. For every female who makes herself male will enter heaven's kingdom."⁷⁸

Peter desires to kick Mary of Magdala out of the inner circle of religious discussion. He even goes so far as to say women should not exist. Yet, Jesus disagrees with Peter and she remains part of the group and in an important role. For early Christians, the role of women within the community remained an unresolved issue which numerous texts attempt to settle. Contrary to Peter's opinions, Jesus goes against convention and says that both women and men can enter the Kingdom of God.

⁷⁷Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 178.

⁷⁸"The Gospel of Thomas," *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make it into the New Testament*, ed. Bart Ehrman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 28.

Peter's animosity for Mary of Magdala arises up in another text called *Pistis Sophia* (Greek for Faith Wisdom). The *Pistis Sophia* details gnostic reflections and revelations about Faith Wisdom, describes the female manifestation of the divine.⁷⁹ According to Carl Schmidt, Mary of Magdala asks thirty-nine of the forty-six questions asked⁸⁰ and as a result, Peter says,

*"My master, we cannot endure this woman who gets in our way and does not let any of us speak, though she talks all the time . . . Mary came forward and said, 'My master, I understand in my mind that I can come forward at any time to interpret what Pistis Sophia has said, but I am afraid of Peter, because he threatens me and hates our gender . . . Any of those filled with the spirit of light will come forward to interpret what I say: no one will be able to oppose them."*⁸¹

Mary dominates *Pistis Sophia* with her questions and interpretations.⁸²

Peter's first comments come in the form of the above quotation which accuses Mary. Peter sets the stage for the confrontation and Jesus, again, takes Mary's side. Jesus says to Mary, "Well done, Mary, pure spiritual

⁷⁹Marvin Meyer, *The Gospels of Mary: The Secret Tradition of Mary Magdalene the Companion of Jesus* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 64.

⁸⁰Carl Schmidt and Violet McDermot, eds. *Pistis Sophia*. Nag Hammadi Studies 9. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).

⁸¹"*Pistis Sophia*," *The Gospels of Mary: The Secret Tradition of Mary Magdalene The Companion of Jesus*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Esther A. DeBoer, (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 68.

⁸²Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 133.

woman. This is the interpretation of the word."⁸³ Jesus does not call any other disciple pure spirit other than Mary. Mary holds a special place in the community. Jesus legitimatizes Mary's status as well as her right to both question and interpret.

The *Gospel of Phillip* differs greatly from the other gnostic texts because of the sexual imagery used to describe the relationship with the divine. Gnostics felt the use of sexual allegory clearly defined intense intellectual truths. The authors (disciples of Valentinus, 2nd Century mystic, teacher, and preacher in Alexandria and Rome, and candidate for Pope) write much of the text using symbols and images. Scholars remain split on the true nature of the sexual imagery as physical or spiritual.⁸⁴ In the act of interpretation one accesses the truth, according to the Gospel of Phillip, "Truth did not come into the world naked but in symbols and images. The world cannot receive truth in any other way."⁸⁵ These symbols aid in the interpretation of Mary of Magdala's status. The other disciples give the opportunity to discuss the privileged position of Mary of Magdala when the text details,

Wisdom, who is called barren, is the mother of the angels. The companion of the [savior] is Mary Magdalene. The [savior loved] her more than [all] the disciples. [and he] kissed her often on her []. The [disciples] said to him,

⁸³Meyer, "Pistis Sophia," 69.

⁸⁴Meyer, *The Gospels of Mary*, 37.

⁸⁵Meyer, *The Gospel of Phillip*, 50.

"Why do you love her more than all of us?" The savior answered and said to them, "Why do I not love you like her? If a blind person and one who can see are both in darkness, they are the same. When the light comes, one who can see will see the light, and the blind person will stay in the darkness."⁸⁶

Where Jesus places the kiss becomes unimportant because the act itself legitimizes Mary of Magdala's place within the community. The kiss itself could be a symbolic way to legitimize the power and status of Mary of Magdala within the group and be the way in which Jesus gives her power. Regardless of the symbolism, for the community, Mary of Magdala played an extremely important role in the interpretation of the word of Jesus. Not only does Jesus kiss Mary of Magdala, but the author of the text calls her companion to Jesus. The authors do not call any other disciple the companion of Jesus.⁸⁷ Therefore, Mary of Magdala played a key role as the second only to Jesus.

Through imagery, dialog, interpretation, and symbolism Mary of Magdala emerges as an apostle whom orthodox authors tried to hide from view. However, with the addition of gnostic and orthodox texts together we draw a firm picture of a woman who lead her community after the death of its founder. Many opposed her, such as Peter however, she had little trouble bypassing his issues with the help of Jesus's ideas of women. Mary of Magdala became the apostle of apostles.

⁸⁶Meyer, *Gospel of Philip*, 49.

⁸⁷Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 152.

Appendix 1

Differences of Mark, Luke, and John at the resurrection scene . . .

Mark (16:1-10)	Luke (23:55-10)	John (20:11-16)
<p><i>When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' When they looked up they saw that the stone which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look there is the place they laid him. But go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as told you.' So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid. Now after he rose early on the first say of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with im, while they were mourning and weeping.</i></p>	<p><i>The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.</i></p>	<p><i>But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she weep, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she say two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that is was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (Which means teacher and a more solemn variation of teacher)</i></p>

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_____. (2005) *Apostle*. Retrieved February 21, 2005, from Dictionary.com
Web site: <http://www.dictionary.com/>.

A very use dictionary site that searches over 20 different definitions of words including word origins. Whenever a definition is needed, dictionary.com gives the most concise and understandable. The definitions are also tied to the modern definition of the word which is important too. The way that society today views a word might differ from that in ancient times and it is important to know the difference.

Aland, Barbara and Aland, Kurt. *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, 2nd ed., tr. Erroll F. Rhodes. Grand Rapids, Mich. : Erdmans, 1989.

Another text on the problems inherent with using the New Testament as a source. The text proved to be very technical, however, extremely well written and gave another level of thinking about translations and textual criticism.

Begg, Ean. *The Cult of the Black Virgin*. Boston: Arkana, 1985.

Begg's chapter on Lilith was of great use. The text in part illustrates the role of Mary Magdalene as a heroic character in the New Testament because it is she who stays with Jesus throughout the trial. She does not appear anything like Lilith or Salome who merely use their seductive power while Mary uses hers actively and therefore heroically. The author uses psychology to realize many of her conclusions.

Brock, Ann Graham. *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority*. Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003.

The book begins on finding the meaning of being an apostle and its requirements. Brock uses Biblical and Gnostic texts to lay out the argument and possible interpretations of female apostleship. The Peter vs. Mary of Magdala issue plays a key role in this text. The author has a PH.D. from Harvard University and is a lecturer who has taught at several universities.

Chatzitheodorou, Ilias. (2001). "Problems of Bible Translation." Retrieved

February 21, 2005, from Translation Journal Web site:
<http://accurapid.com/journal/18bible.htm>.

An online journal that looks at problems with translations. This article further developed the problems with translating the Bible. Issues from theological (faith impacting word choice) and language.

D'Angelo, Mary Rose. "(Re)Presentation of Women in the Gospels: *John* and *Mark*." *Women & Christian Origins*. Ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 129-149.

D'Angelo (theology, Univ. of Notre Dame) uses *John and Mark* in order to understand Women in early Christianity. She analyzes women's representation and roles in ancient Mediterranean Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. One of many articles found in *Women & Christian Origins* dealing with Mary of Magdala. This source was extremely helpful because it looked at specific gospels and interpreted them.

D'Angelo, Mary Rose. "Reconstructing 'Real' Women from Gospel Literature: The Case of Mary Magdalene." *Women & Christian Origins*. Ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 105-128.

Another article by D'Angelo that focuses on women throughout the gospel tradition. She spends the majority of the article looking directly at Mary of Magdala in gnostic and canonical sources. She gives more importance to *John* and the *Gospel of Mary* than *Mark*.

_____. (2005). *Developing Biblical Literacy*. Retrieved February 21, 2005, from Western Illinois University, Religious Studies 207 Web site:
<http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfjks/207i4.html>.

The website, created by a professor at Western Illinois University, concisely goes through all the ideas behind the origins of the Bible. The source appears to be a map for a religion class as a way for students to easily understand the issues behind Biblical interpretation and history.

_____. (2005) *Did Jesus have brothers and sisters (siblings)?*. Retrieved March 17, 2005, from GotQuestions.Org Web site:
<http://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-siblings.html>.

The source itself is not the best, however, I used it in order to

discover those portions of the Bible that mention the family of Jesus. The website helped as a springboard to specific passages in the New Testament.

Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make it into the New Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

The actual lost gospels are in this book including Philip, Mary, and Acts of Thecla. They are important for the research of Mary Magdalene. The translations are extremely good and the author is well known in his field. The use of his book in a religion class prompted me to look at his commentary and recommendations.

Ehrman, Bart D. *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

An excellent source of the orthodox creation of the New Testament. Ehrman writes that winners write history and produce the texts. He further looks at the relationship of social history and a the textual tradition of the New Testament/early Christianity. He also proved extremely helpful in understanding the problems inherent with translations and copying.

Ehrman, Bart D. *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code: A Historian Reveals What We Really Know About Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

With the publication of the Da Vinci Code, many people had questions about how much of the text was fictionalized. Ehrman looks at the book, point for point, and states where Dan Brown fictionalized and where historical texts support the book.

Gathagan, Laura. "Medieval Society." History 329: Medieval Culture and Society. SUNY Cortland, Cortland. 26 Aug. 2004.

Gathagan is a scholar of Medieval History. Her lecture included the effects of Constantine on early Christianity and its impact beyond his death. She also attempted to interpret the differences that occurred with the legalization of Christianity and later when it became the official religion of the empire.

_____. "Gnosticism." *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 15th edition. 1992.

Gnosticism is a hard idea to conceptualize and the *Anchor Bible*

Dictionary does a good job of simplifying the issue. Within a few pages the idea and difficulties of the group of people considered Gnostics becomes clear.

Graves, Robert and Raphael Patai. *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis*. New York: Doubleday, 1964.

Graves and Patai collected Hebrew myths that are related to those in the Book of Genesis. The most important chapter for Lilith included "Adam's Helpmeets", that dealt with the Lilith mythology. The authors comment on the myth as well as include the original text translated. An excellent source for Lilith myths.

Hauke, Manfred and David Kipp. *Women in the Priesthood: A Systematic Analysis in the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1988.

Although this text tries to disprove the point I am trying to make in my thesis, I thought it was important to view the other side of the argument. Manfred Hauke wrote a work that looks at the idea of ordination of women. He of course believed that ordination of women is against scripture and Tradition. However, he provides extensive background to both sides of the argument (Philosophical and theological in different religions).

Hoeller, Stephan A. (1997, September). *The Genesis Factor*. Retrieved February 21, 2005, from Quest Web site:
<http://www.gnosis.org/genesis.html>.

Hoeller gives a different interpretation of Genesis. He interprets Adam and Eve throughout Gnostic sources. Also, Hoeller explains what Adam and Eve symbolically meant to the Gnostics.

Hoffmann, Joseph. "Cosmology and the Mythic Origins of Gender: Sexuality in Sacred Texts." Religion 375: Sex and Gender in Antiquity. Wells College, Aurora. 17 Mar. 2005.

A lecture in Religion 375 that focused on Lilith and her place in sacred texts. The class discussed the topic in detail and much of the information became relevant to my thesis as time went on. We discussed Hesiod's *Theogony*, *Genesis 1-4*, and *The Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. The most relevant to my thesis was *Genesis 1-4* because Lilith comes from the Jewish mythology. We also used the following website in the class:

<<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~hummm/Topics/Lilith/>>.

Humm, Alan. (2001, February). *Lilith*. Retrieved February 17, 2005, from University of Pennsylvania, Department of Religious Studies Web site: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~hummm/Topics/Lilith/>.

Humm created the website as a resource online for Lilith. He includes links to The Gnostic Library, Lilith Literature, Rabbinical Sources, artwork, and modern versions of her story. A wonderful encompassing source for Lilith online.

Humm, Alan. (2001, February). *Lilith's Origins*. Retrieved February 17, 2005, from University of Pennsylvania, Department of Religious Studies Web site: <http://www.hist.upenn.edu/~hummm/Topics/Lilith/origin.html>.

Humm includes Zohar 1:34b in his website. This passage is important because it details the idea of an androgynous Adam and Lilith. It is important to understand the different myths of the origins of life. Humm creates a good source of knowledge that became extremely helpful to me while researching the different places the mythology of Lilith arose.

Hurwitz, Siegmund. *Lilith, the First Eve: Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine*. Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon Verlag, 1980.

The psychological aspects were not helpful, however, Hurwitz gave a fairly detailed history of Lilith. The author, not being a religious scholar, gave key outside insight on the Lilith myth.

Jansen, Katherine Ludwig. *The Making of the Magdalen*. NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

The author details life of Mary and further investigates the idea that Mary Magdalen evangelized Southern Gaul. Jansen gives evidence in support of the evangelization. She also details the evolution of Mary into the prostitute of today in the Middle Ages. Evidence includes the unpublished sermons of many friars and also with evidence both visually and textual. Jansen is a scholar and assistant professor of history.

King, Karen L. *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle*. Santa Rose, CA: Polebridge Press, 1993.

One of the most helpful texts that I used. Karen King wrote a wonderful new translation of the Gospel of Mary and gave concise details of the early Christian community that wrote such a text. Many authors source King in their own works including Martin Meyer and Jane Schaberg.

McGrath, Alister E. "Athenagoras of Athens on the Christian God." *The Christian Theology Reader*. 2nd ed. 2002.

McGrath wrote a large text of hundreds of different writings of Ancient authors. He represents many ideas from the Resurrection to the ideas of what it means to be a Christian. Both Christian and Non-Christian authors are included. A wonderful resources for early Christian documents in one source.

Kramer Wolkstein, Diane & Samuel Noah. *Inanna queen of heaven and earth: Her stories and hymns from Sumer*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1983.

An important book because within the mythology of Inanna, Lilith enters for the first time in *Inanna and the Hullupa Tree*. The text looks at Sumerian culture in its many different aspects. The volume includes brief essays on Sumerian history, the story of how the tablets are collection and translated resulting in an analysis of the works by Wolkstein. The background of Sumerian culture makes understanding Lilith within it.

Malvern, Marjorie M. *Venus in Sackcloth: The Magdalen's Origins and Metamorphoses*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975.

Malvern goes through each of the synoptic gospels and interprets Mary's role in them. Using sculpture and paintings, she analyzes the importance of Mary of Magdala and her digression into a prostitute in the biblical record.

Myers, Carol, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer. *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*. New York City, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000.

This book attempts to identify every woman and group of women within the Bible, whether named or unnamed. Lilith and Mary of Magdala were my focus and use of the text. The text works much like a conventional dictionary. Many authors and editors contributed to the over

700 article text.

Omanson, Roger L. *Can You Get There from Here? Problems in Bible Translation*. Ed. Harry Adam, Grace Adams, Ted Brock, Winnie Brock, William E. Chapman, Dick and Sue Kendall, Herb Lowe, June Lowe, Paul Mobley, and John C. Purdy. Retrieved February 21, 2005, from Religion-Online.org Web site:
<<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=975>>.

An article detailing the problems inherent with working with different translations of Bibles. The database of religious articles is an important resource if one does not have access to many of the books concerning translation. Mr. Omanson is quoted on many sights and his opinions are respected within the field of translation and he consulted for the United Bible Societies.

Patai, Raphael. *The Hebrew Goddess*. US: KTAV Publishing House, INC., 1976.

The book looks at the Jewish polytheism and the popular manifestation in times past of the veneration of a goddess. Although not totally related to Mary Magdalene, it is important to understand the Goddess worship that existed within the Jewish faith to understand the role and acceptance of leadership roles for women. Without the existence of Goddess worship it is difficult to understand how Mary Magdalene could have been considered an apostle. Her background comes from anthropology.

Plato. *The Symposium*. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

The most important part of the Symposium for Lilith is the idea of the androgynous idea of early human origins. Aristophanes idea of the dual body of male and female forever seeking their other half becomes important when trying to understand the idea of androgyny.

Rappoport, Angelo S. *Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel*. London: Senate, 1995.

This text includes the Alphabetum Siracidis (Sepher Ben Sira) which mentions the tale of Lilith. Rappoport translated the Rabbinical source of the Lilith mythology of the early Jewish tradition. An important source that many books on the subject of Lilith utilize.

Schaberg, Jane. *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament*. NY: Continuum International Publishing, 2003.

Schaberg looks at the legend, apocryphal writing and biblical ideas to understand the "real" Mary of Magdala. She decides that Mary became denigrated because she was extremely powerful within the community and closer to Jesus than John the Baptist. She also suggests that Mary of Magdala was Jesus' Elisha.

Torjesen, Karen Jo. *When Women were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity*. CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

The topic of the book states the topic of my inquiry. The writing of other women in leadership roles becomes important in trying to find the regular woman in Jewish society at the time of early Christianity and as a result the life of Mary. What kind of life did she live and grow up in. What was expected of her and were leadership roles open to women of means? This book answers many of the previous questions and proved helpful in gathering more sources of women in Judaism.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translation Studies Reader*. London, England: Routledge, 2000.

Lawrence Venuti is Professor of English at Temple University. The reader gives translation theory and research as well as the history of translation from the last thirty years. This book became important when trying to understand the problems with consistency within different translations of the Bible.

James M. Robinson, "Dialogue of the Savior," The Gnostic Society Library, <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/dialog.html> (Accessed February 22, 2005).