

Tackling the *Da Vinci Code* 2

Who was Mary Magdalene?
What Was the Role of Women
in the Early Church?

**In *The Da Vinci*
Code...**

In *The Da Vinci Code*

- Mary Magdalene is the:
 - Wife of Jesus:
 - A “fact” explored endlessly by historians (p. 245, 249)
 - Known through the Gnostic Gospels, including the *Gospel of Philip* (p. 246) and the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* (p. 247)
 - Mother of His Children
 - After Jesus’ death, Mary fled to France to escape persecution by the Catholic Church

In *The Da Vinci Code*

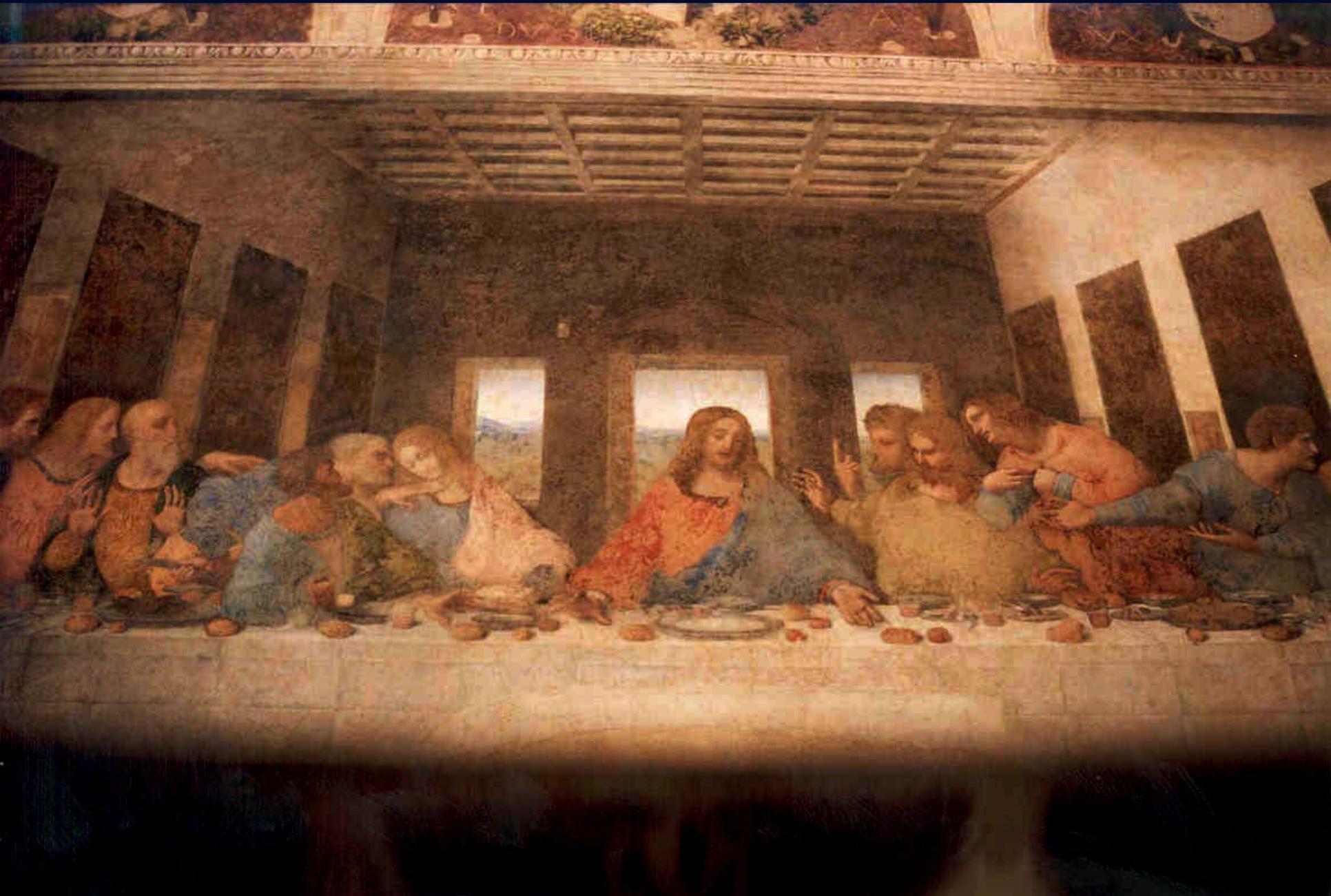
- Mary Magdalene, not a chalice, was the Holy Grail (the sacred vessel containing the bloodline of Jesus) (p. 236-39; p.243-246; p. 253)
 - Jesus taught this (p. 242)
 - Quest for the Holy Grail is the search for the resting place of Mary Magdalene (p. 257)

In *The Da Vinci Code*

- Church tried to suppress these truths for fear it would undermine its claims of the divinity of Jesus. The church:
 - Slandered Mary's name (p. 244, 249, 254, 261)
 - Labeled her a prostitute out of spite (p. 244) and “in order to erase evidence of her powerful family ties” (p. 249)
 - Campaign included murder and violence (p. 266)
 - Continues in less violent form today (p. 407)

In *The Da Vinci Code*

- However a secret society preserved the truth about Mary and protected the descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene
- Leonardo da Vinci was a member of this society, and painted Mary into his painting *The Last Supper*
 - “V” shape between Jesus and the reputed Mary said to be a symbol of the feminine



In *The Da Vinci Code*

- Jesus was a feminist intent on creating an egalitarian community free from male authority (p. 248)
- Mary Magdalene was meant to be the head disciple, not Peter
- The church's suppression of the truth of Mary Magdalene is part of a more sweeping suppression of the "sacred" or "divine" feminine
- Global peace will be restored only when there is a return to the ancient worship of the goddess

Mary Magdalene in the New Testament

In the New Testament

Introduction

- 1. Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:30-31)
- 2. Mary of Bethany (John 11:1)
- 3. Mary, the mother of James who was not the Lord's brother (Matthew 27:56)
- 4. Mary, the wife of Clopas (John 19:25)
- 5. Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12)
- 6. Mary, otherwise unidentified (Romans 16:6)
- 7. Mary of Magdala = Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2)

In the New Testament

Introduction

- Mary: modern form of the Jewish name **Miriam** (prophetess of Old Testament fame, Exodus 15:20-21)
- Magdela = Migdal. A very tiny fishing village on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee
- Ancient Near Eastern peoples distinguished other persons with same first name through:
 - their place of birth or residence
 - (for women): reference to husband or son

In the New Testament

Introduction

- That Mary Magdalene is not distinguished by her husband or son suggests:
 - She had neither husband or son
 - She was in control of her own property

In the New Testament

Introduction

- Mary Magdalene is a major figure in the New Testament:
 - 1. One of the original traveling disciples of Jesus
 - 2. Present at Jesus' death
 - 3. One of the first, or perhaps the first to visit Jesus' tomb
 - 4. The first to see the risen Lord
 - 5. The first to testify to the Resurrection to the male disciples

In the New Testament

Traveling Disciple

- Luke 8:1-3: first mention of Mary Magdalene
- A follower of Jesus
- Jesus had cast 7 demons out of her
 - 7: the number of completion or perfection
 - Casting out of “demons” may have referred to:
 - Mental illness or epilepsy
 - Spiritual illness from demonic occult and astrological practices

In the New Testament

Traveling Disciple

- She and other women traveled with the disciples and provided for them
 - May mean she was a person of means
 - Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's estate manager also part of the retinue of women traveling with Jesus
- Itinerant Jewish preachers with a retinue of male disciples was not common

In the New Testament

Traveling Disciple

- Traveling with a retinue of male and female disciples was unprecedented and scandalous
 - Men and women were supposed to travel together only with their own family
 - That Jesus called his disciples “brothers” and “sisters,” did not assuage the scandal
 - He had intentionally given women a greater role in his ministry than what was acceptable to the society at large
 - Mary’s possible past association with the demonic did not disqualify her as a traveling disciple

In the New Testament

Going to Jerusalem for Passover

- Next mention of Mary Magdalene in the Passion narratives
- Matthew 27:55-56: she and several other women traveled with Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration
 - Jesus had continued to have women traveling disciples
 - Mary had likely stuck with the traveling group throughout Jesus' ministry
 - Shows her devotion to Jesus despite the risk of becoming an outcast for traveling with Jesus in an “honor and shame” culture

In the New Testament

At the Cross

- Mark 15:40-41: Mary part of a group of women (Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and Salome) who watch the crucifixion from afar
 - Mary Magdalene first on the list
 - Jesus' male disciples not present, having denied or deserted him

In the New Testament

Burial of Jesus

- Mark 15:47: Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph see Jesus buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb

In the New Testament

Visiting the Tomb

- Mark 16:1-8, Matthew 28:1-7: the two Marys and Salome come to the tomb on Easter morning and find the empty tomb
 - They encounter an angel, who tells them Jesus has been raised

In the New Testament

Encountering the Risen Jesus

- Mark 16:9-20, Matthew 28:8-10, John 20:1-18
Jesus encounters Mary Magdalene
 - Ending Mark 16:9-20 not found in the best manuscripts of Mark
 - John 20:1-18 likely a fuller version of Matthew 28:8-10

In the New Testament

Encountering the Risen Jesus

- John 20:1-18 
- Focuses on the experience of Mary Magdalene encountering the risen Lord, although others may have been with her (John 20:2)
- John 20:11: Mary sees angels in the tomb where Peter did not
 - Suggests she is more spiritually perceptive?

In the New Testament

Encountering the Risen Jesus

- She initially does not recognize Jesus, mistaking him for the gardener
- Only when Jesus calls her by name does she recognize him
 - Recall John 10:3-4: “The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.” (NRSV)

In the New Testament

Encountering the Risen Jesus

- Mary calls Jesus *Rabbouni*, “my teacher,” / “my master”
- Jesus commands her not to “cling” or “hold” him, but to proclaim to the disciples that he is risen and she has seen her
 - No need to evoke here that Mary’s desire to embrace Jesus was because they were married
- So commissioned by Jesus, Mary goes forth and witnesses to the Resurrection
 - Jesus entrusting this commission to Mary raises serious questions for those who would place limits on the role of women in ministry

In the New Testament

Encountering the Risen Jesus

- The integrity of this story attested to by:
 - Use of a women as a witness of the risen Jesus
 - Not considered reliable witnesses in the patriarchal society of the day
 - In a culture hungry for miracles, the Resurrection itself not described

Mary Magdalene in the Early Church

Early Church

General

- The Church Fathers in the early church portrayed Mary Magdalene as:
 - a faithful disciple and follower of Jesus
 - a witness to the Jesus' death, burial and Resurrection

Early Church

Apostle to the Apostles

- In Church Father Hippolytus' (170-236) commentary on the Song of Songs 24-26
 - **“Lest the female apostles doubt the angels, Christ himself came to them so that women would be apostles of Christ and by their obedience rectify the sin of ancient Eve... Christ himself showed himself to the (male) apostles and said to them: ‘It is I who appeared to these women and I who wanted to send them to you as apostles.’”**
- Early Christians referred to Mary Magdalene as the “apostle to the apostles”

Early Church

The New Eve

- Saint Ambrose (340-397): Was popular Roman Governor of Liguria and Aemelia, later Bishop of Milan
- Saint Augustine (354-430): baptized by Ambrose, later became bishop of Hippo (modern Annaba, Algeria)

Early Church

The New Eve

“The high regard for Mary Magdalene continues in the fourth and fifth-century Latin fathers of the church. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, associated Mary Magdalene with the New Eve who clings to Christ as the new Tree of Life, thereby reversing the unfaithfulness of the first Eve.”

- Rosemary Radford Ruether, theologian

Early Church

The New Eve

“Augustine maintains this view, pairing Mary Magdalene with Christ as symbol of the New Eve and the church in relation to Christ as the New Adam. Her faithfulness reversed the sin of the first Eve.”

- Rosemary Radford Ruether, theologian

Early Church

Repentant Prostitute

- On September 21, 591, Pope Gregory I (Gregory the Great) preached a homily at the Basilica of San Clemente in Rome on Luke 7:36-50, and merged two (three?) gospel figures into Mary Magdalene:
 - The unnamed sinner of Luke 7:36-50 (Prostitute? Adulteress?) who bathed Jesus feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with a jar of oil she had brought with her
 - Identified in John 11:1-2 as Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus
 - Mary Magdalene

Early Church

Repentant Prostitute

“She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be Mary from whom seven devils were ejected, according to Mark. And what did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices?... It is clear, brothers, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts. What she therefore displayed more scandalously, she was now offering to God in a more praiseworthy manner. She had coveted with earthly eyes, but now through penitence these are consumed with tears.

Early Church

Repentant Prostitute

She displayed her hair to set off her face, but now her hair dries with tears. She had spoken proud things with her mouth, but in kissing the Lord's feet, she now planted her mouth on the Redeemer's feet. For every delight, therefore, she had had in herself, she now immolated herself. She turned the mass of her crimes to virtues, in order to serve God entirely in penance, for as much as she had wrongly held God in contempt”

- From sermon by Gregory I, Bishop of Rome, Sep. 21, 591

Early Church

Repentant Prostitute

- This began a tradition in the Western Church of identifying **Mary Magdalene** with the **unnamed Sinner of Luke 7:36-50**, who bathed Jesus feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with a jar of oil she had brought
 - Perhaps the same person as Mary of Bethany in John 11:1-2

Early Church

Repentant Prostitute

- Eastern Church never followed this tradition, maintaining separate feast days for each of the three:
 - **March 21:** the Unnamed Sinner
 - **March 18:** Mary of Bethany
 - **July 22:** Mary Magdalene

Early Church

Repentant Prostitute

■ *Some Context:*

- Gregory born in Rome 540 to family of the old Roman aristocracy. Became a monk in 574.
- Rome of Gregory's day a far cry from the glories of the Roman Empire. City had been under repeated sieges, conquered and re-conquered in wars between the Byzantines and Ostrogoths and later Lombards
- Aqueducts and drainage had fallen into disrepair; disease was rife
- It was an age of superstition and credulity

Early Church

Repentant Prostitute

- **590:** heavy floods destroyed food stores. A disastrous period of plague and hunger followed. Pope Pelagius II, Gregory and other monks tried to restore sanitation, bury the dead, feed the hungry
- The ill had frequent hallucinations, and rumors were rampant (a great dragon had emerged from the Tiber, Death personified stalked the streets, fire rained from heaven)
- Pope Pelagius II himself died of the plague; Gregory was elected to replace him by the clergy and people on September 3, 590.

Early Church

Repentant Prostitute

- Gregory accepted his election reluctantly
 - Wrote Emperor in Constantinople (who had to approve appointments to such an important see) asking that his appointment be annulled
 - Chose name “servant of the servants of God”
- He was convinced the end of the world was near, and his own health was poor, yet he took up the new position with unbounded zeal
- In the midst of the famine and plague, his sermons were often on approaching judgment and the need to repent

Mary Magdalene in Gnostic Sources

Gnostic Sources

Gnosticism

- Gnosticism, characterized by:
 - Radical doctrine of Creation
 - The world created by an evil, inferior being
 - Matter, our bodies evil, hence things to escape from
 - Radical doctrine of Salvation
 - Salvation achieved through the knowledge and discernment of who we really are: creatures with a spark of divinity trapped in an evil body
 - Such knowledge will allow us to navigate our way to heaven after we die

Gnostic Sources

Cited in *The Da Vinci Code*

- Two Gnostic sources are cited in *The Da Vinci Code* as showing Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene:
 - *Gospel of Philip* (p. 246)
 - *Gospel of Mary of Magdala* (p. 247)

Gnostic Sources

Gospel of Philip

A very speculative reading from *Gospel of Philip* (about 250 AD):

“the consort of Christ is Mary Magdalene. The [Lord loved Mary] more than all the disciples, and he kissed her on the [mouth many times].”

- **Lost Scriptures**, p. 42. Bart D. Ehrman

Gnostic Sources

Gospel of Philip

“And the companion of the [small gap] Mary Magdalene [small gap] her more than [small gap] the disciples [small gap] kiss her [small gap] on her [gap].” (Lost Christianities, p. 122. Bart D. Ehrman)

- *koinonos* = “companion.” Greek loan word. Can mean:
 - “wife” (but usually “*gyne*” would be used)
 - “sister” in a spiritual sense

Gnostic Sources

Gospel of Philip

- Too many gaps to make any definitive interpretation
- A kiss not necessarily sexual:
 - An earlier section in *Gospel of Philip* discusses a nonsexual kiss of fellowship between believers, referring to an intimate reception of spiritual teaching
 - The Gnostic *Gospels of James* has Jesus impart a secret mystery to James by kissing him on the mouth and calling him “My beloved!”

Gnostic Sources

Gospel of Mary of Magdala

“When Mary had said this, she fell silent, since it was to this point that the Savior had spoken with her. But Andrew answered and said to the brethren, “Say what you (wish to) say about what she has said. I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas.” Peter answered and spoke concerning the same things. He questioned them about the Savior: “Did he really speak with a women without our knowledge (and) not openly? Are we to

Gnostic Sources

Gospel of Mary of Magdala

turn about and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?”

“Then Mary wept and said to Peter, “My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I thought this up myself in my heart, or that I am lying about the Savior?” Levi answered and said to Peter, “Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you are contending against the woman like adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. This is why he loved her more than us.

Gnostic Sources

Gospel of Mary of Magdala

Rather let us be ashamed and put on the perfect man and acquire him for ourselves as he commanded us, and preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or law beyond what the Savior said.”

Gnostic Sources

Gospel of Mary of Magdala

- Suggests Jesus loved Mary Magdalene enough to trust her with independent revelation
- However there is no need to invoke martial intimacy between them to explain this trust

The Sacred Feminine and Gnosticism

The Sacred Feminine and Gnosticism

■ *Charge:*

- The church has suppressed the “sacred feminine,” the female part of the Godhead, the “goddess”
- This sense of the “sacred feminine” was part of early Christianity, as revealed in the Gnostic Gospels

■ *Neo-Gnosticism:*

- Mary Magdalene, as the female consort of Jesus, should be associated with the “wisdom of the ages,” = Sophia, the sacred feminine principle of the Godhead

The Sacred Feminine and Gnosticism

- *Orthodoxy:*
 - God is neither male or female
 - References to God as male (“Father, Abba”) or female terms (“Mother”) intended only as analogies to convey our relationship to God in human terms

The Sacred Feminine and Gnosticism

- The fundamental dualism of Gnosticism:
 - The world was created by an inferior, evil being
 - The material world is evil: therefore our bodies, and sex is also evil

The Sacred Feminine and Gnosticism

■ Two Strains in Gnosticism

■ 1. Male and Female Principles Opposing

- Female principle: represents all that is earthly, worldly, subject to change and decay
- Male principle: eternal life, the Holy Spirit, the world to come
- Gnostic saying: “As long as we were children of the female only – as of shameful copulation, imperfect, reasonless... we were children of woman; but once we were formed by the Savior, we have become children of man...”

The Sacred Feminine and Gnosticism

- Salvation involves “androgenation”

- Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*:

‘Simon Peter said to them, “Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.”

Jesus said, “I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.””

(Gospel of Thomas, 114)

The Sacred Feminine and Gnosticism

- 2. Male and Female “Complementary”
 - Valentinian Gnosticism
 - Male and female principle united in the beginning and part of the Godhead
 - They will be reunited again when the female principle is absorbed into the male principle

The Sacred Feminine and Gnosticism

“Salvation in the radically dualistic gnostic systems requires the annihilation and destruction of the female or the ‘feminine principle.’ In the moderately dualistic systems, salvation means the reunification of the male and female principles in an androgynous or asexual unity... The female principle is secondary, since it stands for the part of the divine that became involved in the created world and history. Gnostic dualism shares in the patriarchal paradigm of Western culture.”

- Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*

The Role of Women in the Early Church

Women in the Early Church

Introduction

- Women had significant roles in the ministry of the Early Church
 - Prophetesses
 - Deaconesses
 - Order of Widows
 - Order of Virgins

Women in the Early Church

Prophetesses

- Prophetesses
 - Prophecy, Prophets, and Prophetesses were major figures well into second century
 - Raised acute questions of how Church leaders should be found
 - through the Spirit
 - through some institutional method

Women in the Early Church

Deaconesses

- Began in the New Testament period
- Hippolytus (170-236) *Apostolic Tradition* describes a ceremony of the laying on of hands of deaconesses
- Responsibilities included:
 - Instructing new female converts
 - Ministering to women

Women in the Early Church

Deaconesses

“O Eternal Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of man and of woman, who didst replenish with the Spirit Miriam, and Deborah, and Anna, and Huldah; who didst not disdain that Thy only begotten Son should be born of a woman; who also in the tabernacle of the testimony, and in the temple, didst ordain women to be keepers of Thy holy gates, -- do Thou now also look down upon this Thy servant, who is to be

Women in the Early Church

Deaconesses

ordained to the office of a deaconess, and grant her Thy Holy Spirit, and cleanse her from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, that she may worthily discharge the work which is committed to her to Thy glory, and the praise of Thy Christ, with whom glory and adoration to be Thee and the Holy Spirit for ever, Amen.

- Prayer said by bishop when laying hands on the deaconess, *Apostolic Constitutions* (350-400)

Women in the Early Church

Order of Widows

- Scriptures warn not to neglect widows and orphans
- An **Order of Widows** existed to help protect widows and orphans. Also fasted, visited the sick, prayed over them, laid hands on them
- Included virgins, married women, mothers and teachers of children
- Hippolytus (170-235): widows appointed or elected by word, not ordained
- Tertullian (155-220): had to warn that order of Widows should not be allowed to teach, baptize, or exercise any male function

Women in the Early Church

Order of Virgins

- Growing ascetical tendencies caused virginity to be held in increasingly high esteem
- Orders of Virgins arose
- A practice of unmarried deacons, priests, monks and even bishops chastely sharing homes and even “beds” with these virgins developed
 - Condemned at the Council of Antioch 268 AD on purely pragmatic grounds that it would lead to suspicions
 - Council did not dispute that the grace accompanying chastity and virginity might make it possible to have such chaste relationships

Women in the Early Church

Decreasing Role

- There was a significant decrease in the role of women in the ministry of the Church between 100 AD and 325 AD
- Reasons:
 - Tendency to accept the Gnostic and Greek ideas of body-soul duality
 - The Flesh, although not inherently evil as in Gnosticism and Platonism, viewed as tainted
 - The Original Sin often assumed to be pleasure

Women in the Early Church

Decreasing Role

- Increasing asceticism:
 - with an exaltation of celibacy, singleness, even continence in marriage, combined with an association of women as temptresses to these ideals
 - A sense redemption is best achieved by withdrawing from the world, through mortification and denial of the flesh
- Increasing distrust of those claiming the authority of the Spirit through prophetic gifts

References

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