

This past week was the anniversary of my ordination, on the feast day of Saint Mary Magdalen. Although my ordination date was probably a factor of scheduling, for me it was Holy intervention; the experience that I have had these 17 years to meditate each year with Mary Magdalen has been a blessing. Mary's narrative history in both approved scripture and non-canonical , as we heard a portion of this morning, opens a door for us to reimagine our theological and spiritual history from a feminist point of view.

Why my curious journey with Mary Magdalen? She has opened for me a portal of viewing our salvation history with a more balanced set of lenses. Reflecting with Mary opened for me a lifelong focus on the first century Christians. I trust that she alone had the most significant influence on the early church, as the apostle to the apostle.

My formation as an undergrad and graduate student, where I began my grounding philosophically and theologically as a feminist has over time awakened my deep understanding of the importance of Mary, her stories, and the female contributors to our salvation story. I am fortunate and thankful that three of my four thesis advisors were strong

women feminists with deep backgrounds in the poetics, Marxism, the classics, and Kierkegaard.

For Centuries these voices have been subjected to scorn, ridicule, and hidden whenever possible; we are now in a time of reawakening.

Feminist theologians and philosophers have criticized both the historical exclusion of women from the tradition, and the negative characterization of women and feminine perspectives. Feminist historians of philosophy have argued that the historical record is incomplete because it omits women philosophers, and it is biased because it devalues the women it forgot to omit. Our traditions are conceptually flawed in that our fundamental norms like reason and objectivity are almost exclusively gendered male.

Feminist have worked within a broad range of human scholasticism calling out the importance of a feminist perspective and values, in creating theories of knowledge, ecofeminism, an [ethics of care](#), challenging traditional justice practice. [Feminist metaphysics](#), which focuses on the [ontology](#) of [gender and sex](#) distinctions. Current discussions of creation, ethics, transgender and non-binary people, are

rooted in philosophers such as Sally Haslanger, Elizabeth Johnson, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Judith Butler.

"All-male images of God are hierarchical images rooted in the unequal relation between women and men," she writes. "Once women no longer relate to men as patriarchal fathers, lords, and kings in society, these images become religiously inadequate. Instead of evoking the reality of God, they block it." Elizabeth Johnson

Shulamith Firestone *Dialectic of Sex* wrote, the end goal of feminist revolution must be, not just the elimination of male *privilege* but of the *sex distinction* itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally.

We can imagine Paul's letter "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, **for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**"

Harvard Professor Karen King and others see a deliberate plot in an emerging church hierarchy founded on the assumption of a male-only and celibate succession from the original apostles, Mary Magdalene's apostolate was clearly an anomaly and a threat. Unlike the canonical gospels, which emphasize "right belief" as the basis for salvation, these wisdom gospels emphasize "right practice."

Mary: sinner, saint, wife, prostitute, disciple, follower, contributor, organizer, Easter Egg Artist....

It is the western church that has taught that Mary was a prostitute, the eastern church honors her as an apostle, and claims she is the apostle to the apostles based on John's gospel. Pope Gregory I in 591 pronounced her a sinful woman, conflicting with the stories from the canonical gospels. Gregory's leap from "seven demons" to the seven deadly sins to lust is challenging at best. Cynthia Bourgeault suggests in her book on Mary Gregory's imaginative leap was focused on the sacred oil that had been used by Mary Magdalene "to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts".

In John's Gospel for her saints' day, we heard that she was the first person to witness Jesus' resurrection and was instructed by Jesus to share the news with disciples. All the traditional Gospels agree that it was Mary the Magdalene who went early Sunday morning to wash and anoint Jesus' crucified body. She is frequently referenced throughout the Gospels.

Mary the Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb to prepare his body for burial. Custom, then and now, is that no woman would touch the naked body of a deceased Rabbi, unless they were family. We understand that Jesus

was tortured and crucified. No woman would wash the blood and sweat off his naked body unless she was his wife. We might want to believe that Jews during this period went around “anointing” each other, history and tradition suggests that they did not.

Eastern Orthodox Patriarch Gregory of Antioch in the 6th century wrote that Jesus said to the women at the tomb “proclaim to my disciples the mysteries you have seen. Become the first teacher of the teachers. Peter, who has denied me, must learn that I can also choose women as apostles”.

The legend, from the Eastern-Orthodox tradition, is that Mary, a woman of means, visited the emperor in Rome after the Resurrection. She denounced Pilate for his actions, and shared with Caesar the story of Jesus, death and resurrection. Caesar was not moved with her testimony. She picked up an egg from the table and as she told the story, the egg turned red.

Nikos Kazantzakis, Greek author, put much of this history into his controversial novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which was created in film by Scorsese and of which Roger Ebert wrote: "paid Christ the compliment of taking him and his message seriously, and they have

made a film that does not turn him into a garish, emasculated image from a religious postcard. Here he is flesh and blood, struggling, questioning, asking himself and his father which is the right way, and finally, after great suffering, earning the right to say, on the cross, 'It is accomplished'

When we open our hearts, and consider the inclusion of the lost gospels, more accurately the censored gospels, such as Mary, Phillip, Thomas, and others found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and early Syrian Christian communities we find the expanded stories of Jesus and Mary, who had 'many children by the Crucified'.

We understand that to the victor goes the spoils, and the right to create history. By the 4th century our forefathers had made the claim of orthodoxy. By 325 we had a male dominated creed, the Nicene, by 367 we had the 27 apostolic writings canonically authorized, known now as our New Testament. As the church was organized into the Empire, it had a shared story to write and tell.

Stephanie Spellers writes in the Church Cracked Open, How did we land here? Most historians point to the pivotal moment in 312 CE when the emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and Christianity converted to become an ally and instrument of the emperor. From then

on, with too few exceptions, the way of empire, domination, established order, and cultural supremacy has eclipsed much of what Jesus inaugurated some two thousand years ago.

Feminist theologians teach that the story of Christ is the story of Mary is the story of the Church is the story of humanity is the story of God, and the vision revealed cannot be sufficiently expressed by any one symbol in isolation from the rest.

I am suggesting that we recognize a theological perspective that goes beyond a narrow Christ Centered focus, to a more all-inclusive expansive vision of incarnation that integrates all of creation, male and female bodies, and the natural world.

As feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes in *Wisdom Ways*, “Sophia, the God of Jesus, wills the wholeness and humanity of everyone and enables the Jesus movement to become a ‘discipleship of equals.’” Called to dismantle in her words Kyriarchy, the intersecting structures of privilege and oppression, be they racial, orientation, sexual, or class.

If we are to reclaim Jesus, and embrace the way of love, we are called to study, question, reject, dismantle, and turn. Transform our historical intersections of power privileges: racism, classism, and

misogyny. As we listen to the liberation theology voices of ecofeminist theologians, we understand that we cannot address our ecological crisis without addressing racial injustice.

And in considering Mary, we have the opportunity to readjust view our history from a different point of view. A point of view that has not been controlled for hundreds of years by the limits of a misogynist hierarchy. The Way of Love I believe challenges us to view the way of Jesus with first century eyes, from discipleships of equals.

The story of Mary suggests that we open ourselves to a different perspective, as Phyllis Tickel has written it is time for a 500 year old rummage sale and a renewed Emerging Church. An opening transformative path, one that has been hidden is now being revealed or unhidden.

She, Sophia, the Holy Spirit, is calling each of us to embrace and to proclaim the courageous truth telling voices of women; perhaps we can begin with Mary.