Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother

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"I have seen the Lord": Mary Magdalen as Visionary, Early Christian Prophecy, and the Context of John 20:14–18

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He comes to us as one unknown. . . .
She comes to us as one unknown? . . .

In contemplating this essay, I envisioned myself opening it with these famous words from Albert Schweitzer’s Quest for the Historical Jesus, but with the pregnant pronoun transposed from masculine to feminine—“She comes to us as one unknown.” Schweitzer’s critique had placed a caesura to all the liberal lives and reconstructions of Jesus from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, offering in their place an alien, apocalyptic visionary who died in disillusion. Recalling this warning as I began a quest for the historical Mary Magdalen seemed particularly apt. After all, I reasoned, even less can be said of the “historical” Mary than of the “historical” Jesus. Far less is said of her in the gospels, and of that little, virtually none can be placed in the pre-crucifixion memories of the movement.

A quick check of Schweitzer’s text required me to reconsider:

He comes to us as one unknown as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word: “Follow thou me!” and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey him whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which
they shall pass through in his fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who he is.²

What seemed to speak to me so strongly, I had misremembered, perhaps fictionalized, both in wording and in context. What Schweitzer had actually written left me with a new set of problems and questions. Schweitzer’s peroration turned out to be both much less applicable to my investigation of Mary Magdalene and much more illuminating of it than had been my expectation.

This portion of Schweitzer’s work does not dwell upon the mysterious and alien character of the Jesus of history, but rather turns from the unknown Jesus of the past to the risen Jesus encountered in the spirit, by those who do know him—as he acts among and in them now. Mary does indeed “come to us as one unknown,” but my goal is not to contemplate a Mary Magdalene who is known today in the spirit, as distinct from the unknown Mary of history. My feminist sensitivities balked at proclaiming of Mary Magdalene, “She commands. And to those who obey her, whether they be wise or simple, she will reveal herself.” Instead I will argue for the recognition of Mary Magdalene as the unknown knower, the visionary whose encounter with Jesus in the spirit became the avenue of revelation through which later Christians could “learn in their own experience who he is.”

Distant and hidden as she is, a “Mary Magdalene of history” is in some sense the avenue for Christian and, insofar as is possible, of historical access to the Christ of faith. For, insofar as history can recover her, she was a witness to and interpreter of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In this essay, I shall argue that the visionary experience of Mary, particularly the vision report in John 20:14–18, deserves a special scrutiny from scholars of early Christianity, from theological thinkers, and from women and men who want to read the beginnings of Christianity in the light of a fuller and more inclusive understanding of what it means to be human.

Mary’s vision offers an entrée to the character of the resurrection appearances and of early Christian prophecy in general. The insight it offers into this experience is an important lens through which to rethink the context of Jesus and the gospels as a source for the “teaching of Jesus.” This essay is not an argument for the historicity of the scene depicted in John 20:14–18. By definition, this narrative is “post-resurrection material,” a category normally opposed to “historical” traditions. Rather, I shall delineate the features of the narrative that suggest its antiquity and point to analogous narratives that can illuminate its formal characteristics and impact a reading of its function.

“I HAVE SEEN THE LORD”

The Search for Mary Magdalen: Mary in the Tradition as One and Many

Ever since Koester’s treatment of early gospel types under the rubric “one Jesus, four primitive gospels,” NT scholars have been more explicit in celebrating the multiplicity and diversity of images of Jesus in the texts that pass on the traditions about him.³ Despite the slenderness of the material about Mary Magdalen in the canonical and most of the noncanonical texts, it is also possible to delineate both multiple Marys and central threads in the early Christian gospels.⁴ Scholars of Christian origins, especially feminist scholars, have worked through the varying gospel traditions in the effort to dislodge the early Christian Mary from the long history of Mary the repentant harlot.⁵ Mary the penitent has been revealed as a figure patched together out of a variety of biblical women in later Christian antiquity amid a spiritual fashion for tales of the conversions of famous and famously beautiful whores.⁶ And contemporary theology and piety have widely revived Mary’s ancient title apostola apostolorum—apostle to the apostles, or perhaps greatest of the apostles.⁷

The multiple Marys of the early sources warrant a brief review.⁸ Here I shall focus on the four canonical gospels, and the appendix to the Gospel of Mark (the “longer ending,” long printed as Mark 16:9–20), briefly considering the Gospel of Peter and four works from Nag Hammadi: the Gospel of Thomas, a sayings collection, and two dialogue gospels, the Gospel of Mary and the Dialogue of the Savior, and the Gospel of Philip, a sort of florilegium of Valentinian aphorisms. Except for the Gospel of Philip (and perhaps the Gospel of Peter), all of these texts are likely to have been composed between 70 and 170.⁹

Mark’s gospel is generally understood to be the earliest of the gospels, and lays down the basic lines of the picture of Mary in the three synoptic gospels. Mary appears in three scenes of the gospel: at the cross, at the burial of Jesus, and at the empty tomb (Mark 15:40–41, 15:47–16:8). At the cross, she is one of three named women disciples; the other two are Salome and Mary of Jacob (or James) and Joses.¹⁰ The names of these three women are given because of their status as witnesses: they perform the essential task of tying together the death of Jesus, his burial place, and its discovery.¹¹ All three are characterized as both disciples (they “followed” Jesus—ἐκολούθων) and διάκοναι (they ministered to, διηνότον hic; 15:40–41)—the latter term may reflect their roles in later Christian mission.¹² At the cross, they stand “far off” among many women who are said to have come up from Galilee to Jerusalem with Jesus (41).¹³ This brief reference implies that the
author has taken for granted the presence of a substantial number of women in the circle and on the travels of Jesus. Mary is named first, and is the only woman who clearly reappears in Mark’s interpreters. She thus seems to be the foremost among the women disciples and ministers. Mary “of Joses” goes with her to see the place where Jesus is laid (47). And both Salome and Mary “of Jacob,” go with her to anoint the body of Jesus (16:1–4). They receive a vision (16:5) and an oracular message that interprets the emptiness of the tomb in terms of the death of Jesus and of their memories and expectations (16:6–7). The fear in which they flee and their silence (16:8) has been subjected to extensive and disputatious analysis. But at the very least it associates their vision with the numinous and terrifying character of other such revelations. Thus Mark identifies Mary as disciple and diakonos, chief witness that the one who died was the one who was raised.

In Matthew also, Mary is re/presented at the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 27:55–56, 61; 28:1–8, 9–10). While these accounts are based heavily on Mark, subtle changes in the narrative introduce Matthew theological concerns and depict a particularly intrepid and fearless Mary. Mary’s companions change. Salome is replaced at the cross by the mother of the Zebedees. This figure’s role seems to be to see and so to underline the fulfillment of Jesus’ pronouncement that the places at his right hand and left are assigned; they go to the two thieves crucified on either side of him (Matt. 20:21–23, see 27:38). She then disappears from the narrative. “Mary the mother of Jacob and Joseph” (probably the same figure as in Mark) also appears at the cross; as the “other Mary,” she accompanies Mary Magdalene to the burial of Jesus, thus providing the second witness required by the biblical prescription (see Matt. 18:16, citing Deut 19:15). In Matthew, Joseph of Arimathea is described not as a pious Jew also awaiting God’s reign but as a disciple, so the two Marys are able to sit openly opposite the tomb (27:61).

Their courage is manifested by their willingness to visit the tomb, despite the Roman soldiers set to guard the tomb in this gospel (27:62–66). The focus of this scene is the dramatic, indeed earthshaking, vision of an angel descending from heaven, described in terms that evoke the transfiguration, and the prophetic visions of Daniel (28:2–4; see 17:2, Dan. 7:9, 10:6 Theodotion). While the Roman guards are overcome by their terror (Matt. 28:4), the women receive the angel’s greeting, commission (“go tell the disciples”), and message (5–7) with joy and a fear that is clearly holy awe, running to fulfill it by telling the disciples (28:8). They then experience a second vision: they are met by Jesus, who repeats the angel’s commission in very slightly different words (“go tell my brothers”) and an abbreviated message (28:9–10).

Matt. 28:16 makes clear that the women have fulfilled their task and have been heeded by the eleven.

The Gospel of Luke also revises Mark’s version of Mary’s role and that of the other women. Early in the narrative Luke 8:1–3 introduces a list of women disciples, apparently to parallel the male disciple list in 6:13–16. Unlike the men’s, the women’s discipleship is explained as gratitude for being cured from “evil spirits and diseases” and as consisting of financial support for the men’s mission. Mary is named first, and described as one from whom seven devils had gone out (cf. 11:24–26). Mary Magdalene thus is established as the client of Jesus and a patron of the male apostles, a cured demoniac. Two “new” women are mentioned, Susanna and Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward. At the cross, no women are named; “all his acquaintances and female fellow travelers” see Jesus’ death (23:49). All the women who had come from Galilee follow behind the burial and see where the grave is, then go to prepare ointments. On the Sabbath they rest to observe the law (23:55–56). In the morning they bring the ointments and find the empty tomb (24:1–3), where they see “two men in shining garments” who interpret the empty tomb in terms of the passion predictions (24:4–7). Without a commission, they report this to the eleven (8–9); only then are the women identified as “Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary of Jacob and the rest with them” (24:10). “The apostles” are said to disbelieve the women, because their message seemed nonsensical. Their skepticism is hardly to the discredit of the women; rather it lays the ground for the dramatic irony when the two disciples tell the “stranger” that the women claim to have seen “a vision of angels, who say that he is alive” (24:23–24). Acts alone narrates the ascension scene, which closes the appearances forty days after the resurrection. At the end of this scene, the eleven male disciples are listed again; they are said to take up a vigil in the upper room “with women, Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers” (Acts 1:14). The names of the famous women disciples do not recur in Acts, though the narrative suggests that they too experience the descent of the spirit.

The Gospel of John seems to have undergone a long development independent of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, but also to have had some contact either with these gospels or with their sources at the cross (19:25–26). As in the synoptic gospels, Mary appears at the empty tomb (20:11–18), though not at the burial. At the cross, Mary is named only after “the mother of Jesus and her sister, Mary of Clopas” (19:25). Because Jesus is then said to see his mother and “the disciple whom he loved standing at hand,” this mysterious disciple has occasionally been identified as Mary, despite becoming the sub-
stitute son of Jesus’ mother (19:26). At the tomb, Mary appears alone, and then goes to find Peter and this disciple (20:1–2), who inspect the tomb, finding it empty except for the grave clothes (20:3–7). While the disciple “believes,” he and Peter depart with no resolution to the scene (8–10). Mary, who stays at the tomb weeping, first sees two angels (11–13), then encounters Jesus first and alone in a scene of great intimacy (14–18). This vision will be the focus of the main part of this essay, so I will postpone discussion of it.

In most manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark dating from the fifth century or later, the gospel closes with an appendix that supplies the appearances of the risen Jesus that are so conspicuously missing from the gospel. Until recently, this appendix was printed without interruption as 16:9–20. Verses 9–11 recount a first appearance (ἐφανεῖ τῷ Μαρία) to Mary Magdalene, “out of whom he had cast seven devils.” She then reports the vision to “those who had been with him” but is disbelieved. Verses 12–13 relate a second appearance (ἐφανερώθην ἄγγελον) to “two of them going to the country.” They too are disbelieved. All three are vindicated by Jesus’ reproaches when he appears (ἐφανερώθην) to the eleven (14). The reference to an appearance to Mary alone is reminiscent of the gospel of John, but the rest of the summary seems to be based on Luke and the beginning of Acts (cf. Luke 24:14–36; 37–51; 10:17–20; Acts 1:11, 2:38).

Another text of an uncertain date, Gospel of Peter, appears to be a revision of traditions that appear in the canonical gospels. In this gospel Mary Magdalene, identified as a disciple, braves the anger of the Jews, gathers her friends, and goes to perform mourning rites at the tomb. There they are granted the vision of a “young man,” who explains the empty tomb by announcing the resurrection (13–14). Mary does not appear at the cross or burial, and the women are not commissioned to tell anyone else.

As in the narrative gospels, in the sayings collection called the Gospel of Thomas (late first or early second century), Mary and her companion Salome are disciples; Thomas in fact makes Mary a spokesperson for the disciples; she turns the table on Jesus, requesting from him an analogy for the disciples (21) as he asked them for an analogy for himself (13). In the last saying of the gospel, Peter’s demand that she be dismissed “because women are not worthy of life” makes her the representative of women disciples in general—and of all the women who struggled to claim their role in the context of Thomas (114).

The Gospel of Mary, a fragmentary dialogue gospel, opens with a vision in which the “savior” converses with the disciples; when he departs, they are at a loss and turn to Mary for the special revelation she has received. At the request of Peter, she recounts a vision whose content is rejected first by Andrew and then by Peter; Levi comes to her defense. The gospel thus uses her to put forward the issues of women as communal leaders/prophets and of the legitimacy of prophecy itself—of visions and revelations.

Like Gospel of Mary, the Dialogue of the Savior is in form a dialogue in which Jesus instructs the disciples by answering their questions. Mary seems to be the most intrepid and most insightful of the interlocutors (see esp. 53, 60, 64, 69). At one point, Jesus brings Judas, Matthew, and Mary to the edge of heaven and earth, where they see a vision (36). If post-resurrection, the dialogue is in itself a vision.

The Gospel of Philip does not fit the gospel genre as it is now defined; it is an anthology of aphoristic meditations on the Christian message in its Valentinian form; it appears to have been culled from earlier works and, in its present form, to date from the later part of the third century. In it Mary is twice described as the κοινωνός, companion or partner, of Jesus: “there were three who always walked with the Lord: his mother and his mother’s sister, and the Magdalene, who is called his companion. His mother and his sister and his companion were each called Mary” (59, 6–10). The second passage may identify Mary the κοινωνός with the (divine) Wisdom who is mother of the angels; it further relates that Jesus loved Mary and kissed her often. The (other) disciples complain and ask why Jesus loved her more than them; Jesus gives a double answer. First is a rhetorical question, “Why do I not love you like her?” Thus he turns their question back to them, inviting them to emulate her. He then tells a parable: “When a blind man and one who see are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. When the light comes, then he who sees will see the light, and who is blind will remain in darkness” (63, 30–64, 12). The parable in some way suggests that Mary is enlightened in ways that the other disciples are not, or are not yet enlightened. The reference to seeing may imply or commemorate her visionary status.

In all these versions of Mary, she is a disciple among the disciples. In the gospels of Thomas, Mary, and Philip, her gender plays an explicit role in the representation of her discipleship; that she appears at the tomb with other women may suggest that her gender is also significant in the synoptic gospels and Peter. In all the narratives she is a witness to the resurrection. Most, perhaps all, of these early texts depict her as a visionary. The gospels of John, Matthew, and Mary, the appendix to Mark, and perhaps Dialogue of the Savior celebrate Mary’s vision of the risen Lord. All the canonical gospels and Peter credit her with a vision of angels, and Dialogue of the Savior with an apocalyptic vision. Only the gospels of Philip and Thomas do not directly engage with this picture, though both texts may assume it. Thus
Mary/Mariam, the early Christian visionary, is a sister of Miriam the Hebrew prophet.

**Recovering the “Resurrection Experience”**

Locating the significance of Mary as visionary and prophet both for the earliest stages of Christianity and for Christian feminists evokes significant questions about the event usually referred to as the resurrection of Jesus. Approaching it from a historical perspective raises particular difficulties, for as an event its very claim is to transcend and therefore to escape history—the early texts never treat the fate of Jesus as return to life (like that of Lazarus in John 11:1–44 or of the daughter of Jairus in Mark 5:21–43), but always describe it as a transformation of the world.

New Testament scholarship has generally divided the reports about the fate of Jesus into (1) brief reports of appearances of the risen Jesus, such as 1 Cor. 15:5–8 and 9:3; (2) stories about the empty tomb, that is, Mark 16:1–8, the revisions of this story in Matthew and Luke, and John 20:1–11; and (3) longer narratives that describe appearances of Jesus, for instance, the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus or the appearance to the eleven in Matthew 28:16–20 and to the assembled disciples in Luke 24:36–51. The brief reports in the letters of Paul are significantly earlier than the other texts and contain no hint of the empty tomb. At the same time, there are no substantive correspondences among the appearance narratives. These observations have contributed to an opinion on the part of many (but by no means all) scholars that the earliest source of belief in the resurrection was experiences of meeting Jesus alive from the dead. These experiences were interpreted through the emerging Jewish doctrine of resurrection of the dead. The story of the empty tomb was ultimately created as a dramatization of this interpretation. The first reports of meeting Jesus were elaborated by various theological motifs that explained his fate or enabled the community to continue, and so developed into the variety of appearance stories in the gospels. This picture is complicated by other questions, in particular by ancient and modern conflicts over the physical or spiritual character of the resurrection and by reflection on the difference between imaging the fate of Jesus as resurrection (awakening or standing up) or as exaltation (ascending or being lifted up).

“Second-wave” feminist interpretation of the New Testament quickly fastened upon the role of women in the resurrection traditions, in part as an antidote to the claim that since only men were apostles, only men could be ministers or priests. But the list of witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15:5–8 men- tioned no women: its “first witness” is Cephas, usually, though not always, identified with Peter.33 This posed a problem, for not only is 1 Corinthians earlier than the gospels, the list is probably earlier than 1 Corinthians. The conflict between the list and the traditions about an appearance to Mary could mean that this early list ignored or rejected the appearances to women or that the traditions about the appearances to women are later.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza stands over against the relatively widespread consensus that the experience of meeting Jesus alive from the dead (in visionary experiences) preceded the creation of the empty-tomb narratives. Arguing that it is difficult to determine whether the empty tomb narrative or the vision reports are earlier, she rejects the historical positivism inherent in the question, or at least in attempts to answer it. Her concern is different: analyzing the material according to gender as male and female traditions, she calls into question the significance of appearance reports for feminist readings of the resurrection of Jesus, seeing them as created by and authorizing men. The empty tomb, on the other hand, she takes to be a “women’s tradition.”34 Schüssler Fiorenza argues for “privileging the empty tomb” as the originating space. This does not mean that the empty tomb narratives were earlier and closer to “what really happened.” Rather she proposes locating the empty tomb narratives as the basis of a feminist constructive theology of future hope that does not spiritualize suffering.35

In her view, “the texts of the empty tomb tradition take suffering and death seriously but do not allow them to have the ‘last word’ or a religious-theological value in themselves.” They “leave open what happened to the body of Jesus. Their narrative valorizes a compassionate practice of honoring those unjustly killed.”36 In contrast to the traditions of the empty tomb, Schüssler Fiorenza sees “visionary experience” not only as claiming “individual male religious experience as authorizing experience” but also as transforming Jesus’ death so that it is “no longer an execution, but a ‘sacri- ficial atonement,’ no longer a violent dehumanization, but an obedient self-immolation, no longer an encounter with brutal force, but a willingly accepted victimization.”37

This evaluation of the visionary narratives appears to focus heavily on 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, which certainly sees visionary experience as creating apostles (cf. 9:1–2). The forgiveness of sins is attached to the death (not the resurrection) of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:3. While most of the visionary narratives include some authorization of the visionaries, the motif of atonement and sacrifice is virtually absent from the appearance narratives in the canonical gospels. The only texts from which such a theology might be deduced are the expositions of the way Jesus’ death and resurrection are said

In contrast to Schüssler Fiorenza’s, Kathleen Corley’s investigation of the roles of women in the narratives of the crucifixion and the empty tomb focus on the question of historicity and context. She sets the texts among ancient practices and views of mourning and burial, contextualizing their depictions of women in light of female roles in these practices and the ancient topoi and conflicts around them, and she argues that the empty tomb narratives were created as a “female tradition” precisely in order to obfuscate or denigrate the association of women with the visions of the risen Jesus: “The empty tomb and physical appearance stories in the gospels disavow visionary experience as a possible origin for Christian belief and practice by replacing it with resurrection theology.” These stories were “developed to correct the assumption that Jesus’ resurrection ‘on the third day’ was a simple matter of women (or other family members) going to the gravesite to commune with the spirit of the deceased as women had done for thousands of years.” Thus, in Corley’s view, the empty tomb stories are both historically secondary and subtly denigrating of the women disciples.

A yet more recent treatment of that issue appears in Jane Schaberg’s Resurrection of Mary Magdalene. While she recognizes the complexities of historical inquiry, Schaberg attempts a reconstruction of the events behind the texts. She argues for a historical basis for both the tradition that Mary and other women discovered the tomb empty (and for the women’s presence at the cross and burial of Jesus) and the tradition that the first resurrection appearance was to Mary Magdalene. Schaberg locates this vision in the experience of prophecy in the movement before Jesus’ death (as I do). She further suggests that the discovery of the empty tomb was the catalyst for that first vision, which she reconstructs on the basis of John 20:11-18 and Matthew 28:9-10. It was inspired by receiving the empty tomb into a corporate understanding of the son of man (“Human One”) in Daniel 7 and 12 and the narrative of Elijah’s ascent in 2 Kings 2. Thus, as the witness of Jesus “ascending to my father and your father, to my God and your God,” Mary emerges as the successor of Jesus as Elisha became the successor to Elijah. Schaberg does not allot this status to Mary alone, but sees it as shared among the visionaries.

The attempt to identify either vision reports or empty tomb narratives with the memory of only male or only female disciples seems to me mistaken. The persistence with which Mary is identified as a visionary demonstrates that the visionary accounts cannot be classified as a “masculine tradition.” Further, the empty tomb accounts, beginning with Mark, all treat the women as visionaries: a vision of angels is still a vision. Nor is the empty tomb exclusively associated with women. Found by Mary in John 20:1-2, it is also explored by Peter and the beloved disciple in John 20:3-10, although they do not see angels there. Luke, or one of the correctors of Luke, also appears to know either John’s account or this tradition (see 24:12). Thus it is far from clear either that the purpose of the empty tomb narrative was to denigrate the women’s witness or that visionary reports were a tradition for and from men.

While certainty is unattainable, I am inclined to accept the view that the visionary experiences were the earliest source of faith in the resurrection and to locate these experiences within the context of the movement’s prophetic character. In another context, I argued that the reign-of-God movement might have been led by a trinity of prophets: Jesus, Mary, and Peter, like the prophetic trinity of Moses, Miriam, and Aaron that Tröble proposed for the exodus. Whatever the extent of prophetic activity in the movement before the death of Jesus, the visionary experience of “meeting Jesus alive from the dead” was widely shared. That much is clear from the list of 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, however its gendered character and chronology are to be interpreted. The question of “first” appearance cannot be resolved. It seems best to simply acknowledge multiple traditions: the tradition known to Paul, which identifies Cephas as the first to see Jesus, the tradition reflected in John 20:14-18 and Matthew 28:9–10, which claims (or assumes) Mary, and perhaps also a third tradition, which claims Simon, who may or may not be [Simon] Peter, reflected in Luke 24:34. Alternatively, Luke may be presenting Cleophas and his companion “on the way” to Emmaus as the first visionaries; they hear of Simon’s vision only after they return to Jerusalem, and the text gives no indication whether Simon’s vision took place before, after, or simultaneously with theirs.

The Prophetic Visions of Mary and John the Prophet of Revelation

Among the canonical gospels, John 20:11-18 gives the fullest account of Mary Magdalene as visionary; here she is credited with a very brief vision of angels and a more substantial account of a vision of the risen Jesus. John 20:14-18, which recounts her vision of Jesus, gets surprisingly little attention from interpreters of the resurrection, who tend to be more taken with the problems and interests of the appearances to the assembled disciples in John
20:19–29, or with the narratives in the other gospels.\(^5\) Indeed the very first commentator, the author of the appendix to John, seems to exclude Mary's vision from the count of three appearances to the disciples (John 21:14).

Yet this narrative shows far fewer of the motifs identified as secondary than do the other narrative reports of visions. John 20:14–17 manifests little direct concern for authorizing Mary Magdalen and no emphasis on physical proof, in contrast to the other appearance narratives in John, Matthew, and Luke-Acts, all of which are dominated by motifs seen as secondary: the authorization of the disciples, provision for the continuance of the community, and anti-docetic concerns.\(^6\) The brief summary report in 20:18 compares well with Paul's reports of his visions. Apologetic concerns do play a role in the empty tomb account; Mary herself three times articulates the obvious interpretation of the tomb: grave-robbing. "They have taken him away," she says (20:2,13,15). Thus she makes clear that Jesus' disciples and successors did not leap credulously to a superstitious interpretation of a perfectly normal phenomenon.

Juxtaposing Mary Magdalen's vision of Jesus in John 20:14–18 to the programmatic vision of the prophet John in Revelation 1:10–19 manifests the location of both these visions in the context of early Christian prophecy. John 20:18 deserves attention as a brief summary report in itself, while John 20:14–17 and Revelation 1:10–19 share four formal features, which emerge in the parallels shown in table 6.1. Both the vision of Mary in John and the opening vision of Revelation are reports of the visions of the risen Lord, but later interpretation has contextualized them very differently. In part their likenesses have been obscured by the plot of Luke-Acts, which created a caesura between the appearances of the risen Lord in the first forty days after his resurrection and visions of a later time. But this distinction is an artificial one, unknown to the other texts of earliest Christianity and in particular to Paul, who considers the vision of the risen Lord that made him an apostle to be continuous with and in no way inferior to that of the very earliest witness.

The first of the four formal features these two visions share is an odd repetition. In John 20:14, when Mary finished speaking to two angels inside the tomb "she turned back (στραφῆς ἐκ τῆς ὀρίσκως) and saw Jesus." He then speaks, asking "woman, why do you weep?" as if she were a stranger. She replies also as to a stranger; then, the text tells us, "Jesus said to her: 'Mary!' turning (στραφῇς) she said to him in Hebrew: 'Rabbouni!'" (16). An attempt to stage this scene comes up against the difficulty of that second "turn." According to 14, Mary has already turned to face Jesus before she speaks to her; turning again, she ought to be facing away from him. The opening of the first vision in Revelation gives a clue to the significance of this strange

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<td><strong>John 20:14–18</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1. turning to the vision</strong></td>
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<td>Having turned (ἐπεστρέφομαι), she said to him in Hebrew, &quot;Rabbouni!&quot; (Which means teacher)</td>
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<td>I saw...</td>
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<td>17 Jesus said to her,</td>
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<td>2. admonition</td>
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<td>do not touch me (Apoc. Mos. 31: &quot;let no one touch me&quot;) for I have not yet ascended to the father.</td>
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| 17 "do not fear (cf. 19:10, 22:9: "look! don't!""
| 3. commission |
| but go and tell my brothers (and sisters?), (cf. Matt 28:10: go, announce to my brothers (and sisters?)) |
| 19 write therefore what you have seen and what things are and what will happen after this (cf. 1:11 write...and send) |
| 4. oracle |
| I ascend to my father and your father, to my God and your God." |
| 18. Mary went and proclaimed to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1: "have I not seen our Lord Jesus?" John 20:25: "we have seen the Lord") And that these things he said to her. |
| 17–18 "I am the first and last, and the living one, and I was dead, and lo I am living forever and ever and I have the keys of death and hell" |
description. John declares that while he was “in the spirit . . . I heard behind me (ὀπίσω μου) a great voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write . . .’ and I turned (ἐπιστρέφα) to see the voice that was speaking to me, and having turned (ἐπιστράψας), I saw seven lampstands” (1:10, 12). Taken together, the two passages suggest that “turning behind” signals a change of state, functioning as a cue that introduces the vision report.47 In both cases, the repetition functions to emphasize the change.48

The second shared feature emerges in a second problem in the text of John: the mysterious command, “Do not touch me!” (μη μου ἄρτι) that opens Jesus’ speech in John 20:17. This command is probably the single feature of this vision that has inspired the most commentary; debate about its implications overshadows every other aspect of the vision report. Comparing the text to Revelation casts into relief an aspect that is usually ignored: that it is formally and functionally similar to negative commands that tell a visionary how to receive the vision. The command “Do not fear” (μη φοβοῦ) opens Jesus’ speech in Revelation 1:17; some version of it appears in many other visionary speeches, including the message of the angel at the empty tomb in Mark and Matthew (Mark 16:5; Matt. 28:5), Jesus’ appearance to the disciples walking on the water in Mark, John, and Matthew (Mark 6:50; John 6:20; Matt. 14:27); the annunciation scenes in Matthew and Luke (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:33, 30, 26) and the oracles to Paul in Acts 18:9, 27:24. A closer parallel to the command “don’t touch me!” is found in the montion in Revelation 19:10 and 22:9, where the angel who mediates the revelation fends off the prophet’s obeisance with the words “Look! don’t!” (“Mind you don’t!” ὅρα μη) and the explanation “I am your coslae and that of your brothers. Worship God.”

The command “don’t touch” has overly preoccupied commentators on John 20:17, but, in my view, without offering much enlightenment. Recent interpretation has generally preferred to translate it as “do not cling to me” or “do not hold on to me.” This translation absolves the text of distaste for the touch of a woman or perhaps even of the flesh, and at the same time manages to reconcile the tensions between the vision of Mary and the later vision in which Thomas is invited to touch, allowing the gospel to have a consistent position on the question of whether the resurrection appearances were palpable, or in the terms of Luke, have flesh and bones.49 But this translation is shaped not only by Luke’s rendering of the resurrection, but also by a more contemporary form of sexism: Mary is portrayed in a favorite of more recent misogynist stereotypes: as the woman whose clinging love holds a man back from his true destiny (whereas Thomas’s desire to touch can be seen as the misplaced, but in contemporary terms laudable, desire for experiential knowledge).

That “don’t touch” is the better reading is suggested by a parallel from an ancient life of Adam and Eve. The Apocalypse of Moses offers a prophetic scene that casts different light on this warning. When Adam predicts his death and burial to Eve, he instructs her, “When I die, leave me and let no one touch me until an angel says something about me. For God will not forget his vessel that he formed.” Similarly in John 20:17, Jesus explains the warning as a temporary measure. The command not to touch signals the liminal and temporary state of the not-yet-ascended Jesus as Apocalypse of Moses 31 does that of the not-yet-buried Adam.50

The third common feature of the visions of Mary and John is a commission. In John 20:17 Mary is told: “go tell my brothers [and sisters?]” These “brothers [and sisters?]” appear to be equated by the narrator with the disciples. This equation is an anomaly in the gospel; the references to the “brothers of Jesus” in the gospel refer literally to his family rather than metaphorically to his disciples (23, 5:1–10). Interestingly enough, the very brief message the risen Jesus delivers to the women disciples in Matthew seems to be no more than an abbreviation of the message the angel gave them. But where the angel sent them to the disciples, Jesus’ word sends them to “my brothers [and sisters?].” In Matthew’s gospel there are a few references to believers as “brothers [and sisters?]” of Jesus (12:46–50, 25:40) and several references to the community as each other’s siblings, so that the phrase is less anomalous than in John. Even so, the likeness between Matthew and John may suggest a tradition that is older than either.52

John the prophet also receives a commission to deliver a message: the words “write what you see,” bracket the vision in Revelation, preceding it in 1:11 and repeated after the first oracle in 1:19. The audience of this message is the churches of Asia Minor—send it to the seven churches, the voice says. But Revelation also may offer a clue to the significance of “brothers” for the visionary context. In Revelation, this term refers to the author’s fellow prophets (2:29 cf. 1:9, 6:11, 12:10, 19:10). In light of this, the identification of Miriam the prophet as “sister” of Moses or Aaron raises a particularly significant echo with the portrayal of Mary: Might not this commission envisage Jesus, Mary, and the others of their circle as a “brotherhood” of prophets?

The fourth common feature is an oracle that explains both the vision itself and the fate of Jesus. The message is entrusted to Mary in John 20:17: “I ascend to my father and your father, to my God and your God.” Unlike the message the angel commits to the women in the empty tomb scene in Mark 16:7 and Matthew 28:7, this message is not a prediction of future appearances; it neither implies nor requires them. Rather it explains Jesus’ de-
parture (both his death and his new life) as an ascent, a going up to God, his origin and source. The parallel phrases “my father and your father, to my God and your God” remind their audience that they share the origin and destiny of Jesus. Although the gospel elsewhere explains Jesus’ fate through the doctrine of resurrection (2:19, 20, 22; perhaps 7:52; see also the appendix 21:14), this oracle does not refer to or even imply that explanation, but rather uses the metaphor of ascension, one that is important in, but by no means exclusive to, the gospel (using ἀνάβοντας in 3:13, 6:62, perhaps 7:8; using ἀναλαμβάνω, 3:14, 8:28, 12:32, 34). The word “I go up/ascend” (ἀναβαίνω) in this oracle is an important factor in Schaberg’s suggestion that the visions are formed by reflection on the ascension of Elijah.53 With or without other appearances, this message can in itself serve as the foundational proclamation for the new community.54

At first reading this message appears to be couched in entirely Johannine language. While it fits well with John’s insistence that Jesus knew that he came from God and returns to God (13:3-5), subtle variations from the usual Johannine diction suggest that this message may not be the creation of the author or community behind the fourth gospel, but a remnant of the inherited material on which their theology was based. Nowhere else in John are “my father” and “my God” so explicitly identified. This is not because these terms are not synonymous for the gospel, but because they are so synonymous that the point need never be made. Right from the beginning of the gospel, everyone knows who “the father” is. Nor does this gospel speak of God as “your father” as the other gospels do. Some interpreters have suggested that the verse marks a turning point for this gospel: Before the resurrection, God is exclusively the father of Jesus, and becomes the disciples’ father only at this point.55 But this is a misreading; this gospel prefers the absolute “the father,” which refers to the deity as the father of the disciples, all Jews, probably even all human and heavenly beings.56

What then of the oracle delivered in Revelation 1:17-18? This oracle has as its first function identifying the giver of the revelation, the alien and awesome figure who speaks to the prophet. But it makes that identification not by naming Jesus (as does the closing vision 22:16) but by describing Jesus’ fate: “I am the first and the last and the living one and I was dead and lo I am alive forever and ever.” Like the oracle in John 20:17, this description does not resort explicitly to the explanation “resurrection.” Also like the oracle in John 20:17, this message declares its meaning for the revelation’s recipients: “and I have the keys of death and hell” (Rev. 1:17-18).

These four shared features—the “turn” that signifies a change of consciousness, the admonition, the commission, and the oracle—all suggest that

the vision of Mary in John 20:14-18 and the vision of John in Revelation 1:9-19 share a prophetic context. Beyond these four features I wish to point to two other features of the passage in light of prophetic literature from Christian and Jewish antiquity.

The first of these features is the exchange in which Jesus calls Mary by name and she responds with a greeting that demonstrates her recognition of him, perhaps her acquiescence to the visitation. There is no parallel to this exchange in Revelation; none of the revelatory figures address the author by name. But visions in Acts and in the Hebrew Bible frequently feature such an exchange of addresses. “Saul” is addressed by name at the beginning of the vision in Acts 9:4-5, as are Ananias in 9:10, Cornelius in 10:4, and Peter in 10:13-14. All of these figures respond with the address “Lord.” Probably the exchanges of Acts are modeled on the call of Samuel (1 Sam. 3:2-10, but see also Gen. 22:1).

The second is the final verse of this narrative. John 20:18 is a vision report in miniature. It identifies Mary with her full name, Mariam Magdalēnē, and describes her as coming and announcing, making a proclamation, to the disciples. That proclamation consists of two parts: The first is delivered in direct discourse and in the first person: She says, “I have seen the Lord (ἐπήρθεν τὸν κύριον).” The language is virtually identical to the formula Paul uses to put forth his vision of the Lord in support of his apostolic claim: “Have I not seen our lord Jesus?” (οὐχὶ ἕκαστον τοῦ κύριου ἤματον ἐπήρθον). These same words report the assembled disciples’ vision to Thomas in John 20:25: “we have seen the Lord” (ἐπηρθείς τοῦ κύριου). The second part is in indirect discourse. When the text says, “these things she said to them,” it conveys a picture of Mary delivering the oracle that Jesus had communicated to her. One might imagine her proclaiming it among the assembled companions of Jesus, beginning with the oracle formula: “thus says the Lord: ‘I ascend to my father and your father, to my God and your God.’” Similarly when the mediator of John’s vision dictates oracles that John must write and send to the seven churches of Asia, the threats and promises of the oracles are articulated in the first person, and the speaker is not John, but the figure who appears in 1:9-19. The same is true of the lengthy and complex oracles of Isaiah 40-55 as well as other prophetic material from the Hebrew Bible.

The very brief vision report in John 20:18 summarizes the claim of Mary to the title apostolē apostolorum, for it depicts her as fulfilling Paul’s criteria for apostleship: She has had a vision of the risen Lord (1 Cor. 9:1), her mission is to proclaim (1:17), and her message is the foundation for a new community (9:1). Unlike Paul, she can claim also her memories of Jesus from the time between the baptism of John and the “ascension” (cf. Acts 1:22).
Making a Difference

What difference does my argument make? How does it change the picture of Mary to suggest, as I have done, that the vision described in John 20:14–17 is closer in form to the vision of John that opens Revelation than to the other resurrection narratives, and that the report in John 20:18 is parallel in function to Paul's reports? How does it change the picture of varieties of early Christianity and of the career of Jesus behind them? And does it, as Margaret Farley has asked of the message of the women returning from the tomb, mean "good news for women"?57

First, recognizing Mary's experience as similar to the prophet John's makes clear that there is a closer continuity between Mary of the fourth gospel and Mary of the Gospel of Mary than is usually recognized. Both depict Mary as prophet and originator of the mission. This is a picture of Mary that is likely to have been widely known within and to some extent outside the Christian movements. In the later years of the second century, a critic of Christianity named Celsus seems to have seen her role as evidence of the credulous and superstitious character of Christians. He charged that the Christians believed in the resurrection of Jesus on the basis of secret meetings, a single woman, and a few insiders (C. Cels. 2.70).58

But who saw this? A hysterical woman, as you say, and perhaps some other one of those who were deluded by the same sorcery, who either dreamt in a certain state of mind, or had a hallucination due to some mistaken notion.59

This passage is the starting point of Margaret MacDonald's study of Greek and Roman writers' views on early Christian women.60 These references, as she shows, are almost certainly to Mary Magdalen. MacDonald chooses to retain the word "hysterical" in order to convey the misogynist stereotype the charge draws upon, and gives her book the subtitle The Power of the Hysterial Woman. But παροικηστής, the word behind it, actually means frenzied or frantic (as she points out), and Celsus also appears to have used it to characterize the Christian prophets of his time (C. Cels. 7.9–10). While Celsus's use of παροικηστής was always pejorative, the application of the word to prophets is not inherently negative, for frenzy, madness, ecstasy were used by the Greek philosophical tradition to designate the state in which the prophet, the poet, and ultimately the philosopher bring forth their inspired work. The references to dreams and sorcery also evoke prophetic practices cast in a pejorative light. Elsewhere, Celsus accuses some early Christians of being "Sybills"—that is, followers of Greek women prophets called the Sybils. In fact, as MacDonald points out, the early Christian prophet Hermas first identifies his vision of a female figure who represents the church as an encounter with the Sybil.61 Christians of the early (and later) centuries were in fact much taken with the long poems called the Sibylline Oracles, which purported to be the work of ancient women prophets. Thus in the late second century, and by an enemy of Christianity, Mary was still understood as a prophet, as a witness and interpreter of the resurrection and an originator of the Christian message, and Christians were seen as followers of women prophets.

This leads to a second observation. Attention to commonalities between Mary's vision and that of the prophet John (which presents itself as having taken place between 70 and 90 CE) helps to eradicate the division created by Luke's overly rationalized picture of the origins of Christianity. It reminds later interpreters that Luke's theory that resurrection appearances stopped or perhaps changed in definitive ways after forty days is not shared by the other early Christian witnesses. For most, perhaps all, early Christians, the spirit was not only the advocate who supplied Jesus' absence, but also the medium of his presence; appearances of Jesus were not sealed in the past but a continuing source of power and wisdom. Locating Mary's vision in this context also makes clear that these experiences should not be explained as projections or hallucinations arising from grief, guilt, or wishful thinking and extrapolated from current theories of the psyche. Rather, they were the product of modes of prophetic experience and the practices that made that experience accessible. These practices are not fully recoverable, although they undoubtedly involve meditation upon the products and traditions of earlier prophets. Jane Schaberg has suggested that these meditations focused especially upon Daniel and the ascent of Elijah.62 Such texts as Revelation, the later chapters of Acts, the Shepherd of Hermas, the visionary reports of Priscilla/Quintilla, Maximilla, Montanus, and the other prophets of the New Prophecy, the Gospel of Mary, and Theda's vision of the Lord as Paul in Acts of Paul and Thecla reflect literary versions and remnants of these practices.

Third, putting the visions of a prophetic Mary at the center of attempts to interpret the resurrection traditions can help to produce important shifts in the interpretation of the phenomenon now widely called the Jesus movement. Scholarly interpretation of the career of Jesus has long interpreted him as a prophet, but his prophetic role has generally been imagined along the lines of a persona created by and for the texts of Amos and the narratives about Moses and Joshua—that is, as a heroic and lonely figure standing in
opposition to kings and priests, and with followers, perhaps, but no equals. This picture is at best anachronistic. Even for the texts of the Hebrew Bible, this picture is less than accurate, as the traditions about Miriam the prophet show. And it is also highly problematic for current theological thinking, especially for Christology. It focuses attention on a single male leader and at the same time places Jesus in opposition to the Judaism of his time, fostering anti-Jewish versions of Christology.

More recently scholarship has attempted to turn from the focus on retrieving Jesus’ individual mission and intent to locating him in the context of a movement. Some versions of the movement, largely inspired by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, have at least raised questions of women’s participation. This shift ought in theory to have produced a remedy for both of these problems by placing Jesus into the context of collaborative experience and of Jewish expectation. On the whole it has been less than successful in doing either of these, but instead has inspired a new and unnervingly self-confident quest for the historical Jesus. To some extent, speaking of the “Jesus movement” inevitably reinscribes the heroic isolation of Jesus within the tradition. I prefer to speak of the reign-of-God movement on the grounds of the older critical insight that insisted that Jesus preached not himself, but God’s reign, and to see God’s reign as a movement of Jewish spiritual resistance to the violent and idolatrous reign of Caesar.

The analysis that produced the concept “Jesus movement” also described that movement as prophetic and charismatic, that is, spirit-driven, with no distinction between the career of Jesus and the years that succeeded his death. A Mary Magdalen whose experience is seen as continuous with that of John the prophet of Revelation and the New Prophets can help to illuminate the character of that experience. Mary saw the risen Lord because like Jesus and their companions in the movement she too was a prophet, accustomed to the voice of the spirit. The resurrection marked a transformative point in her prophetic experience, but that transformation did not consist of receiving the spirit for the first time, but of knowing the spirit in a new way. Once Jesus became the martyr of the movement, the visions that she saw were of him, the spirit in which she prophesied was his, the “word of the Lord” she spoke, the word of the lord Jesus.44

Recognizing the prophetic character of the movement and the first communities should have an effect on understanding both of the movement and of the creation of the gospels. Scholarship has long suggested that at least some of the sayings of Jesus in the gospels originated as sayings of the risen Lord who spoke through the early prophets—to resolve communal problems, to comfort and encourage the growing community, to explain when they needed enlightenment. To imagine what this means, one might add Mary into the category of those prophets: Recall my suggestion that John 20 depicts Mary as delivering an oracle with the words: “thus says the Lord, ‘I ascend to my father and your father, to my God and your God.’” She speaks, but the “I” in the saying is the “I” of the Lord or of the spirit. This practice survived into the second century, and is attested in the sayings of a prophetic movement originated by another “trinity”: two women, one named either Priscilla or Quintilla and one named Maximilla, and a man named Montanus; the movement called itself the new prophets, but was characterized by its enemies as Montanists (from the name of the man). Most of the few oracles that survive from the New Prophecy are reported by their enemies. Even so, it is clear that the spirit spoke through them in the first person. To Montanus is attributed an oracle that proclaims, “Lo, the human being is like a lyre, and I fly over like alectron (pick); the human sleeps, while I wake.” This oracle deploys a standard ancient metaphor that explains the working of prophetic inspiration. Its continuation defends prophetic experience by identifying its source: “The one who displaces the heart of human beings and gives human beings a heart is Lord.”45 Similarly an oracle attributed to Maximilla expresses the experience of rejection by other groups of Christians: “I am hunted like a wolf from the sheep: I am not a wolf; I am word, and spirit and power.”46 This “I” is the “I” of the Holy Spirit, probably complaining of the condemnation of the prophets by their opponents, who claim to defend orthodoxy as they sponsor the institutionalization of church offices. Consider the Johannine saying “I am the good shepherd” (10:11,14) or “I am the living bread.” Might they not have originated in the prophetic inspiration of Mary or one of her women or men companions? In response to the terror and disarray of the days after the crucifixion, the prophet speaks in the spirit of the risen Lord, who explains his death and promises his guidance and sustaining power with the words: “I am the good shepherd, I lay down my life for my sheep”; “I am the living bread come down from heaven. The one who comes to me will never hunger, the one who believes in me will never thirst” (John 6:35,32). Thus, when the voice of Jesus speaks in the gospels, it may have come into the gospel texts through the inspiration of Mary the prophet or some other of her inspired companions. Like Schweitzer’s Quest for the Historical Jesus, my quest for a Mary of history comes to rest in the experience of the spirit. I do not suggest that Mary comes to us in the spirit, or that she commands and we obey. Rather I wish to suggest that women and men seekers in the spirit and the memory of Jesus take a place as companion to Mary, moving forward to meet God’s reign. But I also want to close with a caution, by recalling that Mary the re-
pantent harlot was created in and by Christianity’s early and increasing difficulties reconciling the spirit and the flesh. Noli me tangere echoes through the ages in attitudes toward the female body and sexuality in general that have done women no good. The memories of the prophets Miriam and Mariam can be liberated to speak “good news for women” only insofar as the heirs of those memories can learn to love the flesh in which the spirit dwells. And finally, I suggest that the person of Mary the prophet, the visionary, the witness, was never as fully lost as it sometimes seems.

Mary the visionary survived in the tradition, even after she acquired a past from which she was required to repent. If the liturgy for the Western feast of Mary Magdalene focused on her career as repentant harlot, in the Easter celebrations of the West she emerged as witness, visionary, and apostle. Victimae Paschale Laudes, one of five sequences that survived the Tridentine reforms of the Roman Catholic liturgy, is in part a dialogue in which Mary is invited, by the congregation or perhaps by the other disciples, to recount her experience:

Dic nobis, Maria, quid vidistis in via?  
Tell us Mary what you saw on the way? (Luke 24:35)

Like the appendix to Mark, Mary’s reply is a compendium of vision narratives—she proclaims her own witness to the empty tomb, her vision of the risen Jesus, the angels she saw. But she also claims to have seen the mute evidence that the beloved disciple and Peter are said to have seen in John 20:5–7. She takes over the tradition of a vision “on the way” from Luke 24:35, and she delivers the message that does not get delivered in Mark 16:7–8:

Sepulchrum Christi viventis et gloriem vidi resurgentis  
The tomb of the living Christ I saw, and the glory of the rising one (John 20:1–18)

Angelicos testes, sudarium et vestes  
the angelic witnesses, the handkerchief and grave clothes (John 20:11–13, 5–7)

Surrexit Christus spes mea praecevit suos in Galilae!  
Christ my hope is risen; he goes before his own into Galilee! (Mark 16:7)

Although the sequence was written well after the creation of the repentant Magdalen, no trace of her appears in this dialogue: only Mary the sub-

“i have seen the lord”

lime apostle, who here delivers the message of her visions to audiences who hear and proclaim their belief:

Scimus Christum surrexisse a mortuis vere! Tu nobis victor rex, miserere  
We know Christ has arisen from the dead, truly! Have mercy on us. O victor king!

NOTES

2. Ibid.
5. See especially now Jane Schaberg, The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament (New York: Continuum, 2002). This essay was substantially completed before the publication of Schaberg’s work, and I have not been able to integrate it fully into the argument. The scholarly effort to distinguish Mary Magdalen, Mary of Bethany (John 12:1–8), and the sinful women of Luke 7:36–50 goes back to Lefevre d’Etaples, and has been accepted by the major Western churches. The distinction had in fact been maintained in the Orthodox churches.
8. See also D’Angelo, “Reconstructing Real Women,” 109–19.
10. In the NRSV and most other translations, the relation of Mary to Jacob and Joses is specified: She is called “the mother” of James (Jacob) and Joses.

11. Kathleen E. Corley’s study of these narratives in light of women’s mourning practices suggests the probability of the women’s presence at the cross, while arguing for a strong compositional hand in Mark’s narrative; see Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 2002), also “Women and the Crucifixion and Burial of Jesus,” Forum n.s. 1 (1998): 181–217. In particular she disputes that any of the companions of Jesus could have known where he was buried and rejects the empty tomb stories (Women and the Historical Jesus, 134–38).

12. See W. D. Davies, The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 422–23, for the significance of the word; he actually sees the term as reflecting a relation between the disciples, including these women, and Jesus, based upon the pattern of the relation between Moses and Joshua. They thus become his successors.

13. The phrase ζητεῖν μαρτύρησθαι appears to be influenced by Ps. 38:11 (37:12LXX), but it also reflects the political realities for associates of someone being executed for sedition.

14. Winsome Munro, and following her Kathleen Corley, suggests that Mark has suppressed the presence of women in the movement to this point. Munro, “Women Disciples in Mark?” CBQ 44 (1982): 235–41; Corley, Women and the Historical Jesus, 136.

15. R. Bultmann suggested that the variation of the second Mary’s names results from the joining of different traditions; History of the Synoptic Tradition; trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 276. But the variation may also be a means of avoiding a tedious repetition, or it may simply testify to the author’s lack of interest in this woman.


20. Rigato takes this position; see esp. 279–86; see alternatively de Boer, 157–58, who suggests that the Galilean women are restricted to Jesus’ lifetime.

21. Sandra Schneider has absorbed and redirected this idea into a reading of the beloved disciple as a corporate personality; Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 211–32. See also the discussion in Schaberg, 344–45.

22. Corley sees no evidence that John used an independent source for the crucifixion, empty tomb, and appearances, and suggests that Peter and the beloved disciples were secondarily introduced specifically to lessen the importance of the women; 134.

23. The appendix is missing in the great fourth-century Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus and from some ancient Syriac, Sahidic, and Armenian texts. Clement, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome also know texts from which it is absent. But it appears in the old Latin tradition cited in Irenaeus’ Adversus Haereses 3,11,5 (extant only in Latin). This suggests that it was composed during the later half of the second century, probably in the West.

24. It has been suggested that this text incorporates sources that were contemporaneous with the formation of the passion narrative. See John Dominic Crossan, The Cross That Spoke (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988); for a summary of this theory, see Paul Allan Mirecki, “Peter, Gospel of,” in Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 5, 278–81.


27. Wesley Isenberg assigns the Gospel of Philip to the later part of the third century.

28. See Antti Marjanen, in this volume, who explains the kiss as communicative secret knowledge.


THE MIRIAMIC VISION


33. Gerd Lüdemann has moved from this conclusion to the further hypothesis that this vision was produced by Peter’s guilt and grief, 93–94, 132. Bart Ehrman, on the other hand, argues against identifying the Cephas of 1 Cor. 15:23 with Peter; see “Cephas and Peter,” JBL 109:3 (1990): 463–74.


35. Ibid., 127–28.

36. Ibid., 125.

37. Ibid., 126.


39. Ibid., 139.

40. Ibid., 203–209.

41. As does Osiek, 212–19.

42. This is a summary of a lengthy and complex argument put forward in two chapters of the book; 254–356.

43. Corley sees this as a further attempt to marginalize the role of women; see Women and the Historical Jesus.


45. See, e.g., Gregory J. Riley, Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), who regulates it to a brief mention (94) and a long footnote (98, n. 86) and harmonizes this passage’s treatment of Jesus’ body with the Thomas story. The exceptions are feminist; see Harold W. Attridge, “Don’t Be Touching Me: Recent Feminist Scholarship on Mary Magdalene,” in A Feminist Companion to John, vol. 2, ed. Amy-Jill Levine, Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings Series 5 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 140–66. Attridge’s study was published too recently to be integrated into this essay.

46. John 20:18 may make an authoritative claim for Mary, though hardly an explicit one.


48. This is true even if one postulates a source.

49. See, e.g., Riley, 98, n. 86.


51. The Greek words for sister and brother, ἦδελφος and ἦδελφη, are distinguished only by an ending (like the Spanish, hermano and hermana), so the generic plural, which is masculine in form and usually translated “brothers,” is less exclusive than the English plural “brothers.” Thus the NRSV has in most cases chosen to translate it as “brothers and sisters.”

52. See also Schaberg’s reconstruction of a common source behind John 20:18 and Matthew 28:10; 294–99.


54. It may not be the category of an oracle of assurance; see David Aune’s description of this category in Early Christian Prophecy in its Ancient Mediterranean Context (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 117–18; I do not, however, wish to limit the use of the word “oracle” to his categories; I am using the word to describe the content of any prophetic communication.


58. Celsus’s work, The True Word, is known only through Origen’s response in a treatise called Against Celsus. The objections to the resurrection were apparently attributed by Celsus to an unnamed Jewish critic. This particular charge is from C. Cels. 2:70.


65. Epiphanius, Medicine Box against All Heresies, 48.4.

We have had a very long and circuitous relationship—she and I. She appears, disappears, and reappears, as is her wont. Sometimes I have released her from my thinking, research, and visual investigations; other times, I have re-invited her into my life. Absence and presence, denial and affirmation, textual inquiry and the visual, these are our forms of communication. My first memory of her is clear and powerful. She came into my life formally for the first time when I was seven or eight years old. The detail of my exact age is a blur, as age should be for a woman. However, the event itself remains so vivid that I can see myself and my mother so clearly and describe not simply what we were wearing and where we were sitting but every emotion on both our faces as we talked that weekday afternoon. My regular Sunday School teacher had been absent that previous Sunday, and her replacement had terrorized, perhaps unknowingly, my entire class with her exacting descriptions not simply of hell but of all the punishments sinners received according to their sins—the tongues of liars nailed to the burning roofs of tall buildings, the mouths of those who swore stuffed constantly with hot coals, and so forth. Perhaps Dantesque, perhaps not, nonetheless terrifying for a group of young children who silently met their parents at the end of the Divine Liturgy. It was several days before I could even possibly begin to voice my fears to my mother, for the teacher, substitute or no, was very firm: there was no salvation for those who had sinned. My greatest terror was that my father—who was a sports fanatic—would be condemned to hell for all those “words” he exchanged in a monologue with