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Mary Magdalene

Lead: In Scripture, legend, and fiction, Mary Magdalene over the centuries has been made a symbol of how Christians have defined the importance of devotion, the place of sexuality and the role of women.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: There are a number of Marys mentioned in the New Testament among them Mary, the mother of Jesus and Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus. Then there is the enigmatic character, Mary of Magdala, a village

near the west shore of Galilee or perhaps she is in fact Mary Magdalen, whose second name may have been derived from the Talmudic word referring to an adulteress.

Whatever her origins or the meaning of her name, she is portrayed in the orthodox Gospels as a prominent and devoted follower of Jesus. She is said in two accounts (Luke 8:2 and Mar 16:9) to have been delivered of multiple demons and in gratitude became one of several women who provided financial support from their own resources for Jesus and the disciples.

Early Christian scholars identified Mary as the local “sinful woman”

whose extravagance in pouring oil on Jesus' feet as a sign of humility and repentance (Luke 7:36-39; Mark 14:3-9 John 12:3-8; and Matthew 26:6-13) and others asserted that she was the "woman caught in adultery" (John 7:53-8:11) whom Jesus refused condemn (the earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not include this passage).

Magdalene is most certainly identified as one of those who remained at the Crucifixion of Jesus when most of his followers fled and was portrayed in the Gospels as being present immediately following the resurrection, specifically identified by John as the first to encounter the risen Christ.

It is how the figure of Mary was used in subsequent centuries that most intrigues scholars. She was the subject or author of an apocryphal Gospel, in which she was depicted as receiving a leadership role equal to or greater than the male disciples. Usually she has been shaped in the hands of writers into a symbol of the repentant, usually sexual, sinner, an example of the danger of female allure and dominance. She was said in some traditions to have spent the years following Jesus' death in prayer and remorse, thus commending to others the life of contemplation and retreat.

Legends swirl around this figure, including some best-selling modern

speculative novels and films. She is portrayed in medieval legends as marrying the Apostle John at Cana or even being the lover of Jesus or preacher to the pagan world.

Perhaps the true reality of the life and role of Magdalene can never be known, but she remains a fascinating participant in the Gospel narratives and has been the subject of speculation and devotion and often a symbol in the hands of those who have a religious agenda and use her, accurately or inaccurately, to advance it.

Research assistance by Nancy Waldo, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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