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The Time Returns:

A Study of the Imaginings of Mary the Magdalene

By

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To Mary,

Might our paths meet again.

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The Time Returns:

A Study of the Imaginings of Mary the Magdalene

Lama Makki

ABSTRACT

The debatable figure of Mary the Magdalene and the discovery of the Nag Hammadi gospels have caused a renewed interest in Christian discourses regarding the role of Mary the Magdalene in the four Gospels of the New Testament. Her relationship with Jesus Christ and with the other women in the Gospels has sparked controversy that reached a peak in the eighties of the last century after the publication of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (1982) by Henry Lincoln, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh. The publication of this book sparked a deep interest in her ambiguous role as a witness to the Resurrection and subsequently in her representation in the mystical writings of Gnostic origins. My thesis explores the controversial character of Mary the Magdalene in the light of present day debates about the role of women in the church. Mary the Magdalene will be presented as a composite image of different layers through her representations in the different canonical and Gnostic gospels including: *The Gospel of Matthew*, the *Gospel of Mark*, the *Gospel of Luke*, the *Gospel of John*, the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Mary*. The ultimate perspective of my study of the image of Mary the Magdalene is to see who she was. Was she a repentant prostitute, an apostle to the apostles, a high priestess, or a female aspect of Jesus Christ himself?

Keywords: Mary the Magdalene, Canonical gospels, Gnostic gospels.

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Introduction

The name Mary the Magdalene has evoked a multitude of images in the last two thousand years. From a witness to resurrection to an apostle to the apostles to a repentant sinner; few women are as mysterious as Mary the Magdalene. The earliest sources of information about her come from the New Testament Gospels and the writings of the church fathers, yet those sources do not provide any concrete information about her historical background. We do not know anything about the place she came from, her age, or her marital status as she is never identified with a father, husband, brother or son. The image of Mary the Magdalene in literature and art as a repentant prostitute is magnificent, but it is mistaken in terms of historical accuracy and the literary interpretation of the New Testament. She is reduced to the role of a repentant prostitute deliberately in an effort to marginalize her. Twelve scriptural passages are the only canonical texts that explicitly identify Mary as Mary the Magdalene. The other passages just conflate her with the other Mary(s). However, “she is a character in eleven gnostic/apocryphal works, where sometimes she is a major character” (Thimmes, 1998, p. 193). Galen Kunston adds, “if a count is made more narrowly of the passion, death and resurrection narratives, only Peter who denied Jesus, and Judas who betrayed Jesus are mentioned more frequently” (Kunston, 1997, p. 207).

Several women are mentioned by the name Mary in the canonical gospels, and this has caused a lot of confusion especially in the *Gospel of Mark* as three of the four women he mentions are called Mary. Esther De Boer considers that the name Mary is a much used Hebrew name. She explains that the name Mary or Mariamme represents

“Queen Mariamme who, as a threat to his throne, was killed by her husband, the Nabatean Herod, who was made king of the Jews by the Romans” (De Boer, 2004, p. 118). Karim El Koussa on the other hand considers that “the Aramaic Maryam, a reputed female name in Canaan- Phoenicia, is in fact a composed name of two words, ‘Mort-Yam’, and it means ‘Lady of the Sea’” (El Koussa, 2013, p. 44). El Koussa comments that the title ‘Lady of the Sea’ has been given “as a title to the goddess Astarte (Ashtarte) by the Phoenician seafarers who always sought her protection during their travels across seas and oceans” (El Koussa, 2013, p. 44). It is noteworthy that many churches around the world dedicated to the Virgin Mary bear the name ‘Lady of the Sea’. Two of these churches are in Lebanon: one in Batroun and the other in Tyr.

The name Mary the Magdalene is rather interesting as instead of referring to a family name, it refers to a place. When the name Mary is mentioned in the canonical Gospels, relatives are usually added to differentiate the women from each other as in the case of: Mary the Mother of James, Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and Mary of Clopas. De Boer citing Thompson explains that “The New Testament Gospels constantly have the name of Mary Magdalene formed as proper noun+ definite article+ geographical name. The definite article in these cases is only used in Greek if a well-known person is to be distinguished from others with the same name” (De Boer, 2004, pp.118-119). The *Gospel of Luke* speaks of Mary who was called the Magdalene (Luke 8.2). De Boer asserts that this name means that “it is the Mary who comes from Magdala” (De Boer, 1997, p. 21). The official texts of the New Testament do not mention the town of Magdala, but mentions Delmanutha and Magadan. Magdala is only mentioned in few manuscripts in a version of Mark (8.10) and a version of Matthew (15.39). Delmanutha

and Magadan were not identified, but De Boer comments that “it becomes clear from the Rabbinic literature that we have to look for Magdala in the neighborhood of Tiberias, by the Sea of Galilee” (De Boer, 1997, p.21). Margaret Starbid, on the other hand, argues that the word Magdala means ‘tower’ or ‘fortress’ in Hebrew and Aramaic, denoting that Mary may have been a particularly tall or strong woman (Starbid, 2005, pp.90-95). Furthermore, Thomas McDaniel comments that “the similarity of a Greek word ‘magdalia’ which can mean ‘dirt washed off’ with the completely unrelated Aramaic word ‘magdala’ became intertwined in Western traditions about Mary Magdalene soiling her name and her reputation” (McDaniel, 2007, p. 348). It is interesting to notice how such a name would generate multitude of meanings with opposite denotations.

Mary the Magdalene was the first to be bestowed upon the title ‘Apostle to the Apostles’ by Hippolytus, Bishop of Rome (C.170-235). Thimmes notes that “in his commentary on Cantic of Canticles, he associates her with the bride and with the Bride of Christ, a symbol of the Church” (Thimmes, 1998, pp.220-221). Mary the Magdalene’s role in the resurrection scene brought a new hope for mankind, a hope of eternal life. Susan Haskins comments that by “compensating for the first Eve’s sin, the New Eve becomes ‘Apostle to the Apostles’. ‘Oh consolation,’ Hippolytus exclaims, ‘Eve was called Apostle’” (Haskins, 1993, p.65). The Eastern tradition “depicts her explicitly as disciple and apostle, even though she is a woman” (De Boer, 1997, p.12). De Boer mentions that Gregory of Antioch (sixth century) in one of his sermons “makes Christ say to women at the tomb ‘proclaim to my disciples the mysteries which you have seen. Become the first teachers of the teachers. Peter, who has denied me, must learn that I can also choose women as disciples’” (De Boer, 1997, p.12).

In 591 A.D. Pope Gregory the Great issued Homily 33 where he stated “we believe that this woman whom Luke calls a female sinner, whom John calls Mary, is the same Mary from whom Mark says seven demons were cast out” (Jansen, 2000, pp.32-33). This Homily altered the image of Mary the Magdalene from an ‘Apostle to the Apostles’ to a sinner and tarnished her reputation for a long time. Although “ following the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church in 1969 officially rescinded its almost-two-thousand-year tradition that Mary Magdalene was a penitent prostitute, finally acknowledging that no scriptural evidence existed for this slander” (Starbid, 2005, p.44). Unfortunately, Pope Gregory’s depiction of Mary the Magdalene “is still believed by many as the ‘Gospel truth’ ” (Haskins, 1993, xiv). This makes one contemplates the power of clergy men to blemish the image of the main witness of resurrection for 1500 years. Thimmes considers that there was evidence for this conflation before Pope Gregory’s homily. She argues that “the origins of the ‘invented’ Mary Magdalene traditions are so elusive and obscure that a source cannot be posited, although some suggest that the writings of Ephraim the Syrian (306-373 C.E.) provide a clue to the origins of this ruse, for he identifies the Mary Magdalene of Luke (8.1-3) with the unnamed woman of Luke (7.36-50)” (Thimmes, 1998, p.221). Mary the Magdalene was also conflated with the woman taken in adultery in John 8, and Haskins comments on this is that:

The links between Mary Magdalene and both the woman of Samaria and the woman taken in adultery are even more tenuous than those between the Magdalene and Luke’s sinner and Mary of Bethany. They owe their origins,

however, to the conflated creature which Mary of Magdala became from the sixth century on – the repentant whore. (Haskins, 1993, p.26).

Unfortunately, the horrible effects still persist. Lucy Winkett comments that:

Mary Magdalene has given her name to homes for fallen women, to the Magdalene laundries; popular as workhouses for, among others, women pregnant with the children of priests (All with the attendant imagery of sin and stain). She has given her name to a charity which currently exists to assist woman who have had or who are having relationships with priests who have committed themselves to celibacy. (Winkett, 2002, p.20).

The transformation of Mary the Magdalene from an apostle to a repentant whore was done. From “the gospel figure, with her active role as herald of the New Life, the Apostle to the Apostles – she became the redeemed whore and Christianity’s model of repentance, a manageable, controllable figure, and effective weapon and instrument of propaganda against her own sex” (Haskins, 1993, pp.96-97).

The Eastern Church never saw Mary the Magdalene as a composite character. She remained the same woman who appears in the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. She is not celebrated as a penitent prostitute but as myrrh bearer. She was the woman who prepared the ointment and spices to anoint the dead body of Jesus Christ. The Eastern Church believes that after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Mary the Magdalene became a permanent companion of the Virgin Mary and never went to France as it has been claimed recently.

This composite character of Mary the Magdalene and the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library have caused a renewed interest in Christian discourses regarding the

role of Mary the Magdalene in the Four Canonized Gospels of the New Testament. Her composite character became a popular subject in scholarly studies as many works have been devoted to the study of her character in both canonical and Gnostic gospels, in addition to plays from the Middle Ages and recent movies. Susan Haskins in her book *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor*, published in 1993, discusses the image of Mary the Magdalene in the four canonical gospels, in the Gnostic gospels, and in works of art and movies. Haskins argues that myth has changed the image of Mary the Magdalene. Haskins considers that “the ideology behind her creation is one which has not retreated but remains ever-potent” (Haskins, 1993, p.398). Bruce Chilton in his book *Mary Magdalene: a Biography* published in 2005 is convinced that Mary the Magdalene “belongs on this list of the creators of Christianity” (Chilton, 2005, p. x). He argues that she provided the source of the exorcism stories in the four Canonical Gospels and “influenced much of what early Christians believed about how to treat demonic possession” (Chilton, 2005, p. x). Bruce concludes that although “Christianity has often appreciated the power of Mary’s spiritual practices, but church after church has distorted their meaning by alienating them from Mary herself” (Chilton, 2005, p. xiii). Ann Graham Brock in her book *Mary Magdalene: the First Apostle* published in 2003 discusses the definition of apostleship and sheds light on the main differences between the gospels regarding the qualifications necessary for being an apostle. Moreover, she discusses the concept of the “twelve apostles” and compares it to “the portrayals of other early church leaders who could and did qualify to be called an apostle” (Brock, 2003, p.18). Most importantly, Brock examines deeply the “two early traditions of apostolic authority concerning Mary Magdalene and Peter and the path each eventually took”

(Brock, 2003, p.18). Antti Marjanen in his book *The Woman Jesus Loved* published in 1996 delineates the image and importance of Mary the Magdalene in both Gnostic texts and texts that have close parallels to Gnostic thought that belong to the second and third century Christian texts. In his study, he attempts “to see what role Mary Magdalene assumes in the textual and symbolic world of a particular writing and what her characterization reveals about the author’s view on women, especially about their possibility to gain a position of authority” (Marjanen, 1996, p.23). Esther de Boer in her book *The Gospel of Mary: beyond a Gnostic and Biblical Mary Magdalene* published in 2004 evaluates the different opinions and points of view on the Gnostic Mary the Magdalene. De Boer does that by examining the role of Mary the Magdalene in the *Gospel of Mary* in addition to her role in the four canonical Gospels. De Boer concludes that there should be a new evaluation of the Gnostic portrayal of Mary the Magdalene, and to her role as an apostolic leader. Moreover, she considers that “the portrayal of Mary Magdalene in the *Gospel of Mary* most likely does not depend on the New Testament Gospels, but rather on earlier tradition about Mary Magdalene” (De Boer, 2004, p.208). Karen King in her book *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala* published in 2003 discusses the *Gospel of Mary* and its role in early Christianity. She argues that “Christian doctrine and practice are not fixed dogmas that one can accept or reject; rather Christians are required to step into the story and work together to shape the meaning of the Gospel in their own time” (King, 2003, p.189). She considers that the *Gospel of Mary* in addition to other works “argue energetically that the appropriation of Jesus’ teachings points out the way to true discipleship and salvation” (King, 2003, p.190).

This thesis aims to study the controversial composite image of Mary the Magdalene in the light of present day debates about the role of women in the church. A thematic analysis of the discourse of representations would be applied taking into consideration the subjectivity of the resources and how their use of images constitutes possible identifications of Mary the Magdalene. In addition to that, a literary analysis of the poetical conventions and the narrative techniques and literature's shifting conventions will be needed to assess the textual deployment of the image of Mary the Magdalene in a balanced way.

In chapter one, I will apply a thematic analysis of the image of Mary the Magdalene in the Canonical Gospels and identify the area of controversy and discuss her different roles as a disciple, and witness. In the four canonical gospels we see Mary the Magdalene as a leading woman who followed the Christ through Galilee and appears to be a central figure at a time the other male disciples were not available. She was present at the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This places her as the most truthful figure to the teachings of the Jesus Christ in spite of the grief and pain she must have suffered at such difficult days. Fiorenza speculates that "as a feminist vision, the basileia vision of Jesus calls all women without exception to wholeness and selfhood, as well as to solidarity with those women who are the improvised, the maimed, and outcasts of our society and church" (Fiorenza, 1994, p.153).

The second chapter will be a study of three of the Gnostic gospels: the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Philip*. In these gospels, we see a different Mary the Magdalene than the canonical gospels. In the canonical gospels, Mary the Magdalene is present in the history and geography of the Gospels of the New Testament.

In the Gnostic gospels, we see a woman with a Gnostic and philosophical background who solely received revelations from Jesus Christ. In the *Gospel of Mary*, we see her encouraging the sad and fearful students. Then she explains to them a vision she saw and how Jesus Christ explained to her the nature of visions and how people see them. This conversation reveals the depth of her understanding of Jesus Christ's teachings and her ability to both apply and teach them even in his absence. In the *Gospel of Philip*, she is mentioned as the companion of Jesus Christ. She is depicted as the one who is able to see the light, and that is why Jesus Christ loved her more than the other disciples. In the *Gospel of Thomas* she is seen as a disciple who wants to know more about the requirements of discipleship to reach the stage of a perfect human being. She is such a special student that Jesus Christ offered to guide her through the process of becoming a perfect and complete human being.

The ultimate perspective of my study of the image of Mary the Magdalene is to understand her as a woman who paved the way for females to reach salvation. Her relationship with Jesus Christ and the competition between her and Peter are examined to reveal how Mary the Magdalene gives empowerment and self-determination to the female figure within the social context of the different gospels.

Chapter One

Mary the Magdalene in the Canonical Gospels

Chapter one is a thematic analysis of the image of Mary the Magdalene in the four canonical gospels: The *Gospel of Matthew*, the *Gospel of Mark*, the *Gospel of Luke*, and the *Gospel of John*. The word gospel means “good news”. It comes from the Greek word ‘euangelion’. (Pennington, 2012, p.19). The Greek word ‘euangelion’ is the source of the terms “evangelist” and “evangelism” in English. The authors of the four canonical Christian gospels are known as the Four Evangelists. Pennington defines the gospel as “a kerygma or proclamation” (Pennington, 2012, pp.21-22). The Gospel refers “not only to the oral proclamation of the good news but also to the written documents about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus” (Pennington, 2012, p.23). It is a literary genre used by many of the different gospel writers including the four Canonical Gospels: *Mark*, *Matthew*, *Luke* and *John*. This term refers to the apocryphal gospels, Gnostic gospels, and Jewish-Christian gospels too. John Riches states that “Many scholars doubt that the Gospels were written by eye witnesses as their attributions seem to suggest: there is too much evidence of reworking oral traditions and of straight borrowing from others gospels to make this likely” (Riches, 2000, p.45).

Three of the gospels, by *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke* “are so close in form and content that they are called the 'synoptics', from the Greek word ‘synoptikos’, meaning from the same point of view” (Haskins, 1993, p.5) While the fourth gospel, which is different in style and approach, is attributed to the apostle John “who is also identified

with the 'beloved disciple' who leant against Christ's breast at the Last Supper (John 13:23)" (Haskins, 1993, p.5).

Women were treated differently by Jesus Christ as he refused to accept many of the rules stated by the Hebrew Scriptures and established by the Jewish religious groups. Women "had become second-class Jews, excluded from the worship and teaching of God, with status scarcely above that of slaves" (Metzger & Coogan, 1993, p.807). Jesus Christ in the accounts of the four canonical gospels ignored the Jewish ritual impurity rules, talked to foreign women, taught women students and accepted them in his inner circle. Moreover, women were mostly present at Jesus' crucifixion and he appeared to one or more women after his resurrection, namely Mary the Magdalene. He expressed concern for widows, and changed the laws of divorce in *Mark* (10.11-12) stating that neither spouse husband nor wife can divorce the other. In the *Gospel of Luke*, he used parallel stories of men and women. Forster) considers that:

The most striking thing about the role of women in the life and teaching of Jesus is the simple fact that they are there. Although the gospel texts contain no special sayings repudiating the view of the day about women, their uniform testimony to the presence of women among the followers of Jesus and to his serious teaching of them constitutes the a break with tradition which has been described as being without precedent in [then] contemporary Judaism. (Forster, 1967, p.124).

E. Schussler Fiorenza in her book *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* states that "imaginatively adopting the perspective of biblical wo/men rather than just looking at them as fixed objects in texts in a fixed content yields a different world and set of possibilities" (Fiorenza, 2001, p. 36). If we do this, we will realize that both women and

men will be able to “discover new possibilities within the socially accepted framework of their lives” (Bauckham, 2002, p. xiv).

1.1 The Gospel of Mark

The *Gospel of Mark*, the second book of the New Testament, is one of the four canonical gospels and the three synoptic gospels. It has received “little attention through most of Christian history” because “Augustine a fourth century theologian” considered “that *Mark* was an abbreviation of the *Gospel of Matthew*” (Tolbert, 1998, p.350). Most modern scholars “regard it as the work of an unknown author working with various sources including collections of miracle stories, controversy stories, parables, and a passion narrative” (Burkett, 2002, p.156). Schussler Fiorenza considers that “the unknown Christian who brought the various traditions and stories about Jesus of Nazareth together into a coherent narrative structure did so in order to strengthen the faith and praxis of the Christian community to who s/he writes” (Fiorenza, 1994, p.316).

Mary the Magdalene is “first referred to by name in Chapter 15 of St Mark's gospel, towards the end of his account of Christ's crucifixion on Golgotha, ‘the place of a skull’, the Hebrew name for Calvary, just outside Jerusalem. Mark's gospel, probably written about AD 66-8, is now agreed on by most scholars to be the source of those of Luke and Matthew; the latter traditionally thought to have been written first” (Haskins, 1993, p. 5). The book was “probably written during Nero’s persecution of the Christians in Rome or the Jewish revolt, as suggested by the references to war in Judea and to persecution” (Perkins, 1998, p.241). Haskins commenting on the status of women in the gospel realizes that:

From the gospel accounts it would appear that the women formed a heterogeneous group, some of whom in conventional Jewish terms might also have been seen as marginalized. That social status and other socio-religious considerations are unimportant to Christ is shown by his rejection of the traditional Jewish ideas about taboo and impurity found in the Old Testament, as in the case of the woman with an issue of blood (Matthew 9.20-2; Luke 8.43-8), whom he cures her physical ailment, thereby denying any connotation of uncleanness. (Haskins, 1993, p.14).

Moreover, W. Murno considers that “*Mark* has intentionally concealed the presence of women because he is uneasy with the prominence of women in the early church, and he is trying to downplay their role in Jesus’ mission” (Murno, 1982, p.234). W. R. Telford:

wonders about the evangelist’s motivation(s) in portraying them so positively, especially when the male disciples are treated so harshly. Some have suggested that the evangelist’ exemplary treatment of the women reflects the true state of affairs in the Markan community, where women, it is claimed are treated as equals and occupied positions of influence or even leadership, others that it reflects the situation of the early church that more women than men were martyred for their faith. (Telford, 1999, p.233).

Mary the Magdalene is mentioned four times in the *Gospel of Mark*, and she is mentioned for the first time after the death of Jesus Christ. She is standing at the crucifixion site with a group of women, but the author of *Mark* mentions the names of three women only and lists Mary the Magdalene as the first name, and then, 1) Mary the mother of James the younger and Joseph and 2) Salome. Bruce Chilton notices that "The Gospel According to

Mark effaces women. Almost every female- even Jesus' mother- is deprived of her name." (Chilton, 2005, p. 98) Yet, it is seems that these women were of certain importance to get their names mentioned at the crucifixion scene. The three women are not mentioned before in the gospel and it is not clear why a group of women is standing there alone among a group of Roman soldiers and chief priests at such a bleak time. K.E. Corley in her article 'Salves, Servants and Prostitutes: Gender and Social Class in Mark' considers that these three named women are the only members of the discipleship group, while the others have only accompanied Jesus the Christ in a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Corley, 2001, p.198). We are not provided with any information regarding the background of Mary the Magdalene. She is not mentioned in relationship to a father, a brother or even a husband; rather she is only linked with Galilee, where the ministry of Jesus Christ started, so that she is associated with him early from the beginning. W. Murno argues that these three women are mentioned only at the end of the gospel because their most important role is as witnesses to the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus the Christ (Murno, 1982, p. 236).

Mary the Magdalene stands at the crucifixion scene with these two women "looking from afar" (*Mark*, 15:40) with "-no apostolic grandeur, no expectations to be lived up to or disappointed." (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.25) The women cannot come any closer to Jesus the Christ, possibly because of the presence of the Roman soldiers and the chief priests and scribes. The women are just standing there supposedly for six hours which is the crucifixion period, three hours of which are in complete darkness, but we do not see them crying or mourning as one would expect in a situation like this. On the contrary, it seems that these women had a good reason just to stand afar and watch

without bringing attention to their identity after what happened to the young man who tried to stay with Jesus, and was caught by the soldiers; he was barely able to escape from them and ended up running away with no clothes as he was only wearing a gown (*Mark* 14:51-52). Although de Boer considers that “the women’s willingness to follow and to serve Jesus would be shown by this verse to be deficient” (De Boer, 2004, p.120), but it seems that these women knew that they can do nothing especially after Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s three times denial. They are the last followers left present at the crucifixion. An echo of Jesus Christ teaching appears here as he promises them earlier that ‘the first will be last, and the last will be first’ (*Mark* 10.31). This verse is used by Jesus to explain how things will be in the new community of faith, and how people will be valued according to their faith and transformation. These women must have been left in a very confusing and annoying situation, but they couldn’t have abandoned their Lord in his darkest hours which was something the male disciples did. The male disciples left the women watching their Lord dying without being able to do anything for his sake. The women’s role in this narrative opposes the role of the male disciples. Their endurance and faith placed them in an advanced position in the New Markan community. M. Grey defines the strength of these women as a relational power that corresponds to the hidden power of God which is present with Jesus himself (Grey, 1989, pp.100-101). Although these women do not have the power to intervene, they show boldness, determination, heroism and faith in standing there. Jesus Christ has asked his disciples earlier to deny themselves to be with him in the verse “deny themselves and take up their cross” (*Mark* 8.34), and these women have indeed denied themselves to be with him at the time of his death. To bring this further, Schussler Fiorenza states that:

Scholars agree that *Mark's* portrayal of the leading male disciples is rather critical and almost negative. Not only do they misunderstand Jesus and his mission, they also misconstrue his nature and identity. Finally, they betray, deny, and abandon him during the time of his arrest and execution. (Fiorenza, 1994, p. 319)

Moreover, Mary Ann Tolbert considers that “women enter the story actively only as a group at the cross after the downfall of the male disciples (15.40) (Tolbert, 1998, p. 350). She insists that “the Christian community reflected by *Mark's* Gospel must have contained strong women leaders and role models, since the gospel itself so clearly uses women characters in such a fashion” (Tolbert, 1998, p.350). The presence of these women at the crucifixion puts them in parallel position with Jesus Christ as they are willing to suffer in case they got arrested as he has done for the sake of the world. They have indeed denied themselves and took up their cross.

We then know from verse 15.41 that these three women knew Jesus since his ministry in Galilee, and they used to follow him and provide for him; in addition to a larger group of many women who followed him from Jerusalem. This brings forth verse 9.35 'last of all and servant of all' where these women have placed themselves at service to the new family of brothers and sisters that Jesus the Christ has brought forward. These women are “thus characterized as Jesus true relatives” (Fiorenza, 1994, p.320). All over the Gospel, we notice a distinction between the small circle of the twelve disciples and a wider circle of disciples that Jesus Christ considers as his own, and who have received the secrets of the Kingdom of God. Although the twelve are listed as males, the wider circle of disciples are not identified only as males; rather they included a large number of women. These women have always been present in the *Gospel of Mark* and are portrayed

positively as in the narratives of the healing of the woman with the blood flow and the exorcism of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter, but what distinguishes the group of women who followed him to Jerusalem is that the woman with the blood flow and the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter are mentioned once in the Gospel, while the group of women including Mary the Magdalene have always followed him and ministered to him.

The role of the women as witnesses continues in the burial of Jesus Christ. Only two women are mentioned to have witnessed the place of the tomb where the body was laid: Mary the Magdalene and Mary the mother of James. It is not mentioned where and why the other women have disappeared. We only know that two women cared enough to follow Joseph of Arimathea during the burial time to see where the body of Jesus Christ was placed. Joseph of Arimathea is nowhere mentioned in the *Gospel of Mark* as a disciple of Jesus Christ, but he acted bravely and went to Pontius Pilate to ask for the body. No proper ceremony was conducted, yet the body was wrapped in white linen clothes and placed in a tomb carved in a rock. A proper burial in the Jewish tradition would have administered anointing the body of the dead with spices; maybe that's why the three women: Mary the Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices and went to the tomb early in the first day of the week.

De Boer states that "some exegetes argue that the women's desire to anoint Jesus' body indicates their misunderstanding, since Jesus was already anointed at Bethany, which he himself interpreted to have been in preparation for his burial (*Mark*, 14.8)" (De Boer, 2004, p.121), yet still other exegetes "point to the uselessness of going to balm a deteriorating body" (De Boer, 2004, p.121). It is not clear if Mary the Magdalene and the other women bought the spices because they were not present during the very expensive

anointment incident in Beit Ania, or because they were performing a different ritual to help cover the ominous odors of the decomposing body. Maybe these women “just wanted to complete the burial by Joseph of Arimathea and thus to pay their respects” (De Boer, 2004, p.121). Bruce Chilton deems the procedure done by the women of more importance as Mary the Magdalene in this act of going to the tomb with spices “connects his death and Resurrection, not only by who she is but also by what she does: Mary the Magdalene established the place of anointing as a central ritual in Christianity, recollecting Jesus' death and pointing forward to his Resurrection” (Chilton, 2005, p.52).

It must have taken the women a great courage to decide to go to the tomb and anoint Jesus Christ, for he was not a regular criminal; rather, he was condemned because he was accused of being ‘the King of the Jews’. This meant that he was a political criminal who was a threat to the Roman emperor himself. It was dangerous to visit his grave, as those visiting it “ran the risk of being condemned to death just as he had been” (De Boer, 2004, p.122). Moreover, these women had yet the burden of rolling the really heavy stone away from the door of the tomb to be able to get in and anoint the body. It is not clear why the male disciples didn’t accompany them to help roll the stone, which is a mission usually done by men rather than by women. But these women “caught between their own despair and the size of the rock, they lifted their eyes and ‘perceived’. This moment of extraordinary perception opened them to the announcement of Jesus' Resurrection, and their vision became the vessel of Christian hope” (Chilton, 2005, p.82). To their luck, when they looked up, they discovered that the stone has been rolled, and they entered the tomb. Bruce Chilton realizes that:

Mark's Gospel was written early enough that Mary's effacement is incomplete. But in the later Gospels, women became more and more ancillary. Likewise, Mary's vision at the mouth of the tomb appeared as purely provisional in the Gospels that followed Mark's. As we are about to see, women were even deprived of the role of going to the tomb to anoint Jesus' corpse. (Chilton, 2005, p.101)

Griffith –Jones best describes the scene as:

Now Mary Magdalene and the other women are approaching the tomb, as Mark tells us in elaborate detail, *very early on Day One of the week, when the sun had risen*. Mark is surely evoking Psalm 24, set *For Day One of the Week*, as a triumphant hymn for the morning, to be sung as the Temple's gates were flung open at sunrise: *Lift up the gates, those who rule you; and you ancient gates, be lifted up; and the king of glory shall come in*. The women are approaching a place of death, but at a time of new creation and new life and solemn celebration. (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.23)

To their amazement, the three women find a young man wearing a white garment sitting on the right side of the tomb. He addresses them saying “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter: ‘He is going before you into Galilee’. There you will see him, as he told you” (*Mark*, 16: 6-7). Many interpretations have been given to this verse, mostly excluding the women from the discipleship of Jesus the Christ. Yet De Boer, quoting Neiryneck (1969) and Schottroff (1982) consider that “the words ‘there you will see him, as he told you’ are directed to the women as a reminder and explanation of Jesus’ promise. This clearly includes them” (De Boer, 2004, p.122). De Boer explains that she

considers this explanation as a valid one as “Mark, in the rest of the Gospel includes both women and men in the use of the word ‘disciples’” (De Boer, 2004, p.122). So basically Jesus Christ asks them to go back to their starting place, their hometowns in Galilee where he will see them again as he promised them before his death. This act of 'seeing' him after death would become one of the basic components of the Christian faith and essential to the Orthodox creed of faith that states “And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried. And on the third day, He rose from the dead, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into the heavens” ("The Symbol of Faith of Orthodox Christians, Nicene Creed", 2015). It is important to notice here that Mary the Magdalene is the first witness to the place of burial, and also to the empty tomb and resurrection incidents. She and the other Mary are the only followers of Jesus Christ who can identify the place of the tomb and testify that he was buried and has risen from the dead. Moreover, Chilton realizes that “Mark identifies Mary Magdalene as the principle figure among the women at the mouth of Jesus' tomb after his Crucifixion, and that she undertakes a key ritual action associated with interment- anointing (*Mark* 16:1)" (Chilton, 2005, p.52).

After the encounter in the tomb, the women were bewildered and they fled the tomb in a hurry. Going to anoint the body of their Lord, they would not have expected to find a stranger sitting in the empty tomb and asking them to proclaim the Lord's message to the other disciples. They were afraid and their bodies were shaking. They ran away and they didn't tell anyone about the incident that happened with them at the empty tomb. Ann Graham Brock considers that “a figure's authority is further enhanced in such a narrative if the encounter also includes a commissioning from Jesus” (Brock, 2003, p. 61)

which did not occur in the short ending of the gospel. Moreover, Brock realizes that the short ending of the *Gospel of Mark* is not logical as the Gospel of Mark ends with the particle *yáp* and Greek sentences (The Greek version) that end with the particle *yáp* are rare indeed. In addition to that, the author of the Gospel might have “felt that narrating a commissioning and the announcement from a heavenly messenger that Christ is risen and no longer there would provide sufficient evidence of the resurrection itself” and might have chosen “to focus rather, on the commissioning of the women to evangelize to the disciples and to Peter” (Brock, 2003, p.62). The mentioning of Peter then raises curiosity. Brock explains that by quoting Hugh Anderson who states that “The singling out of Peter recalls his denial” (Brock, 2003, p.62), as the author of the gospel last refers to Peter lastly in the account of his denial of Jesus (26.75), and “his name does not appear again, even when Jesus sends his disciples out into the world” (Brock, 2003, p.65).

This unexpected conclusion of the *Gospel of Mark* has given rise to many different interpretations of the purposes behind such a conclusion. T. J. Weeden claims that these women did not proclaim the news to the twelve disciples. He assumes that this was done to discredit the twelve disciples whom he associated with the Jerusalem church (Weeden, 1971, p.50). Some scholars argued that this shorter ending of the gospel is not logical as if Mary the Magdalene and the other women kept their silence, no one would have known about the resurrected Jesus and about his promise to see them in Galilee.

Yet according to the other Markan long ending, the verses are extended from 16.8 to 16.20. Jesus Christ appears another time to Mary the Magdalene only after he casts out seven demons from her. Mary the Magdalene goes to tell those “who had been with Jesus’ as they were crying and mourning his death, that he is still alive and that she saw

him, but no one believes her. One cannot but notice that If Mary the Magdalene has failed the first mission when she was told to go and tell Peter and the disciples to go to Galilee, Jesus Christ has chosen her for the second time to be the messenger for the disciples. She went to tell the disciples who were in utter grievance, but they didn't believe her. They didn't do that because she was a woman, as Jesus Christ appeared to two other disciples while walking in the country and those two disciples went to tell the others, but no one believed them too. His resurrection was not believed until he appeared for the eleven students and "rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen" (*Mark* 16:14), then he sent them to proclaim the good news.

The long ending of the *Gospel of Mark* describes Mary the Magdalene as a woman who was exorcised by Jesus Christ He had cast out seven demons out of her. A great scholarly debate arose around the long ending of *Mark* and the concept of exorcism and the reason for mentioning it. James Kelhoffer claims that the description of Mary the Magdalene being exorcised "is not an essential component of the Long ending narrative as in *Luke* 8.2" (Kelhoffer, 2000, p.181). Farmer in *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* asserts that "verse 16.9 is Markan, and he insists that this verse does not depend on other Gospel passages" (Farmer, 2005, p.85). One would ask a question: why would the author of the Long ending choose this particular piece of information about exorcism to tell about Mary the Magdalene and not anything else? Mary the Magdalene is portrayed as a positive character in the Long ending of *Mark*. Jesus appears to her, and she goes to deliver the good news of resurrection to the others who were with Jesus. As nothing is mentioned about her in the *Gospel of Mark* except her name, so maybe the author of the

Gospel wanted to give exorcism a positive view by relating it to Mary the Magdalene who is portrayed positively.

The issue of discipleship in the *Gospel of Mark* has been of great debate among scholars. Schussler Fiorenza considers that the “discipleship of *Mark* is understood as a literal following of Jesus and of his example” and that “the true understanding of Jesus messiahship does not come through the experience of miracles or through his public preaching or private instructions, but only in and through ‘taking up the cross’ and following him on the way of suffering and death” (Fiorenza, 1994, p. 316-317). In the *Gospel of Mark*, these women: 1) followed him in Galilee, 2) ministered to him, and 3) came up with him to Jerusalem. Schussler Fiorenza explains these three points to show that these women have indeed followed the example of Jesus Christ and walked with him even to his crucifixion. First, these women followed him in Galilee, and by following him, they accepted the danger of being arrested and executed. Moreover, it means that they have accepted the new familial relationships set by Jesus Christ as these women were considered sisters in this new community, thus these women “are thus characterized as true disciples of Jesus who have left everything and have followed him on the way, even to its bitter end at the cross” (Fiorenza, 1994, p.320). Second, “the verb *diakonein* (the Greek verb meaning to serve) emphasizes that the women disciples have practiced the true leadership demanded of the followers of Jesus” as he is “the suffering servant who liberates and elevates them from servitude” so “those who exercise leadership in the community must take the last place on the community’s social scale and exercise their leadership as servitude” (Fiorenza, 1994, p.320). Third, “the last verb *synanabainein* refers not only to the four leading women disciples”, but “to those who

had encountered the resurrected Lord and became his witnesses” (Fiorenza, 1994, p. 321). Thus, by following him, by accepting the new social order that he had set for them, by practicing their new social role in society as servants and not by subordinating others to be their servants, and by encountering the resurrected Lord, these women have fulfilled all the requirements that Jesus Christ has demanded, and they are indeed excellent examples of discipleship and are seen as apostolic witnesses.

Mary the Magdalene of the *Gospel of Mark* is a woman who was a follower of Jesus since his days in Galilee. This means that she had witnessed his miracles, teachings, and his healings of the sick. She has provided for him along with other women, and even though she was not mentioned from the beginning of the Gospel, she was most probably from his inner circle that was “given the secret of the Kingdom of God, in contrast to those outside who receive everything in parables” (De Boer, 2004, p.125). She was present with other women at the crucifixion, went with one other woman to witness the place of the tomb, and decided to go after the Sabbath to pay her respect to the dead Jesus Christ and anoint his body. Even though the author of the short ending of *Mark* mentions that she has failed to deliver the massage the first time, she must have been an excellent disciple of Jesus Christ who understood the concept of resurrection so that she was chosen, alone, another time to inform the students. However, it seems that the problem was with the eleven students’ lack of faith and not with her credibility that Jesus Christ had to appear to them personally, for them to believe his resurrection and begin spreading the good word. De Boer states that discipleship “has nothing to do with power, but with the utmost willingness to remain of service, even when it is dangerous to do so” (De Boer, 2004, p.126). Even though Mary the Magdalene was watching the crucifixion afar,

and failed to deliver the message to the other disciples the first time supposedly, she proved herself worthy enough to represent the other disciples in trying to serve Jesus Christ even after his death because of her status with respect to Jesus Christ. W. R. Telford realizes that “women in *Mark* emerge as ‘hidden heroes’, following Jesus on his way to the cross, demonstrating courage, showing faith, offering service, in short exemplifying the marks of true discipleship” (Telford, 1999, p.232). While Schussler Fiorenza brings things further to a deeper perspective as she sees that the women disciples under the cross “signify that the community of *Mark*, including its leadership, was open across social, religious, sexual, and ethnic lines” (Fiorenza, 1994, p.321). This new community brought to the center all those who were marginalized and dominated, and women in particular became “the paradigms of true discipleship” (Fiorenza, 1994, p.323).

1.2 The Gospel of Matthew

The *Gospel of Matthew* is one of the four canonical gospels and the first book of the *New Testament* although it is not the oldest. The *Gospel of Matthew* is anonymous, and the “superscription ‘according to Matthew’ was added some time in the second century” (Nolland, 2005, p.16). D’Angelo states that:

The gospel is widely believed to have been written at the end of the first century in Syria. Much attention has been devoted to its ‘Jewish background,’ and Kathleen Corley’s claim that Matthew is ‘most Jewish’ and ‘most egalitarian’ was made as a salutary antidote to the tendency among feminists and other scholars to

explain away reflections of patriarchy, misogyny, or both in early Christian texts as an inheritance from Judaism. (D'Angelo, 1999, p.172)

It is commonly known that the *Gospel of Matthew* is not associated with ongoing scholarly debate concerning the role of women and gender issues in Biblical studies. Yet enough interest has yielded the necessary attention of scholarship to examine the female characters and their attribution to the first Christian faith community. Judith C. Anderson realizes that “there is a tension between the treatment of female gender as a positive attribute or irrelevant in comparison to other values and its treatment as a mark of subordinate status” (Anderson, 1983, p.21). She considers that the *Gospel of Matthew* gives women rather important roles, but she notes that “female gender renders the exemplary behavior of women as more of an achievement and heightens contrasts with male character” (Anderson, 1983, p.21). M.J. Selvidge studies the *Gospel of Matthew* in the light of the First Jewish-Roman War that led to the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. She considers that in a country torn by violence and death, in the *Gospel of Matthew* “women emerge as solidifying agents within this new community. They are part of the reason for its existence and continuation” (Selvidge, 1984, p.220). Furthermore, Jane Kopas points out that the *Gospel of Matthew* struggles “to incorporate women moving from the periphery to greater public involvement and from being victims and survivors to being disciples and leaders” (Kopas, 1990, p.13).

The *Gospel of Matthew* has a great similarity to the *Gospel of Mark* especially in the events happening towards the end of the Gospel, and “repeats almost verbatim ninety percent of *Mark*” (Miller, 1994, p.55). Accordingly, this Gospel does not add a lot of information to the composite character of Mary the Magdalene in the *New Testament*.

The women followers are introduced at the end of the Gospel after the death of Jesus Christ where Mary the Magdalene is first mentioned among the named women. Apparently, these women were among Jesus' loyal followers who walked with him in his trip from Galilee to Jerusalem to minister to him. In the *Gospel of Mark*, these women are divided into two groups, one large group of unnamed women, and a small group of named women. *Mark* mentions the named women first giving them more importance in the role they play in the life of Jesus Christ and his ministry. Unlike *Mark*, *Matthew* mentions the unnamed women before the named ones. In *Matthew*, the unnamed women have decided 'to follow' and 'to serve', while the named women are not combined "with any active verbs at all. *Matthew* relates that they 'were' among the unnamed women" (De Boer, 2004, p.127) only without adding any more specific information about them. This difference in presenting the women "alters the Markan portrait of Mary Magdalene in a significant way. She and the other named women, as a small group, are no longer distinguished from the larger group of women. They have become part of it" (De Boer, 2004, p.127). This altering of the portrayal of the group of named women indicates that the three named women did not minister and serve Jesus Christ in Galilee. Instead, these women decided to follow Jesus Christ when he left Galilee to come to Jerusalem only and not before that.

Although such a life style of travelling and ministering was not fashionable in a society that followed strict traditions regarding social relationships between men and women and their public behavior, but we see here a group of women who lived in constant travelling going from one place to another, and who are apparently taking care of the daily needs of the group. But their duties were much more than that as de Boer

considers that serving “consists of feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty something to drink, receiving strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting the prisoners” and all these tasks were “to be done by all of Jesus’ followers as if one did it to Jesus himself” (De Boer, 2004, p.130). So these women were basically held responsible for a lot of tasks during their ministry, the same tasks as the male disciples apparently. In addition to that, these women following Jesus Christ from Galilee to Jerusalem should have witnessed all the stopping points of his journey and his teaching about marriage and divorce, his blessing of the children, and his entrance to Jerusalem. They must have also been witnesses to his teaching in the Temple (Matthew 22.33), his warning against the actions of the scribes and the Pharisees, and his prophecy on the Temple being abandoned. This means that these women were receiving the same teaching as the male disciples. Although some scholars like Yolanda Dreyer might argue that the language used in the Gospel is androcentric (Dryer, 2010, p.1), D’Angelo claims that “androcentric language in teaching and exhortation does not necessarily imply a male audience or even a male author” (D’Angelo, 1999, p.178). So does these women’s involvement in social services and learning from Jesus Christ directly qualify them to be disciples? There has been a lot of scholarly debate around this issue. Dreyer in her article argues that:

In *Matthew* women are only followers, clearly distinguished from the twelve disciples or apostles. Along with all the marginalized categories of people who did not have access to the temple, women are the receivers of Jesus’ love and therefore have free access to God. They receive that love. However, they are not the agents who transmit that love to others. They do not take the initiative.

(Dreyer, 2010, p.2)

While Bruce Chilton using a later source argues this by stating that:

Holy Scripture mandated the role of deaconesses according to this source, and Mary Magdalene provided the premier example (*Didascalia* 16.12.4, referring to Matthew 27:55-6): ‘We have said that the service of a woman deaconess is above all obligatory and necessary because our Lord and Savior was served by women deaconesses, who are: Mary Magdalene, Mary the daughter of James, and the mother of Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee with other women’.

(Chilton, 2005, pp.114-115)

So, as de Boer puts it: “*Matthew* introduces Mary Magdalene as one of a large group of women determined to serve Jesus on his journey from Galilee onward. How should we interpret this?” (De Boer, 2004, p.128). Well, it seems that she fulfills all the requirements of a disciple. She has taken the initiative so forth to follow and serve, and she stands at the cross without being instructed to do so basically.

Mary the Magdalene is one of many women who: 1) stood there looking from afar, and 2) followed Jesus the Christ from Galilee to minister to him. Of this group of women only three are named: 1) Mary the Magdalene, 2) Mary the mother of James and Joseph, 3) and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. Salome who was present in the *Gospel of Mark* is not mentioned in the *Gospel of Matthew*, unless Salome is the maiden name of the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Mary the Magdalene appears four times only in the *Gospel of Matthew*. We first see her standing among the group of women at the crucifixion site, watching from a distance with no male disciples nearby. These women stood there facing the same

dangerous situation of being arrested and persecuted like their Lord. She is there with the other two Marys, Mary the mother of James and Josés, and Mary the mother of John and James, yet there is no clue where the sons are; they might have all gone away with the other male disciples. As in the *Gospel of Mark*, the women stood there during the whole process of crucifixion, with three hours in complete darkness. But here, the dramatic scene of the moments directly after the crucifixion is much influential. Jesus Christ cries loudly and dies, but the sequence of events does not end there. After his death, the centurion and the soldiers see the earth shaking and the rocks splitting apart, the graves breaking open and the bodies of many saints getting out of their tombs and entering the city where they were seen by many people. Then, these soldiers believe that Jesus Christ was really the 'Son of God'. It must have been difficult for these women to encounter the death of their Lord, and then have to endure an earthquake that woke the dead out of their tombs. Yet, these women did not run away. They followed Joseph of Arimathea to watch the burial of their Lord. Longstaff comments on the role of these women by stating that,

In *Matthew's* Gospel, the women emerge as models of faithful discipleship. While the other disciples are conspicuously absent, these women are noticeably present; doing what should be done for a person who just died (Longstaff, 1981, p.204).

The second time we encounter Mary the Magdalene is at the burial scene. Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man who became a disciple of Jesus Christ, comes and takes the body down after taking the permission from Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Joseph of Arimathea takes the body, wraps it in a clean linen cloth and puts it in his own tomb that was curved in the rock. Mary the Magdalene is there with the other Mary just sitting opposite the tomb. It is not clear if they took part in the burial process, we only

know that they were sitting there probably watching what is going on. One of the main differences between the *Gospel of Mark* and the *Gospel of Matthew*, is that in the *Gospel of Matthew*, the high priests and the Pharisees decided to put guards by the tomb to secure the body so that the disciples can't steal it after three days and foster Jesus Christ's resurrection. So one might wonder, were the two Marys sitting there guarding the tomb as well? So that to be witnesses that no one stole the body, or were they sitting there mourning the death of their Lord? *Matthew* does not tell clearly. D'Angelo considers that "two of the named women, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses, provide the two witnesses *Matthew* deems necessary to connect the death of Jesus, the place where he was buried, and the empty tomb" (D'Angelo, 1999, pp.173-174). Taking into consideration that the male disciples have disappeared from the scene of the events, it appears that "the role of women in these scenes seems to have been enhanced rather than diminished; if anything, *Matthew* is more conscious of the role of women as witnesses than *Mark* is" (D'Angelo, 1999, p.174). These two women staying there near the tomb in spite of the presence of the guards is courageous and their act reflects their faith and their loyalty. They are considered inspiring models of dedication and servitude.

In the third scene which is after the Sabbath, as in the *Gospel of Mark*, we see Mary the Magdalene with the other Mary (with no further identification to her identity) going to the tomb. There is no anointing involved this time, as the author of the Gospel does not mention any spices or myrrh. Thomas Longstaff states that "these women's presence at the tomb was a part of a well-established ritual of mourning. Visits to tombs and burial grounds can be traced back to the late Hellenistic period if not earlier" (Longstaff, 1981, p.198). Sherman Johnson on the other hand remarks that "friends or

relatives often watched at the tomb in case the apparently dead person should revive” (Johnson, 1951, p.613). De Boer, yet, quotes other authors who have provided different explanations to the reason behind the two women going to visit the tomb. Some consider it as a mere grave visit, others suggest that it shows the women’s great faith as they were sure the Lord has risen (De Boer, 2004, pp.133-134). We see two women going to visit the tomb with no other explanation of the event. It is not explained how the two women would deal with the issue of the guards who were near the tomb. Moreover, they are not worried about rolling the big stone that seals the entrance of the tomb. Ironically, before they arrive, a great earthquake happens, an angel of the Lord descends from heaven, rolls the stone and sits on it. Instead of a young man wearing white like in the *Gospel of Mark*, we see here an angel whose appearance is like lightening, and his clothes are as white as snow. The guards watching over the tomb are struck by fear and are not able to move like dead men, so basically the two problems that the two women might have faced were solved easily. The angel assures the two women that there is nothing to be afraid of, and the same scenario of the *Gospel of Mark* goes on: the angel tells them that he knows their purpose of coming to the tomb, and that Jesus Christ whom they are looking for is not there anymore. He explains that Jesus Christ has risen, and offers to show them the place where he was laid in the tomb. Finally, he tells them to go and tell 'his disciples' that he has been raised from the dead, that he is going ahead of 'you' to Galilee, and that 'you' will see him there. De Boer considers that “in *Matthew*, the readers are to hold Mary Magdalene and the other Mary in high esteem” because “their faith in the resurrection and their courage to follow Jesus, even remaining near him near the tomb, in spite of the guards, make them inspiring examples” (De Boer, 2004, p.137). Again these two women

have played an essential role in the events of the last day in Jesus' life; they were present at the crucifixion even after Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial, and they stood there alone with no male disciple or 'brother' in presence. They believed the message of the angel and the resurrection of their Lord even before they met him later in person a few minutes later.

We see then Mary the Magdalene and the other Mary leaving the site of the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and running to tell "his disciples". It is not clear for us if they entered the tomb or not. Although the two women are afraid like in the *Gospel of Mark*, they are in great joy. They are happy that their Lord has risen and they run quickly to inform the other disciples of the glorious event. But on their way, suddenly Jesus Christ appears to them and greets them. The two women come to him, hold his feet and kneel down. Jesus Christ then assures them that there is nothing to be afraid of and then repeats the message of the angel that the disciples should go to Galilee and 'see' him there. As in the *Gospel of Mark*, the message of the angel is not enough. Jesus Christ has to appear in person to authenticate the concept of his resurrection, and insists on the issue of the disciples going to Galilee for only there, they could see him. It is important to notice that the *Gospel of Matthew* is unique in that the two women were commissioned twice, the first time by the angel, and the second time by the Lord himself.

Griffith-Jones asks an essential question "Did Mary Magdalene actually see the risen Jesus? According to *Matthew*, yes, she did. His story of Easter is fuller than *Mark's*" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.28). The two women believed the message of the angel and the resurrection of their Lord even before they met him later in person, not like some of the eleven disciples who went to Galilee as they were told to do, and saw him as they

were foretold, but still had their doubts until Jesus Christ told them to go proclaim the Gospel and promised to be with them till the end of time. Richard Bauckham comments that in the *Gospel of Matthew*:

The two women and the eleven men see the Lord, but the experience of the women is not only chronologically prior but also indispensable for the men's experience. Only because the men believe and obey the revelation brought them by the women can they themselves see the Lord. The women's priority is really a kind of positive discrimination that, by reversing the normally expected priority of one gender over the other, has the effect of ruling gender privilege out of the new order the resurrection appearances constitute. (Bauckham, 2002, p.278)

The two women show good examples of faith, courage, love and stability in facing hardships. In addition, they are trustable messengers to carry such a great message such as the resurrection of the Lord. Yet D'Angelo objects that "The Wisdom Christology of *Matthew* is likewise two-edged; while its insistence on the continuing presence of Jesus endows the community with the capacity to rethink and remake its practice, it also effaces the female persona of Wisdom behind the male person of Jesus" (D'Angelo, 1999, p.180). Dreyer confirms this by stating that:

The textual evidence, however, does not allow the exegete to consider the liberation that Jesus brought for the marginalized as having been successfully carried through to women by Matthew. His androcentric perspective caused him to regress and to conform to the cultural norms of his day. We then are left with imagining how to fill the gaps. (Dreyer, 2010, p.5).

Amy-Jill Levine best fills one of the gaps by insisting that “these independent motivated women are both the first witnesses to the resurrection and the first missionaries of the Church” (Levine, 1992, p.262).

1.3 The Gospel of Luke

The *Gospel of Luke* is the third and longest of the three synoptic gospels. Bruce Chilton sees that:

Luke takes a different tack from that of *Matthew*, with poetics that have a literary ring about them. The Gospel opens by acknowledging the oral preachers who provided the sources for the text (Luke 1:1-4). Written around 90 C.E. in Antioch, a more diverse and thoroughly pagan city than Damascus, *Luke's* Gospel deliberately casts a wider net for these sources than *Mark* and *Matthew* do (Chilton, 2005, p.106).

Joseph Fitzmyer in his book *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX* states that “the Greek text of *Mark* provides the framework for much of *Luke's* Gospel. For the largest part of the gospel, the sequence of episodes in *Luke's* Gospel follows closely that of *Mark's* gospel” (Fitzmyer, 1981, p.67). Schaberg considers that “the *Gospel of Luke* is extremely dangerous in the Bible. Because it contains a great deal of material about women that is found nowhere else in the gospels, many readers insist that the author is enhancing or promoting the status of women” (Schaberg, 1998, p.363). She goes further on to explain that “The author of *Luke* is interested in the education of women in the basics of the Christian faith and in the education of outsiders about Christian women” but Schaberg considers that the scholarly research about *Luke* today is “not at all the education *Luke* had in mind” of women who are “prayerful, quiet, grateful [women], supportive of male leadership, forgoing the prophetic ministry” (Schaberg, 1998, p.363).

The *Gospel of Luke* introduces Mary the Magdalene much earlier than the Gospels of *Mark* and *Matthew*. We see Mary the Magdalene for the first time during the ministry of Jesus Christ through the villages and cities. The Gospel mentions that Jesus Christ was accompanied with his twelve disciples and a group of women whom he had cured of evil spirits and infirmities. Schaberg comments that “the number of women depicted in *Luke* and the emphasis on their presence in the narrative is surprising” (Schaberg, 1998, p.366). Among the women are Mary the Magdalene, Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna. These women provided for Jesus Christ and his disciples out of their resources, that is why Jesus Christ and the male disciples were able to travel from one place to another without having to work. The first similarity between *Gospel of Luke* and the *Gospels of Mark* and *Matthew* is that there are two groups of women, some mentioned by name, and others discussed in general. But the first difference is that the women in the *Gospel of Luke* are said to have been healed from evil spirits, and that they have enough money to provide for thirteen men, basically, out of their own means. By doing this, the *Gospel of Luke* “makes the women followers of Jesus more visible and present than they are in *Mark* and *Matthew*” (De Boer, 2004, p.139). Although the first information provided to us about Mary the Magdalene is in *Luke* (8.1-3) which “is usually treated as a summary”, “the relationship of the women disciples to Jesus that *Luke* here introduces is to be understood as continuing through the rest of *Luke*’s narrative of Jesus’ preaching ministry” (Bauckham, 2002, p.110). Moreover, Bauckham considers that “the focus of the passage is very much on the women, matching in their case the kind of detail already provided about the twelve in 6.13-16” (Bauckham, 2002, p.112). Maria Anicia Co defines a summary as an “independent and concise

narrative statement that describes a prolonged situation or portrays an event as happening repeatedly within an indefinite period of time” (Anicia Co, 1992, p.56-57). So the information given about Mary the Magdalene and the other women is parallel to the information given about the twelve disciples thus placing these two groups of men and women in a similar position. Moreover, this information indicates that these women have been ministering with Jesus Christ for a long time.

It is important to notice that these women are always present with Jesus Christ in all the places he visited, and they witnessed his preaching and his good news of the Kingdom of God, and “by listening to Jesus’ teachings and observing his miracles, the disciples increase their understanding of Jesus’ mission and identity” (Klassen-Wiebe, 2001, p.150). These women have followed him from the beginning of his ministry until the end of his life. Corley explains that “the scandal of such wealthy women actually travelling around the countryside without their husbands has not been lost on many commentators” (Corley, 1993, p.118). By traveling around with Jesus the Christ, these women “lost the protection of their wider kin groups, making them extremely vulnerable in a world in which a woman’s identity is tied to the group identity of her broader network of kin” (Moltmann-Wendel, 1982, p.69), yet these women gained “a new fictive kin group that is built on the hope of the Kingdom of God” (Schottroff, 1993, p.95). Ben Witherington in his book *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* argues that “it was unheard for a Jewish woman in the first century to be the disciple of a rabbi unless her husband or master was a rabbi willing to teach her” (Witherington, 1990, p.111). Above all that “technically, Jewish women were exempt from learning Torah” (Tucker & Liefeld, 1987, pp.35-36). It appears that those women have sacrificed a lot by deciding to

leave their families and travel around the country with a group of men, but by doing this; they have fulfilled the requirements for discipleship mentioned by *Luke* in 14.25-35 and became true disciples of Jesus Christ.

We do not simply see these women as just attending to the needs of Jesus and the disciples as “*Luke* is not telling his readers that the women cooked the meals, washed the dishes, and mended the clothes. Perhaps they did, but it is not what *Luke* says” (Bauckham, 2002, p.114). It does not seem that any of Jesus’ followers had any income out of a stable job as they were always on the move, so it “is not difficult to suppose that the women who followed Jesus included a few wealthy women and that these supplied the greater part of the economic resources of the group” (Bauckham, 2002, p.117). Sheila Klassen-Wiebe takes things further by noting that the “active participation of the women in the mission of Jesus is striking in light of the fact that it’s still unclear what role the twelve will play” (Klassen-Wiebe, 2001, pp.152-153).

Jesus’ attitude toward these women and their role is best evident in the incident of Mary and Martha, when Jesus points that Mary has chosen the learning which no one can ever take from her. Jesus gives more examples like this in verse 8.21 when he asserts that his real mother and his real brothers are those who hear God's word and live accordingly. Moreover, when a woman praises him in verse 11.27-28, he answers that the praise should be for those who hear God’s word and memorize it. This focusing on the importance of the word of God and hearing it and following it “is also more highly valued than gender-specified duties and privileges” (De Boer, 2004, p.140). At the end of the Gospel, Jesus Christ gives the twelve apostles power and authority over all evil spirits and diseases and sends them to heal and preach the Kingdom of God, but “Nothing

special is said about the women, although we might perhaps assume that they, and also the other women, could be included in the mission of the Seventy, sent out two by two (Luke 10.1)” (De Boer, 2004, p.147). In her article ‘The Lukan Mary Magdalene’, De Boer concludes that “the twelve and the women are also on an equal footing with regards to learning from Jesus” (De Boer, 2002, p.149). As we can see *Luke* speaks in good terms of these women regarding hearing the word of God and providing their money and means, but “the rest is silence” (Seim, 1995, p.745). After analyzing the stories of the women’s healings in *Luke*, Seim concludes that *Luke* portrays these women as passive recipients, with no ability to take the initiative (Seim, 1994, p.39-57). We do not hear these women speak, they just have no voice to explain or to tell or to proclaim the resurrection. Moreover, De Angelo sees that: “*Luke*’s manipulation of representations of women is accompanied by a corresponding limitation of their roles. *Luke* is concerned not with changing the status of women, but with the appropriate deployment of gender” (D’Angelo, 1999, p.187). Bauckham on the other hand considers that the main point to be mentioned about the women is that “they travelled with Jesus as he traveled around proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. At this stage of *Luke*’s narrative this is the essence of discipleship: to accompany Jesus and to witness his ministry” (Bauckham, 2002, p.112). Later on, Jesus sends the twelve disciples (9.1-6) in addition to the seventy (10.1-20) “among whom it is surely natural for readers to assume that women are included” (Bauckham, 2002, p.112). This is asserted by Schussler Fiorenza who proposes that “any interpretation or translation claiming to be historically adequate to the language character of its sources must understand and translate New Testament language on the whole to be inclusive of women unless proven otherwise” (Schussler Fiorenza,

1994, p.45). Ian Howard Marshall asserts the opinion that women had active roles in the ministry of Jesus Christ by stating that “there can be no doubt that the motif in *Luke* (8.2) is historical, for it is firmly fixed in the tradition (*Mark* 15.40, *Luke* 23.49-55, 24:6-10)” (Marshall, 1978, p.315).

The women in *Luke* 8.1-3 are mentioned to have been “healed of evil spirits and infirmities”. According to John Pilch, the word 'healing' included "the provision of personal and social meaning for the life problems that accompanied human health misfortunes” (Pilch, 2000, p.93) as “belief in religion and the power of magic and the miraculous was common in the Greco-Roman world, regardless of gender, ethnicity or class” (Yamaguchi, 2002, p.67). People believed that “extraordinary things, such as disease and natural disasters, happened as a result of divine and demonic powers or spirits”, in this way, “a miracle was a sign of divine intervention” (Yamaguchi, 2002, p.66). Consequently, the healing of these women of evil spirits and infirmities means that they became physically, mentally and spiritually stable after the healing, as a person with an evil spirit “was considered impure or unclean and thus suffered a devalued state of being within society” (Pilch, 2000, pp.110-111). Susan Haskins ponders more on the social status of these women as she explains that:

Christ's disinterest in the conventions of his day, and his desire to radically alter certain social *mores*, are made manifest in his treatment of women, not least because they actually formed part of his retinue. Although women might assist rabbis financially, it was certainly uncommon for them to accompany preachers as traveling disciples. Christ also welcomed into the group the kind of women whom

Luke describes as having been healed of 'evil spirits and infirmities' (8:2-3), those who might otherwise have been regarded as social outcasts. (Haskins, 1993, p.13)

But *Luke* puts conditions to the healing of evil spirits in verse 11:15-26, as the sick person after being healed has to believe in Jesus Christ to keep the demons and bad spirits away. For if these spirits are cast away, and return to find out that their old home is empty, they will come back in a wicked manner to occupy it again. But when a person receives the Gospel, he is no longer empty because he/she is filled with Jesus Christ and bad spirits will find no empty space in him/her to repossess. This places the women in Luke 8.1-3 as models of faith because they have believed in Jesus Christ, and they are filled with him; the evil spirits can return no more.

Mary the Magdalene in specific is healed of seven demons, as mentioned earlier in the longer ending of the *Gospel of Mark*, but we don't have any clues to her condition in particular. The use of number seven "indicates that her illness was particularly severe, and in turn, that her healing was nothing short of miraculous" (Marshall, 1978, p.316). In the Bible, number seven is used "to symbolize completeness or perfection" (Elwell, 1988, p.1561). Number seven is mentioned many times in the New Testament: seven loaves of bread (*Matthew* 15.34, *Mark* 8.5-6), seven baskets of left over bread (*Matthew* 15.37, *Mark* 8.8), seven demons (*Mark* 16.9, *Luke* 8.2) in addition to many other examples. Moreover, the number seven is mentioned in the Old Testament in the creation accounts, as God has created the World in six days and rested on the seventh, and the significant importance the Jews place on the Sabbath day which is the seventh day of the week "commanded by God to be kept as a holy day of rest, as God rested from creation" (Exodus 20.8). Consequently, the fact the Mary the Magdalene has been healed of seven

demons denotes “the totality or completeness of her pervious possession by evil spirits” (Elwell, 1988, p.1561). Esther de Boer contemplates on this issue by explaining that “Mary Magdalene would have been totally possessed and subsequently completely healed. As Carla Ricci phrases it: ‘Mary Magdalene was dispossessed of herself’ and through Jesus could ‘return to herself’” (De Boer, 2002, p.148-149). Sabine Bieberstein, quoted in De Boer, points that there is a direct relationship between healings and the coming of the Kingdom of God in *Luke*. De Boer paraphrases Bieberstein’s point of view of the three healed women “following Jesus could be understood as representing the realization of the coming Kingdom of God. They represent the human experience of being made whole by Jesus” (De Boer, 2004, p.145). Many explanations have been given to the notion of the seven demons that Mary the Magdalene was healed from. De Boer considers that:

The seven demons also coincide with the Stoic view of the soul as having seven parts difficult to control: the capacities to feel, to hear, to touch, to taste, to see, to desire, and to speak. The eighth part of the soul is the ‘commander’: it has the task of keeping these different capacities in check and giving direction. To achieve a life in harmony with the Divine, one should free oneself from the claims of the seven, more sensual parts. If this is the context of Mary’s seven demons, Jesus apparently, successfully taught her to control them. (De Boer, 2004, p.146).

Mary the Magdalene by being healed from these seven demons became a believer, a devote follower who responds to Jesus’ miracles without leaving the door open for any more demons. She was healed both physically and spiritually and had faith in Jesus’ miraculous abilities.

The *Gospel of Luke* deals with the women as one whole group and he mentions only the names of three of them. These women follow him in his ministry in Galilee and take the journey with him to Jerusalem during the Passover, and stay with him until his crucifixion. Bauckham insists that “the women, of course, appear as distinctive actors in the story toward the end (23.49, 23.55, 24.11), and the mention again in 24.10 of the first two names from the list in 8.2-3 forms a kind of *inclusion*, reminding the reader that the women’s discipleship spans the whole narrative from chapter 8 to chapter 24” (Bauckham, 2002, p. 113). But in this Gospel, the male disciples do not run away after the arrest of Jesus Christ and his persecution. Rather, we find all who knew Jesus Christ watching the crucifixion and beating their breasts with sorrow. Ann Graham Brock argues that:

Although the other gospels describe the male disciples as fleeing, the Lukan version places additional characters into the crucifixion scene, writing, ‘But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these events’ (23.49). Not only are the words ‘all his acquaintances’ or ‘all those known to him’ not present in the parallels in *Mark* and *Matthew*, but as Schaberg argues, *Luke* seems to have added the words ‘all his acquaintances’ into the narrative, as suggested by another grammatical difficulty, the lack of subject-verb agreement between these ‘acquaintances’ and what they were doing. *Luke*’s female witnesses, along with ‘all his acquaintances,’ stand on the hill ‘watching’, but where context now expects a masculine plural participle in agreement with the male acquaintances, the Lukan text still preserves the feminine plural participle that stands in the source. (Brock, 2003, p.34)

Although this group of women is mentioned earlier in the *Gospel of Luke* than it is mentioned in the *Gospels of Mark* and *Matthew*, but *Luke* seems to diminish the role of these women in general, and the role of Mary the Magdalene in particular when he mentions them as part of a bigger group of people rather than the sole witness of crucifixion as in the other two synoptic gospels.

In the crucifixion narrative, *Luke* presents us with a new group of women wailing for Jesus Christ on his way to the cross. Jesus Christ calls them 'daughters of Jerusalem' and asks them not to mourn him, but to cry for themselves, "For, if they do this to the green wood, what shall be done with the dry?" (23.31). At the crucifixion, the scene is different from that described in both *Mark* and *Matthew*. The darkness is out of "a solar eclipse" (De Boer, 2004, p.149), Jesus does not cry loud for Elia as in *Matthew* and *Mark*, and Mary the Magdalene is not signaled by name as one of the women standing at the cross. Two groups of women are presented at Jesus' crucifixion: the 'daughters of Jerusalem' whom he meets on his way to the cross and the women from Galilee standing at the crucifixion scene. The 'daughters of Jerusalem' narrative is used to reflect the fate waiting for Jerusalem as the people of Jerusalem failed to recognize Jesus for who he is and sent him to his death. On the contrary, the narrative of the women from Galilee reveals that Jesus Christ is alive, and these women are commissioned as witnesses to his resurrection in *Luke* 24.48. Seim considers that "the women from Galilee provide a critical linkage between Jesus' Galilean ministry, his crucifixion, burial and resurrection" (Seim, 1994, p.28). It seems that this juxtaposing of these two groups of women is used as a pointer to Galilee. In the empty tomb scene in both the *Gospels of Mark* and

Matthew, Mary the Magdalene is asked to tell the disciples to go to Galilee as Jesus Christ told them before during his teaching.

After the crucifixion, the same story of *Mark* and *Matthew* is repeated as Joseph of Arimathea having the permission of Pilate Pontius takes down the body of Jesus Christ, wraps it in linen and puts it in a new tomb curved in the rock where no one has ever been buried. The group of women, who followed Jesus Christ from Galilee, followed also Joseph of Arimathea to see the place of the tomb, and where the body was placed. It is specified here that only the group of women knows the location of the tomb, so later on, when Peter goes to the tomb, he must have asked them for directions as no male disciples were present at the burial. After the burial, these women go together to an unspecified place, and prepare spices and myrrh to anoint the body. The women are not just Mary the Magdalene and one or two other Marys as in the *Gospel of Matthew* and the *Gospel of Mark*, but rather, they are the women who came with Jesus from Galilee. Setzer affirms that “In the synoptic gospels, the women are witnesses to the death, burial and empty tomb (Mark 15.40-47, Matthew 27.55-61, 28.1, Luke 23.49-55, 24.10) (Setzer, 1997, p.261), and “The fact that they are present resolves any doubts which would assume that they ignored the tomb where Jesus was buried” (Setzer, 1997, p.261). Mary the Magdalene’s role is diminished again as she is not with one or two other women present at the burial, but again, the whole group of women is present. Moreover, her name is not mentioned in particular as in the *Gospel of Mark* and the *Gospel of Matthew*.

At dawn of the first day of the week, the women and some other people with them go to the tomb carrying the spices they have prepared, and as in the *Gospel of Matthew*

and the *Gospel of Mark*, they also realize that the stone has been rolled away for no apparent reason. They enter the tomb and they discover that the body of Jesus Christ is not there. They all stand there afraid and confused, and they wonder about the disappearance of the body. Suddenly, two men with shiny clothes ask them why they are looking for the living one among the dead and assure them that Jesus Christ is not there any longer and that he has risen. Then the two men ask the women to remember the words of Jesus Christ; the words that he taught them in Galilee. The words say that he will be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again, and the women remember these words. It is worth noting that the women are the first to hear the message of resurrection and the first to come to faith among Jesus' followers, and this again confirms their discipleship. A lot of debate has surrounded the explaining of this verse, as some scholars "argue that the women remember the words, but without understanding" (De Boer, 2004, p.150). Moreover, a supporting opinion is presented by de Boer quoting M. D. Goulder, who states: "Being women, the receivers of this message do not presume to rise to faith before the apostles, but limit themselves to remembering his 'sayings' (a Lucanism), and scuttling off to the Eleven. For all his feeling for women, *Luke* comes from a world of male chauvinists" (De Boer, 2004, p.150).

Seim on the other hand defines the term 'remember' as "a term used by *Luke* to denote an understanding that occurs in connection with later activation of prophetic predictions" (Seim, 1994, pp. 152-153). Thus, when these women remember the words of Jesus Christ, these words transform them from confusion and fear to belief and faith. In addition to that, one has to notice here the contradiction between the women's

remembering and Peter's remembering in verse 22.61-62. After he denies Jesus Christ three times, Peter then remembers the words of the Lord and understands what he has done, and he cries bitterly. Women's remembering should be analyzed in a similar way. As these women remember the words of the Lord, they come to realize his resurrection, and understand then the reason of the emptiness of the tomb. One important point to notice here is that these women remembered the words of the Lord even though "those words about the suffering and resurrection of the Son of Man which he only told in private" (De Boer, 2004, p.155). These women were present with the twelve disciples when Jesus Christ told them the secrets of the Kingdom of God which reflects their important position as women disciples. But it is noteworthy that "Mary Magdalene encounters only two messengers at the sepulcher scene and not the resurrected Jesus himself" (Brock, 2003, p.34). Unlike the other synoptic gospels, Jesus Christ does not appear to Mary the Magdalene in the *Gospel of Luke*. Instead, the message of resurrection is delivered to the women by the two messengers only, and "corresponding to the diminishment of Mary Magdalene's role as resurrection witness in this gospel is Luke's overall diminishment of women's roles as early Christian leaders" (Brock, 2003, p.36).

After that, the women leave the tomb, and go to tell the eleven disciples and all the other disciples of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mary the Magdalene is mentioned as being present among these women with Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. One positive thing to notice here is that she is mentioned first among the named women, notably with no mention of the Virgin Mary by name. But one negative thing to realize is that the women are not asked to go and tell the disciples anything. They are not entrusted with the mission of the messenger as in *Mark* and *Matthew*. They go to tell the eleven

disciples and the other followers on their own, but as in the other two Gospels, no one believes them until Jesus Christ encounters two followers on the road to Emmaus. To describe the disciples' opinion of the women's words, the author of *Luke* uses a Greek word that means 'futile nonsense' or 'idle talk', and occurs only here in the New Testament" (Brock, 2003, p.35).

The two followers do not recognize Jesus Christ immediately. He walks with them and they have a conversation about what happened in Jerusalem in the past days. They relate to him the women's encounter with the angels at the tomb, and how the angels told the women about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ then upbraids the two followers for the lack of their faith in all the words of the prophets. The two followers do not realize that the stranger was actually Jesus Christ until he breaks the bread and gives them to eat. When they recognize him, he disappears from their sight. So the two followers go back to Jerusalem to tell of what happened with them. The eleven tell them that the Lord has already appeared to Peter, though in verse (24.12), there is no mention of the appearance of Jesus Christ to Peter. We are told in this verse that Peter goes to the tomb, sees the empty shroud, and leaves the place wondering of what had happened. The only reaction that Peter shows after he goes to the tomb is amazement and not belief, and nowhere in the *Gospel of Luke* is it mentioned that Jesus Christ appears to Peter, but by saying so, Peter takes the role of Mary the Magdalene as the first witness to resurrection. In the *Gospel of Luke*, Mary the Magdalene and the other women are not special anymore, neither as witnesses to the resurrection, nor as messengers to the other disciples, for "what they have to relate is not unique" (De Boer, 2004, p.152), as "Simon is the first to whom the risen Lord appeared" (De Boer, 2004, p.152). By doing so, *Luke*

underestimated the role of the group of women in general and Mary the Magdalene in particular, and places Peter in the most prominent position as the first witness of the resurrection. The major role Mary the Magdalene played in both the *Gospels of Mark* and *Matthew* and the authority positions that she had been granted by the young man in *Mark* and the angel in *Matthew* are there no more. She has no authority position in the *Gospel of Luke*, and Jesus does not rebuke the disciples for not believing her story about the resurrection. These women “simply lack authority, and the authority is not given to them, as in other texts, by any of the male disciples, or by Jesus himself or by the angels” (De Boer, 2004, p.153).

To sum up Mary the Magdalene’s role in the *Gospel of Luke*, we can state that she has been a trustworthy woman who followed Jesus Christ during his ministry and teaching, his death, burial and resurrection. She was healed by him, and provided for him and for the male disciples with what she owned. She listened to his words, and remembered them after his resurrection and understood their true meaning, though she didn’t have the authority to proclaim them. She was truly able to understand the scriptures. De Boer in her article ‘The Lukan Mary Magdalene’ states that:

Luke does portray Mary Magdalene and the other women as trustworthy and understanding witnesses. They simply lack authority. Authority is not given to them by any of the male disciples, by Jesus himself, or by the angels. Although they keep repeating what has happened, their words cause confusion rather than belief (Luke 24.11-22). (De Boer, 2002, p.156)

Seim agrees with de Boer as she states that women’s “own immediate attempt to break through the boundaries shows how stillborn this is. Men’s lack of confidence in women

makes it useless” (Seim, 1994, pp.156-157). Schaberg warns that “the danger lies in the subtle artistic power of the story to seduce the reader into uncritical acceptance of it as simple history, and into acceptance of the depicted gender roles as divinely ordained” (Schaberg, 1998, p.363).

1.4 The Gospel of John

The *Gospel of John* is the last Gospel to appear in the New Testament. It appears to have been written in “Ephesus around 100 C.E.” (Chilton, 2005, p.34). But:

the authorship of the fourth and later Gospel, which is entirely different in style and approach, is still a matter of scholarly dispute, although it is traditionally attributed, together with that of the Book of Revelation, to the apostle John, who is also identified with the 'beloved disciple' who leant against Christ's breast at the Last Supper (John 13:23). (Haskins, 1993, p.5)

Robert Kysar in his book *John: The Maverick Gospel* considers that the *Gospel of John* is “remarkable for its intentional presentations of women as models of faith” as these women “pop up at all the crucial places” and they are “involved in the beginning, the middle and the conclusion of the Johannine story” (Kysar, 2007, p.147). Kysar asks about the subliminal message in the design of the Gospel as:

First, women were among Jesus’ disciples- of that this Gospel allows no doubt. They are the equals of the male disciples. Second, their discipleship is central to the Jesus story. Without them it would be hard to tell the Johannine version of Jesus ministry. Finally, the reader is directed to female (as well as male) figures to witness the models of faith. (Kysar, 2007, p.149)

Moreover, Robert J. Karris wonders “what in his community situation, theology and cultural setting led the Fourth Evangelist to give such special roles to women” (Karris, 1990, p.74), especially in a situation where “some ecclesiastical communities are not in favor of the ordination of women” (Karris, 1990, p.74), so why does the Fourth Gospel portray women in a distinguished way? To answer this question, Karris argues that:

The evangelist’s purpose was missionary and exhortatory rather than apologetic and polemical. He was not concerned to combat the apostolic churches which flew the flag of Peter’s leadership. Nor was he concerned to put in their places male chauvinists within his own community. His concern was to be faithful to Jesus’ concern for the lowly and thus to bring the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God, to another group of marginalized-women. Within the Johannine community these marginalized would enjoy co-equality of discipleship with men and would exercise leadership roles. To them Jesus’ mother, Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala were heroines and representative of what they were called to be. (Karris, 1990, p.95)

The *Gospel of John* is one of the most important gospels in understanding the development of the character of Mary the Magdalene in both the canonical and the apocryphal gospels and traditions. In addition to that, it appears that the Johannine Mary the Magdalene has been an inspiration for the Mary the Magdalene in some of the apocryphal gospels of Nag Hammadi. Mary the Magdalene is mentioned four times in the Gospel of John: 1) at the cross, 2) at the empty tomb, 3) in the encounter with the two

angles in the tomb after the two disciples leave, and 4) in seeing Jesus the Christ and recognizing him.

Like in the Gospels of *Mark* and *Matthew*, in the *Gospel of John*, Mary the Magdalene first appears in the cross scene just before Jesus dies, witnessing “the Son of Man being lifted up and glorified (John 3.14) (De Boer, 2004, p.168). Mary the Magdalene is standing at the cross with Jesus’ mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, but there have been scholarly debate regarding the number of women present at the cross as the women who are named in John do not correspond to those named in the synoptic gospels (De Boer, 2004, p.158). According to De Boer, the modern consensus is that there are in fact four women, suggesting that Jesus’ mother sister and Mary the wife of Clopas are indeed two different women. (De Boer, 2004, p.158), but “if we think of two women being present, Mary Magdalene is introduced as the niece or sister-in-law of Jesus’ mother (De Boer, 2004, p.168). Bauckham on the other hand claims that “there are two pairs of women, the first pair unnamed (his mother and his mother’s sister), and the second pair named (Mary of Clopas and Mary Magdalene”) (Bauckham, 2002, p.204). Regarding Mary the Magdalene, “it is immediately clear from the Gospels that the evangelists are careful to name her precisely, setting her apart from the several other Marys in their texts and, in every account of the crucifixion except *John's*, placing her at the head of the list of Christ's female followers. This prominent position has naturally engendered much speculation about Mary Magdalene’s exact role and place within the group of women followers, but there has recently been a growing tendency to see her as its leader" (Haskins, 1993, pp.10-11).

The first thing to notice is that in the *Gospel of John*, the group of women are standing near the cross, close enough to hear his words, while in *Matthew* 27.55-56, *Mark* 15.40-41, and *Luke* 23.49, the women stood watching from afar. Thus, the women in the *Gospel of John* are given the ability to talk with the Jesus Christ and hear what he had to say. In addition to that, unlike the synoptic gospels, there aren't any unnamed women or a crowd of all the people Jesus loved as in the *Gospel of Luke* standing at the crucifixion scene. There are only three or four women and the disciple Jesus loved standing at the foot of the cross. The scene is just reserved for them and the fact that Mary the Magdalene is mentioned among a very limited number of people at Golgotha implies that she is an important character, and again, she stands in contrast to the twelve or just the eleven disciples who have fled the scene. There is no reference in the *Gospel of John* that Mary the Magdalene has been a follower of Jesus Christ before the crucifixion scene. We just see her at the cross with no previous information about her as in the *Gospel of Luke* where she is introduced as one of the followers of Jesus Christ and one of the providers for him and his disciples. Although we cannot assume that Mary the Magdalene plays an important role at the cross, she is mentioned in the scene just standing there "at the threshold between an earthly belonging to Jesus and a spiritual one" (De Boer, 2004, p.168), where "the Son of Man must ascend to where he came from" (John 6.62). By standing at the foot of the cross, she becomes a witness to the crucifixion and death of Jesus and to his glorification at the cross as there is no particular account for ascension in the *Gospel of John*, and who "despite her sorrow, 'seeks' Jesus and finds him" (Fiorenza, 1994, p.333).

Women are not present at the burial of Jesus like in the synoptic Gospels. Rather, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus bury him in a very respectable manner. The body is wrapped in linen clothes and anointed with a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloe that Nicodemus has brought with him. Then they lay Jesus' body in a new tomb in a garden (John 19.38-42). The *Gospel of John* is evidently not concerned with Mary Magdalene's ability to identify the right tomb" (Bauckham, 2002, p.283), yet we realize that she knew where to go to visit the tomb at the dawn of the first day of the week; hence she was most probably present at the burial or just watched from afar as in the *Gospel of Matthew*.

The second time we see Mary the Magdalene is at the empty tomb. Like in the synoptic Gospels, Mary the Magdalene goes to the tomb on the first day of the week at dawn. We do not know why she is going so early to the tomb, as the body of Jesus has already been anointed more than sufficiently, "and there is no context of suspense awaiting the moment of the third day, as in *Matthew*" (De Boer, 2004, p.169). Moreover, she is at the empty tomb with no reference to other women as in the synoptic gospels. This "highlights her role by excluding any mention of the other female visitors to the empty tomb" (Brock, 2003, pp.56-57). She sees that the stone has been removed from the tomb, and she "immediately experiences a resurrection epiphany" (Brock, 2003, p.57). She acts with an impulsive haste, and she runs and goes to tell Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved of what had happened. She tells them that the body of the Lord has been taken, and that she doesn't know where they have laid him. One important thing to notice here is that Mary the Magdalene has a voice. She articulates the problem in contrast to the two male disciples Peter and the Beloved Disciple who do not say anything whether they believed her or not. The two male disciples have no voice in the

conversation. Moreover, she is the first one to use the title 'The Lord' in the *Gospel of John*, most probably realizing the aptness of this title of sovereignty as she realizes unconsciously that her 'Rabbouni' is already with his Father.

A main difference between the *Gospel of John* and the synoptic Gospels is that when Mary the Magdalene reaches the tomb, she does not see a young man with bright clothes as in *Mark* (16.5), or an angel descending from heaven as in *Matthew* (28.2), or two men in dazzling clothes as in *Luke* (24.4). There is no one at the tomb, no reason is given for the removing of the stone, no angels to explain to her that Jesus has risen, or to ask her to go tell the disciples to go to Galilee. She is in the scene all by herself baffled and confused yet persistent in her insistence to stay there wondering about the place of the body of Jesus the Christ. But, “numerous scholars agree that the text as it stands now in the *Gospel of John* is not an original unity” because “the discontinuity in sequence and the two seams between v.1 and v.2 and between v.10 and v.11 strongly suggest that the scene of Peter and the other disciple running to the tomb is an interpolation” (Brock, 2003, p.57). This evokes a very essential question: what is the role of Peter in the narrative then? Brock considers that his role may be the result of an existing narrative that places him at the empty tomb as in the *Gospel of Luke*, but the author of the *Gospel of John* “specifically choose to focus upon the protophany to Mary Magdalene, even to the exclusion of other women” (Brock, 2003, p.59). We are not told that Mary the Magdalene enters the tomb when she comes the first time alone. She just sees the stone removed from the tomb, understands that the body has disappeared and then runs to tell the disciples of what had happened. Her role is primarily that of a witness. O’Collins and Kendall define “witness as someone who has firsthand knowledge of facts or events. A

major witness is someone whose testimony is of great importance and/or is the most complete” (O’Collins and Kendall, 1987, p.632), but “the fact that some women, and Mary Magdalene in particular, were cited by the New Testament as witnesses for the resurrection evoked scorn from those who opposed early Christianity” (O’Collins and Kendall, 1987, p.631). C. Osiek considers that “the authority of Mary Magdalene’s testimony could not be easily repressed in the memory of the early church” (Osiek, 1993, pp.105-106), while Schussler Fiorenze considers that “Patristic Christianity did not encourage the role of female discipleship and central female characters, such as Mary Magdalene. Instead, the early Fathers of the Church pushed forth Peter and Paul as central characters” (Fiorenze, 1994, p.304). François Bovon on the other hand considers that since Mary the Magdalene is mentioned in the resurrection narratives, this proves that the early community valued her role in the development of the Church, in addition to that, the early community wanted to associate Mary Magdalene with the story of the early tomb; therefore, directly linking her with Easter as an ‘Eastertime witness’ (Bovon, 1984, pp.228-35). Although the empty tomb narrative has evoked a lot of responses among scholars, the simple fact that she is mentioned in the empty tomb scene of the four canonical Gospels brings forward a tradition that was not able to eliminate her involvement and distinguished role in the empty tomb scene in spite of the possible efforts to do so.

Peter and the other disciple Jesus loved seem to consider what Mary the Magdalene told them about the lost body, and they run to the tomb to inspect what had happened, and they realize that the body has disappeared indeed. The other disciple outruns Peter and reaches the empty tomb first. He does not go in, but he bends down to

look in, and he sees the wrappings lying there. Then Simon Peter arrives, enters the tomb, and sees the linen wrappings lying, and the clothes that have been on Jesus' head rolled up in a place by itself. After that, we are told that the other disciple, who reached the tomb first and didn't go in, decides then to enter the tomb only after Peter went in first, and "he saw and believed" (John 20.8). It is not clear for the reader what is the difference between what he saw the first time and what he saw the second time to make him believe. Moreover, we do not know what he believed in. Then we are told that "For as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead" (John 20.9).

Furthermore, another ambiguity faces the reader in that the three disciples present at the tomb didn't know the scripture, then they didn't know that he must have risen from the dead, so what did the other disciple believe in, and why did not Peter and Mary the Magdalene believe too in what the other disciple has believed? We have no answers to such questions in the story of the Gospel. The Beloved Disciple keeps silent and says nothing. Even though this places the Beloved Disciple in a better position than Mary the Magdalene, this comes good for the development of her character, as his silence drives her to stay at the tomb and then have an encounter with the two angels and Jesus the Christ himself. Then, Peter Simon and the other disciple simply returned home. One might expect a different reaction after discovering the disappearance of Jesus' body. The story of the empty tomb in the *Gospel of John* is quite different from the synoptic gospels. Mary the Magdalene and the other women do not go to fetch the other disciples in the synoptic gospels; in addition to that "they ask no other person to go to the tomb and there is no distinguishing between Peter who 'sees' and the other disciple Jesus loved who 'sees and believes'" (De Boer, 2004, p.169).

The two disciples leave, possibly for fear of being arrested by the Jews who persecuted their Master, and Mary the Magdalene is left there on her own “weeping outside the tomb” (John 20.11). It seems unconventional for a woman at that time to decide to go to the tomb at dawn at the first place and to decide to stay after the two disciples left in the second place. This reflects her independency and fearlessness on one side, and her devotion and perseverance on the other. Moreover, this attitude reflects a spiritual stability that is unaffected by fear of being arrested and persecuted. She just couldn’t leave the tomb and go; she couldn’t release her object of affection. It is worthy to notice that Peter enters the tomb and leaves without understanding what took place, and because the two male disciples “meet neither an angel nor Jesus, this text grants Peter nothing special in terms of authority or recognition” (Brock, 2003, p. 47). Mary the Magdalene like Peter does not come to knowledge and understanding after seeing the tomb, but unlike him, she doesn’t leave. She stays there until she sees Jesus Christ and gets his message. This places her in a more profound position than him. While she is weeping, she bends over to look into the tomb, and sees “two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet” (John 20.12). The two angels ask her why she is weeping. She tells them that they had taken away her Lord and that she doesn’t know where they have laid him. Before the two angels get to answer her, she turns around, and sees Jesus Christ standing behind her, but she doesn’t recognize him. It is important to notice here the difference between the synoptic Gospels and the *Gospel of John* is that in the synoptic Gospels the angels play a significant role in revealing to Mary the Magdalene and the women with her that Jesus Christ had risen, but in the *Gospel of John* these angels ask only one question and reveal

nothing. The role of the angels in the narration of the story is not clear as they have no revelatory message; rather the two angels leave the message to be delivered by Jesus Christ directly.

The fourth time Mary the Magdalene is mentioned in the gospel is in her encounter with Jesus the Christ. She turns around, sees a man, but she does not recognize him; rather, she thinks that he is the gardener. This question parallels the question asked by Jesus Christ in verse 1.38, when he asks his disciples “What are you looking for?” they answer that they are looking for their teacher. This can be considered a clear pointer that Mary the Magdalene can be considered and is viewed as a disciple. When he asks her about the reason of her weeping and whom she is looking for, she tells him that she is willing to carry the body away if he just tells her where they have laid him. For the third time she asks about the body of the dead Jesus. She is totally confused and feels a great loss. We can feel empathy with her and identify with her confusion as no further explanation is given in the text of the gospel to explain what happened to the body of Jesus Christ. She keeps on asking about the lost body of Jesus Christ and where it was placed, and she even offers to carry the body if she is just told where it was laid. This attitude of hers “shed light on why she came: to be with Jesus’ dead body, almost to keep him to herself, seeking comfort in his physical proximity” (De Boer, 2004, p.172). When Jesus Christ calls her “Mary”, she suddenly realizes that it is him, her “Rabbouni” who has been standing near her. He calls her by her proper name reflecting the intimacy of verse (10.3-4) where “he calls his own sheep by name”. Moreover, Mary the Magdalene experiences here the fulfillment of Jesus Christ’s earlier promise: “You shall weep, but your sorrow shall be turned to joy” (John 16.19-21). Her tears at losing her 'Rabbouni' are

directly rewarded, and her 'Rabbouni' appears to her. She is indeed the first inheritor of his great promise. Furthermore, Bauckham considers that by appearing to Mary the Magdalene:

Jesus begins to fulfill his promise that he will show himself, not to the world but to the disciples only, and moreover, individually to each one who loves and obeys Jesus “The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love that one and show myself to that individual” (John 14.21). (Bauckham, 2002, p.284)

In addition to that, De Boer also argues that Mary Magdalene in her encounter with the risen Lord experiences the fulfilment of verse 14.18-20, where Jesus says:

I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (John 14.18-20). (De Boer, 2004, p.173)

Mary the Magdalene after hearing her name realizes that she is not left behind as an orphan. She understands “that this day has now come, since she indeed stops holding on to the earthly Jesus and brings the message about the new relationship, which will be completed in the narrative of the evening of the same day (20.18-23)” (De Boer, 2004, p.174). The shift between Mary the Magdalene’s not recognizing her 'Rabbouni' and the awareness that it is he who is standing near her is very essential in the development of her character. Fehrbach in her book *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom* quotes Aristotle’s definition of recognition as “the shift from ignorance to knowledge the moment at which characters understand their predicament fully for the first time, the

moment that the world becomes intelligible” (Fehrbach, 1998, p.155). This shows Mary the Magdalene as an active character who is willing to learn and understand. She progresses from confusion to knowledge to being commissioned.

Jesus Christ asks her not to touch him because he has not ascended to his father yet, and he asks her to go tell his brothers and tell them that he is ascending to his father. Mary the Magdalene goes and does this. Two things are to be noticed in these verses. The first thing is that Jesus Christ himself tells Mary the Magdalene what to do, not the heavenly figures. This places her in a more advanced position as her encounter in this Gospel is with Jesus Christ directly. Secondly, the verse ends with Mary the Magdalene going and telling the disciples of what had happened at the tomb, but we do not see any reaction of the disciples showing their disbelief like in the synoptic gospels. Clearly, she is more of a trusted follower in this Gospel than in the synoptic Gospels, and in her report to the disciples, she says “I have seen the Lord” (John 20.18) and:

This is exactly what the other disciples later say to Thomas: “We have seen the Lord” (John 20.25). In Paul, this is the defining content and terminology of the apostolic witness: “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Cor 9.1). John does not use the term apostle, but the words of the witness are given first by Mary belong to the theme of seeing and believing that runs through John’s resurrection narratives, culminating in 20:29 but in doing so are dependent on the witness of those who did see. In that sense, Mary’s witness is in no sense superseded by or subordinated to that of the other disciples. (Bauckham, 2002, p.285)

The 'Do not hold me' scene known in Latin as 'Nolo me tangere' has evoked many controversial responses among the scholars. This negative imperative was interpreted in many different ways, as it has “been seen as a problem that Mary the Magdalene is not allowed to touch Jesus, whereas he invites Thomas to do so (John 20.27)” (De Boer, 2004, p.172). Linddel and Scott in their book *A Greek English Lexicon* consider that "the imperative 'Do not hold me' has both a metaphorical and literal meaning. Metaphorically, it would mean 'to take hold of', and more psychologically it would mean 'to touch' or 'to affect', while literally it would mean 'to grasp' "(Liddell & Scott, 1968, p.231). So literally speaking, we can speculate that Mary the Magdalene actually touched Jesus Christ as she did in *Matthew* “where she and the other Mary held Jesus’ feet, thus worshipping him (*Matthew* 28.9)” but “*John* does not actually relate that Mary Magdalene touched or worshipped Jesus” (De Boer, 2004, p.172). While metaphorically speaking, it might mean that Mary the Magdalene must stop holding him, and she has to let go off him as she has been feverishly searching for his dead body, as “he is not lying somewhere, but standing before her. He explains: he has to go his way to his Father and she is to go her way to his brothers and sisters” (De Boer, 2004, p.173). Ironically, we can also see Mary the Magdalene here in contrast to the Jews and Romans, who arrested him, persecuted him and finally crucified him. We can also set her in opposition to Peter who denied him three times and the male disciples who ran away and left him in his last hours on Earth. Apparently, she is trying to cling to him, to keep him not to destroy him or to run away from him. It seems that Mary the Magdalene alone demonstrates an unconditional love for Jesus Christ, a love that is only expressed in Jesus’ new commandment: “that you love one another, as I have loved you” (John 13.34). By doing

this, she is rewarded by being the first to see him during his resurrection which is a unique experience. She is trying 'to hold' Jesus the Christ who is still in his transitional state of resurrection. Her experience, which is a mysterious privilege, is different from that of the risen Christ who appeared to Thomas or to the other disciples. Furthermore, the scene of Mary the Magdalene weeping can be seen as a fulfillment to what Jesus Christ had said in John 16.20, where he speaks of the mourning and the weeping of the disciples when they will no longer be able to see him. It is ironic to realize that even though this verse talks about the disciples weeping, Mary the Magdalene is the only one mentioned to be weeping after his burial, not any of the male disciples. This again places her in the position of a disciple as she fulfilled the prediction made by Jesus Christ earlier.

Most importantly, in a Gospel with no commission section, she is awarded by an exclusive commission. It is exceptional that Mary the Magdalene, a woman, is asked to “go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20.17). In this verse, Jesus Christ announces his mission complete. He has ascended to his Father/God, and now his disciples can become the children of God, too, based on his completed avocation on the cross. Now, they share with him the same 'Father' and the same 'God'. So Mary the Magdalene is actually 'the apostle to the apostles' as she is the one confided to bestow the great announcement with the other disciples. To Brown, Mary the Magdalene is “the vehicle for the Johannine reinterpretation of the resurrection” (Brown, 1970, p.1014). Brown “emphasizes the great importance of Jesus’ solemn declaration in *John* (20.17)” as “through Jesus’ resurrection/ascension a new relationship will be established for the disciples” (Brown,

1970, p.1016-1017). She is a 'woman', as opposed to the other 'men'; given such a crucial task is an unprecedented perspective in the *Gospel of John*. John the Evangelist makes it obvious that when it comes to the concept of Christian service and revelation, the twelve are not held in an unmatched or privileged position. Bruce Chilton asserts that "Mary Magdalene's role is both truncated and enhanced. She emerges as a Gnostic visionary, and she continued in that role in the Gnostic tradition as the guardian of the vision of Christ raised from the dead" (Chilton, 2005, p.132). Moreover, "her portrayal as the first resurrection witness in *John* coincides well with the way that the Gospel as a whole portrays female characters in leadership roles spreading the good news" (Brock, 2003, p.60). One more thing to notice at the end of the *Gospel of John* is that Mary the Magdalene "does not appear in the appendix (John 21) with Peter and the Beloved Disciple" because "the verse may reflect less participation in leadership among women in the community in its later years" or because of "the desire to restrict women's participation on the part of the author of the appendix or its audience" (D'Angelo, 1999, p.137).

Mary the Magdalene, one of the women in the *Gospel of John*, shows no doubt or reluctance in responding to Jesus Christ's divine call. She is strong and courageous as she stands at the foot of the tomb with no fear, and then goes to the tomb at the dawn when it is still dark in a city that has been of extreme hostility to her Lord. She considers Jesus Christ to be her teacher. Jesus Christ calls her by name and sends her as a messenger to the other disciples. She runs to the disciples and proclaims the message. She takes the role of the mediator between Jesus Christ and the disciples. This role is attributed to neither Peter nor the Beloved Disciple; rather this role is a confirmation that she can

prepare the disciples to receive the risen Jesus as she is the only one who have witnessed his resurrection to the Father. Susan Haskins describes the heroine of the fourth gospel by stating that:

It is, however, here, in the *Gospel of John*, that Mary Magdalene appears as one of the several women of faith, and unequivocally as the first witness of the Empty Tomb and of the Risen Christ, the cornerstone of Christian belief; the first recipient of an apostolic commission, she becomes not only the herald of the 'New Life', but also the first apostle. (Haskins, 1993, p.10)

Schussler Fiorenza asserts the primacy of Mary the Magdalene as an apostolic witness by stating that “it is remarkable that it has survived in two independent streams of the Gospel tradition. Moreover, later apocryphal writings reflect the theological debate over the apostolic primacy of Mary Magdalene and Peter explicitly” (Schussler Fiorenza, 1994, p.332).

1.5 Concluding Thoughts

The New Testament Gospels are the earliest written material on Mary the Magdalene, as she is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. After analyzing the Four Canonical Gospels, we see Mary the Magdalene as a woman who has a special relationship with Jesus Christ and is one of his close disciples. Jesus Christ loved her and called her his own. Mary the Magdalene was authorized to go and tell the disciples that Jesus Christ had risen and that he wants them to meet him in Galilee. She is depicted as a teacher and instructor for the disciples, whose teaching is valuable and trustworthy to proclaim the news of the resurrection.

In the *Gospel of Matthew*, Mary the Magdalene is a disciple, a witness of the crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Jesus Christ tells Mary the Magdalene and the other Mary to proclaim the news of the resurrection to the disciples. He asks her to tell them that he will meet them in Galilee at a certain mountain Jesus Christ had already told them about. Mary the Magdalene is depicted as a woman of faith, courage, love and stability in facing hardships. She is one of the first missionaries of the Church.

In the *Gospel of Mark*, Mary the Magdalene along with the twelve disciples receive secret teaching from Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ instructs them about the secrets of the Kingdom of God. Mary the Magdalene is a close follower who is present at the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. After the crucifixion, the young man at the tomb asks Mary the Magdalene to go and inform the disciples and Peter in particular to go to Galilee to meet the Lord. The short ending of Mark indicates that the three women: Mary the Magdalene, Mary of James, and Salome did not proclaim the resurrection news to the other disciples because they were struck with fear. Yet, these women should have proclaimed the news later on; otherwise, no one else would have known about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the longer ending of Mark, Jesus Christ appears to Mary the Magdalene, who is described as being healed from seven demons, and asks her to go proclaim the news to the other disciples, and “the narrator confirms that she indeed did so” (De Boer, 2004, p.192). But the disciples did not believe her. In the *Gospel of Mark*, Mary the Magdalene is depicted as a woman of faith and endurance. She shows boldness and determination in witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as she has denied herself and took up her cross.

In the *Gospel of Luke*, Mary the Magdalene is depicted as a disciple of Jesus Christ and a receiver of his teaching. She is mentioned as a disciple right from the beginning. She is included in the group of apostles whom Jesus Christ opened their minds so that they can understand the scriptures. Mary the Magdalene receives "Jesus's blessings and the promise that she will be clothed with power from on high" (De Boer, 2004, p. 192). Mary the Magdalene is depicted as a trustworthy woman who followed Jesus Christ during his ministry, teaching, crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Jesus Christ healed her from seven demons, and she provided for him and his male disciples. After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Mary the Magdalene, Joanna and Mary of James tell the apostles about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but the apostles consider the women's words as idle stories, and they do not believe them.

The *Gospel of John*, unlike the synoptic gospels presents Mary the Magdalene as receiving private tutoring from Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ loved her as he loved all his other disciples. At the resurrection scene, Mary the Magdalene recognizes his voice, and calls him 'Rabboni'. Jesus Christ asks her to go proclaim the news to the other disciples. Mary the Magdalene "receives the Holy Spirit and is sent by Jesus as he was sent by the Father" (De Boer, 2004, p.192). She proclaims the news to the disciples, and the *Gospel of John* "shows specific regards for Mary Magdalene's teaching, since its content is the central confession of the prologue" (De Boer, 2004, p.193). In the *Gospel of John*, Mary the Magdalene is depicted as a strong and courageous woman. She is an apostolic witness who shows no doubt or reluctance in responding to Jesus Christ's divine call.

In the four Gospels, Mary the Magdalene is present at the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. She is "associated with Jesus's suffering and with his

transcending his suffering” (De Boer, 2004, p.193). She is a trustworthy witness and an example of faithfulness, courage and stability. Bruce Chilton best describes Mary the Magdalene as “the disciple who best appreciated Jesus’s visionary teaching of resurrection, and without her, Christianity would have been entirely different” (Chilton, 2005, p. XI) as she is the one who told the apostles that Jesus Christ had raised from the dead.

Chapter Two

Mary the Magdalene in the Gnostic Gospels

The Coptic Gnostic Library of Nag Hammadi was discovered in December 1945 by some Arab fellahin. Those fellahin unearthed an ancient jar full of papyrus books. These manuscripts were “hidden nearly sixteen hundred years ago possibly because of their heretical nature during a period of persecution, or for safe-keeping by believer” (Haskins, 1993, p. 34). Some of these manuscripts are named after apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ, and claim to contain secret teachings that Jesus Christ revealed only to his chosen disciples. This Library provided valuable Gnostic material, but it seems that this material raised more questions than it has answered. Doresse in his book *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* considered that the Nag Hammadi Library was essentially a Sethian Gnostic collection (Doresse, 1997, p. 249-251). Others considered it to represent Valentian thought, Barbelo-Gnostics, Hermetic-Literature and ethical maxims attributed to Sextus. The Greek word gnosis is usually translated as ‘knowledge’, but “gnosis is not primarily rational knowledge. The Greek language distinguishes between scientific or reflective knowledge and knowledge through experience which is gnosis” (Pagels, 1979, p. xix). Gnosis is the process of knowing oneself. Pagels quotes the Gnostic teacher Theodotus, “the Gnostic is the one who has come to understand: ‘who we were, and what we have become; where we were... whither we are hastening; from what we are being released; what birth is, and what is rebirth’” (Pagels, 1979, p. xix). Yet Pagels considers that “to know oneself, at the deepest level, is simultaneously to know God; this is the secret of gnosis” (Pagels, 1979, p. xix).

The texts of Nag Hammadi “have unveiled in Mary Magdalene a figure both ambiguous and sharply defined whose importance in the early centuries of Christianity may only be hazarded at, but nevertheless should not be disregarded” (Haskins, 1993, p. 36). Her figure contrasts to a large extent with the figure that is depicted in the traditional interpretations of the New Testament Gospels. For many Gnostics, “Mary Magdalene stood at the apex of those who glimpsed the spiritual reality beyond human flesh: After all, she had seen the risen Jesus” (Chilton, 2005, p. 117).

A Coptic manuscript was discovered in Egypt in 1896 and entitled *The Gospel According to Mary*, “that document has forever changed our understanding of Mary” (Chilton, 2005, p.123). The Mary “in the title refers to the Magdalene, and the Coptic text reflects the Gnostic Christianity that thrived in Egypt eighteen hundred years ago” (Chilton, 2005, p. 123). In the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Philip*, Mary the Magdalene has a “prominent role as disciple, visionary, mediatrix and messenger of esoteric revelations” (Haskins, 1993, p. 37). According to Bruce Chilton, “Each person who found gnosis lived thereafter in the assurance of divine favor, saved from the predations of the flesh, incarnated within the realm of Spirit. Entering that realm required guidance, and Mary Magdalene became one of Gnosticism’s most articulate guides” (Chilton, 2005, p. 122).

2.1 The Gospel of Mary

Three copies of *The Gospel of Mary* were ever found: "two Greek manuscripts from the early third century (P. Rylands 463 and P. Oxyrhynchus 3525) and one in

Coptic from the fifth century (Codex Berolinensis 8502) " (King, 2003 a, p.11), but "prime among these (at least in terms of substance) is the manuscript known as Papyrus Berolinensis" (Tuckett, 2007, p.3).

Jean-Yves Leloup, in the introduction to his book *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, states that the Coptic manuscript of *The Gospel of Mary* first came to light in Cairo in 1896 (Leloup, 2002, p.28). It appeared into existence before the revolutionary discovery of the jars in Nag Hammadi, Egypt around 50 years later. *The Gospel of Mary* makes up the first part of the so-called Berlin Papyrus (Codex Berolinensis 8502) which is around the first eighteen and a quarter pages out of roughly one hundred and fifty-two pages of the papyrus (King, 2003 a, p.9), and "this codex contains four works in Coptic translation, with *The Gospel of Mary* as the first in the codex" (Tuckett, 2007, p.4). The four writings are "the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Wisdom of Jesus Christ* and the *Acts of Peter*" (De Boer, 1997, p.75). This manuscript was acquired by D. Karl Reinhardt, a German scholar, in Cairo and has been preserved in the Egyptology section of the National Museum of Berlin (Leloup, 2002, p.28). Although the details of the discovery are still obscure, the manuscript probably came from Akhmim in Central Egypt, since it first appeared in the marketplace of that town (King, 2003 a, p.7) and since it "is written in Sahidic in the Subachmimic dialect" (Tuckett, 2007, p.80). An interesting point to note here is that "we can conclude that the *Gospel of Mary* was thought sufficiently worth reading to be translated into the language of the ordinary Egyptian" (De Boer, 1997, p.81). But still, others speculate that it might have been written in Syria (King, 1995, p.628). The additional two fragments in Greek came to light in the twentieth century (King, 2003 a, p.3), and the Coptic translation was "originally

published in 1955 by Walter Till" (Tuckett, 2007, p.80). But till our days, no complete copy of *The Gospel of Mary* is known, as around half the gospel is lost and "the reason for the loss is unclear" (Tuckett, 2007, p.7), but "in spite of its damaged state, the Gospel of Mary retains a substantial portion of its message, and what is retained is illuminating" (Meyer, 2005 b, p.170). The pages 1 to 6 and 11 to 14 are missing from the document rendering its interpretation particularly difficult (Leloup, 2002, p.28), but "in terms of manuscript attestation in relatively early papyri, *The Gospel of Mary* is relatively well attested" (Tuckett, 2007, p.9).

An important point to notice about *The Gospel of Mary* is that:

The gospel is not mentioned by any of the Church Fathers (e.g. Irenaeus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius) even when they discuss the existence of (possibly dangerous, or heretical) non-canonical texts; nor it is mentioned in any of the lists or catalogues which name (and occasionally discuss) canonical and/or non-canonical texts (e.g. the Muratorian Canon, the Gelasian Decree, etc.).

(Tuckett, 2007, p.3)

De Boer confirms this fact by claiming that "no manuscripts have been discovered outside Egypt, nor does any Church Father seem to be familiar with the Gospel" (De Boer, 1997, p.81). Leloup claims that "as to the dating of the original text upon which the Coptic copy was based, it is interesting to note that there exists a Greek fragment- the Rylands Papyrus 463- whose identity as the precursor of the Coptic text has been confirmed by Professor Carl Schmidt" (Leloup, 2002, p.28). The Greek fragment comes from Oxyrhynchus and dates from the beginning of the third century, but the first edition of *The Gospel of Mary* would be older than this. Leloup states that Walter Till places *The*

Gospel of Mary around the year 150 (Leloup, 2002, p.29). Moreover, de Boer goes further to claim that the Gospel “would have been composed no later than 150 and not earlier than 90,” in addition to that, “parts of the *Gospel of Mary* could go back to oral and written traditions older than the Gospel itself” (De Boer, 1997, p.79). Marjanen asserts this point of view by stating that “it is safe to argue on the basis of the external evidence that the Gospel of Mary should be dated before 200 and that this view represents a consensus among the scholars” (Marjanen, 1996, p.98). The Coptic manuscript contains a few interesting different readings from the Greek fragments though no substantial differences are present (King, 2003 a, p. 9). Moreover, Tuckett in his book *The Gospel of Mary* insists that “the text of *The Gospel of Mary* almost certainly existed in a number of manuscript versions at various times”; in addition to that, “the evidence from the manuscripts shows that the gospel must have been copied relatively extensively in an early period” (Tuckett, 2007, p.10). So if the gospel goes back to the mid of the second century, and was copied extensively, then this denotes that “the text must have been quite popular, certainly popular enough to have generated the production of a number of copies of the text” (Tuckett, 2007, p.11), so why was it ignored by the Fathers of the Church completely? Was it considered part of the secret teachings of Jesus Christ and therefore available only to the close disciples? A question like this is worth answering because it might reveal a lot about the importance of such a gospel.

Although only around half the gospel still exists until our days, the available pages “provide an intriguing glimpse into a kind of Christianity lost for almost fifteen hundred years” (King, 2003 a, p.3). A great debate around the classification of *The Gospel of Mary* as a Gnostic or Stoic text took place in recent studies. Tuckett in his book

The Gospel of Mary dedicates a whole section of his monograph to illustrate the Gnostic elements of the Gospel of Mary, while De Boer goes on to argue that *The Gospel of Mary* has more Stoic elements than Gnostic ones. She goes further into details explaining that the gospel does not mention an evil demiurge, does not have a creation myth, and does not discuss any radical transcendence of God (De Boer, 2000, pp. 695-707). Haskins, on the other hand, states that "It is here that Mary Magdalene enters the Gnostic cosmos, as the 'mysterious figure called Mariam' who is given unparalleled prominence in several of these apocryphal writings" (Haskins, 1993, p. 38). Haskins goes further to assert that "Although a categorical identification of this Mary is impossible; there is little doubt that this figure is Mary Magdalene herself" (Haskins, 1993, p.38). Bruce Chilton in his book *Mary Magdalene* confirms Haskins' claim by stating that "The Mary in the title refers to Magdalene, and the Coptic text reflects the Gnostic Christianity that thrived in Egypt eighteen hundred years ago" (Chilton, 2005, p.122). Furthermore Tuckett affirms that "it is therefore highly likely that, in referring to a figure called 'Mary', the author of *The Gospel of Mary* intends to refer to the person of Mary Magdalene, rather than to any other Mary" (Tuckett, 2007, p.18).

Griffith- Jones in his discussion about the different roles of Mary the Magdalene states that "*The Gospel of Mary* may have been written up as a short and subversive text, commanding respect for all its teaching and thereby for the Mary who relayed the climax of that teaching" and "thereby for authoritative and visionary women who had teaching to rely in the Gnostics' own churches" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.163). The importance of this gospel is that Mary the Magdalene who has been mentioned in all the canonical gospels "is the only female figure from the New Testament to have one of these apocryphal texts,

The Gospel of Mary, named for her" (Haskins, 1993, p.34). Moreover, "for *The Gospel of Mary*, the saving message and the contents of the text coincide more closely" (Tuckett, 2007, p.33). But what is important to notice is that "The Gnostic Mary Magdalene contrasts strongly, therefore, with the figure that emerges from conventional interpretations of the New Testament"; in addition to that, Haskins notes that "there is no reference to her in the writings as a sinner or prostitute, which would suggest that this was a later tradition" (Haskins, 1993, p.38). King confirms this idea by stating that *The Gospel of Mary* "exposes the erroneous view that Mary of Magdala was a prostitute for what it is – a piece of theological fiction" (King, 2003 a, p.3). Moreover, its importance rests in the fact that "*The Gospel of Mary* ascribes to her alone the two most intimate forms of the four forms of knowledge exemplified within the text" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.145). Those scant pages of *The Gospel of Mary* give us "a perfect, lively vignette of church life; and for all the distance we have explored between the ancient Gnostics and ourselves, none of us would be surprised to encounter such a clash of gifts and roles today" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.167). De Boer in her book *Mary Magdalene, Beyond the Myth* quotes Walter Till who asserts that the purpose of the *Gospel of Mary* is "to depict Mary Magdalene, the first witness of resurrection as a proclaimer of Gnostic teaching. Her insight is clearly superior to that of the apostles"; moreover, "Till points out that the Gnostic teaching of the *Gospel of Mary* is not secret, as is usually the case in the other Gnostic writings" (De Boer, 1997,p.88).

The author of the *Gospel of Mary* does not narrate anything about Mary the Magdalene or about her background in the Gospel. Although the gospel is called *The Gospel of Mary*, Mary the Magdalene appears on only three main occasions; 1)after the

departure of the Savior, 2)when Peter asks her to relate revelations to them, and 3)in the confrontation between her on one side, and Peter and Andrew on the other. All the characters "appear without introduction (at least in the extant text). They thus are apparently well known to the readers, who need no more information about them to make sense of what is said" (Tuckett, 2007, p.13). The importance of these appearances lies in the different roles attributed to Mary the Magdalene in these few pages.

Mary the Magdalene first appears in the gospel in chapter 5. 2 after the Savior departs and leaves the disciples in a state of despair. The disciples are confused and do not understand the words of the Savior, and they fear that they will face the same destiny as his if they go to preach. They do not understand why the Savior asks them to preach the gospel message to the Gentiles, and they become so deeply agitated that they began to weep greatly. After the disciples began to weep, Mary Magdalene is mentioned for the first time. The first six pages of the text are missing which makes it difficult to determine whether Mary was with the disciples before the Savior departed or after that. But we can only conclude from the text that she was there all the time even if she is not mentioned from the beginning:

When He said this, He departed. But they were grieved. They wept greatly, saying, How shall will we go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel of the Kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare Him, how will they spare us?" Then Mary stood up, greeted them all, and said to her brethren, Do not weep and do not grieve nor be irresolute, for His grace will be entirely with you and will protect you. But rather, let us praise His greatness, for He has prepared us and made us into Men. (Robinson, 2009, p.294)

Mary the Magdalene appeared in the scene after the departure of the Savior taking his role of guidance. She was already there, but she 'stood' and 'greeted' the disciples only after they expressed their fear and anguish. The disciples were in a state of confusion, so she asked them not to weep and to calm down. She played the role of the consoler and guided them through their pain. She told them that they cannot be grieving and doubting the Savior's words at that time in particular because they had a mission to accomplish, and she wanted to make sure that they understood what the Savior asked them to do. She is depicted here as a leading disciple who knows what is going on and is able to explain that to the other students. The Magdalene is "clearly portrayed as teaching within a church's meeting" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.167). Moreover, she is a central character in the plot of the narrative who makes sure that the theological message reaches both the disciples and the readers. Mary is positively characterized and takes the role of an authority figure. King asserts that *The Gospel of Mary* "presents the most straightforward and convincing argument in any early Christian writing for the legitimacy of women's leadership"; moreover, the gospel "offers a sharp critique of illegitimate power and a utopian vision of spiritual perfection" (King, 2003 a, pp.3-4). Mary the Magdalene is not weeping like the male disciples who are viewed as weak and fearful of what might happen to them in case they preached the gospel to the Gentiles. De Boer asserts that "Mary sets praise over against sorrow and despair. In her eyes, the suffering of the Lord does not have the last word, but his greatness" (De Boer, 1997, p.106). We see Mary the Magdalene here as opposed to Mary the Magdalene present in the *Gospel of John*. Mary in the *Gospel of John* (20.11-13) is depicted as weeping because she does not find the body of Jesus and does not understand what happened to him and who had taken the

body. She is in a state of confusion and misunderstanding as are the other disciples in the *Gospel of Mary* after the Savior left them.

Mary goes further and explains to the disciples how the Lord 'prepared us and made us into Men'. She includes herself in the act of preparation and making, implying that she is equal to the male disciples in those two aspects. What is more important to notice here is that *The Gospel of Mary* "is not presenting an androgynous image" (De Boer, 1997, p.106). There is no difference between male and female; they are both made into "Man". Karen King states that "the ideal is non-gendered; gender and sexuality belong to the lower sphere" (King, 2003 b, p.59). This concept of androgyny was clear to Mary, and that's why she was confused later on when Peter refuses to listen to her because she is a 'woman'.

After this statement, the disciples calm down and they begin arguing and discussing the words of the Savior. They do not argue with Mary; they just accept her words and calm down with no discussion till that point. Chilton states that "Peter is at loss without Mary's guidance and the strengthening of her special manhood" (Chilton, 2005, p.125). The Magdalene is given this role because of her unique experience with the resurrected Lord. It is "Mary Magdalene rather than Peter" who "brings about Christianity's emergence in the Hellenistic world" (Chilton, 2005, p.125).

Then Peter turns to Mary and says:

Sister we know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of women. Tell us the words of the Saviour which you remember, which you know, but we do not, nor have we heard them." Mary answered and said, What is hidden from you I will

proclaim to you. And she began to speak to them these words: I, she said, I saw the Lord in vision and I said to Him, Lord I saw you today in a vision. He answered and said to me, Blessed are you that you did not waver at the sight of Me. (Robinson, 2009, p.295)

There are many significant points in this conversation. First, Peter calls Mary 'sister' rendering her to be a disciple and a believer like them. She is clearly part of the group that was present there, not an outsider. Second, Peter clearly states that the Savior loved her more than 'the rest of women' pointing to the special relationship that she and the Savior had. Robin Griffith-Jones asserts this fact by stating that "*The Gospel of Mary* sees the link between the disciples and Mary and declares Jesus to have loved Mary above all others; Mary Magdalene has become the Beloved Disciple" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.144). Elaine Pagels in her book *The Gnostic Gospels* asserts that "The hint of an erotic relationship between him (the Savior) and Mary Magdalene may indicate claims to mystical communion; throughout history, mystics of many traditions have chosen sexual metaphors to describe their experiences" (Pagels, 1979, p.18). Third, the students accept her presence normally, and then Peter invites her to speak and tell them of what they didn't know. It is crucial to note here that the disciples knew and acknowledged that the Magdalene knew things that they all didn't know, and that they needed her to tell them what the Savior did not tell them directly. Pagels considers that *The Gospel of Mary* "depicts Mary Magdalene as the one favored with visions and insight that far surpass Peter's" (Pagels, 1979, p. 22). The disciples wanted to know what she had to say and initially believed that what she would say will be true. In addition to that, we can assume here that Mary also knew that she knew things the other disciples did not know, and

promised to tell them of what is hidden from them. Mary is characterized here as being a revealer. The fact that she had private conversations with the Savior places her in a unique position as a disciple and as a woman.

Mary begins by telling the disciples that she has seen the Savior in a vision, and "Her words vibrate with a simple grandeur and elegance" (Chilton, 2005, p.125). The Savior is glad that she does not 'waver' when she sees him and he calls her 'Blessed'. The Lord praises her at this point because he realizes that she is not afraid of seeing him and that she understands the process of a vision. It is significant to notice that the narrator calls the Savior the 'Blessed one' also in *The Gospel of Mary* (4.33) placing Mary in an equal position to that of the Lord. E. de Boer in her book *The Gospel of Mary* claims that the fact that both the Savior and the Magdalene are called "Blessed" is also a reinforcement of the idea that Mary represents the departed Savior (De Boer, 2004, p.89); moreover, Tuckett affirms this notion by stating that "the prominent position occupied by the Mary in the narrative correlates well with the high frequency with which the person of Mary Magdalene occupies the role of a dialogue partner in other 'Gnostic' dialogues" (Tuckett, 2007, p.17).

In addition to that, it is important to notice that the Magdalene is placed in a more progressive position than she had been in *The Gospel of John*. In John (20.14-15), she sees the Lord, but she doesn't recognize him immediately, but in *The Gospel of Mary*, she sees him and recognizes him directly. She is self confident and able to handle such a situation with more maturity and responsibility. Most importantly, the Magdalene had the ability to see the Lord in a vision. She had the spiritual ability to see visions and to tell her visions to the Lord and to the other disciples. This post-resurrection encounter with

the Lord is present in both *The Gospel of John* and *The Gospel of Mary* as she sees the Lord in a vision, he gives her information that she is to pass on to the other disciples later on. Moreover, the Magdalene refers to Jesus as the Lord in both gospels, although in *The Gospel of Mary*, Jesus is referred to as the Savior elsewhere in the gospel. She is the only one to call him 'The Lord' in *The Gospel of Mary*. The Savior instructs her in the art of visionary gnosis “which is neither sensory perception nor perception of the psyche or intellect, but rather a state of opening that mystics call the 'nous', or the fine point where the highest region of the soul merges with spirit” (Leloup, 2005, pp.301-2). Mary the Magdalene understands the art of visions and is able to explain it to the disciples in a clear manner.

It is unfortunate that four pages are missing from the manuscript, so we have no idea what the vision was about. At the end of the revelation, the narrator says that Mary fell silent. Leloup comments on the Magdalene's silence by claiming that "her silence annoys her critics as much as her words do, for it is a sign of the peace of the One who inhabits her" (Leloup, 2005, p.207). Tuckett in his book *The Gospel of Mary* claims that "the final goal of the soul is silence" (Tuckett, 2007, p.185). Moreover, De Boer sees that Mary's action of silence can be seen as a mimicked action of the soul's silence (De Boer, 2004, p.89). This shows to a far extent that Mary's understanding of the acts of the soul is at a higher level than the understanding of the students. She had the ability not only of revealing the Lord's message, but also of understanding its deep meaning and acting accordingly. Mary "has reached this longed-for final destiny herself and shown herself to be a true follower of the Savior" (Tuckett, 2007, p.185).

The role of the Magdalene and her characterization are well revealed by Haskins in her book *Mary Magdalene* where she asserts the Magdalene's "prominent role as disciple, visionary, mediatrix and messenger of esoteric revelations". Haskins considers that the Magdalene "even transcends the implications inherent in Mark and John of the importance of her function in the gospels" (Haskins, 1993, p.37).

After Mary reveals her vision, she is faced with disbelief from Peter and Andrew. For after she said that:

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 these same things. He questioned them about the Savior. Did He really speak privately with a woman and not openly to us? Are we to turn around and all listen to her? Did He prefer her to us? (Robinson, 2009, p.296)

It is in this passage that the conflict between Mary and Peter begins. The first point to notice is that Andrew doesn't believe what the Magdalene says and accuses her of lying. He feels that what she has revealed is different from what the Savior has taught them – most probably at the beginning of the gospel. Unfortunately, *The Gospel of Mary* is not complete so "no comprehensive comparison between Jesus' and Mary's teaching is possible" (Marjanen, 1996, p.113). Andrew's comments are harsh; he feels that he does not fully understand what the Magdalene had said and this frustrates him to the extent of calling her a liar, and "questions the validity of the report itself, suggesting that her words are a false teaching" (Leloup, 2002, pp.207-8). As far as Andrew is concerned,

"she has been ranting" (Leloup, 2002, p.208). Marvin Meyer sees that "in the *Gospel of Mary*, Mary of Magdala is a beloved disciple, perhaps the beloved disciple, and Andrew does not like any of this" (Meyer, 2005 b, p.173). The conflict between Andrew and the Magdalene "may be generated by the note in Luke (24.11) that the male disciples did not believe the testimony of the women at the tomb, including Mary Magdalene, about their finding the tomb empty" (Tuckett, 2007, p.18).

Peter's response on the other hand is different from that of Andrew's and contradictory to what he had said earlier in *The Gospel of Mary* (5.5-6). At the beginning, Peter invites the Magdalene to speak of what they had not been told before, thus acknowledging that the Savior had revealed to her more knowledge than that he had revealed to them. When she tells of her revelation, he suddenly realizes that the Savior has revealed hidden messages to a woman in private (Marjanen, 1996, p.114). This fact frustrates Peter more than the nature of the revelation itself, as "Mary does not tell anecdotes from the past", instead "she explains that she has just seen the Lord in a vision received through the mind" (Pagels, 1979, p.13). In *The Gospel of Mary* (5.5-6) Peter admits that Mary the Magdalene is the woman Jesus Christ loved more than the other woman, but at the end of her revelation, he suddenly realizes that she has indeed received secret teachings from the Savior himself in private, and this had only one meaning: the Savior loved her more than the male and the female disciples all together to entrust her with such hidden teachings. Peter stresses the fact that she is a 'woman', and wonders 'shall we turn around and all listen to her?' Probably he would have considered the revelation had it come from a male disciple, but the fact that it was given to a woman annoys him a lot. Haskins quotes Elaine Pagels who suggested that Peter "represents the

orthodox position which rejected 'inner vision' regarded by the Church as threatening its authority" while Mary Magdalene "represents the Gnostic claim of Christ's continued presence and the value of individual visionary experience" (Haskins, 1993, p.39).

Peter asks three questions, although he knows the answers beforehand. The first question was: 'Did he really speak privately with a woman and not openly to us?' The fact that Peter was the one who invited her to talk at the beginning doesn't seem that relevant to him now. He doesn't believe that the Savior has talked to a woman secretly and without them knowing and the situation all together makes him feel underestimated as "Mary's articulate insight and her gender upset Peter and his cohort" (Chilton, 2005, p.126). The second question was: 'Are we to turn about and all listen to her?' This question in itself puts Peter in a worse situation than the first one. He ignores the fact that she has revealed a secret teaching from the Savior directly. Instead of taking benefit of the revelation and trying to understand it, the only question that comes into his mind is: how can we the male disciples listen to her? He feels belittled to the extent that he cannot even consider the revelation altogether. The third question was: 'Did he prefer her to us?' This doesn't seem a question in itself. It seems more as an acknowledgment of the special position of the Magdalene and the close relationship that she had with the Savior. Peter was just admitting the fact that if she knew the secret teachings, then this would mean that she was closer to the Savior than all of them and had more understanding of his teachings than the other disciples. Peter understood that this placed him in a secondary position, and he couldn't accept this fact. Marjanen claims that Peter's reactions and attitude may be the result of jealousy and fear over Mary replacing him and be given his position of authority (Marjanen, 1996, p.115).

The last scene where Mary the Magdalene appears is best described by Griffith-Jones by saying that "Within the story, Mary speaks out, is rebuffed, vindicated- and finally left aside; Levi has the last word" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.145). The significance of this part of the gospel lies in the fact that Levi defends Mary the Magdalene and correctly accuses Peter of acting out of anger. The lack of self-confidence on the part of Peter and Andrew is in contrast to the wisdom and calmness that she shows in response to their attacks and accusations causing some readers to feel sympathy with Mary the Magdalene. Her position now also stands in contradiction to the role of the comforter that she had played earlier in the gospel when she calmed all the disciples down reminding them of the teachings of the Savior and his guidance.

Then Mary wept. She said to Peter "My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I have thought this up myself in my heart or that I am lying about the Savior?" Levi answered and said to Peter, Peter you are always been hot tempered. Now, I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? The Savior knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us. Rather let us be ashamed and put on the perfect man and separate as he commanded us and preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said. (Robinson, 2009, p.296)

The first thing to be noted in this text is that Mary weeps. One would expect a strong verbal reaction, but she responds to Andrew and Peter in a calm way wondering why are they are accusing her of lying. She calls Peter 'my brother' reminding him of their

relationship as equal disciples. She doesn't understand why they question her words, and she is disturbed by their actions. The second thing to be noted is that even though she was attacked by two male disciples, Mary answers Peter and defends herself. She speaks and this is important as we rarely see women speaking in the gospels in general. When she asks Peter: 'What do you think?' She wants to know what is going on in his mind to lead him to accuse her of lying. Mary's discourse shows her as "a visionary, spirit-filled, given deep understanding, and opposed by the patriarchal Simon-Peter" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.82).

Levi's answer is of great support to Mary's position. Levi "appears on the scene here as the antithesis to Peter, rebuking Peter and defending Mary against Peter's criticism" (Tuckett, 2007, p.21). First, he portrays Peter as an ill-tempered person who has anger management issues. This portrayal "may imply that Peter's response to Mary is in some respects irrational and inconsistent" (Tuckett, 2007, p.29). Levi sees Peter acting as a gender-biased person with the Magdalene and not as the brother he should be. Levi accuses Peter of dealing with the Magdalene like the enemies do. Tuckett states that "this coheres with a number of aspects of the portrayal of Peter in the canonical gospels, where he appears as impulsive, and perhaps acting and speaking too quickly before thinking" (Tuckett, 2007, p.19). Then, he asks him the most crucial question: But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you to be against her? Levi's emphasis on the worthiness of the Magdalene is very important. The Lord ordered them to love each other as he loved them and this is not the way Peter and Andrew are acting towards the Magdalene. Levi here apprehends Peter and reminds him of his position. If the Savior has considered the Magdalene worthy and loved her more than them then Peter has no right to question her

position and to put new laws. Moreover, Levi stresses the point that the Lord loved Mary the Magdalene more than all of them, not just more than the other women. This places the Magdalene in a superior position over all the other disciples. There is a similarity here between *The Gospel of Mary* and *The Gospel of Philip* regarding the position of the Magdalene "whom, it is said, Jesus 'loved her more than [all] the disciples' (63.34-5), a claim which is clearly similar to the words of Levi here in *The Gospel of Mary*" (Tuckett, 2007, p.16). It is important to notice here that, "Levi makes a connection between loving and knowing" (De Boer, 1997, p.103). Levi realizes that the Lord "had made known to her more of his teaching than he did to the brothers" so that "she can supplement the knowledge of the brothers" (De Boer, 1997, p.102). Levi then steps forwards and asks Peter to be ashamed, for they have more important things to do than to attack the Magdalene and accuse her of false teachings. Levi concludes his words by "urging Peter and the others to be humble and human-truly and perfectly" (Eherman, 2006, p.246). They have to do what the Lord ordered them to do and not to invent new laws. The Savior has already set the rules for them. Levi's interpretation of Mary's message is not faced with any rejection from the disciples. Peter and Andrew's attempt to present the Magdalene in a negative way by calling her a liar and Peter's questioning of the reliability of her visions are turned against them. They are presented negatively because of their trying to discredit and question the authority of the Magdalene. Eherman asserts that "Mary here is exalted to the highest level possible. She is the one whom Christ fully knew, and to whom he revealed the truth necessary for salvation" (Eherman, 2006, p.246). Finally, Levi asks the disciples "to take the path of the Anthropos, or fully realized human being (not Andros, meaning male). No matter what their gender happens

to be, if they let themselves be guided and inspired by the Breath of the Living One, it will lead them to a fullness and an integration of masculine and feminine” (Leloup, 2005, p.304).

In conclusion, Mary the Magdalene is here depicted "not only as the beloved of the Savior, but also as the leader of the group of apostles, even though this position does not, as we have seen, go unchallenged"(Haskins, 1993, pp.39-40). She is "the one privileged to receive visions, has greater comprehension than Peter, and acts as a conduit for the Lord's teachings" (Haskins, 1993, p.40). The Magdalene is "more highly privileged still, with insight and an unwavering mind" (Griffith- Jones, 2008, p.144). King considers that *The Gospel of Mary* "challenges our rather romantic views about the harmony and unanimity of the first Christians; and it asks us to rethink the basis for church authority. All written in the name of a woman" (King, 2003 a, p.4). The importance of *The Gospel of Mary* "only emerges when we read it not in isolation but in its connection with the thought and practice of ancient Christianity as a whole." (Chilton, 2005, p.128). In doing so, we can "perceive the power and continuing force of Mary's vision" (Chilton, 2005, p.128). It is noted clearly that "One leader presides over the meeting and gives permission to the church's members-men and women- to speak" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.167). The *Gospel of Mary* "may also help to correct a false understanding of the Christian church, and this gospel and other similar texts may help to reclaim the image of Mary and restore her to her rightful place within the history of Judaism and Christianity” (Meyer, 2005 b, p.175). Griffith-Jones best concludes his interpretation of *The Gospel of Mary* by stating that "Into a world of men's voices and men's texts that shout down the teaching of women as improper in principle and heretical

in practice, our author has sent this short story with a simple closing declaration: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARY" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.145).

3.2 The Gospel of Thomas

The *Gospel of Thomas* has been one of the most discussed Gospels of Nag Hammadi. John Crossan in his book *Four Other Gospels* states that "at the turn of the century, then, fragments from three different Greek copies of The *Gospel of Thomas* were discovered in manuscripts dating from the start, middle, and end of the third century" (Crossan, 1985, p.22), as is confirmed by "testimonia in early Christian literature, especially in the writings of Hippolytus of Rome"(Meyer, 2005 a, p.36). In addition to that, the Coptic version of *The Gospel of Thomas* was found in "the second tractate of codex 2 of the Nag Hammadi Library, where it is preserved in the Coptic translation" (Meyer, 2004, p.23). The discovery "happened in 1945, in upper Egypt, in the area where Khenoboskion, the ancient monastic community founded by St. Pachomius, had once stood" (Leloup, 2005, p.16). The Library was hidden in "amphora normally used to age wine" and it "consisted of fifty-three parchments written in Sahidic Coptic, the last remaining language still close to the extinct Egyptian pharaonic language. (The word Copt is derived from the Arabic *qibt*, which in turn derives from the Greek Aiguptios, Egypt) (Leloup, 2005, p.17). The sayings are "usually numbered at 114, and although the system of numeration is flawed, the convention has stuck" (Meyer, 2005 b, p.74) but it is important to notice that "there is no narrative story line in The *Gospel of Thomas*" (Meyer, 2005 b, p.74).

The Gospel of Thomas is "a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus' -hidden sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Judas Thomas the Twin recorded" (Meyer, 2004, p.23). Who was Judas Thomas the Twin? Was he the twin (*didymos* in Greek, and Thomas or te'oma in Aramaic) of Jesus in some sense of alter ego or closest disciple? The sayings themselves do not elaborate on this, for they are anything but loquacious narratives" (Leloup, 2005, p.18). This gospel "contains no apocalyptic proclamations and no prophecies" (Leloup, 2005, p.17), but it is "composed exclusively of aphorisms, parables, and dialogues of Jesus and is thus a discourse rather than a narrative gospel" (Crossan, 1985, p.26-27). Moreover, "this gospel contains no biography of Jesus (Yesu in Greek and Coptic, Yeshua in Aramaic), nor any account of his miracles. It is a collection of 114 sayings, called *logia* in Greek (singular: *logion*)" (Leloup, 2005, p.17). Thus it seems that the significance of Jesus in this gospel lies in the meaning of his sayings, not in the events of his life, crucifixion and resurrection. Crossan quoting J.M. Robinson states that this collection of sayings is "certainly the most important part of the library for understanding the historical Jesus and the beginnings of Christianity" (Crossan, 1985, p.15); moreover, Robinson affirms that *The Gospel of Thomas* "alone would make the Nag Hammadi Library a very important discovery, probably doing more as a single text to advance our understanding of the historical Jesus and of the transmissions of his teachings than all the Dead Sea Scrolls put together" (Crossan, 1985, p.15). Most likely "*The Gospel of Thomas* was composed in Greek, probably in Syria, perhaps at Edessa, where Thomas was revered and his bones venerated" (Meyer, 2004, p.23), and where he is remembered as "twin brother of Christ, apostle of the Most High and fellow-initiate into the hidden word of Christ, who dost receive his secret sayings" (Acts of Thomas 39,

NT: 2.464), or "in another bi-lingual city approximately in the same geographical area" (Marjanen, 1996, p.37).

The dating of the Gospel "can be made for a first-century date for a first edition of *The Gospel of Thomas*, though some scholars prefer a second-century date"(Meyer, 2005 b, p.36). *The Gospel of Thomas* "does not proclaim a gospel of the cross, as do the Gospels of *Mark*, *Matthew*, *Luke*, *John*, and *Peter*, but rather a gospel of wisdom, and hearers and readers are encouraged to encounter the sayings, interact with them, and discover for themselves their interpretation and meaning", and "that is how people attain salvation and life" (Meyer, 2004, p.24). The first English version of this text "was published in 1959 and was greeted with intense interest by scholars and theologians alike" (Leloup, 2005, p.8).

Those documents found at Nag Hammadi are usually assigned to "the current of religious doctrines and practices that flourished in the early centuries of the Christian era and were condemned as heresy in a movement spearheaded in the second century by the redoubtable bishop of Lyon, Irenaeus" (Leloup, 2005, pp.9-10). The result of this vilification was "the widespread suppression of these heresies and the relentless destruction of their constitutive texts", as until now, these teachings are known to us only through "the adversarial accounts of them provided in Irenaeus's vastly influential work, *Against the Heresies*" (Leloup, 2005, p.10).

This gospel evoked different reactions among scholars, some considered it to be "an item of academic interest in the study of Gnostic texts", while others considered it as "a mere collage of the words of Jesus derived from the canonical gospels and mixed with heterodox traditions that claim to originate with Jesus", still for others "it is the closest

document we have to the very source that the canonical gospels themselves drew upon, a tradition that predates them" (Leloup, 2005, p.18). *The Gospel of Thomas* is then a "protogospel that we have so long been seeking, the only one that transmits the authentic words of Jesus" (Leloup, 2005, p.18). Yet, Griffith-Jones considers "its origins and character lay elsewhere- in a mystical Christianity toward the end of the first century CE"(Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.52).

According to saying 1 of *The Gospel of Thomas*, "Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death" (Meyer, 2004, p.23). Leloup wonders:

Is this merely a figure of speech? Or do these words speak to some kind of knowledge and knowing that have an action upon the very flesh and blood of human being, an action that is incomparably more penetrating than anything we call 'knowledge' or 'knowing'- including even our inspired moments of intellectual insight or passionate realization? (Leloup, 2005, p.10)

He answers this question by explaining that "such knowing that is inseparable from the act of faith considered not simply as a set of emotionally charged beliefs, but as a movement within the human psyche that generates a magnetic current flowing between our individual human life and the source of human life itself" (Leloup, 2005, p.11). Self-transformation "through understanding the words of Jesus leads to salvation which is considered as an aspect of Gnosticism" (Lewis, 2013, p.106). Schaberg suggests that "some of the texts-for example, the Gospel of Mary or the Gospel of Thomas-are not Gnostic according to anything but the widest use of the term: that is, they are Gnostic

only in that they seem to share an emphasis on the saving significance of experiential religious knowledge” (Schaberg, 2006, p.70).

In the *Gospel of Thomas*, Mary the Magdalene is one of the named six disciples, and one of the five who speak: Simon Peter in logia 13 and 114, Matthew in logion 13, Thomas in logion 13, and Salome in logion 61 (Schaberg, 2002, p.130). Taking into consideration that only six persons of Jesus’ intimate circle are named in *Thomas*, it is distinguished that two of them are women. In addition to that, “the only other character of Early Christianity who is mentioned in the writing is James the Just in logion 12” (Marjanen, 1996, p.40). In *The Gospel of Thomas*, the name Mary appears twice: in logion 21 and logion 114, but in neither logion, she is referred to as Mary the Magdalene. Marjanen yet asserts that “there is no doubt that in both cases the same woman is meant” (Marjanen, 1996, p.39). Stephan Shoemaker argues that “in all but two instances, those being the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Pistis Sophia*, this woman is known only by the name ‘Mary’, without any further clarification”; furthermore, he explains that the other narratives including the *Gospel of Thomas* “do not specify that this woman is Mary the Magdalene, an equation that is generally assumed on the basis of other criteria” (Shoemaker, 2003, p.7). Marjanen uses two criteria to assume that the woman named ‘Mary’ is actually Mary the Magdalene. First, Marjanen explains that “the situation described in logion 114 makes it most probable that it is Mary Magdalene about whom the texts speak” (Marjanen, 1996, p.39). The tension between Mary and Peter in logion 114 has been a central theme in both the canonical gospels and the apocryphal ones most prominently in the *Gospel of Mary*. Second, Marjanen realizes that “apart from Mary Magdalene, no other Mary turns up in such a polemic context. The form of the name,

which in Coptic texts is used of Mary Magdalene, but not of the mother of Jesus, also bolsters this conclusion” (Marjanen, 1996, p.39).

The first time the character Mary appears in *The Gospel of Thomas* is in the first part of logion 21 when she asks Jesus a question about discipleship:

Mary said to Jesus “What are your disciples like?” He said, “They are like children living in a field that is not theirs. When the owners of the field come, they will say, ‘Give our field back to us.’ They take off their clothes in front of them in order to give it back to them, and they return their field to them. For this reason I say, if the owner of a house knows that a thief is coming, he will be on guard before the thief arrives and will not let the thief break into the house of his estate and steal his possessions. As for you, then, be on guard against the world. Arm yourselves with great strength or the robbers might find a way to get to you, for the trouble you expect will come. Let there be among you a person who understands. When the crop ripened, the person came quickly with sickle in hand and harvested it. Whoever has ears to hear should hear. (Meyer, 2004, pp.29-30)

In this logion, Mary the Magdalene is involved in a conversation which demonstrates the nature of discipleship. The question Mary the Magdalene asks "prompts Jesus to offer words about life, trouble, and the consummation of things in the world" (Meyer, 2004, p.24). The first thing to be noted here is that Mary the Magdalene is already there. She is not introduced or greeted; rather she is sitting with the disciples and asking Jesus Christ questions that denote her need of deeper understanding of the concept of discipleship, and Jesus Christ answers her. Mary the Magdalene and Salome, the other female disciple mentioned in this gospel, both ask questions about discipleship. Marjanen relates that

"Clearly, the question implies that she wants and needs to get more information about this matter. Should this be understood to suggest that she in fact does not yet belong to the circle of disciples who collectively act as interlocutors but that she only deliberates whether she should and could join it?" (Marjanen, 1996, pp.41-42). This quest for knowledge is introduced in logion 2 that describes how someone can come to knowledge and understanding. Jesus explains that anyone can come to knowledge by seeking as anyone who seeks should "not stop seeking until one finds. When one finds, one will be troubled. When one is troubled, one will marvel and will reign over all" (Meyer, 2004, p.26). According to Marvin Meyer, the Greek Gospel adds "an additional stage to the interpretive process: 'and [having reigned], one will [rest]'" (Meyer, 2005 a, p.34). This denotes that the path of knowledge and understanding the sayings of Jesus is a path "to be undertaken with commitment" (Meyer, 2005 a, p.34) no matter how difficult and demanding it could be. This shows Mary the Magdalene to be on the correct way of seeking knowledge. She wants to know the characteristics of true disciples to be able to be one, and by being one she can reach God's kingdom. This shows her perseverance to find the way to salvation and eternal life. In the New Testament Gospels, as in the *Gospel of Thomas*, we see Jesus Christ asking his disciples to search for the truth, to seek and find, and Mary the Magdalene is following his teaching properly. Marjanen answers his own question contemplating that "it is rather that, like Salome, Mary Magdalene is a disciple in the ordinary sense of the word. Nevertheless she still lacks understanding and needs to be exhorted to become a person who understands. In other words, she is urged to reach the higher stage of discipleship" (Marjanen, 1996, p.42). Moreover, Jean-Yves Leloup explains that "Mary Magdalene plays the role of the initiate who asks Yeshua

about the stage of development of his disciples. What he confides to her applies not to his closest disciples, but rather to people who follow him from a certain distance" (Leloup, 2005, p.138). So, Leloup considers that what Mary the Magdalene is asking about is not something private or related to her instruction only. Rather she is asking a general question that applies to all the followers and the disciples of Jesus Christ who have not yet reached the "Jesus-like stage explained in logion 108" (Marjanen, 1996, p.42). It is noteworthy that Mary the Magdalene in this logion is the prolocutor who asks Jesus Christ the question about discipleship. The second thing to be noted is that although the question is raised by Mary, Jesus' answer is addressed to all the disciples. Mary the Magdalene "is given a voice that is powerful, insistent and courageous and her question about discipleship request for an image seems to replace or parallel the question about the nature of the kingdom of heaven in the synoptics" (Schaberg, 2002, p.141).

The Gospel of Thomas is "an interactive gospel" and "such an interactive approach may go back to the historical Jesus, whose sayings and stories seem to have provided the opportunity for his disciples and others around him to react and respond" (Meyer, 2005 a, p.35). This gospel thus offers us a hermeneutic challenge to its readers to understand and comprehend the mysterious meanings of its words.

Ann McGuire argues that the *Gospel of Thomas* "uses two highly gendered images of salvation, which have differences that generated much debate. One speaks of salvation as transcending male and female altogether (making the two one), the other of an ascent to maleness (making Mary male)" (McGuire, 1999, p.277). The first image is presented in logion 22, where Jesus compares nursing infants to those who enter the Kingdom. The second image is presented in the final saying of the gospel, in logion 114:

Simon Peter said to them, "Mary should leave us, for females are not worthy of life." Jesus said, "Look, I shall guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter heaven's Kingdom. (Meyer, 2004, pp.59-60)

This logion has cultivated many interpretations that varied a lot in the last two decades. Some readers might have considered it as one of the male-chauvinistic voices of the first centuries of Christianity because of "the gospel's complex use of gender symbolism" (McGuire, 1999, p.277).

In this logion, Peter states that Mary should leave them, for women in general are not worthy of life. Apparently, Peter seems to be a sexist who hates woman and wants no female disciples among the male disciples, and 'strange as it sounds, this simply states what religious rhetoric assumes: that the men form the legitimate body of the community, while women are allowed to participate only when they assimilate themselves to men" (Pagels, 1979, p.49). Pagels goes on to explain that the language used in these gospels might appear to relate to the pagan traditions of the Mother Goddess, but mainly, "their language is specifically Christian, unmistakably related to a Jewish heritage" (Pagels, 1979, p.49), but instead of speaking of a one masculine God, "many of these texts speak of a God as a dyad who embraces both masculine and feminine elements" (Pagels, 1979, p.49). This logion shows Peter's "difficulty in acknowledging the rightful place of woman-which is not unrelated to the more general difficulty of acknowledging the rightful place of gnosis" (Leloup, 2005, pp.303-4).

In *The Gospel of Mary*, "we again find Peter the representative of a repressive, patriarchal attitude toward women. We also find there the theme of the

'perfected' human being, but in a different expression: as those who have integrated the masculine and the feminine in themselves, whatever their biological sex happens to be" (Leloup, 2005, pp.299-300). Peter's misconception in this situation needs to be corrected, and Jesus Christ offers to do that. Jesus Christ does not argue Peter that women are worthy of life, rather he offers to make Mary male so that she becomes a Living breath like the males. Ann McGuire contemplates into this by arguing explain that this saying "aligns the categories of Life, Spirit, and entering the Kingdom with that of the male" (McGuire, 1999, p.278), but it is noteworthy in this logion only women need salvific transformation, and this stands "in striking contrast to logion 22, in which male and female achieve the salvific state along parallel lines" (McGuire, 1999, p.279).

This salvific state can be achieved only when we engage ourselves completely to live the true meaning of these words because as "*The Gospel of Thomas* and *The Gospel of Mary* often repeat: Those who have ears let them hear! In order to be able to hear, though, one must engage with the teaching of the first logion of *The Gospel of Thomas* and ask if human beings are truly living the interpretation of these words in their body, heart, and mind. Only then can the creative words of the Living Yeshua give rise to the new Anthropos in us, in the image and likeness of the Eternal Son"(Leloup, 2005, p.304).

Griffith-Jones opinion regarding the image of God is rather logical as for him:

God is beyond all sexual differentiation; and then in turn the First Human, created by God in God's own image, contained in that one figure who first dwelt in paradise everything that would become male and female; and we ourselves are called to recover the image within ourselves of that First Human and so the image

of God. So we were not made for our present sexual division or for the inner tumult to which it leads. We will in the fullness of eternity overcome them both, and in our social roles and self-understanding we can in good measure overcome them in this life. We can make our way back to the primordial unity of the First Human and will do so through a journey to the heavenly paradise, the home of God. (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.57)

Marvin Meyer further explains the symbolism of the gender categories as:

In the ancient world the transformation of the female into the male was widely discussed, and although a few ancient authors like Ovid and Phlegon of Tralles tell colorful stories about women sprouting male genitals and becoming male, most of the accounts discuss gender categories in a symbolic sense. In ancient texts the female is frequently thought to stand for all that is earthly, perishable, passive, and sense-perceptible, and the male all that is heavenly, imperishable, active, and rational. The transformation of the female into the male, as mandated by Jesus in *The Gospel of Thomas*, may then be interpreted as the transformation of what is perishable into what is imperishable, and that transformation is necessary for all people, both men and women. (Meyer, 2005 b, p.82)

Meyer in his article gives four citations to support his point of view that "the message of logion 114 may be seen as harmonious with the rest of the Gospel" (Meyer, 1985, p.562). The first example he gives is from Theodotus, the Valentinian teacher who considers males as angels and females as the superior seed, so the Valentinian Gnostics themselves should become male and unite with angels to enter the fullness of the divine. Moreover, Theodotus indicates that when a female becomes a male, she is liberated, and is no longer

weak and subjected to the cosmos. The second example he gives is that of the Naassenes as described by Hippolytus. The Naassenes assert that all become bridegrooms "being rendered wholly male through the virgin spirit" (Meyer, 1985, p.567). The third example Meyer gives is that of the *First Apocalypse of James*. This Nag Hammadi tractate connects the female with the perishable and the male with the imperishable, so "The perishable has [gone up] to the imperishable, and the female element has attained to this male element" (Meyer, 1985, p.567). The last example he gives is that of *Zostrianos*, another Nag Hammadi tractate where the "female is linked to the enslavement of earthly existence, and maleness promises true freedom" (Meyer, 1985, p.567).

As a result of the above examples, Meyer considers that "The *Gospel of Thomas* logion 114 can be understood as quite compatible with the perspective of the rest of the gospel. Although the categories 'male' and 'female' have a different symbolic value in the final logion from the rest of the tractate, these categories as employed in *The Gospel of Thomas* reflect the varieties of contemporary Hellenistic and Gnostic usage" (Meyer, 1985, p.567), and what applies to Mary the Magdalene as a woman "is equally true for all those who participate in femaleness. Sensuality and sexuality are overcome, the dying cosmos of the mother goddess is transcended, and she-and all human beings-who are physical and earthly can be transformed to the spiritual and heavenly" (Meyer, 1985, p.567).

Leloup interprets the words of wisdom in the *Gospel of Thomas* by explaining that:

The gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, Thomas, and a number of others represent at least five different ways of listening to the word. Each also represents

different ways of understanding, interpreting, and translating cultural and linguistic differences according to the quality of his own intimacy with the Master, and according to his own levels of evolution, openness, and awareness. None of these ways of listening can pretend to circumscribe the Word. Each has truth, but none contains the whole truth. (Leloup, 2005, p.18-19)

In the *Gospel of Thomas*, Mary the Magdalene appears to be an evolving character seeking to understand the concept of discipleship to become a better disciple. Bruce Chilton considers that "Mary Magdalene became emblematic of that transforming guest. Her gnosis was not just a collection of data or reasoned argument; rather, the knowledge she conveyed involved direct insight into the celestial realm, and brought about an inner transformation in the Gnostic seeker who followed her lead" (Chilton, 2005, p.122). The *Gospel of Thomas* reflects Jesus Christ's attitude towards salvation in that it is available to both men and women on an equal base. She is worthy of life and salvation, and Jesus Christ himself is willing to help her reach salvation; they are both a part of the transformation from the feminine to the masculine. The liberation and salvation offered to Mary the Magdalene in this gospel illustrates the transformation that women went through "to be restored to the lost unity of Adam" (Buckley, 1985, p.271). Griffith-Jones describes the *Gospel of Thomas* as demanding "every woman to be worthy of the kingdom" and in order to do that, she must "make herself male in order to be ready to leave behind the turbulence of our sexed and gendered lives and be transformed, in visionary ascent, into the unsullied image of God borne by the First Human" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.112).

3.3 The Gospel of Philip

The Gospel of Philip is one of the gospels found in Nag Hammadi in December 1945. *The Gospel of Philip* was "compiled in Greek and translated in the second or third century into the Coptic version in which it has survived" (Griffith- Jones, 2008, p.111) as "most of the books of the Nag Hammadi codices are Coptic translations of Greek originals" (Leloup, 2004, p.21). This gospel is a part of codex 2 of the Nag Hammadi Library and is placed after the *Gospel of Thomas*. *The Gospel of Philip* is a not a gospel in the traditional sense of the word; it is "a Gnostic anthology with a long series of meditations" (Meyer, 2004, p.36). B.A. Pearson describes it as "a collection of sayings, similar to, but not completely the same as *The Gospel of Thomas*"; (Pearson, 2007, p.176) though "these sayings do not always have a literary connection to each other" (Marjanen, 1996, p.148). Leloup describes the gospel as "a garland, or pearl necklace" (Leloup, 2004, p.34), but the problem that this gospel poses is that "being a compilation of passages, we have no means of assigning all of these logia to a single date" (Leloup, 2004, p.23). The sayings in *The Gospel of Philip* "seem to be arranged in a more or less random order, although at times they seem to be connected to each other by means of catchwords or the juxtaposition of similar ideas. The meditations may derive from different sources, and Bentley Layton leaves open the possibility that some may come from Valentinus himself" (Meyer, 2005 b, p.71), but Meyer considers the gospel to have been "written by disciples of Valentinus, the brilliant second century mystic" (Meyer, 2005 a, p.36). It is not clear or definite that the gospel was composed in Syria, but "references to Syriac terms suggest an acquaintance with Syriac language and literature" (Meyer, 2005 a, p.36). Leloup considers that *The Gospel of Philip* "is witness to the

diverse influences in which the cultures and beliefs of an era mingle. Such diversity always informs the supposedly perennial sources of inspiration" (Leloup, 2004, p.23). The name Philip is mentioned in "*The Gospel of Philip* 73, and this may be the reason the authorship of the gospel is attributed to Philip" (Meyer, 2005 a, p.71). *The Gospel of Philip* is "pseudepigraphic in this sense, like most of the other gospels" (Leloup, 2004, p.25), but what is more important to notice is that "Philip also appears as a greatly venerated figure in the so-called apocryphal texts. The *Pistis Sophia* reminds us that 'Philip is the scribe of all the speeches that Jesus made and of all that he did'" (Leloup, 2004, p.31).

The Gospel of Philip is considered one of the important gospels for the characterization of Mary Magdalene "as is she specifically mentioned as 'Mary the Magdalene' not just as 'Mary' as it has been named in *The Gospel of Mary* and *The Gospel of Thomas*. The Magdalene is mentioned two times in the gospel in 59 and 63-64" (Meyer, 2004, pp.36-37), where she plays a significant and unique role. These two passages are essential to the understanding of Mary the Magdalene's early traditions. She appears to have a special relationship with Jesus and the disciples.

The first time the Magdalene is mentioned in *The Gospel of Philip* is in verse 59. We see her walking with the Lord and two other women:

There were three [women] who walked always walked with the Lord: Mary his mother and her sister and (the) Magdalene who they call (her) companion. For Mary is his sister, and his mother and his companion.

Marjanen considers that "The first part of the passage states that among Jesus' most intimate followers there were three women who accompanied him during his entire earthly career" (Marjanen, 1996, p.150). Mary "is not just Mary Magdalene; she is one member of a trio of Mary's-or one third of a single Mary-that is related to Christ in each of the three layers of creation" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.113). This might seem a bit confusing but it "is just one of the ambiguities Philip found in the names of the most important people and powers with which his gospel had to deal" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.113). The presentation of the women in this Gospel has parallels with the New Testament. In the Canonical gospels, the women are mentioned in addition to Mary the Magdalene. The first point to notice here is that there are three women who were "always" with the Lord. This means that these three female characters were always present with him in his ministry, and had no doubt an important role as they always followed him. Apparently, they had a close and strong relationship with him and must have had a good understanding of his teachings as they were always present while he taught people and listened to his teaching. There is no conversation or interaction between the characters in the text. In this saying, the narrator is simply telling the readers that those three women were in the scene with the Lord. The second point to notice is that the mentioned women include: Mary, his mother, and her sister and the Magdalene. This is different from the canonical Gospels, as whenever the women are mentioned in a list, it is Mary the Magdalene who is mentioned first. Although she is mentioned as the last person here, the fact that she is mentioned gives her a prominent role.

The description of the Magdalene as 'his companion' has raised a lot of debate. Different authors have given many explanations for this intriguing description. Although

Mary the Magdalene is mentioned briefly, her mention in this Gospel has evoked a diverse of interpretations, as “the term ‘companion’ has provided an incentive for modern legend: Jesus and Mary were married, or everything but married but the word ‘companion’ does not mean 'bride', just as reference to a 'bridal chamber' needn't imply sexual relationship" (Chilton, 2005, p. 140). On the contrary, the word ‘companion’ "represents the common Semitic term ‘chaber’, referring to a companion at meals rather than in bed" (Chilton, 2005, p.140). Chilton goes on to explain that the word ‘companion’ is used to mean "what Luke's Gospel said in other words: that Mary Magdalene was Jesus' disciple from their early days in Galilee" (Chilton, 2005, p.140). Griffith-Jones, on the other hand, defines the word ‘companion’ as "a word borrowed into Coptic from Greek, in which it denotes a person who shares with another in an undertaking that might be anything from a business enterprise to marriage" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.119). Even though "the word occurs two times in *The Gospel of Philip*: once, to speak of Mary Magdalene as the companion of Jesus, and later in a damaged portion of the text, to speak of either Wisdom or Mary as the companion of the Savior" (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p.119). Marjanen attributes a salvific experience to the word ‘companion’. For him, “this experience takes place when the unity with the divine realm is reestablished. This experience is depicted as union with an angelic counterpart in the *pleroma*” (Marjanen, 1996, p.153). Marjanen also offers another alternative for the word ‘companion’. He considers that it might mean spiritual consort. Mary the Magdalene can be defined as “the earthly partner of Jesus with whom he forms a spiritual partnership” (Marjanen, 1996, p.154). Griffith-Jones explains that the role of Mary is actually divided into three parts: 1) in the realm of Fullness/spirit, Christ is in pair with the spirit who is the mother of Jesus

(who is Mary) in the Bridal bedroom, 2) in the realm of the emerging powers/Heaven, the Savior who rescues by coming to pair with wisdom who is the sister of the Savior (who is also a Mary) in the home of angels, 3) in the realm of Earth/Flesh, Jesus is in a pair with (and so rescuing) the Church of spiritual humans who is Jesus's companion (who is Mary Magdalene) in the home of angels' human images (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p. 114). Those three manifestations of Mary reveal that "there is a Mary who plays three different roles in the life of the Savior. She is his sister, his mother, and his companion" (Marjanen, 1996, p.161). Haskins comments further that "The relationship between Christ and Mary Magdalene symbolizes that perfect spiritual union" (Haskins, 1993, p.41). Schaberg in her book *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* considers that Mary the Magdalene can be considered as a visionary in the *Gospel of Philip*. Schaberg compares between Mary the Magdalene who walked with Jesus and Enoch and Noah who also walked with God. She considers that both Enoch and Noah walked with God and became visionaries, and the author of the *Gospel of Philip* could have had this in mind when he described Mary the Magdalene as walking with the Jesus. She is a visionary (Schaberg, 2002, pp.146-147).

The second time Mary the Magdalene appears in the *Gospel of Philip* is in 63.30-64:

Wisdom, who is called the barren, is the mother [of the] angels and the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene [...] [...] loved her more than [all] the disciples [and he] kissed her [often] on her [...]. The other [disciples]... said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?"

The savior answered and said to them, "Why do I not love you like her? If a blind person and one who can see are both in darkness, they are the same. When the light comes, one who can see will see the light, and the blind person will stay in darkness." (Meyer, 2004, p.76)

This is one of the crucial sayings in the *Gospel of Philip* that should be analyzed deeply when examining the character of Mary the Magdalene. We do not know or understand from the text if Mary the Magdalene was present during this conversation between Jesus Christ and disciples. The first impression a reader gets when reading this passage is that there might be a marital relationship between Jesus Christ and Mary the Magdalene, but the concept that Jesus Christ loved Mary the Magdalene more than the other disciples is found also in the *Gospel of Mary*. In the *Gospel of Mary*, Levi states that Jesus Christ loved Mary the Magdalene more than the other disciples and that they had a very special relationship, yet there is no hint to any marital relationship. Marjanen considers that Jesus Christ's love for Mary the Magdalene is a kind of love that has no sexual implications (Marjanen, 1996, p. 158). King translates this passage as "...concerning Sophia who is called the barren" (King, 2003 a, p.145). According to this translation, she is the Sophia who acts as the spiritual partner to Christ.

The *Gospel of Philip* mentions the act of kissing frequently, but this act does not involve sexual acts only as Jesus used to kiss his male disciples also. Bruce Chilton considers that kissing is "an activity that is by no means limited to marriage or moments of sexual intimacy" (Chilton, 2005, p. 141). The act of kissing is discussed just before Mary the Magdalene is mentioned for the first time in the *Gospel of Philip* as the author considers that "the perfect conceive and give birth through a kiss. That is why we also

kiss each other. We conceive from the grace within each other" (Meyer, 2004, p.70).

Chilton considers that "the grace-conceiving kiss was mouth -to-mouth, as in the old Galilean custom of greeting" (Chilton, 2005, pp. 141-142). There is a similarity between the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of John*. In *John* (20.19-23), after the resurrection scene, Jesus Christ greets his disciples and "he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'. Chilton comments that "a kiss on the mouth often went with this greeting" and that "the breath of Spirit went with the exhalation of one practitioner into another in an ancient Gnostic practice that stretched from the *Gospel According to John* through the *Gospel According to Philip*" (Chilton, 2005, p.142).

Marjanen agrees that the kiss has no sexual interpretation. He gives four reasons for this:

First, in the only other passage where kissing is referred to, it is used without concrete sexual implications as a metaphor of spiritual nourishment which leads to spiritual procreation. Second, in other contemporary religious writings there are plenty of examples where kissing functions as a metaphor for transmitting a special spiritual power. Third, the altercation between the disciples and the Savior suggest that kissing is not to be understood as an expression of sexual love. The question of the disciples show that the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene is viewed in such terms that also male disciples can be jealous of the position of Mary. In addition, when the disciples ask why the Savior loves Mary more than them he does not point to any sexual motives but to her spiritual capacity to see what he is conveying to her (through the word, i.e., a kiss, making her capable of producing spiritual off spring). Fourth, in the Second Apocalypse

of James 56 14-16, which is the most interesting parallel to the Gospel of Philip 63, 34-37, it is said that when the Risen Lord wanted to reveal his most secret mysteries to James he kissed him and called him his beloved. In that context it is fully clear that kissing has no sexual connotation. It is a symbolic act which demonstrates James' privileged position. Moreover, it is through embracing the Lord that James receives the most important revelation, i.e. he comes to understand who the Hidden One is. (Marjanen, 1996, p. 158-159)

Jesus loved Mary the Magdalene and kissed her often "perhaps on the mouth, but the Coptic text requires restoration here in order to specify precisely where on Mary Jesus placed his kisses" (Meyer, 2004, pp.62-3). Moreover, Meyer comments on this issue by stating that "In the critical edition by Bentley Layton, the feet, a cheek, and the forehead of Mary are also raised as possible objects of kisses" (Meyer, 2004, p.63). The fact that the text is fragmented opens a lot of possibilities that many authors like Dan Brown have taken advantage of to imply a marital relationship in his popular fiction novel the *Da Vinci Code*. Chilton mentions that "Hippolytus, the third-century Roman liturgist, reserved the kiss solely for those already baptized, and set out a period of three years for those who prepared for baptism; during that time, they listened to the liturgy without participating in the Eucharist or the kiss" (Chilton, 2005, p.142).

The second aspect to be discussed in this passage is that Mary the Magdalene can see in the dark, while the male disciples cannot see even when there is light. The male disciples are negatively described in this passage. The male disciples are portrayed "as blind and small, dazed by their unbelief. It is only Mary Magdalene, the favorite of the

Savior, who is able to see what the others can see only after the resurrection" (Marjanen, 1996, p.168). Mary the Magdalene has a prominent role as a female disciple as she is described in a similar way to the Beloved disciple in the *Gospel of John*. She is able to see and comprehend what the other disciples were not able to see in the first place.

Mary the Magdalene's depiction in the *Gospel of Philip* puts her in a parallel position with the Sophia, the heavenly consort of the earthly Jesus Christ. She and the other two Marys walked with Jesus Christ. She was his companion and has a significant pre-resurrection role. This fascinating portrayal of her causes the male disciples to wonder about Jesus Christ's love for her, and gives him the chance to explain that she can see the light while the others live in the darkness. She received a spiritual revelation through the act of kissing. In the two passages, the term companion is used to describe Mary the Magdalene in a symbolic way and shows the true significance of unity with Jesus Christ. Leloup best describes the concept of love in the *Gospel of Philip* as "seeking of one wholeness for another wholeness. It is born not of lack, of *penia*, but of *pleroma*, an overflowing toward otherness" (Leloup, 2004, p.46).

2.4 Concluding Thoughts

The Gnostic texts disappeared during the fourth century. They were "suppressed by the orthodox Church for their heretical ideas" (Haskins, 1993, p. 56). With the suppression of these heretical writings, Mary the Magdalene who is the "heroine of the Gnostics, chief disciple, companion of the Saviour, his spouse, consort, and partner vanished too" (Haskins, 1993, p.57).

The *Gospel of Mary* is one of the interesting Gnostic gospels that depict Mary the Magdalene as having a significant position among the close disciples of Jesus Christ and is the only gospel written after a woman. She turns the hearts of the disciples to the good and encourages them to proclaim the Gospel. She is depicted as a comforter, a leader, and a revealer to the other disciples. She is a woman who has a vision of the Lord and does not waver. The vision reveals how the soul finds its way to the final rest after it departs from the body. She is blessed, loved by the Lord, and exalted to the highest level.

The *Gospel of Thomas* first depicts Mary the Magdalene in logion 21 as a disciple seeking a mature understanding of the requirements of discipleship. She has a dialogue with the Savior, and she can be considered as speaking on the behalf of the other disciples. She wants to reach a “masterless, Jesus-like” level. Logion 114 is one of the most important sayings related to salvation. It shows that Mary the Magdalene, an ever evolving figure, has the right, along with other women, to salvation. The *Gospel of Thomas* bears witness “to a vital and deeply contested question: how will humans recover the form and life in which humanity began, within the primordial Human?” (Griffith-Jones, 2008, p. 71). Jesus Christ intends to help Mary the Magdalene to rise to the New Anthropos.

The *Gospel of Philip* is different from the two other gospels in that it tells of the historical Jesus Christ, and it depicts Mary the Magdalene as “the only one of his disciples who already during his earthly life understands his real character and message” (Marjanen, 1996, p.216). In the *Gospel of Philip*, she is Jesus Christ’s companion, and his syzygos which are two of the most amazing portrayals of Mary the Magdalene. She is the ‘the barren’ and the ‘mother of the angels’. Jesus Christ loved her more than the other

disciples and used to kiss her. The *Gospel of Philip* “evokes a host of possibilities but shies away from making firm historical statements” (Chilton, 2005, p.143).

Conclusion

Who was Mary the Magdalene? This question has generated an infinite possibility of answers during the last two thousand years. Yet no one has been able to answer the question as there is no correct or wrong answer. Nothing is known about her familial life or even her place of birth. Many speculations around this subject matter led the Roman Catholic Church to accuse her of being a repentant whore. She was praised as a female disciple who witnessed the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. She might have been the companion of the savior or a redeemer figure on her own. Her composite character with the multiple layers that accumulated during the years rendered her a character worth studying, but it has to be kept in mind that there is nothing concrete to help us separate the myth from history in her life.

In the Canonical gospels, we see a woman who followed Jesus Christ in his ministry in Galilee and witnessed his teaching in public and in private. In addition to that, she witnessed his healings and exorcisms and forgiving of people's sins. Her task as a "witness and messenger of the true faith was unique within the context of what may seem an equally unique period in the growing Christian community" (Haskins, 1993, p.85). Narration about her and conversation with her is little, but it is noteworthy as she became one of the first missionaries of the church who helped people understand Jesus Christ as the Lord and the Son of Man.

Her image in the four Canonical Gospels, as they are the earliest written material about her, is that of a woman who has a special relationship with Jesus Christ and is one of his close disciples. Jesus Christ loved her and called her his own. Mary the Magdalene

was given the authority to go and tell the disciples that Jesus Christ had risen and that he wants them to meet him in Galilee. She is depicted as a teacher and instructor for the disciples, whose teaching is valuable and trustworthy to proclaim the news of the resurrection. She is depicted as a woman of faith, courage, love and stability in facing hardships.

In the *Gospel of Matthew*, Mary the Magdalene is an example of a true disciple. She followed Jesus Christ, served him and ministered to him. She and the other Mary were the sole witnesses to the descending angel from Heaven, and the ones whom Jesus Christ commissioned to go and tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee. She is depicted as a teacher and instructor for the disciples, whose teaching is valuable and trustworthy to proclaim the news of the resurrection. She is depicted as a woman of faith, courage, love and stability in facing hardships.

In the *Gospel of Mark*, Mary the Magdalene is the receiver of secret teachings about the Kingdom of God from Jesus Christ. She is a close follower who is present at the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mary the Magdalene followed Jesus Christ since the beginning of his ministry and was a witness of his teaching, his healings, his exorcisms, and his forgiveness of the sins of people. In the *Gospel of Mark*, Mary the Magdalene is depicted as a woman of faith and endurance. She shows boldness and determination in witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as she has denied herself and took up her cross.

In the *Gospel of Luke*, Mary the Magdalene is depicted as a disciple of Jesus Christ and a receiver of his teaching. She is mentioned as a disciple right from the beginning, and has a rather special relationship with Jesus Christ as he cured her from

seven demons. She is included in the group of apostles whom Jesus Christ opened their minds so that they can understand the scriptures. Mary the Magdalene receives "Jesus's blessings and the promise that she will be clothed with power from on high" (De Boer, 2004, p. 192). Mary the Magdalene is depicted as a trustworthy woman who followed Jesus Christ during his ministry, teaching, crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Jesus Christ healed her from seven demons, and she provided for him and his male disciples.

The *Gospel of John*, unlike the synoptic gospels, presents Mary the Magdalene as receiving private tutoring from Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ loved her as he loved all his other disciples. She is an important witness of his glorification at the cross, and she is the first to discover the empty tomb. At the resurrection scene, Mary the Magdalene recognizes Jesus Christ's voice, and calls him 'Rabboni'. Jesus Christ asks her to go proclaim the news to the other disciples. Mary the Magdalene "receives the Holy Spirit and is sent by Jesus as he was sent by the Father" (De Boer, 2004, p.192). She proclaims the news to the disciples. In the *Gospel of John*, Mary the Magdalene is depicted as a strong and courageous woman. She is an apostolic witness who shows no doubt or reluctance in responding to Jesus Christ's divine call.

The Gnostic Gospels present a different character of Mary the Magdalene. Scholars studying the Nag Hammadi Library were startled when they discovered that Mary the Magdalene was held in a high position among the disciples of Jesus Christ. She was seen as the Savior's companion, his consort, his Sophia and his counterpart. She took the role of the redeemer in Sethian Gnostic Gospels. She is a visionary who receives inspiration from Jesus Christ and gives comfort and courage to the male disciples.

Although she had different roles in each gospel, she is never shown in a negative way in any of them.

In the *Gospel of Mary*, we see her as disciple of Jesus Christ who had access to information the other male disciples had no access to. She was trained by the Lord to proclaim the word of his Kingdom and was able to do that after he departs. She sees visions and the Lord calls her blessed for not being afraid of what she saw. She is seen as a comforter, and a leader who is able to turn the hearts of the disciples to the good. Mary the Magdalene best understood that Jesus Christ's greatness lies in his words and teaching not in his suffering.

In the *Gospel of Thomas*, we see Mary the Magdalene as a disciple who is seeking perfect understanding of the concept of discipleship. She is named as a woman who is having a direct conversation with Jesus Christ and receiving answers to her questions. In the last logia of the gospel, we see Mary the Magdalene as a example of how both men and women can reach salvation at an equal base. She is worthy of life and salvation, and Jesus Christ himself is willing to help her reach salvation; they are both a part of the transformation from the feminine to the masculine.

In the *Gospel of Philip*, we see one of the amazing portrayals of Mary the Magdalene. She is the ever companion of the Lord, his consort and his Sophia. She is the most beloved disciple who sees what others cannot see, and she receives revelations from the Lord himself through a kiss. The male disciples wonder about Jesus Christ's love for her, and she is depicted as having a superior position.

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