

SPECTRUM

"Not That You Asked"

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have no choice but to accommodate ourselves to the brutal economics of the supposedly real world.

Myself, I am of the opinion that being a student gives me the moral duty to be part of a world community beyond that of my narrow self-interests. Only a very small percentage of students have to seriously deal with the exigencies of feeding and clothing one's self, let alone the worry of caring for a family. So long as the most serious problem facing the majority of students remains the pursuit of the means to fund yet another night on the town, we remain a privileged class. During our brief tenure as students, we have the luxury of dealing with issues of a global scope. Our Student Union, in its abhorrently reactionary pose, is trying to take this luxury from us. Their policies suggest that they agree with Paul Martin and Lloyd Axworthy in all but the details. They are agreeing that huge slashes must be made to the nation's budgets, but like the pork barrel politicians they have come to be, they lack the moral courage to taste the bite of the axe themselves.

In short, the referendum over CFS is a simple one. If you believe that the students of UNB should be part of a larger world community, then the vote should be to retain membership in CFS. If you believe that students should have no voice in events not directly affecting them in some manner, then the vote should be to abandon CFS.

Metanoia by John Valk

One of the Gospel's most intriguing, and perhaps mystifying, characters is Mary Magdalen. Though mentioned only briefly, her name surfaces in contexts significant in the ministry of Jesus Christ. She was known to be one of Jesus' closest female followers. She was also the first witness to his resurrection. Yet, Mary Magdalen may also be one of the most misrepresented, if not maligned, women mentioned in the Scriptures. That is the result, argues Susan Haskins in her new book *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor*, of incorrect exegesis, cultural biases, and male disregard.

Mary Magdalen is always mentioned first in the groups of women who followed Jesus. She is the one from whom "seven demons" had been exorcised (Luke 8:2). We may infer from the Biblical number seven, which frequently indicates completeness or fullness, that her situation had been rather severe. Yet, the text does not elaborate on the nature of these "demons", whether they represented spiritual, psychological or physical turmoil, corruption, or illness. Neither is there any inference, in this or any other context, that demon possession was synonymous with moral or sexual sin.

Upon her restoration, Mary Magdalen becomes a devoted follower of Jesus. She, along with other women, provided, out of their own means, for Jesus and the twelve disciples. Interestingly, it was women, not men, who were hospitable to this itinerant preacher and his male associates as they traveled from city to village.

Mary Magdalen is mentioned next, in all four gospels, at the crucifixion. She, and the other women, followed Jesus to this bitter end, to his cruel and agonizing death on the cross. Such was their devotion. Later, they went to the tomb to anoint his body, in preparation for a proper burial. They discover it missing and, with devastated hearts, leave. But Mary Magdalen remains at the tomb weeping. Suddenly a resurrected Jesus appears before her. After speaking briefly, he gives her a most important commission: tell the others what she has just witnessed.

The Scriptures thereafter fall silent regarding Mary Magdalen's involvements in the early church movement. Paul, whose written account of the resurrection is actually the earliest, excluded her altogether as the first witness. Perhaps he did so because he recognized that the testimony of women

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was inadmissible in legal contexts in that culture. That is evidenced by the writings of the platonic philosopher Celsus. In his critique of Christianity (*The True Word* c. 175 AD), he discounts the resurrection because it was witnessed by a "hysterical woman".

Yet, the memory of Mary Magdalen has been preserved, and we find frequent reference to her in ecclesiastical history. However, she comes down to us as Mary Magdalen the penitent prostitute. She is linked to a passage mentioning a woman "who was a sinner", one who anointed Jesus' feet. The "sin" of this woman is identified as prostitution. In Luke the passage comes just prior to the first mention of Mary Magdalen. Improper exegesis then quickly seals her fate, and she is depicted thereafter, in numerous sermons, meditations, writings, paintings, even photographs, from the early centuries to the present day, as the devoted follower of Jesus who turned away from a life of sexual immorality. She even has the "honour" of having houses of refuge for street prostitutes named after her. Two modern films also perpetuate this tradition. Martin Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ" and Denys Arcand's "Jesus of Montreal" portray

her as a woman of ill repute who is attracted to Jesus. According to Haskins, ecclesiastical history has grossly misrepresented, even defamed, the character of Mary Magdalen.

Certain Gnostic writings of the 1st to 4th Century portray Mary Magdalen in more favourable light, even giving her prominence above other disciples. But as these writings became increasingly heretical, what remained were the portrayals of the early Church Fathers, who viewed her only as the penitent whore. Such characterization, in a church now overwhelmingly male dominated, served to limit her stature as a faithful disciple of Jesus.

It is difficult to uncover a clear picture of Mary Magdalen from the scarce details available. We do not know what kind of leadership she came to exercise, if any. Yet, it is necessary to correct misconceptions derived from sloppy exegesis, and their perpetuation through church tradition. Susan Haskins has done a great service in exposing those misconceptions. She reminds us that they frequently prevent us from fully appreciating the significant role women played in bearing witness to Jesus Christ in the early church. That has had severe consequences, even to the present day.



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