

– Today we are going to look at one of the most fascinating characters in Christian history. Of course, she wasn't Christian in the sense that we would perhaps understand Christianity today. She was of course originally Jewish, and that is Mary Magdalene known as the Apostle to the Apostles thought to have been the favourite and the closest to Jesus. And we're going to look today at what's happened to her legacy, not only her legacy but her reputation, how she has been portrayed, not only in religious ideas and in traditional canonical texts. We say those are texts which have been accepted as scripture by the Christian churches, but also how she's been portrayed in Western art. And some of it is quite shocking. But we're going to try after looking at the layers of how she's been interpreted throughout the centuries, I'm going to look, just a brief overview in that sense. I'm going to look at the historical figure of Mary Magdalene.

So she's very firmly rooted in the 1st century, in the time of Jesus, and if those of you who've attended my lectures on the 1st century, there's partings of the ways between Judaism and Christianity, and if you haven't seen that then maybe you can get hold of a copy of that through Lockdown University because this is the backdrop to the whole Mary Magdalene story, her relationship with the figure of Jesus, that wandering prophet of the 1st century. And we must understand both Jesus and Mary Magdalene within the diverse Jewish settings, the sects and movements that are occurring in the 1st century, but also the emergence of Christianity. And Christianity was not just one single mode of religion as we would think of it. Well not even today. We have Eastern Orthodoxy of course, and Western Orthodoxy just to name two, as well as the Reformed Traditions. So there is yes a diversity today, but equally in the 1st century, nothing was established during the time of Jesus or in the time immediately after his death around 30 CE. Scholars today use CE to mean of the Common Era, the Common Era between Judaism and Christianity. Now the first image on the right there of Mary Magdalene in Western art is interesting because she's quite often portrayed with this sort of orangey red, almost sometimes ginger, either hair or garment. And in this case she's actually, her frontage is covered over, which is supposed to denote that she's now repentant. And we're going to look at some of the ideas behind her reputation in Christianity. But here she a reminder with that beautiful cloth that she's lying on, that she is a repentant prostitute, a repentant whore, a repentant sinner even. Next slide please. And just to give you the context, so we are talking about the period of a roughly four BCE, BCE being Before the Common Era. We no longer use, in Jewish and Christian scholarship, we no longer use BC, Before Christ or AD, Anno Domino. We no longer use that. Scholars use BCE for the period before Christianity and Judaism of the Common Era and CE to mean the Common Era. So this is a period under which the then Judea and parts of what was then Palestine are under oppression

and occupation.

We have various stories surrounding Jesus' birth. Some of them emerge a bit later, sort of mythical figure that develops. But he can firmly be rooted within the Judaism of his day. And this is really important when we come to understand the role of Mary Magdalene in Jesus' own life and potentially as one of his disciples apostles. And I'm raising a question quite early on that I will come back to, was Mary Magdalene married to Jesus? 'Cause if we're going to place them as observant Jews, which they were within the 1st century, it would be highly unlikely that Jesus was not married and that he does not start his ministry, his itinerant wandering ministry with his prophets, and sayings and his stories, his prophetic stories, that doesn't start until he's about the age of 30. So I'll leave that question there. We will come back to it because it has proved to be in the Christian churches, very, very controversial that Jesus might have been married to Mary Magdalene. So during his ministry he traditionally has 12 disciples around him, all of the male. There were some famous ones, of course Peter, "Upon whose rock," it is said, "the Roman Catholic Church was founded." He's the rock upon which the Roman Catholic Church was founded. You have Judas Iscariot for example. You have James the brother of Jesus, that they are, all the 12 disciples are males. But in the gospels it's really clear that there are a close circle of women around Jesus. They are part of his ministry. They follow him around. Now are they part of his inner circle? That's a very interesting question that I'll come back to. So there were three women who are the closest to him, his mother of course, his sister, and a close companion, Mary Magdalene. So they are all called Mary, that's the Greek equivalent of Miriam. And it's probable that Mary is used because the New Testament is written in Greek, and so that's the Greek equivalent of Miriam. And I know there are calls by some in the Judea-Christian dialogue to actually restore their names to their Jewish names of Miriam. But they are known in the Christian traditions as Mary.

So it becomes quite confusing. So already you can see when we're going to have references to Mary in the different gospels of the New Testament, and by gospels I'm talking about the gospel of Mark, Luke, Matthew, and John. I've cited them roughly in the timespan in which they were written. So Mark is the earliest, Luke next, Matthew around 80 CE, John was written last around 90 CE. So quite late. And there are these female figures, pretty much all of them called Mary, and there is room for quite a lot of misunderstanding. I suppose the least misunderstanding is with Jesus' own mother. She's quite a clear figure. But as we'll see there is some room for confusion. Next slide please. And so to this ministry that Mary Magdalene is supporting, is this how she follows Jesus as this prophet figure who is going to hail in the kingdom of God, living under oppression, she's supporting this ministry very closely. She's so significant in the tradition immediately after the death of Jesus that she cannot be totally erased

even though various factions within the early church would like to erase her name and her legacy, it's just not possible. So she is very much supportive as we'll see of Jesus's teachings, he believes that the kingdom of God is coming, this whole apocalyptic age, that the whole new order is about to happen. And of course we now know 2000 years later it hasn't happened.

But at that time they were living with the sense of urgency. Next slide please. And some of the imagery which Western artists have drawn on purport to be from images of Mary Magdalene in the gospels. And we'll see actually that there's a huge disconnect between the historical figure of Mary Magdalene and how she's portrayed in art. So you can see in the top left there, she's got this long red hair. Red is traditionally associated with prostitutes, with sinners, but most specifically with these whores, these prostitute women. And the middle photograph at the top there you've got just a hint of her past through the reddish cloth of her dress. But again, like the one we saw earlier, she's covered up, and so that sort of denotes that she's repentant and she's got this kind of glow to her face and her chest. She's looking up towards heaven, and this very much is the woman who is made new again, she is the epitome of the repentant woman. And on the right there again she's covered up, she's thought to be holding a jar of myrrh. She's one of three women that anointed Jesus' body with myrrh at the time of the burial. And again that kind of light around her top of her chest and her forehead looking up to heaven, she's very clearly this new woman that's been transformed through her faith in Jesus. Of course the bottom photograph there of this art, of her completely naked. It is quite unusual to see images of her completely naked. Quite often it's just the sort of top half of the chest or part of the breast that's exposed. But again, you've got the reddish cloth behind. She is the epitome of the worst woman of society.

Next slide please. And just a few more images. Again on the left there, this whole light, the light in the darkness that she's come from the darkness, her chest and top, very significant that that and her hands are lit. Her hands of course were those that had anointed the feet of Jesus. Her face glowed, but you still got in the darkness, her hair is reddish colour and she's got that reddish cloak. In the middle at the top there, that could be mistaken for the mother of Jesus. So she's now almost being compared in saintliness to Jesus' own mother. And again on the right there this time she's even got a halo. So she has been canonised as they say in the Christian Church. She has been made a saint. She's completely modest in the way she dresses, and I wouldn't really say that her hair is now reddish at all. And then of course the bottom depiction of her reddish hair, almost ginger hair, again the cloak, and she's holding that jar of myrrh. Next slide please. So what about Mary Magdalene? It's worth bearing in mind, and these are a few points which I think are important. She's the woman who is closest to Jesus apart from his own mother. So she's the second most important woman in his life. She's also known to have been

cleansed of seven demons, and this is in the gospel of Mark and Luke. It doesn't appear in the other two gospels of Matthew and John, but it does appear, this story that Jesus cleansed her of demons. Now this is not the same as being a prostitute. So whatever was going on, probably some kind of psychological trauma in her life in those days prophets would use exorcism, there still use in some Christian churches today to exercise demons from a person's life and believe and she was healed of whatever condition she had at that time. She's mentioned interestingly 12 times in the gospels of Mark and Luke, more than any other woman in the gospels except for Jesus' own mother. She's mentioned more than any of the other apostles.

So Jesus's closest disciples, she is mentioned more than any of them individually. So we begin, once we start picking out the figures like this, we begin to realise she's a really central person in Jesus' ministry. But it also tells us, next slide please, that she's really close in the early Christian Church and we're going to see shortly what happens to her legacy in the early Christian Church. And she is, as I've said already, that penitent sinner. Next slide please. So before we look at the historical figure in more detail, I want to just pick out and reinforce some of the negative imagery. Reinforce what has been done to her image in Western Christian art because it's really difficult to erase that. I mean if you were to go and have a poll in various churches and ask those worshipers, who is Mary Magdalene, they would probably say she was the repentance sinner, but they would probably also link her to prostitution. So traditionally she's been understood as a prostitute, an adulterous as we've said, depicted with that reddish hair. She's contrasted in a lot of Western art, although there is a shift at one period when she becomes more sadly. But she is of course always contrasted with Jesus' mother, the virgin Mary. Wendy is keen for for me to do something for you at some point on the Virgin Mary. So we'll look at the mother of Jesus who is always described as the Saint of Saints. Next slide please. Few more images there of Mary Magdalene. Next slide please. So in art and tradition, so I'm not now talking about the historical Mary or the Mary of the gospels, the New Testament, in art and tradition. She's often de portrayed as semi-naked. As we've mentioned occasionally totally naked, but that's quite rare. So she's sort of semi-naked, she is an outcast of society, she's an isolated hermit even, completely isolated from the society of her day who has repented of her sins. And Christianity has a big focus of course on repentance and sin. Her primary link with Jesus, and this is true in art too, is that as the woman who's washed Jesus' feet, who's anointed him, but she's portrayed in the Christian history as the most penitent prostitute, there is no other that ranks as high as Mary Magdalene.

Next slide please. But this portrayal is this, the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament. And you know people don't question those lists, Mary Magdalene the outcasts, the sinner, the prostitute, nobody has actually questioned this. What does it actually say in the New

Testament, but in particular in the gospels. So she's mentioned sometimes very briefly, but in all four gospels, and in not, and I'm underlining this here, not one of those gospels is she ever, ever described as a prostitute or a sinner? Really interesting. Yes, Jesus has performed some kind of miracle with her and exercise these seven demons, whatever was troubling her in her life, but not one of those gospels ever describes her as a prostitute or a sinner. And it's made a little bit more complicated by the fact that, well not only are there several Mary's in the gospels, but quite often they're conflated into the same person. So she's become confused as I've put there in the Christian tradition with Mary, the sister of Martha. There are two sisters, Mary and Martha. Martha of course they're the sisters of Lazarus who's raised from the dead. One of Jesus' miracles in the gospels. And I'm not going to comment on whether these miracles happened or not, I'm just saying they are in the gospels and the unnamed sinner in Luke's gospel, this is chapter seven, those verses afterwards. So she is often identified as the unnamed sinner and this is where it's thought to have come from. And no point does the unnamed sinner in Luke's gospel chapter seven ever link that unnamed sinner to Mary Magdalene. But later Christian traditions have linked it to her, and both of them, the unnamed sinner and Mary Magdalene, actually there are examples of where they wash Jesus' feet with their hands. So that's possibly why they've become mixed up.

Next slide please. And it was in the sixth century, so 500 and whatever years after the birth of Jesus, Pope Gregory the Great, he's one of the church fathers, and there were a number of church fathers who defined Christian doctrine, whether it was in the Eastern churches or the Russian and Western churches, a number of church fathers who were trying to define orthodoxy. And this would plague the Christian Church really from after the death and resurrection of Jesus right up to the period hundreds of years after even into the mediaeval period, they're fighting over what is real Christianity, what is orthodoxy? And it was Pope Gregory in the 6th century who declares that those three Marys are all the same person. So now we really do have a problem because it becomes embedded. His teachings are taken as, we say again canonical, they're treated as authoritative and orthodox, part of orthodox tradition. And some of the orthodoxy would be decided around the table at church councils. And it was later that she actually, Mary Magdalene in spite of her original alleged reputation, she becomes a saint in many of the Christian churches. And I've listed them there. And interestingly her feast day is now is recognised as a feast day rather than just a memorial day is the 22nd of July. So maybe we should have been doing this on the 22nd of July, but on the 22nd of July, I hope each year you will give a thought to Mary Magdalene.

Next slide please. I'm sorry, should we, can we go back just one, I want to just quote something. I beg your pardon. So it was the pagan philosopher and I've written it down 'cause I'll never remember the

quote, Celsus. So he wrote a text around 170, this is CE, 170-180, and at this time, as I said the church fathers are trying to define what is Christianity against a lot of competing ideas, beliefs, and claims. And so a whole range of texts and sermons were written, most of them, we call them polemical, they are fighting a cause often against some of the, often against Judaism actually. So a lot of the polemical texts of the church fathers are answering what a perceived threat of Judaism. But Celsus, so he's a pagan philosopher writing around 170 to 180 CE. He wrote a sermon called "The True Word". Sermons have really weird titles and kind of strange, anyway. So he wrote of Mary Magdalene that she was quote, "Nothing more," this is so typical, "Nothing more than a hysterical female "who either dreamt in a certain state of mind "and through wishful thinking had a hallucination." So you can see that whatever the tradition and we're going to come to that, that Mary Magdalene was one of the ways to denigrate it, to counter her tradition. Her closest to Jesus is to dismiss her as a hysterical female, and it did nothing of course to help her already struggling reputation. And what we've got to remember is potentially not only the rivalry in the different groups within early Christianity of which Mary Magdalene would be, her section would be one of them. Even hundreds of years later, the church fathers are still so bothered by her, her legacy is still floating around, is so bothered by her that they have to counter her character, and she's this sort of hysterical figure. But interestingly another church father origin and he's around the same period, around 184 to 253. So he again is defending Christianity orthodoxy, they are totally obsessed with defining the real true Christianity. Anyway, he refers in his teachings to Mary Magdalene's teachings and followers. We're thinking, right, so what's happened to this whole tradition and line of Mary's teachings and the fact that she had followers or she perhaps created an early branch of Christianity. So I'll leave that sort of hanging there just for a little bit because obscure references like this help us to understand that there is more behind the attack on Mary Magdalene and the attempt to suppress not only her true character but her importance within Christianity, more so in her importance within Jesus' life. And I've got one more for you, Hippolytus of Rome, and he's writing about 170 again to the 230 CE. And in one of his sermons he explicitly refers to Mary Magdalene and other women as apostles. So that's fascinating. So this is something which the Christian Church thereafter would be a pain to distance Mary Magdalene as an apostle of Jesus, but Hippolytus writing in Rome, one of the Roman church fathers has actually referred to Mary Magdalene as an apostle. Quite a breakthrough.

Next slide please. So what can we actually say about the historical Mary Magdalene. According to the gospels then, Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, she's come from the town called Magdala. It's not or near the Galilee, 120 miles North of Jerusalem on the shores of the Galilee. Much of Jesus' ministry is itinerant wanderings happened in the area of Judea, Galilee, and she appears interestingly in the New

Testament. And my understanding is, and some of you may wish to reendorse this, that she appears in some Jewish texts, Lamentations Raba. Magdala is judged by God. Sorry, Magdala, sorry, I beg your pardon. Magdala, the little dwelling of Magdala appears not only in the New Testament but also in Jewish texts. One of them, Lamentations Raba, Magdala is actually the subject to God's wrath and is destroyed because it is a centre of prostitution or fornication. Now because Mary, now you can see where the link's coming now. Because Mary Magdalene, in traditional church thinking, because Mary Magdalene has hailed from Magdala, somebody at some point, one of those church fathers has put two and two together and said, "Ah, Mary Magdalene has come from Magdala, the centre of prostitution. "She was close to Jesus. "She's repented clearly, "she's very important in the Christian tradition. "So therefore she's a repentant sinner, "she's a repentant whore." You can see where that connection has been made. But just to reinforce what I said earlier, there is absolutely nothing in the Christian scriptures, in the gospels that say Mary Magdalene was a sinner or a prostitute. Next slide please. It's thought that she may have worked in and around the fish markets. And at that time, particularly in Magdala, we've got, I've mentioned already that backdrop of oppression, the Roman occupation, the belief, and this was the belief of many of those wandering itinerant prophets of the day and some of the sects within Judaism, Qumran being one of them, that community in the Dead Sea, by the Dead Sea. This oppression, the belief that the oppression by Rome, one of which was a financial repression, heavy taxation, there was this belief that this regime would be overthrown, not necessarily, primarily not through civil war or civil unrest, but primarily because God would intervene and the prophets that are operating at that time would actually bring in, would usher in that period of liberation. It's led some Christian theologians and some Jewish thinkers actually to call it liberation theology. This belief that the Jewish people were going to be liberated from this oppression. And at that time many destitute women did have to resort to prostitution. But as I've underlined there, there's no evidence that she was a prostitute. She might have been unmarried. We don't have evidence either way, because no husband and no children are named, it does not mean in the gospels, does not mean that she was unmarried. So there's a question mark over her marital status. And according to Luke's gospel, it's after Jesus' exercised those demons that she becomes his follower.

Next slide please. But then becomes something fascinating that's been totally erased from subsequent Christian tradition. And I thought it was so important that I've actually written the quote from Luke Gospel 8:1-3, "A woman of independent means?" And this passage, it reads this, "Jesus travelled about," this is after various miracles, after this miracles. "Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another. "The 12 were with him." That's the 12 disciples, the male disciples, "and also some women who have been cured "of evil spirits and diseases. "Mary called Magdalene, "from whom seven demons had come

out "and many others," meaning many other women. "These women were helping "to support them out of their own means." Utterly fascinating. We now have a number of women, most of them unnamed, but Mary Magdalene is one of them, who actually financially support Jesus' mission and financially support those 12 disciples. I mean it's astonishing, utterly astonishing. Next slide please. She is then a very close follower, the closest to Jesus, but also a financial supporter of his ministry. In fact, those women, those unnamed women, and Mary Magdalene are the only known financial supporters of Jesus. The only male supporter who actually purchases the tomb depicted here was Joseph of Arimathea, very wealthy Jewish merchant, but he's not accredited with supporting Jesus during his ministry financially. Now this puts a whole new light on Mary Magdalene, but also women in the New Testament, because they are the financial support for the likes of Jesus and his disciples to be able to carry out their prophetic work. But very importantly, Mary Magdalene is the first witness to the resurrection. She's there, of course stood at the foot of the cross during the crucifixion. She's there with Jesus' sister and Jesus' mother, Virgin Mary, Virgin Mary. But of all the possible witnesses to Jesus' resurrection and by that the early Christians believed in a physical resurrection. So however we want to describe this, whether it happened or not is not the issue here. The issue is she had an experience of the risen Jesus called resurrection and she's the first witness to it. And Peter comes running along a bit behind. It's not Peter, don't forget, Peter is one of the most important disciples in the Christian tradition. He's the disciple, he's the founder, if you like, of the Roman Catholic Church. But even the Christian writers that were writing the gospels could not erase Mary Magdalene as the first witness to the resurrection. So I hope this point is coming across quite well and that your understanding, it really places her at a pivotal point in the Christian tradition and she's so important that she can't be erased. Not even male misogyny and power struggles of that period can erase her from the gospels.

Next slide please. There is of course attention that emerges between the Mary Magdalene tradition and this is where I'm going to lead into these texts, Nag Hammadi texts, there becomes a tension in that developing early Christianity. And there were a number of groups. There were those that were following the James, the brother of Jesus, there were those that were happy to incorporate Gentiles, and of course we have the Apostle Paul later coming into the picture. We have different forms of Christianity. There is no set orthodoxy at this point. And within that mix we have the testimony, the eyewitness testimony of Mary Magdalene and she had her own followers that were not following her as a prophet, but that were listening to her firsthand account of the teachings of Jesus as she had witnessed them. And then you get this intense fight, particularly between the Mary Magdalene lot and Peter, the Apostle Peter, the fight for supremacy and for correct interpretation of Jesus' life, resurrection, et cetera. And so her legacy starts to become suppressed. And one of the



greatest discoveries I think apart from the Qumran scrolls, those fabulous scrolls, which I believe are still on show in Jerusalem, found on the banks of the Dead Sea, in that community Qumran. But there are other texts which are contemporary to the Qumran texts and also to the Christian gospels, what becomes the New Testament? A number of scrolls or fragments were found in Nag Hammadi in Southern Egypt. And this is often overlooked in trying to understand the ideas and developments of Judaism, Christianity in the 1st century. And they were discovered in 1945 but not very well studied until about the last 20 or 30 years. So they were in sealed ceramic jars. So very parallel story to the Qumran community. They were a hoard of ancient papyrus books that scholars are now beginning to study in more depth, although they're very fragmented, it's quite hard to piece together. These are gospels and a series of texts belonging to early Christianity or groups within early Christianity. They're written in Coptic. So I guess that's probably one of the deciding factors why it hasn't been very well studied. Is that you have to actually be a scholar in Coptic from Egypt to be able to read them.

Next slide please. But they are exciting because of the ideas that they are portraying in them and they are what we call apocryphal text. Apocryphal meaning they are looking to the end days. Sounds familiar, yeah? We studied before within early Christianity, in my course on early Christianity, in the partings of the ways. How a lot of those prophets and groups, those sects, so within Judaism of the 1st century and early Christianity, how they were looking for that overthrowing of Rome, looking to that apocalyptic era, that kind of heavenly fight between good and evil. The Romans being evil and they will be overthrown and there will be this whole kind of heavily celestial battle. The Book of Revelation at the end of the New Testament is one of those quite bizarre scenes of this fight, this end days when this new era will be heralded. Well the Nag Hammadi texts are part of that world. They are reflecting the beliefs of a community or communities who also believed that the end was near. Some of them are thought to have been written in Syria, some of them amongst the Coptic Christian community, but they all ultimately end up found at this place Nag Hammadi in Egypt. Now three of them, there are a number of texts, but I'm just listing three of them here. Gospel of Thomas is probably the most famous. It has been thought to be written, the Gospel of Thomas, possibly as early as 60 CE, that's contemporary with the Gospel of Mark, for example. Acts of Peter is another, Gospel of Philip is another. And I think we're going to hopefully do another session on some of the ideas which are contained in them. Ultimately the church fathers decided that they were not to be included as part of the New Testament. And interestingly the Gospel of John, which is very obscure in many ways made it into the New Testament, but it very nearly didn't because it was as obscure in its ideas and trying to understand the very Greek concepts being brought into it, very obscure like the gospel of Thomas, Philip and Acts of Peter. So you know, therefore the grace of God that they say, the Gospel of John, which is probably the

most heavily quoted gospel by Christians nearly didn't make it into the New Testament 'cause it was deemed to be so almost unorthodox. And also that weird kind of world of the Book of Revelation at the end of the New Testament also nearly didn't make it. So I think it would be interesting to have a session on why some of this didn't make it. But a lot of these texts from Nag Hammadi have Jewish origins within Jewish Christianity. And so they become really important for shedding light on early Christianity, but also on some of the ideas floating around in the diverse Judaism of the 1st century. And interestingly, yeah, for relevance for today, Mary Magdalene appears in these apocryphal texts that were found at Nag Hammadi.

Next slide please. So we have some very obscure, and I've just done a few quotes on this page of references to her. And the gaps are where there are gaps in the fragments scholars haven't been able to, well they don't want to guess what the gaps are. It's a bit like with the Qumran, the Dead Sea Scrolls. So, "And the companion of Mary Magdalene "loved her more than all the disciples." So it's probably Jesus, but we can't kind of necessarily just write that in. "And used to kiss her often on her." We'll have to guess. "The rest of the disciples," it's almost certainly referring to Jesus. And another fragment which says, "They said to him, "presumably his disciples said to him, ""Why do you love her more than all of us?" "And the Saviour," So it was starting to use very Christian language. Now Jesus said to them, "Why do I not love you like her? "When a blind man and one who sees "are both together in darkness, "they are no different from one another." "When the light comes, then he who sees," he who's got the vision, "will see the light but the blind, "he who is blind will remain in the darkness." So there's a contrast now with Mary, perhaps her teachings and her legacy is being part of the light if you like, that the genuine legacy against others who are sort of in the darkness. But it's a really obscure, I mean, how can we interpret this from a 21st century mindset? It does become quite challenging at times. Next slide please. Gnostic Gospel of Philips, gnostic meaning knowledge. So the Nag Hammadi texts were part of a group known as gnostics who believe they had some kind of secret knowledge imparted from Jesus. That's what they claimed. And some of them were very much contemporary with around the '50s and 60's CE and just beyond. So they are contemporary with the legacies which are emerging from Jesus' own disciples. And it's in the Gospel of Philip that gives rise, it didn't make it into the New Testament. That gives rise to the idea that Jesus loved Mary Magdalene more than all of his other disciples. So that in itself I guess is going to cause a bit of rivalry and jealousy particularly between those who follow Peter and listened to his eyewitness accounts of his time with Jesus. And Mary Magdalene is also named as Jesus' companion. And the term that's used in Greek is Koinonos. Which can translates as I've put there as partner, associate, comrade, companion, wife? We might come back to that. Next slide please. In the Gospel of Mary, and this is thought of originated from Mary Magdalene. She may not have written it herself, well she wouldn't have written it

herself, but the the sayings, the oral traditions probably came from Mary Magdalene herself. Most scholars place it around the 2nd century CE 200. Although as we see later, there are professors who believe that her tradition is earlier than this, but it could well have been written earlier than this. And in the gospel of Mary, Mary Magdalene has this deep understanding of Jesus' teachings. So you can see in early Christianity we have this rivalry for interpretation of Jesus' teachings, for passing on oral tradition, And whether it was the gospels that make it into the New Testament or these gospels that did not make it into the New Testament, they all have strands of Jesus' teachings. In fact, the gospel of Thomas has 114 sayings attributed to Jesus in it. Two-thirds of which can be found in the gospels in the New Testament. So there's clearly these oral traditions before this is written down in these gospels, various gospels, there are these oral traditions floating around and very firmly that is an oral tradition that is passed on by Mary Magdalene and she's imparting it to other disciples and to those that are following her, But this very quickly, of course, her legacy gets suppressed. Her version of the truth, if you like, gets suppressed.

Next slide please. And the Gospel of Mary, which actually exalts her over all the male disciples. And she may well I think have been, I certainly believe she was one of the most important, if not the closest of Jesus's followers. Whether in that male orientated world she could literally been claimed to be a disciple is a different matter. But she does provide with the other women an important insight into the role of women in the early church. They're certainly supporting Jesus's ministry during his lifetime, but they are very much present in the early church and an absolutely vital continuity link, eyewitness link between the real historical Jesus. I wish we could get them back. I'd love to know what really happened. I think we got a pretty good idea, but I would love to know what was that world really like. But she's the historical, one of the historical links between the historical Jesus and what begins to develop afterwards. And in this Gospel of Mary, which doesn't make it into the New Testament, she has this vision of the resurrected Jesus. And it's described in quite some detail, it's understood, but six pages are missing from the beginning of it and four from the middle. I don't know, maybe they'll turn up in some other hidden cash of documentation in the future. I really hope so. we must always not give up, I think there could be more to come out of Egypt. Next slide please. And some of these ideas and stuff we can do in more detail why they didn't make it into the New Testament. So Gospel of Thomas, as I've said earlier, the one that Christian scholars would attribute to being the most famous and the one that if anyone's heard of, will have heard of. And it very nearly made it into the New Testament, but it's not included. And it might not have been included because some of the teachings, they're quite obscure, we don't really understand the meaning. You can see one of the fragments there on the right. I love those. They've kind of got a presence to them, haven't they? Gospel of Thomas was

part of that cash of documents found at Nag Hammadi and it very, very nearly made it. The church fathers very nearly made, we know, very nearly included it in the canon. So the church fathers knew about these gospels, we didn't. Because of course they were hidden until their discovery in 1945. Next slide please. So in one of them, again we can see this kind of obscurity. Mary Magdalene asks Jesus, "Who are your disciples like?" And you have this kind of proverbial story. It's very similar to the kind of sometimes obscure sayings of Jesus in the gospels in the New Testament. And he replies, "They're like children who've settled "in a field which is not theirs. "When the owner of the field comes back, "they will say, "Let us have our field back." "They will undress in their presence in order to," it was very obscure. "In order to let them have back their field "and give it back to them." So you can see passages like this, well I think the the meaning is pretty much lost to us today, but it is obscure and it might be one of the reasons why or the primary reason why ultimately it was decided the Gospel of Thomas should not make it into the New Testament.

Next slide please. But what it tells us is that even with the Gospel of Thomas, which is thought to have come from a follower of Jesus by the surname Thomas, possibly from Syria, we don't know for sure. That the Mary Magdalene tradition was so important in the early church that even other gospel writers, like in the Gospel of Thomas couldn't erase her from their history. And another one very interesting in terms of gender here, Simon Peter, one of the apostles said to them, the other disciples, "Let Mary go forth from among us, for women are not worthy of the life." I.e. the life of being a disciple. And Jesus replies, so in your mind you can think this may or may not be the historical Jesus, of course, we have no parallel in the New Testament. But Jesus says, "Behold I shall lead her that I may make "her male in order that she also may become a living spirit "like you males. "For every woman who makes herself male shall enter "into the kingdom of heaven." So my interpretation, I mean I almost certainly can say it's not the words of the historical Jesus, but there is clearly a gender struggle here, a power. I think Wendy will love this too. It's kind of power struggle in early Christianity, the women were the foundations and the financial support of Jesus's ministry. And there's nothing to suggest that they didn't go on supporting financially their early communities. Next slide please. And so you get this at this attempt to kind of gain a acceptance for them. So before I come onto, and I'm keeping aware of the time, I want to come back to that incident where Jesus', is a very important one, where Jesus' feet are anointed. And it's a story where the 12 disciples are horrified that Mary has actually anointed, washed Jesus' feet with her hair, with some very expensive perfume. And it raises a number of issues actually, which have never really been satisfactorily answered. And it's one of the whole washing of Jesus' feet is also traditionally understood as her penance, her repentance as a allegedly sinner. Of course there's no reference to her being a sinner in the New Testament. Are they protesting against the use of expensive perfume on his feet? Are they objecting to the authority

which is invested in her by the fact that she's washing his feet? Shouldn't it be one of them? Is it a power thing again. A hierarchical objection. Are they objecting to the use of perfume rather than olive oil? So is this really a story about issues of authority, not necessarily about the washing of what is used in the washing of the feet. Because on the surface it looks like the disciples are objecting to the fact that she's using an expensive perfume, but it's really about Mary's position in the community and her authority, her right to be able to anoint Jesus. Next slide please. So I think what we're coming to is this whole power struggle. Is there a deeper symbolism? And this I find utterly fascinating because the word that's used in the story, in the gospels is the word used for nard is used for perfume. And as I've put there, it's only used in two contexts in the Bible for the anointing in the gospels by Mary.

So in the New Testament, but in the Hebrew Bible, in the Song of Songs, the scent of nard is one of the elements of essential delights that lovers partake. Interesting. Next slide please. There is also the gospel of Jesus' wife. Utterly fascinating. What is it? It's a small papyrus, and as you can see from that photograph with Professor Taussig. It's so, so tiny, it's only three inches wide. So this is the only fragment we have. So there's no full scroll, it's in a private collection. It was discovered in, what I'd say, acquired behind the iron curtain in Eastern Germany in the 1960s. Badly damaged, but it's written in Coptic, along the lines of those Nag Hammadi texts. I've said two years ago. It's longer than that now. But this is a disputed aspect in that tiny fragment. Jesus uses the words my wife to his disciples. Next, which is why it's called the Gospel of Jesus' wife. Yeah, there you can see it's framed very, very tiny fragment. But of everything or anything of that tiny fragment could have said anything, could have been from any of the scriptures that we're aware of the Hebrew Bible, from the New Testament, it could have been from Qumran, from Nag Hammadi, but no, it's a completely new fragment that actually refers to the wife of Jesus. Next slide please. So in this fragment, this tiny, tiny fragment, there's a reference to Jesus' mother, to his wife and another female disciple called Mary. So the origin, probably Egypt, because it is written in Coptic, and of course that's the language of the Coptic Christians in Egypt. Next slide please. And from what has been translated, Jesus said to them, "My wife," and there is a blank, "she is able to be my disciple." So it appears sort of been cut off. I really hope it hasn't just been cut into segments. Well probably someone's deliberately cut it into segments to sell it. But we got to find are the rest of the fragments so we can complete what this actually says.

Next slide please. And Professor Taussig said, "It's meaning his breath-taking, "could support the notion that Mary Magdalene "was a major leader in the early Jesus movement," in the early church. I think we can pretty much establish that she was anyway. Next slide please. Is it a forgery? Well that's the obvious question, isn't it?

It could have been a forgery, the product of a highly skilled forger. You know, not dissimilar to the the shrouded Turin maybe in the mediaeval period, which I think they still haven't decided whether it's real or not. But it's using the correct ink. But according to scientists it dates to quite late to about the 6th century, possibly even as late as the 9th century. But others think it may even be earlier. Now Professor Karen King who's also worked on this has suggested or believes it dates to the 2nd century. Carbon dating currently places it in the eighth century but the ink used is the same kind of ink used by the ancient Egyptians. So the question is open on forgery. Next slide please. And I'm aware of the time. I should be able to wrap up in the next five minutes or so, I hope that's okay. Professor King kind of has the broader vision, I'm hoping she once wrote that we can move past the issue of forgery to questions about the significance of this fragment for the history of Christianity. Even if it's written later, it's reflecting something much, much earlier, isn't it? So for thinking she says about questions like why does Jesus being married or not even matter? Why is it that people have had such an incredible reaction to this? Because of course most of the reactions have been that this is a forgery, they don't really want to admit that Jesus might have been married. Next slide please. The fragment is non-canonical, i.e. meaning it doesn't make it into the Christian Bible. But Professor King says, "It provides the first evidence that some early Christians," even though it was written later this fragment, "but this provides the first evidence "that some early Christians believed "that Jesus had been married." Next slide please. And the main topic then of this fragment, we can boil down to three points. Women who are mothers and wives can be disciples of Jesus. That's primarily the message, isn't it? And was a very male dominated world. And she said this was, Professor King says, "A hotly debated topic "in early Christianity as celibate virginity "increasingly became highly valued." And we've got of course the development later of the idea Jesus' mother was a virgin, we've got the idea of Jesus and celibacy. "And the fragment may reinforce a reevaluation", quote what she says, "What we know about Jesus' marital status "in early Christian controversies "over marriage, celibacy and family." So this is really reflecting an early controversy and debate, perhaps even an attempt to suppress Jesus's marital status. Next slide please. "The fragment does not prove," right, is Karen King, "that Jesus was married." It doesn't prove it, "but it could shed light on early Christian debate "about the ideal mode of life was a celibate one." And that of course is in a reaction against Judaism, isn't it? Which doesn't actually advocate celibacy.

Next slide please. Professor King believes this is not a forgery but a product of early Christian writing and Professor Taussig has written to consider a non-celibate, so marriage Jesus would be a huge shift. She says, well for married people it would make Jesus feel closer, maybe. Next slide please. But if Jesus was married and was he married to Mary Magdalene, wouldn't it rather place him much more firmly in

his Jewish context? And I raised this question, was the celibacy of Jesus a product of early church reaction against Judaism or was Jesus celibate, was he influenced by the Qumran community? Next slide please. And it shouldn't really be a game changer, this text, says Ben Witherington, a theologian in America. That you know, within Christianity there was this rise of the monastic movement and quite a lot of monks had followers who were, some of their companions as a sort of sister wife. So perhaps that's the interpretation. Next slide please. And I'm coming to my last couple of points.

So I ask that question, I leave it hanging there for a bit and we may come back to it in a part two. How likely is it given Jesus is firmly rooted in the diversity of the Judaisms of his day? In the pharisaic tradition is what we concluded in my previous talks on the partings of the ways. If he's within the pharisaic tradition, it's highly unlikely that he was celibate. He almost certainly would have been married. And that doesn't exclude his mission, his call that the kingdom of God is coming. Is understood within the apocalyptic times, within the diversity of Judaism. And again, surely Mary Magdalene is the only possible contender as his wife? Next slide. And I'm just bringing some comments to a close for today. In conclusion then, Mary Magdalene, as this repentant prostitute or loose woman, isn't supported by the gospels, the gospels in the New Testament are the earliest, they are based on oral traditions, which are written down 30 or 40 years after the events. Yeah, 30 to 40 years after the event. Sometimes a little bit longer, but they are based on oral traditions which are passed down. It's not possible to (indistinct) that Magdalene was a prostitute or a repentance sinner. There is no evidence in the early tradition that she was. So we should begin to restore her legacy, and there have been a number of films, of course The Last Temptation of Christ about 30 years ago now, was it? Was hugely controversial because in it Mary Magdalene was Jesus' wife, and then of course if we think of that wonderful musical, "Jesus Christ Superstar", Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice wrote that rock opera, that first came out in 1971 and so long ago there is that song in it by Mary Magdalene, "I don't know how to Love Him". And it's referring to Jesus. It's expressing her sexual desire for Jesus. But it totally, totally shocked audiences. And the idea that Mary Magdalene could have been the most important woman in Jesus' life is still so shocking to people today. And I hope that more will be done by our scholars to restore her to her rightful place in history. Thank you.

- [Judi] Thank you Helen. Did you want to have a look at some of the Q&A or save for part two?

- Perhaps we could incorporate those if we do a part two. 'Cause I think some of the answers could be quite long in building up the background. So perhaps I'll take what questions there are and build that if you are happy with that into a different seminar, as a follow up. 'Cause I think that's probably a helpful way to address the

history than just to do it in a rushed five minutes.

- [Judi] Okay.

- So if everyone's happy with that, maybe that's what we can do.

- [Judi] I will send you a copy of all the Q&A.

- But I hope today has given us a basis of ideas, I know there's an awful lot to digest, but ideas are something to think about and reflect, and reflect on what you as the audience, think of some of what I've presented today. And perhaps you can come to your own conclusions about some of what I've said today. Thank you.

- [Judi] Thank you, and I will send you a copy for the questions and look forward to part two. Take care everybody. Thank you for joining us. Bye-bye.