

Fact or Fiction – Mary Magdalene

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Unholy Grail



Introduction

Mary Magdalene is currently one of the most popular figures from the New Testament. As the woman who anointed Jesus with perfume, and to whom Christ appeared first after his resurrection, her life was multifaceted and therefore appealed to many different groups:

1. She was a troubled woman who found mercy and was helped by Jesus. In other words, she was a very human figure—part saint and part sinner with a hint of sexual intrigue.
2. She was a deeply dedicated and spiritual woman, humbly devoted to serving both man and God.
3. She became the patron saint of hospitals and other organizations of mercy because of her anointing of Christ and her care for his body.
4. Her life of contemplation as evidenced by sitting at Jesus feet provided a model for nuns and monks.
5. Her life as a supposed prostitute and her attempt to love and serve Jesus with unbound hair, in a way that hinted of sexuality and scandal, titillated and appealed to many.
6. The tradition that she and Lazarus personally had brought Christianity to Gaul in the first century had such deep appeal that it remained stubbornly lodged in popular belief.
7. The fact that she was the first person to whom Jesus appeared, and was therefore “the apostle to the apostles,” along with hints from non-Biblical sources has led feminists to champion her as a supposed model for female spiritual authority.

But who was the real Mary Magdalene? She was a real woman, a follower of Christ, and a supporter of his ministry. She had been healed by Jesus of demon possession (seven demons were cast out of her), and her appreciation and feelings for him were so deep that she was one of the few who stood by him while he died on the cross, as well as being one of the women who came back to his tomb to anoint his body with spices, as was the custom of that day.



The Bible and other ancient writings typically did not speak much, if at all, of people’s emotional state, but clearly Mary Magdalene was a woman whose feelings for Jesus ran very deep. If we look below the surface we can picture the extreme heartbreak and frustration that she must have experienced — being desperately in love with a man who would never marry her, and who, despite his greatness and personal majesty, was tortured and died the agonizing and cruel death of a common criminal right in front of her. She undoubtedly realized that he was way beyond her, and after falling in love with Jesus, what other man could even come close? If there is a song that even in a small way could begin to describe what she felt, it is James Blunt’s ballad *I’ll Never Be With You* (“But it’s time to face the truth — I will never be with you.”)

The power of her story and trying to tell it is one of the reasons I wrote the novel *Unholy Grail*. I have long been fascinated with the ultimate frustration of the human condition — how we “can’t get no satisfaction.” The following verses from Hebrews 11:13-16 explains:

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

So after Jesus’ death and resurrection Mary gets back up and soldiers on — like the rest of us she has to have faith that one day God will wipe away our tears and make all things new.

Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany

Mary Magdalene was the woman who was healed of demon possession, became a follower of Christ, was present at the crucifixion, and who came to the tomb after his death to anoint his body with spices (along with another Mary in two of the Gospel accounts). But the woman who anointed Jesus' feet at the dinner which took place a few days before his arrest and trial was identified as "Mary of Bethany." Mary of Bethany was the sister of Martha and Lazarus, a man who Jesus had raised from the dead. Jesus was a close friend to this family, and would stay with them in Bethany when he and the disciples were in the Jerusalem area (Bethany is a town located on the Mount of Olives, approximately two miles from Jerusalem).

Are "Mary Magdalene" and "Mary of Bethany" two different women, or are they the same person? There are also several unnamed women who at times have been identified with Mary Magdalene. Thus her identity has been debated for a long time. Here are the possibilities:

1. "Mary Magdalene," the follower of Jesus (Matthew 27:57-61, 28:1-8; Mark 15:42-47, 16:1-13; Luke 8:1-3, 24:1-12; and John 19:16-25, 20:1-18).
2. "Mary of Bethany," the sister of Lazarus and Martha, who anointed Jesus' feet: (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 12:3-8).
3. An unnamed woman who anointed Jesus' feet during his ministry in Galilee (Luke 7:37-50).
4. An unnamed woman who was taken in adultery and forgiven by Jesus (John 8:3-11).

Many contemporary Bible scholars treat these as four different women, but in the *Unholy Grail* novels, Mary Magdalene is 1, 2, and 3 above. This was also the traditional view of the church as first stated by Pope Gregory the Great, circa AD 600. The reason that these association can be made are as follows:

1. The anointing of Jesus mentioned in three of the Gospels that took place a week before the crucifixion, was performed in Bethany by "Mary of Bethany," who was the sister of Lazarus and Martha, and who had a special love for Jesus. But the Mary at the crucifixion, the Mary who came to anoint Jesus' body with spices, the Mary who was the first woman at the tomb, and the Mary who was the first to see the resurrected Jesus were all identified as "Mary Magdalene," with no indication of any involvement by a "Mary of Bethany" in any of those incidents. The latter's home was Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem, so given her proximity and the depth of her love and concern, it is likely that she would have been involved. Therefore, it would make sense that "Mary of Bethany" and "Mary Magdalene" were one and the same person.

2. There were two anointings of Jesus by a woman. The first one was described only in the Gospel of Luke (7:36-50), although it was possibly also alluded to in the Gospel of John (11:2), and it was performed by an unnamed woman. The event took place during one of Jesus' trips in the Galilee region while he was visiting the home of Simon the Pharisee. Just after this first anointing, Luke mentions that Mary Magdalene as the first of the female followers of Christ, and given the additional evidence from John's Gospel, in the next point below, Mary Magdalene could well have been the woman who also performed the Luke anointing in Galilee. The second anointing of Jesus by a woman is mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew (26:6-16), Mark (14:3-10), and John (12:1-8). In the Matthew and Mark accounts the woman is not named, but John indicates that the anointing was performed by Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. It took place in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper just before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Some have suggested there was only one anointing; that Luke got the location and/or the details of his story wrong; that "Simon the Pharisee" was the same person as "Simon the leper"; and that therefore all four of the Gospels were describing exactly the same event. This is unlikely, however, for a number of reasons:
 - a. The Luke account clearly takes place during Jesus' ministry in Galilee.
 - b. In those times a leper would never have been a Jewish religious leader as was Simon the Pharisee.
 - c. In Luke's account, Jesus has an extensive dialogue with Simon the Pharisee, and rebukes him for his pride and arrogance, and Luke is the only Gospel author to record such a conversation. It is hard to conceive of a leper also being an arrogant religious leader.
 - d. The other Gospels all indicate that Judas sought out the Sanhedrin to make his deal to betray Christ immediately following this event, but not so in Luke, who states that after this event Jesus began traveling from one city to the next along with his disciples, indicating that this anointing took place near the beginning of his public ministry.
 - e. Luke is the Gospel writer with the most background as a historian, and who generally took the most care with the details that he mentions.
 - f. Luke may have avoided mentioning the woman's name so as not to stigmatize her, as Simon the Pharisee was apparently eager to do.
3. In John 11:1-2, during the time when Lazarus was sick and dying, "Mary, the sister of Lazarus" is described as having previously poured perfume on Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair, as in the Luke account described above. Then in the next chapter (John 12:3) the anointing at Bethany is described, and Lazarus who is now identified as being raised from the dead was sitting at the table with Jesus. In other words, the author of John's Gospel is seemingly describing two different anointings, both of which were performed by Mary of Bethany. If John is indeed referring to a previous anointing, and Mary Magdalene had performed it, then she and Mary of Bethany must be the same person.

- 4 The unnamed woman who anointed Jesus in Galilee used “an alabaster vial of perfume,” Luke 7:37. The perfume used by Mary in the Bethany anointing is described as follows: “an alabaster vial of very costly perfume,” Matthew 26:7; “an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard,” Mark 14:3; “a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard,” John 12:3. The same type of perfume container—an alabaster vial—is thus described as being used for both anointings. Furthermore, what the woman actually did in both events is also described in similar terms: “standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume,” Luke 7:38. “Mary anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair,” John 12:3. It is possible that two different women used the same type of perfume container and anointed Jesus in the same way, but it seems more likely that it was the same woman in both cases.
5. The depictions of Mary in early Christian art and literature show only one person who was both the sister of Lazarus and Martha, the woman who anointed Jesus, and the woman who was at the tomb and to whom Jesus appeared after the resurrection.
6. Later tradition has Mary Magdalene traveling by ship along with her brother Lazarus to France. As discussed below, this tradition is very popular.
7. There are hints that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute, or at least a “loose woman” (i.e., an adulterer/divorcée), but this is not conclusive. During the Galilee anointing, the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus feet is described by Simon the Pharisee as being a “sinner,” which would seem to connote some type of sexual sin. Jesus also indicated that “her sins are many,” but nevertheless, he ennobles her actions and ascribes them to the depth of her love and devotion. Assuming that this woman was Mary Magdalene, the designation of her as a sinner may therefore be due to the fact that she had demons cast out of her (i.e., her sin was not necessarily related to sex). It may also have been due to the fact that she unbound her hair to wipe Jesus’ feet, as a woman with unbound hair was considered immodest, and unfortunately in the thinking of that day, “loose.” It does seem reasonable that a woman possessed by demons would have also been involved in some type of deviant sexual practices, and Mary Magdalene did have seven demons cast out of her — Mark 16:9, Luke 8:2. But there is not sufficient evidence to even seriously suggest that Mary Magdalene was the adulterous woman forgiven by Jesus in John 8:3-11.¹

¹ As one researcher of this issue said, “A great many minor characters appear briefly in the Gospel narratives, ‘unheralded and unpursued.’ There is a natural tendency for the imagination to try to tidy things up by identifying them, so that, for example, the centurion at the crucifixion who said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God,’ is said to be the same centurion whose servant was healed at Capernaum. But real life is not always tidy.”

- 8 An objection has been raised over the fact that usually a person is fully identified by the Gospel writers. In other words, they would not have simply used the name “Mary” if the person they were describing was actually “Mary Magdalene.” However, the writers were sensitive to identifying living people at the time that they were writing. Jesus had cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene, and if she is the same woman as Mary of Bethany, the Gospel writers may not have wanted to slur her or damage her reputation when she was mentioned in the context of her family. Lazarus, Mary’s brother, seems to have been fairly wealthy and well known, and after Jesus raised him from the dead many came to Bethany to meet him and check out his story. Another example of this literary reticence are references to Matthew (Jesus’ disciple and author of the first Gospel), in the three other Gospels. Because of his disreputable former occupation as a tax collector, the other writers refer to him as “Levi” rather than “Matthew.”



Sculpture of Mary Magdalene from the Basilica of St. Maximin’s (picture taken by author)

The Magdalene Appellation

A major question is the source and meaning of the “Magdalene” appellation. We do not know the original significance of this term, but traditionally it was assumed that Mary was originally from or had a significant association with Magdala, a town on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee. If she was from Magdala in Galilee, then she supposedly could not be the sister of Martha and Lazarus from Bethany, near Jerusalem.

But even assuming that the “Magdalene” appellation refers to the town of Magdala, there are a number of possible explanations of the source of this name which do not conflict with her living in Bethany as sister to Lazarus and Martha: a) her parents may have originally been from Magdala; b) she could have grown up in Magdala and later moved to Bethany; c) she or her parents may have owned property in Magdala; d) she could have been married and lived in Magdala with a husband (perhaps she was divorced, and perhaps her ex-husband had something to do with her being afflicted with evil spirits); or e) she could have lived in Magdala for some period of time, with a significant event that happened to her there which led her to choose that as an appellation (as in the *Unholy Grail* story). It therefore seems reasonable that she may have usually been referred to as “Mary Magdalene” the follower of Jesus, but in the context of Lazarus and Martha she was called “Mary of Bethany.”

The word “migdol” means “tower,” and some have speculated that either she or her supposed husband owned property or buildings from which that appellation was taken. The thirteenth century *Lengenda Aurea* indicated that the Magdalene name came from the large home (castle) in Bethany or Jerusalem in which she lived with Lazarus and Martha (i.e., this work assumed that the two Marys were the same person). Another possibility is that “Magdalene” was a Talmudic expression which meant “curling the hair,” and which would have denoted a loose woman.

There is no indication in the Gospels that Mary was a witch or a medium, but they do state that Jesus cast seven demons out of her, so her association in the *Unholy Grail* story with mediums and fortune telling seems very reasonable. The Gospels speak of this action in literal rather than figurative terms, and therefore it should not be interpreted as the “seven deadly sins” or other allegorical meanings, as some have alleged.

Mary Magdalene's Later Life

The later activities of Mary Magdalene are known only through traditions. In one of these she travels to Ephesus with Mary the mother of Jesus and dies there. But by far the most popular tradition is her voyage to Marseille in France. This is supported by the many churches and shrines in Provence and the Languedoc dedicated to her, and at first glance, this seems to be quite convincing. She is the patron saint of Marseille, and her supposed remains are kept at the Basilica of St. Maximim in the Baume Mountains near the coast and thirty-five miles from Marseille. Her coffin is in the crypt of the church, as well as her skull, which is displayed in a reliquary (shown below). The skull has been carbon dated to her general time period, and brochures in the Basilica tell the story of Mary Magdalene's voyage to Gaul as historical fact. Every year on July 22, her feast day, there is a procession in her honor, in which the reliquary is paraded through the town. In the mountains near St. Maximin is a site that is claimed to be Mary Magdalene's grotto, where she is said to have gone to pray.



An artistic conception of the arrival of Mary Magdalene in Marseilles (or at St. Maries de la Mer) from a carving in the Basilica of St. Maximim's (picture by the author)

Maximin was said to one of the seventy disciples that Jesus sent out ahead of him (Luke 10:1-20), and supposedly sailed with Lazarus and Mary to Gaul. Some of the other members of this group that appear in the New Testament were said to be: Mark, Luke, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, James, Appolos, Aquila, Barnabas, Philip, Silas, Silvanus, Stephen, and many others.

There are a number of accounts from the middle ages and following of the presence of Mary Magdalene and Lazarus (named as brother and sister) in Marseilles. For example, Roger of Howden, who was more-or-less the official chronicler of the Third Crusade, wrote this account on his visit to Marseilles in 1190 along with the army of King Richard, the Lionheart:

Marseille is a city situated twenty miles from the mouth of the Rhône, and is subject to the King of Aragon. Here can be found the relics of St. Lazarus, the brother of St. Mary Magdalene and of Martha. After Jesus raised him from the dead he became Bishop of Marseilles ([Howden, 1190](#)).

As with Joseph of Arimathea in Britain, ascribing the start of Christianity in France to the actions of Mary and/or Lazarus has a powerful romantic and historic cachet that many have found irresistible.

Regardless of these speculations, asserting that Mary Magdalene and/or Lazarus lived and ministered in France is tenuous. There are no early tales of the activities of either Lazarus or Mary in Gaul as there were for other evangelists, such as St. Patrick in Ireland (AD 460—500). If individuals as significant to the history of Christianity as Lazarus and Mary Magdalene had actually lived in Gaul for many years, and were instrumental in the evangelization of the Celts and the Franks, there certainly would have been many stories about them from that time. The complete lack of early evidence does not definitively disprove the tale, but places it in the realm of hagiography rather than fact.

The documented history is much more prosaic. A ninth-century French monk who journeyed to Palestine is said to have brought back the supposed remains of Mary Magdalene when he returned to France. These were kept initially in the town of Vézelay near Paris, and later they were moved to St. Maximin near Marseille. The literary development of Mary Magdalene began soon after that and was first summarized in a tenth-century (circa AD 930) sermon attributed to Odo of Cluny. This sermon which was subsequently used as a source of the liturgy for Mary Magdalene's feast day of July 22, relates her life up to the time of Christ's Ascension. According to Victor Saxer, one of the pioneering Mary Magdalene researchers, the tradition of her life afterward, especially her years in France, came from five sources ([Saxer, 1959](#)):

1. The *vita eremitica*, telling of her years of solitude in the mountain grotto, was probably borrowed from the Greek legend of a reformed prostitute, Mary of Egypt.

2. The *vita apostolica*, recounting Mary Magdalene's apostolic work in Provence, dates from around the same time in the tenth century as Odo's sermon.
3. A portion was added in the eleventh century to explain how her body had been rediscovered in Provence some 200 years earlier and brought north to the abbey of Vézelay.
4. The story of the prince of Marseilles, which became a favorite part of the common legends of Mary Magdalene, was added even later—probably in the twelfth century.
5. In addition to these major components, the Provençal legend in its fully developed form often includes two other kinds of relatively late additions: brief accounts of Lazarus, Martha, and other saints who supposedly accompanied Mary to Marseilles and participated in the evangelization of France from sources such as the immensely popular *Lengenda Aurea*; and stories about her miraculous intercessions for believers who have prayed to her or honored her memory in other ways.

The Cluniac abbey of Vézelay, which had gained papal recognition in 1058 for its claim to possess the Magdalene remains, grew into one of the greatest pilgrimage centers in Europe—thanks to the prestige of its patron saint, the support of the French monarchy, and its ideal location on a main route used by pilgrims from Germany to Santiago de Compostella in Spain. The original location of Mary's activities, however, was in Provence, at the Baume grotto where she supposedly lived a monastic existence for thirty years, as well as St. Madeleine's Basilica in the town of St. Maximin, which was specifically mentioned in some versions of the legend as her original burial place. The status of the Provençal shrines improved considerably after 1279, when the monks of St. Maximin's and the Angevin prince Charles of Salerno miraculously discovered that her body was still there after all, hidden inside an ancient sarcophagus in the crypt of the church. Thus Charles and his allies attempted to reclaim the saint's patronage and protection for the county of Provence and the house of Anjou. The cult of Mary Magdalene in England came from the same general period, especially following the Norman Conquest of 1066. There were only a few churches dedicated to her through the tenth-century, but by the fifteenth-century there were around 200, as well as an Oxford college named for her ([Reames, 2003](#)). C.S. Lewis, the famous atheist-turned-Christian author, taught at this school, which is known as Magdalene College.

Regardless of the doubt hanging over the story of Lazarus and Mary in France, there is another possibility that could redeem the legend, and still associate the Merovingians with Mary's progeny. She and Lazarus could have made the voyage to France but perished soon after arriving. This could explain the lack of historical accounts of their ministry, and would also allow for Mary's child to intermarry with an influential family that eventually became the Merovingian dynasty of kings, which began in the late 300s.



The skull of Mary Magdalene in its reliquary, in the Basilica of St. Maximin's

Mary Magdalene's Relationship with Jesus

Based on the anointing scene, it has been speculated that Mary Magdalene had some form of relationship with Jesus. However, there is no support for this whatsoever in the Bible, or in any of the writings of Jesus' disciples, followers, or church leaders. Jesus met and talked with many women, which was unusual for a man, and especially for a rabbi of that time. But he did this to honor and ascribe value to women, and did not have any romantic motives or relationships. Given his identity of universal savior, and his role as the suffering servant, Messiah, King, and the third person of the Trinity, this would not have been possible for him. The only support for Mary Magdalene's alleged intimate relationship with Jesus prior to AD 300 is a confusing statement from one of the Gnostic "gospels," the *Gospel of Philip*, which says the following:

The companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by this and expressed disapproval. They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?"

Many assume that the above account, being from a Gnostic writing, is "religious fiction," but some have taken it literally and alleged from the above quote that Mary Magdalene was Jesus' spouse or consort. However, if that were the case, then why would the disciples, who were married men with their own wives, object to him kissing her? Even the Gnostic writings never claim that Jesus and Mary were married, nor do they claim that there was any sexual relationship or that any children were born to them.

The *Gospel of Philip* was written in the second or third century, one to two hundred years after the death and resurrection of Christ, and therefore long after the death of all of his followers. In contrast, all of the Biblical gospels were written by men who were either disciples of Christ, or their close

associates. All of them were therefore penned when the first-person sources were still alive and could verify the details. The Biblical gospels furthermore indicate that the disciples were fallible humans with egos, tempers, and rivalries, but that these were put aside as they gained more spiritual maturity. There is no indication whatsoever from any first century source that Mary Magdalene was a special companion of Jesus, or that any authority was ever given to her. There is also no indication whatsoever that she had conflicts with Peter or any of the other disciples.

There is another Gnostic work known as *The Gospel of Mary* which was written in the same era as the *Gospel of Philip*. There are only four known fragments and much of the original is missing. It is also not certain that the “Mary” referred to in this work is actually Mary Magdalene—her identity is presumed. However, even this writing does not indicate that Jesus had any romantic involvement with her. In each Gnostic gospel, the central figure is always portrayed as Jesus’ favorite follower. Thus, Thomas is the favorite disciple in the *Gospel of Thomas*, Judas is the favorite disciple in the *Gospel of Judas Iscariot*, and Mary is the favorite disciple in the *Gospel of Mary*.

Gnosticism

The Gnostic “gospels” were written by groups who had developed religious and theological concepts very different from the Bible. Gnosticism was based on the thinking of Plato, the Greek philosopher (ca. 400 BC). He believed that the heavenly form or archetype of all things was the ideal, and that earthly things are only shadows of the heavenly, and therefore inferior. The influence of Platonic thought had declined after the destruction of the Greek Empire, but his ideas were revived by the Neoplatonists, led by the Greek philosopher Plotinus (ca. AD 205-270) who lived during the early Christian era, as well as by various sects that borrowed the same ideas.

Gnosticism (from the Greek word “gnosis” meaning inner knowledge or wisdom), was based on the Platonic concept of the superiority of the spiritual over the physical. Gnosticism taught that only the spiritual aspects of a person were good, and the body was evil. This meant that sex, and especially the female body, were from the “dark side.” Being truly spiritual thus meant removing oneself from the physical aspects of life, to the extent that this is possible, and the adepts who understood this hidden wisdom would seek to remove all fleshly influences from their lives. Gnosticism was therefore part of the background of the ascetic movements that saw sex as inherently sinful, and women as a temptation to be resisted. It was also exclusionary—unlike the Bible and Christian teaching which is open and available to all, Gnosticism was a secret society with outer and inner layers; only certain individuals had access to the hidden wisdom.

Gnostic theology is also dualistic—God and the devil are essentially equal in power and are constantly at war with each other. Some Gnostic philosophers taught that this continuous war between God and Satan was the main source of human misery and suffering. The Gnostic writings contain many philosophical statements supposedly made by Jesus, but that are confusing and totally at odds with the New Testament. For example, here is one from *Gospel of Mary*:

The Savior said, “All nature, all formations, all creatures exist in and with one another, and they will be resolved again into their own roots. For the nature of matter is resolved into the roots of its own nature alone... There is no sin, but it is you who make sin when you do the things that are like the nature of adultery, which is called sin.”

The Gnostic writings therefore do not provide any “new light” on the Biblical gospels. Gnosticism was simply one more set of theological speculations, at odds with Biblical theology.

Mary Magdalene and Feminism

In the last forty years, the notion that Mary Magdalene was a significant preacher and evangelist, and therefore the first female in that role, has become a feminist totem. Mary Magdalene is therefore “exhibit A” for those who believe that the church has misogynistically suppressed women.

The feminist goal is for women to be made equal to or exceed men in power and authority, and there has been a concerted attempt on the part of feminists to ground their desires in history, archaeology, and theology. In attempting to construct a comprehensive philosophical worldview, foundational feminist thinkers such as Elizabeth Davis in *The First Sex*, 1971; Merlin Stone in *When God was a Woman*, 1976; Riane Eisler in *The Chalice and the Blade*, 1986; the anthology *Womanspirit Rising*; and others, created a theology (or “thealogy” as it is sometimes called) and a religion to embody their desires, in which “god” is replaced by “goddess.” Female goddesses have been around for millennia, but in most cases they were subservient to their male analogs. However, the goddesses of today, variously called “Isis,” “Ishtar,” or “Sophia,” supposedly supersede any male god. Wicca, the feminist religion, was founded in the 1950s, and the genesis of goddess concepts coincided with the development of feminism.

A history of mankind was developed to explain that original human religion was the worship of a Mother goddess, and that goddess worship, along with women, have been savagely suppressed down through the centuries. According to this hypothesis, societies of the remote past were matriarchal, worshiped the goddess, and lived at peace with the environment. In some accounts, such as that of Davis mentioned above, the first males were mutants, and subordinate to females. Women were said to have created all of the meaningful elements of civilization before men even arrived on the scene. Furthermore, these societies were socialistic utopias—there was no private property, no masculine competitiveness, and no social hierarchies. Everyone had what they needed, there was no hoarding of wealth, and all things were supposedly shared.

But tragically, these societies were crushed by evil, male-led tribes who conquered the defenseless socialists and enslaved them. These malicious patriarchal groups, culminating in the Roman Empire, then invented Christianity as a means of denigrating women and holding them down. Through the centuries, the church was said to have violently suppressed goddess worship, supposedly killing millions of witches, who, in reality, were innocent goddess-worshippers, and keepers of the ancient flame.

Today, these destructive forces are said to have run amok to the point that they are supposedly in danger of destroying the entire world. The crisis in western civilization is allegedly a sign that the male god’s reign is ending, and the goddess is waiting to lead us into a New Age of peace and harmony. We must therefore jettison patriarchy and all of its supporting institutions: male-god religions, monogamous families, and all male-based hierarchies of power. If we fail to do this, we may be facing the end of civilization and life on the earth. The feminist theological agenda is therefore

focused on environmental alarmism, the destruction of Christianity, the magnification of female politicians and female power, and the replacement of capitalistic economic systems with various forms of socialism and environmentalism.

There are certainly a few grains of truth in this analysis, such as our need to improve the environment. But the reality is that this history is entirely fabricated and built on lies:

1. The notion of an ancient matriarchal past is pure fantasy. Women have always had power and influence, but all societies that have ever existed have been led and dominated by males. Patriarchy is acknowledged by anthropologists to be universal ([Goldberg, 1973](#)).
2. Far from being a movement to denigrate women or hold them down, Christianity actually raised the status of women, who were typically treated as chattel in the ancient world. The first individuals in history to speak out against oppression and slavery were Christians, such as St. Patrick in 4th century. In recent centuries the man who almost single-handedly caused the slave trade to be abolished in England was William Wilberforce (1759-1833). He became a Christian in 1785 after serving in parliament, and soon afterward became a tireless abolitionist, as well as a Christian leader. The Slavery Abolition Act was finally passed 46 years later in 1833, three days before Wilberforce's death. The impact of this legislation and the advocacy of Wilberforce was instrumental in the formation of the abolitionist movement in America, eventually resulting in the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. The church has also been the main force behind the creation of hospitals, orphanages, shelters, and relief for the poor down through the centuries, and remains so in today's world. Feminism grew out of the American Christian tradition of equality of the sexes, and in the nation which already had the most personal freedom of any in the world.
3. Feminist leaders routinely provide mendacious statistics. Here are a few examples:
 - a. Gloria Steinem originally reported that 150,000 young women (age 15 to 24) die every year of anorexia nervosa. Actual numbers are in the range of 50-100.
 - b. Public service ads for women's shelters have indicated an increase in domestic violence of up to 40% during the Super Bowl week. No such increase has ever been detected.
 - c. A widely reported feminist statistic states that 1 out of every 4 college women is the victim of rape or attempted rape every year. In other words, every woman who goes to a four-year college has essentially a 100% likelihood of being raped. This is only true if you stretch the definition of "rape" to include "flirtation" and "undesired advance."
 - d. Probably the most popular statistic cited in many feminist works, is that an astounding five to nine million women were slaughtered in witch hunts carried out by Christians over the

last 500 years. This number was first created by the early radical feminist Matilda Gage in her 1893 work *Women, Church and State*, a book that was so extreme and far-fetched that it soon went out of print, but was revived by a feminist publishing house in the 1970s. The actual number was around fifty thousand, many of those were men, and a number of these “witch hunts” were carried out by secularists.

4. The increased androgenization in America engendered by feminism (more powerful women and more uncommitted men) has created more opportunities for women, but has also resulted in much more divorce, marital unhappiness, and other social pathologies.

Feminist theology and history is thus fantasy and deception, with no religious, historical, or anthropological foundation. Philip Davis in his book, *Goddess Unmasked*, sums up the evidence against it, which is devastating:

Not a single [ancient society] provides clear evidence of a supreme female deity; not a single one exhibits the signs of matriarchal rule, or even of serious power-sharing between the sexes; not a single one displays social egalitarianism, non-violent interpersonal and interstate relations, and ecological sensitivity which we have been led to anticipate. In each of these cases, the story of the Goddess is a fabrication in defiance of the facts ([Davis, 1998, pp. 83-84](#)).

One would think that goddess worshipers would be distressed that their religion is based on concocted fallacies. However, these individuals “feel” rather than “think,” because thinking is largely logical, left-brained, and therefore male. The roots of feminism are in the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century, which emphasized feelings above logic, and thinking is subordinated beneath feeling when there is a conflict between the two. Institutional feminism is highly intolerant, censorious, and bigoted, and attempts to condemn and suppress any conflicting viewpoint. For example, criticism is often dismissed as being “male,” and feminists have attempted to redefine terms such as “misogynism” away from “hatred of women” to mean anyone who “opposes feminist thinking.” Institutional feminists also have their own form of witch hunting – people opposing them are not tortured, but they are blackballed from positions in academia and the media.

But feminism has provided more opportunities for women, and there are many sympathizers who may reject feminist theology out of hand, but still feel that women should have more power and authority in today’s society. Those in the church may therefore look to Mary Magdalene as a model. But as indicated above, there is no evidence whatsoever that Mary Magdalene challenged men for leadership, or was ever a leader in her own right in the vein of male leaders. The essence of Mary Magdalene is submission and obedience rather than power and leadership.

To the Christian, Jesus is the pattern for us to follow. He ennobled women, gave them value equal to men, and involved them in his ministry, all of which were revolutionary for his day. But at the same time he supported male leadership and traditional sex roles. That is the balance of Christ.

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