University of Alberta

"Pray in the Place Where There is No Woman":
Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*

by

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Abstract

One of the *Dialogue of the Saviour*'s most prominent features is the female character Mary who participates with other disciples in a discussion with Jesus. Most texts in the Nag Hammadi codices including the *Dialogue of the Saviour* have been traditionally labeled as Gnostic. This study demonstrates the problems with the term, its influence on scholarship specifically on the so-called Gnostic Mary, and the ways in which it inevitably fails as a useful descriptive category, especially with respect to creating an artificial uniform character as the Gnostic Mary. This work then proceeds to consider a number of frequently overlooked issues including the unspecified identity of Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* and the gender construction in the socio-historical context of the *Dialogue of the Saviour*.

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1. Introduction

The *Dialogue of the Saviour* was discovered in 1945 in Nag Hammadi, Egypt in the third of twelve codices preserved in Coptic. The manuscript itself dates to the fourth century, but, it is believed that the text originated in Greek from the second century and was later translated into Coptic. The physical state of the manuscript is fragmentary, thus making reading and interpreting the text quite difficult at times. This is the only extant copy of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* and it is not mentioned in any writings of the Church Fathers nor is there any clear literary dependence on other Nag Hammadi texts.[1] According to Helmut Koester and Elaine Pagels, the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is comprised of five sources: A discourse on the soul's journey, a creation myth related to Genesis 1–2, a wisdom interpretation of a cosmological list, an apocalyptic vision, and a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples.[2]

Since the initial report by Koester and Pagels there have been attempts to determine whether or not the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is dependent on any New Testament writings. Koester and Pagels initially concluded that there is no clear evidence suggesting that this is the case. Julian Hills questions this conclusion by noting three aphorisms in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* which he suggests are quite

[1] Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: Trinity Press International, 1990), 174.

[2] Helmut Koester and Elaine Pagels, "Report on the Dialogue of the Savior," in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis: Papers Read at the First International Congress of Coptology, (Cairo, December 1976)* (NHS 14; ed. R McL. Wilson; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 73.

similar—and even appear in the same order—to those found in the Gospel of Matthew.[3] After weighing the evidence, however, he argues that the text leaves more questions than answers and is unable to conclusively demonstrate that the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is clearly dependent on any of the gospels of the New Testament.[4]

In a similar vein, scholarship has also sought to compare the themes found in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* with other Nag Hammadi texts, most notably with the *Gospel of Thomas*. April DeConick argues that both of these texts hold a similar view regarding the need to reject the body.[5] The main difference is that the *Gospel of Thomas* suggests that one is able to attain salvation before death, the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, according to DeConick, suggests this can only be done after death.[6]

The *Dialogue of the Saviour* has gained particular interest for scholars who study the development of the sayings of Jesus in early Christianity. Koester argues that a dialogue source is the primary source used in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*.[7] By isolating and comparing these sayings with those found in the canonical gospels and the *Gospel of Thomas*, Koester ultimately concludes that "The *Dialogue of the Savior* shows the initial stages of larger compositions, at least in those portions which belong to an older dialogue source utilized by the

[3] Julian V. Hills, "The Three 'Matthean' Aphorisms in the 'Dialogue of the Savior,'" *HTR* 84 (1991): 43–58.

[4] Hills, "The Three 'Matthean' Aphorisms," 58.

[5] April D. DeConick, "The 'Dialogue of the Savior' and the Mystical Sayings of Jesus," *VC* 50 (1996): 178–199. See also April D. DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 157–163.

[6] DeConick, "The 'Dialogue of the Savior,'" 180.

[7] Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 173.

author for the redaction of the writing preserved under this title."[8] In turn, he argues that other texts such as the Gospel of John and the *Epistula Apostolorum* are examples of "the fully developed literary genre."[9] Thus, the *Dialogue of the Saviour* serves as "an important witness to the history of sayings traditions"[10] for those tracing the progression of the ways in which the sayings of Jesus were remembered and passed on.

Pierre Létourneau argues that the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is indicative of a late Valentinian tradition source. He argues that although the common themes associated with Valentinian tradition are not explicit in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, they are nevertheless alluded to implicitly in the text. [11] For example, the character Sophia is usually present in Valentinian texts but instead *Dialogue Saviour* mentions the "Mother of All."[12] Ultimately, Létourneau argues, "the Dialogue of the Savior presents a softer version of Valentinian theology, one less irritating to the new orthodoxy but providing an acceptable baptismal theology for believers of Valentinian origin within the Church."[13]

Additionally, the *Dialogue of the Saviour* consistently appears in scholarly discussions regarding the role of women in early Christianity, specifically in Gnostic or unorthodox communities. The fact that a female disciple, Mary, is an

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[8] Helmut Koester, "Gnostic Writings as Witnesses for the Development of the Sayings Tradition," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978* (Studies in the History of Religions 41; ed. Bentley Layton; Leiden: Brill, 1980), 253.

[9] Koester, "Gnostic Writings," 256.

[10] Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-canonical Gospel Texts* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 39.

[11] Pierre Létourneau, "The Dialogue of the Savior as a Witness to the Late Valentinian Tradition," *VC* 65 (2011): 74–98.

[12] Létourneau, "The Dialogue of the Savior," 88.

[13] Létourneau, "The Dialogue of the Savior," 98.

active participant in the dialogue links the *Dialogue of the Saviour* to other non-canonical texts such as the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Philip* and *Pistis Sophia*, where a character named Mary also plays a role in the discussions in the text. The participation of Mary in these texts leads scholars to argue that women played a prominent role in these early Christian communities.

This study focuses on the role of Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* and the ways in which her participation and status relate to the other disciples in the text as well as the gender imagery it uses. It will also consider the ways in which previous scholarship has influenced this topic through viewing the *Dialogue of the Saviour* as a Gnostic text. After looking at the influence of Gnosticism on women in early Christianity, in particular in the formation of the Gnostic Mary, it looks as the passages chosen most often to study Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* as well as neglected passages that play a crucial role in understanding the text's perspective on gender and women.

2. The Problems with Gnosticism[14]

Most of the texts in the Nag Hammadi Codices at one time or another have been labelled as Gnostic. Gnosticism has been defined as: (1) Christian heresy; (2) representing one variety of many Christianities; (3) a pre-Christian tradition; (4) a completely distinct tradition independent of Christianity.[15] In recent years, however, some scholars have criticized the use of the term.

Two of the most influential scholars opposed to the use of the term Gnostic are Michael Williams and Karen King. Michael Williams in his 1996 publication, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* argues that there was no monolithic group in antiquity which could be clearly identified as Gnostic. In his conclusion, Williams does not entirely dismiss using the term Gnostic and he proposes using the category "biblical demiurgical."[16] He rationalizes this new designation by stating that "biblical demiurgical could be fairly clearly defined."[17] Although this term may seem like a reasonable alternative, it essentially functions as a new band aid over the same wound. Williams, while suggesting that this would not simply be a new term for Gnosticism admits, "[t]here would indeed be considerable overlap, since the

[14] In this work, I do not prefix the terms Gnosticism or Gnostic with "so-called" nor do I put the terms in scare quotes because, as this section will demonstrate, I find these terms inherently problematic. I treat the designations orthodox, normative, heretical etc. in the same manner for there has already been much written on the issues with these terms and I would hope the terms themselves raise red flags for the reader. Although some scholars use a lower case 'g' for Gnosticism while others use the upper case, I will use upper-case for consistency except where I am quoting directly from another work. Moreover, to be clear, I only use the term to engage in the previous scholarship that has relied on Gnosticism: in no way do I think that the category should be used otherwise.

[15] Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 1–4.

[16] Michael Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996), 265.

[17] Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 265.

largest number of sources normally called "gnostic" also happen to contain or assume some biblical demiurgical myth."[18] Yet Williams thinks that this new term would "cut free from baggage" associated with the term Gnosticism.[19] While this may be the case initially, a category based on a single phenomenon found in large portion of diverse texts would be sure to accumulate its own set of "baggage" over time if it is used as carelessly as Gnosticism. Thus although Williams is on the right track by calling attention to the problematic nature of the term Gnosticism he would have been better off abstaining from proposing a new term that merely functions as a replacement for Gnostic.

Karen King in her book *What is Gnosticism?* (2003) provides more nuanced arguments and comes just short of suggesting that the term be abandoned completely. King has several concerns with the term Gnosticism. First, she notes that initially the term Gnostic was used pejoratively by early Christian polemicists against other Christians, deeming them as "heretical."[20] Therefore, King argues that "[w]hen modern historians adopt the strategies as well as the content of the polemicists' construction of heresy to define Gnosticism, they are not just reproducing the heresy of the polemicists; they are themselves propagating the politics of orthodoxy and heresy."[21] Scholars, then, appear to be tracking the ancient mud that was flying in many directions amongst early Christian communities through their scholarship whenever they use the term Gnosticism.

[18] Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 265.
[19] Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 265.
[20] King, *What is Gnosticism,* 53–54.
[21] King, *What is Gnosticism,* 54.

Using the term privileges an understanding of a single, unified, early Christian church in opposition to a heretical, marginal, other.

Another issue for King is that the phenomena and texts classified as Gnostic are extremely diverse and using the term supresses the variety. The typological approach, which many scholars use when discussing Gnostic phenomena, obscures the diversity not only amongst several texts but also within each text itself. King explains, "[t]he synthetic character of typological definitions also works to project a false and artificial uniformity onto what are quite varied phenomena. By erasing or at least submerging the differences among Gnostic phenomena, typology hides the problem of variety rather than resolves it."[22] When several texts are labelled as Gnostic this presupposes some sort of unity and one looks for similar features rather than the diversity amongst them.

Perhaps one of the most significant problems with Gnosticism is that scholars are inconsistent in distinguishing what constitutes something as Gnostic. In fact, as King points out, scholars are also in disagreement with respect to the number of characteristics required to define something as Gnostic. King observes that "[s]ome scholars emphasize a single characteristic as determinative, such as anticosmic dualism […] Others list a set of characteristics whose combination signals a phenomenon to be Gnostic."[23] This inconsistency leads to confusion and superficial results in scholarship concerning Gnostic phenomena, which in turn causes scholars to come to various conclusions concerning the Gnostic nature of a particular text, on which I will elaborate below.

[22] King, *What is Gnosticism,* 226–227.
[23] King, *What is Gnosticism,* 226.

2.1 No More Gnosticism? Not so fast!

While acknowledging the work of Williams and King, scholars in this field continue to employ the term Gnosticism in their own writings and have legitimated the use of the term in various ways. For instance, some scholars acknowledge that Gnosticism is a problematic category but use either scare quotes or refer to texts or phenomena as "so-called Gnostic" instead of simply "Gnostic." Antti Marjanen uses this approach in one of his articles, believing that simply acknowledging the problematic nature of the misnomer is sufficient. "For the sake of convenience, in this article I shall still call the second- and third- century Mary texts [...] gnostic, although I shall add to it the attributive adjective "so-called" in order to underline the problematic character of the term."[24] While drawing some attention to the fact the term is problematic, Marjanen does this not because of the problems of the term itself but rather because "Gnosticism has been redefined in various ways" by scholars.[25] Here is a clear example of the problems which Gnosticism creates for scholars. On the one hand, the typological approach has at some point produced a collection of texts which were considered Gnostic. On the other hand, it is clear that this typological approach has failed insofar as the criteria have fluctuated or changed so much that it has caused Marjanen to reconsider which texts he considers Gnostic. Yet instead of doing away entirely with the category, Marjanen simply adds "so-called" to the term and proceeds with his analysis as if nothing has changed.

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[24] Antti Marjanen, "The Mother of Jesus or the Magdalene? The Identity of Mary in the So-Called Gnostic Christian Texts," in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (ed. F. Stanley Jones; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 32.

[25] Marjanen, "The Mother of Jesus or the Magdalene," 32.

Other scholars maintain that Gnosticism is still a useful category in spite of its problematic nature. Esther De Boer in her work on the *Gospel of Mary*, a document not found in the Nag Hammadi Codices, uses the term to conveniently link the *Gospel of Mary* with Nag Hammadi texts. Immediately after explaining King's contentions with the typological definition of Gnosticism, De Boer legitimates her use of the term by stating:

> If we, however, should decide to call the *Gospel of Mary* a Gnostic gospel, this would be a modern way of categorizing it as related to those Nag Hammadi Codices and other documents that start from dualism in creation. We do not presuppose a more or less clearly defined Gnostic movement and we only call the dualism in creation a criterion to call the Gospel 'Gnostic' as a modern way of categorizing it in order to understand it better.[26]

For De Boer, her single criterion of defining something as Gnostic is dualism in creation. By focusing on this one aspect, she marginalizes any other phenomena. This approach, she suggests, will help to "understand [the *Gospel of Mary*] better."[27] However, she does not offer an explanation of how it will do so. One can surmise that this single criterion is common enough in the texts which De Boer seeks to study together and therefore rationalizes her choice of texts in her study. Although De Boer concedes that the term Gnostic is a modern category, she nevertheless uses a typological approach for the basis of selecting her sources. As a result, her research question of whether or not the *Gospel of Mary* is Gnostic is flawed right from the start.

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[26] Esther A. De Boer, *The Gospel of Mary: Listening to the Beloved Disciple* (London: Continuum, 2005), 34.

[27] De Boer, *The Gospel of Mary*, 34.

So far in this survey of scholarship, Marjanen and De Boer have not abandoned Gnosticism but have nevertheless acknowledged the problematic nature of the term. There are other scholars, however, who refute the arguments made by Williams and King and continue to use the term without any revision or reconsideration. Birger Pearson in his book *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* (2004) writes directly in response to Williams and King defending his use and study of Gnosticism. Pearson contends:

> [Karen King's *What is Gnosticism?*] consists essentially of a critique of those who have attempted to say something about Gnosticism, and accuses historians of religions such as myself of skewing their studies out of an apologetic attempt to define the boundaries of Christianity. I find no merit in her arguments. My reply to her, and to Williams, is that there was and is such a thing as Gnosticism. It it [sic] legitimate to talk about "Gnosticism" as "a religion" analogous to "Judaism" or "Christianity."[28]

Here Pearson is diametrically opposed to Williams and King. He flat-out rejects their conclusions and continues to think of Gnosticism as a distinct religious group from antiquity separate from Christianity. Pearson then proceeds to explain why there is no evidence of Gnostics self-identifying as such and suggests it is similarly insignificant to the absence of the term "Essene" in the Dead Sea Scrolls.[29]

Pearson presupposes a certain number of phenomena as being Gnostic. For him the *Apocryphon of John* serves as the best source for what he calls "the basic Gnostic myth."[30] He suggests that studying this text and "related texts allows the scholar to delineate features that, in terms of phenomenology of

[28] Birger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 213.
[29] Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity*, 214–215.
[30] Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity*, 217.

religion, are *clearly distinguishable* from anything found in Christianity, Judaism, or other religions of antiquity. To apply the category Gnosticism to the aggregate of these features is both justifiable and appropriate."[31] Pearson's rationale is sketchy at best, since it presupposes that "Christianity" and "Judaism" are homogenous entities, which is certainly not the case. Distinguishing Gnostic phenomena based on identifying something as not Christian or not Jewish would only produce valuable results if scholars had a clear understanding of what exactly constitutes Christian or Jewish phenomena or texts.

Another scholar who directly disputes the arguments of King is Christopher Tuckett. His book *The Gospel of Mary* (2007) has an entire chapter entitled "How Gnostic is the *Gospel of Mary*?" which, like De Boer's work, discusses the Gnostic nature of the *Gospel of Mary*. Aware of the problems associated with the term Gnosticism as set out by Karen King, Tuckett defends the use of the term especially with respect to the problem of variety. He argues:

> [V]ariety on its own may not be the only important factor in this discussion. One can equally point to enormous variety in both 'Christianity' and 'Judaism': both categories encompass a very wide range of different texts, ideas, and people; yet in each case there is often considered sufficient common ground to make the description of someone, or some text, as 'Christian' or 'Jewish' at least meaningful (even if there will always be areas of uncertainty, with debates about precise definitions and where one can/should place and boundary lines).[32]

At first glance, Tuckett's contention seems valid. There is indeed a large variety of phenomena classified as "Christian" or "Jewish." However, when one continues to read his book, Tuckett seems to fumble with the term Gnosticism in

[31] Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity*, 217; emphasis added.
[32] Christopher M. Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 45.

order to make it fit his scholarly interests. In order to designate something as Gnostic, Tuckett, like many scholars, suggests that the focus on *gnosis* or knowledge is a key component in categorizing something as Gnostic. "What may be just as central may be the focus on *gnosis,* knowledge. Salvation is primarily by 'knowing'; hence 'knowledge' takes the place of something like 'faith' in (other versions of) Christianity or the Law in Judaism."[33] Like Pearson, Tuckett is using an oversimplification of Christianity and Judaism. On the one hand, Tuckett points to the enormous variety of phenomena labelled as Christian or Jewish in order to defend his use of Gnosticism. On the other hand, he likens "knowledge" in "Gnosticism" to "faith" in "Christianity" which presupposes a less varied Christianity for his argument to work. The notion of faith as a means of salvation in Christianity would probably not have been seen as exclusive in early Christian communities. In fact, faith and knowledge, among other things, would have been part of early Christians' belief concerning salvation.

David Brakke in his book recently tried to revamp the term Gnostics in a different way than Pearson and Tuckett. Aware of the problematic nature of earlier approaches to Gnosticism, Brakke argues that Pearson's is "the easiest to criticize because it so faithfully reproduces all the problems of previous scholarship."[34] Furthermore, Brakke observes that Pearson merely proves that Gnostic documents can be viewed as "religious" but that does not necessarily

[33] Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary*, 49.
[34] David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 25.

mean that they make up a single, distinct religion.[35] Yet Brakke maintains that the term Gnostic need not be given up entirely. Instead, he suggests:

> [A] third group of scholars believes that it is possible to identify an early Christian movement whose members were known properly as "the Gnostics" and who share a distinct mythology and ritual. That is, the "Gnostics" (and perhaps, if we dare, "Gnosticism") can be retrieved as a *social* category, one that corresponds to a group that recognized itself as such—and was so recognized by others. I believe that it is possible identify and describe such a Gnostic movement without succumbing to the dangers of rigid boundaries, essentializing, and reification that concern scholars today.[36]

Even if scholars were to retain the term Gnostics as a "social category," the baggage that the term has accumulated would make it difficult to separate the newer use from the older, problematic typological application. To be sure, in her review of Brakke's book, King is skeptical about the attempt to rehabilitate the term Gnostics and ultimately says "If all these folks are Christians, why not call them such? That would go some distance toward escaping orthodoxy-heresy discourse and letting historiographical nomenclature express a more historically accurate scope for 'Christianities.'"[37] To be sure, the repeated designation of these texts or motifs as Gnostic and not as Gnostic-Christian, or simply Christian, reinforces the assumption that Gnostics were somehow distinctive enough from other Christians to warrant their own unique label.

Having looked at the arguments against Gnosticism by Williams and King as well as the rationale used by scholars who continue to use the term, it is clear that the total abandonment of the term has not occurred in scholarship. One of the

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[35] Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 25.
[36] Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 27; italics original.
[37] Karen L. King, review of David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity*, *HR* 52 (2013): 300–301.

questions that emerges is why do scholars still use the term? In other words, what do scholars have to gain by using the term? The most obvious answer is, of course, convenience. Abandoning a term which is so deeply rooted in scholarship would be a tedious task to say the least. Many articles, books, and anthologies have been published under the assumption that Gnosticism is a useful, meaningful, and unproblematic descriptive term. In fact the term has been used for so long and so uncritically that it seems most scholars rarely pay any attention to what they mean by Gnostic. De Boer herself observes "no scholar really elaborates on the Gnostic character of the *Gospel of Mary*. It seems as if the Gnostic character is taken for granted."[38] Although De Boer is referring to a specific text, it could easily be applied to many other Gnostic works. In De Boer's study of the *Gospel of Mary*, she suggests that this document has been labelled Gnostic because it was discovered in the Berlin Codex which has other Gnostic texts such as the *Apocryphon of John* and *Sophia of Jesus Christ*.[39] This is probably why the majority of the texts in the Nag Hammadi codices are considered Gnostic as well. If the majority of texts are considered to be Gnostic in a certain codex, so too are the others guilty, or Gnostic, by association. Nicola Denzey Lewis makes a similar observation:

> The problem with this sort of scholarship is that it lets a modern definition drive the way we read, understand, and classify an ancient document rather than letting it stand on its own merit. Scholars created and defined

[38] Esther A. De Boer, "A Gnostic Mary in the Gospel of Mary?" in *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium* (OLA 133; eds. M. Immerzeel and J. van der Vliet; Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 696–697.

[39] De Boer, "A Gnostic Mary," 697.

> what Gnosticism was, then searched ancient texts to find it (or not find it) there.[40]

2.2 When Gnosticism Fails: The *Gospel of Mary* and the *Gospel of Thomas*

In order to fully appreciate the extent to which the term Gnostic is constructed and applied inconsistently, this section will examine scholarly descriptions of two texts that have been labeled as Gnostic: the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Gospel of Thomas*. The aim of this section is to convincingly demonstrate the ambiguity that emerges even when only a single text is analyzed by a number of scholars within a Gnostic-or-not framework. Although I have selected only two texts, this exercise could be applied to any number of texts labeled as Gnostic and would produce similar results.

The first scholar's assessment of the *Gospel of Mary* I will examine is that of Esther De Boer. She suggests "[a]lthough many scholars regard the Gospel of Mary as a Gnostic text, the Gospel rather seems to start from a monistic, instead of dualistic, view on creation and its view on Nature and an opposite nature appears to be best understood in context of Jewish, Christian, and Stoic, rather than Gnostic, categories."[41] Thus, in the end De Boer suggests that the *Gospel of Mary* is not a Gnostic text at all and that "[t]his means that the Gospel of Mary cannot be seen as evidence of an early esteem of Mary Magdalene in Gnostic circles." Although De Boer suggests that the *Gospel of Mary* is not Gnostic, this

[40] Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism": Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17.
[41] De Boer, *The Gospel of Mary*, 58.

does not eliminate the use of the category, for she has been working under the presupposition that Gnostic is a useful term. Instead, arguing that the *Gospel of Mary* is not Gnostic only reifies the assertion that *there are* other texts which are Gnostic.

Another scholar, Antti Marjanen, originally thought that the *Gospel of Mary* should be considered a Gnostic text, but has since changed his opinion:

> I have redefined my conception of Gnosticism such that I no longer regard the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Dialogue of the Savior*, and the *Gospel of Mary* as gnostic. Even if the anthropology and the soteriology of these writings correspond to that of Gnosticism (or Platonism) with the emphasis on the return of the preexistent soul to the realm of light as a sign of ultimate salvation, none of these writings contains the other central feature of Gnosticism. They do not contain the idea of a cosmic world created by an evil and/or ignorant demiurge.[42]

For Marjanen, that the *Gospel of Mary* lacks the presence of a creation myth of the world by an evil demiurge—what he considers to be "a central feature of Gnosticism"—is enough to dismiss the *Gospel of Mary* as being Gnostic. Unlike De Boer, Marjanen does not mention the notion of dualism as being a deciding factor in his argument.

Thirdly, Christopher Tuckett contends directly with Marjanen's choice of criterion stating, "it may be inappropriate to focus solely on the presence or absence of a detailed myth about the activity of a demiurge figure in seeking to give some kind of 'definition' of 'Gnosticism.'"[43] Instead, Tuckett follows the work of Birger Pearson suggesting that

> [i]t is not only, or even not exclusively, the detailed myths (of a rewritten creation story) which are relevant: just as important is the broader picture

[42] Marjanen, "The Mother of Jesus or the Magdalene," 32 n.3.
[43] Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary*, 49.

> [...] What may be just as central may be the focus on *gnosis,* knowledge. Salvation is primarily by 'knowing'; hence 'knowledge' takes the place of something like 'faith' in (other versions of) Christianity or the Law in Judaism.[44]

Here, Tuckett creates a sort of dichotomy of salvation through faith versus salvation through knowledge. However, for most Christians at that time these two notions would not have been juxtaposed. Rather, in some cases they would have been seen as complementary, especially for Christian intellectuals.

Comparing the different criteria used by De Boer, Marjanen, and Tuckett, one can see just how difficult it is for scholars to pin down an exact definition of Gnosticism. Both De Boer and Marjanen conclude that the *Gospel of Mary* is not Gnostic. However, De Boer emphasizes the lack of dualism as her criterion, whereas Marjanen focuses on the absence of an evil demiurge as his deciding criterion. Conversely, Tuckett suggests that the *Gospel of Mary* is a Gnostic text. He dismisses Marjanen's suggestion that the evil demiurge should be thought of as an exclusive criterion, but instead uses it in combination with the notion of salvation through knowledge, what he believes to be common throughout Gnostic texts.

The *Gospel of Thomas* also holds an uncertain position on the Gnostic spectrum. Some of the logia are quite similar to the sayings of Jesus found in the canonical gospels and this subsequently throws a wrench into any preliminary attempts to argue that it is a typical Gnostic text. Yet there are certain features that some scholars use in order to paint the *Gospel of Thomas* as a Gnostic text. For

[44] Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary*, 49.

example, the text emphasizes self-transformation through knowledge of the sayings of Jesus and self-knowledge is presented as key to salvation.[45]

On the other hand, however, because it is a sayings tradition source, some have argued that the *Gospel of Thomas* can be dated as early as the mid first century or at the very least, contemporary with the canonical gospels.[46] As such some argue that it predates what later became identified as Gnosticism in the second century. Some other Gnostic elements are missing, such as the Gnostic myth, found in the *Apocryphon of John*, the mention of archons, and the notion of dualism in creation.[47] Marvin Meyer fumbles to try to fit the Gnostic adjective in his characterization of this text when he writes, "although the *Gospel of Thomas* has some features in common with Gnostic texts, it is not easily classified as a Gnostic work without considerable qualification. […] the *Gospel of Thomas* may most appropriately be considered a sayings gospel with an incipient Gnostic perspective."[48] Ultimately, Nicola Denzey Lewis suggests that "[a] better solution is simply to note that the [*Gospel of Thomas*] provides us with a wonderful example of how the term "Gnostic" is unhelpful, since it depends on shifting opinions on what constitutes Gnostic or Gnosticism in the first place."[49]

Jane Schaberg perhaps makes the most apologetic attempt to keep both of these texts under the Gnostic umbrella when she suggests, "some of the texts—for

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[45] Lewis, *Introduction to* "*Gnosticism,*" 106.

[46] Stephen Shoemaker, "Early Christian Apocryphal Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (eds. Susan Harvey Ashbrook and David G. Hunter; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 533.

[47] Lewis, *Introduction to* "*Gnosticism,*" 106.

[48] Marvin Meyer, "The Gospel of Thomas with the Greek Gospel of Thomas," in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperOne, 2007), 133.

[49] Lewis, *Introduction to* "*Gnosticism,*" 106.

example, the Gospel of Mary or the Gospel of Thomas—are not gnostic according to anything but the widest use of the term: that is, they are gnostic only in that they seem to share an emphasis on the saving significance of experiential religious knowledge".[50] Lengthening or broadening the definition of Gnostic allows her to keep the *Gospel of Mary* and *Gospel of Thomas* in the collection of texts she wishes to study. She must utilize this approach because, as this section has demonstrated, both texts maintain an indeterminate place in the conceptualization of Gnosticism. This overview concerning the assessment of the *Gospel of Mary* and *Gospel of Thomas*, has demonstrated that there is a large discrepancy with respect to their characterization as Gnostic or orthodox. The phenomena on which scholars focus along with their own personal definitions of Gnosticism are the largest contributing factors to this inconsistency. As such, labeling these texts as Gnostic or not for varying reasons seems like an unnecessary exercise in scholarship.

2.3 *Dialogue of the Saviour*: Gnostic or Not?

As a part of the Nag Hammadi Codices, the *Dialogue of the Saviour* has also been identified and studied as a Gnostic text. Yet due to the arbitrary and artificial nature of the definition of this category, scholars have sometimes struggled to specify what exactly in the texts makes the *Dialogue of the Saviour* Gnostic. This section provides a brief overview of the ways in which this document has been

[50] Jane Schaberg, *Mary Magdalene Understood* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 70.

interpreted and which phenomena found within the text serve as the deciding factors in determining whether or not it is a Gnostic text.

In volumes and anthologies concerning Gnosticism, the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is sometimes left out for any number of reasons. Pearson, for instance, does not include the *Dialogue of the Saviour* and five other Nag Hammadi texts in his *Ancient Gnosticism* because according to him they "are not "Gnostic" in any sense of the word, and so have been omitted for consideration here."[51] Madeleine Scopello, in an introduction to the *Dialogue of the Saviour* in a Nag Hammadi text collection, wrestles with the question of the *Dialogue of the Saviour*'s Gnostic characterization:

> Is the *Dialogue of the Savior* a Gnostic text? The question remains open because on the one hand the treatise is characterized by typical Gnostic themes, but on the other hand it offers points of view that are shared with orthodox theology and doctrine. A balanced perspective of the tractate is given by Pierre Létourneau, who concludes that the *Dialogue of the Savior* belongs to a world of thought between what is Gnostic and what is orthodox.[52]

On the one hand, Scopello notes that the *Dialogue of the Saviour* contains some Gnostic phenomena such as bridal chamber imagery, garments of life, and the presence of archons.[53] On the other hand, she is puzzled by the absence of a creation myth featuring Sophia and the fact that the author does not hold a pessimistic view of the world based on the presence of an inferior deity.[54]

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[51] Birger Albert Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 2.

[52] Madeleine Scopello, "The Dialogue of the Savior," in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperOne, 2007), 299.

[53] Scopello, "The Dialogue of the Savior," 299.

[54] Scopello, "The Dialogue of the Savior," 299.

Not surprisingly, scholars have been unable to reach a consensus regarding the issue of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* being Gnostic or an orthodox Christian text.[55] As such, this study will not presuppose a Gnostic nature or theology when discussing and evaluating the text in order to allow the text to speak for itself rather than have this misconstrued category govern the discussion. The aim of this approach is to strive for the most unhindered assessment possible of Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*.

2.4 The Long-Standing After-Effects of Gnosticism

Although the labelling of texts as Gnostic may ultimately seem only somewhat problematic, this process has had far-reaching effects. Scholars have formed a counter-canon of texts in relation to what has traditionally been considered the orthodox or normative New Testament. This canon of Gnostic texts, perceived as the other, necessarily needs the corpus of the New Testament writings to exist. Glen Fairen suggests that scholars use Gnosticism to formulate the lines around Western Religious traditions. Fairen explains:

> By working within a discourse whose sole purpose is to shore up the boundaries of "Western" religion, scholars can only construct Gnosticism as that which is "other." Despite having the Nag Hammadi Library, the scholarly construction of Gnosticism needs "normative" Christianity (in particular the New Testament) to have any contextual meaning. No matter how Gnosticism is conceptualized as—"heretical" or "foreign" in Protestant and Colonialist discourses or as "legitimately Christian" within a feminist hermeneutic or as a deviant post-Christian innovation—questions pertaining to it can only be asked in one way: how it related to

[55] See for example the table in Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism,"* 18; Lewis' table is based on Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 47.

"orthodoxy" as Christianity's "Other."[56]

This could be another underlying reason for scholars' continual use of the term Gnosticism. Whatever does not fall neatly into what is considered to be normative Christianity can be placed into the ambiguously defined and ever changing category of Gnosticism. What results is akin to what Burton Mack in his influential essay "On Redescribing Christian Origins" calls "the ring of fire" that is, the orthodox understanding of a normative, monolithic Christianity based largely on the New Testament canon.[57] Mack observes that this functions as a catch-22 insofar as the "New Testament is taken as proof for the conventional picture of Christian origins, and the conventional picture is taken as proof for the way in which the New Testament came to be written."[58] In the case of Gnosticism, there appears to be a Gnostic ring of fire which protects the conception of Gnosticism and the various texts labelled as such from being reconfigured in scholarship.

The fact that Gnosticism exists only in relation to an orthodox conception of Christianity causes many problems. Most significantly, it leads scholars to believe that there were Gnostic communities who composed Gnostic texts to express their Gnostic beliefs. If a few of these Gnostic texts appear to have even remotely similar phenomena, a domino effect occurs where generalizations about Gnostic communities are made. These generalizations occur most frequently in

[56] Glen J. Fairen, *As Below, so Above: Apocalypticism, Gnosticism and the Scribes of Qumran and Nag Hammadi* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 93–94.
[57] See Burton L. Mack, "On Redescribing Christian Origins," *MTSR* 8 (1996): 247–269.
[58] Mack, "On Redescribing," 251.

relation to characteristics of normative Christianity which are thought to be opposite to those of Gnosticism.

2.5 A Solution to Gnosticism?

While many scholars have attempted to qualify their use of the term, and others have called for the abandonment of the category, few have proposed solutions to circumvent the use of the term, or replacement term, for Gnosticism. The purpose of this section is to get at the methodological issues below the surface level of the use of the category. Subsequently, it will offer a potential approach for future studies in hopes that Gnosticism or any replacement categories will not be required to carry out scholarship in the area of non-canonical early Christian texts.

Ultimately the largest underlying problem for Gnosticism is that it attempts to link a large number of diverse data on the basis of inconsistent criteria. The result, more often than not, are banal, cursory analyses of the documents being studied. Bruce Lincoln highlights the issues with comparing such a large quantity of data:

> The more examples compared, the more superficial and preemptory is the analysis of each. In such cases, researchers regularly turn their understanding of a few key data into a template for treating less familiar examples. The deception and self-deception involved in such ventures is of the same sort that typifies all ideology: misrepresenting a part for the whole.[59]

Gnosticism, which is used as an umbrella term for many texts, therefore provides an unwarranted superficial analysis of each text. The *Apocryphon of John* is

[59] Bruce Lincoln, *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 122.

almost always used as the template for comparing any other Gnostic texts for it is thought to be the most representative of all Gnostic texts.

To be sure, King observes that it has been used by scholars as "the signature example of "Gnosticism"" and that it "has garnered a place of privilege in modern descriptions of Gnosticism" because it most closely resembles the beliefs various heresiologists were refuting in their accounts.[60] This approach in itself, as already noted, is extremely problematic since "these heretical lines of transmission were in most cases invented by orthodox heresiographers, not by their subjects, the alleged heretics."[61] In other words, the reason why the *Apocryphon of John* was chosen as the signature text is not because it was written by self-proclaimed Gnostics, but rather because it most closely resembles the accounts of those condemning or opposing the Gnostics. Later it is used as the measuring stick by which all other texts are measured to see how Gnostic they really are. Moreover, from the comparison perspective, focusing on the similarities found within *Apocryphon of John* and other texts necessarily ignores their immensely diverse features.

So then how does one go about studying these extra-canonical texts without using the term Gnosticism or Gnostic? It seems that these labels are employed in order justify the comparison or grouping of ideas or motifs found in

[60] Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 258.

[61] John B. Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and Early Christian Patterns* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998), 151.

certain texts.[62] Bruce Lincoln has recently advocated a new form of comparison where he states:

> [I]t is time we entertained comparatism of weaker and more modest sorts that (a) focus on a relatively small number of comparanda that the researcher can study closely; (b) are equally attentive to relations of similarity and those of difference; (c) grant equal intelligence to all parties considered; and (d) are attentive to the social, historical, and political contexts and subtexts of religious and literary texts.[63]

Following Lincoln's advice could only aid scholars of Gnosticism. Instead of attempting to survey all those texts once labeled as Gnostic, this could be done solely with a few texts that could be studied more closely. Instead of merely highlighting similarities, as most scholars of Gnosticism are wont to do, being cognizant of data that are both different and similar when comparing texts would reduce superficial typologies. Lincoln's third point—perhaps the most important—requires that "equal dignity and intelligence" are given to all comparanda. This means no longer giving the texts of the New Testament an elevated or *a priori* position in comparison to non-canonical texts.

Lincoln's last point also applies to scholars of Gnosticism, namely those who regard it as a religion distinct from Christianity. For example, not giving due diligence to the historical context surrounding the data, especially to the writings of heresiologists, skews analyses. If we acknowledge the fact that these early Christian writers felt threatened by these other groups, not because they were a separate religion but rather because they also regarded themselves as Christians, then scholars would realize that these Gnostics were actually more similar to these

[62] For example, see above De Boer's rationale for employing the use of Gnosticism p. 9.
[63] Lincoln*, Gods and Demons,* 123.

early Christian writers than previously thought. Jonathan Z. Smith provides an excellent description of such rhetoric:

> While the "other" may be perceived as being either LIKE-US or NOT-LIKE-US, he is, in fact, most problematic when the is TOO-MUCH-LIKE-US, or when he claims to BE-US. It is here, to invoke the language of a theory of ritual, that we are not so much concerned with the drama of "expulsion," but with the more mundane and persistent processes of "micro-adjustment." This is not matter of the "far" but, preeminently, of the "near." The problem is not alterity, but similarity—at times, even identity. A "theory of the other" is but another way of phrasing a "theory of the self."[64]

Following Smith's logic, the reason that the heresiologists were so concerned with Gnostic writings was not because they were so radically different, but rather because they were too similar to them. Their writings were a way of separating themselves from the "TOO-MUCH-LIKE-US" early Christians responsible for producing texts such as the *Apocryphon of John*.

Abandoning a term such as Gnosticism is not completely unheard of in the field of religious studies. A similar suggestion is made in Smith's essay "Trading Places" where he argues that the use of the term "magic" be abandoned. He notes that it is most often referenced as a "privative" definition in comparison to terms such as "religion" and "science" where religion and science are seen as newer and magic is seen as an older concept. Furthermore he writes "if one cannot specify the distinctions with precision […] the difference makes no difference at all."[65] This holds true with Gnosticism insofar as Gnosticism is compared to Christianity as a sort of other or marginal group of Christianity. In other words, Gnosticism

[64] Jonathan Z. Smith, "What Difference a Difference Makes," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 275.

[65] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Trading Places," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (eds. Marvin W. Meyer and Paul Mirecki; Leiden: E J Brill, 1995), 15.

does not stand alone on its own; it only exists in relation to a presupposed normative Christianity. Moreover because scholars are inconsistent in their use of criteria, the perceived differences amongst Gnostic texts do not produce any valuable information. Similarly, Christianity itself is immensely ambiguous as a descriptive category too. Comparing the differences between Gnosticism and Christianity, therefore, make no distinguishable difference.

After the Gnostic label has been peeled off from scholarship, we are left with a large amount of data that is filled with variety and differences. As such, scholars are forced to legitimate or explain their reasons for the comparison of this data. A self-reflexive approach wherein one must indicate their rationale behind comparing a number of data would also be an asset. As Lincoln argues:

> Comparison is never innocent but is always interested, and the interests of the researcher (which are never arbitrary, exclusively intellectual, or fully conscious) inevitably condition (a) definition of the issues and categories to be considered (b) selection of the examples judged relevant, (c) evaluation of these data (including the relative dignity and importance accorded to each), and (d) the ultimate conclusions.[66]

Bringing to the forefront the fact that comparison serves the interests of the researcher would encourage more transparency and self-reflexivity in scholarship. With Gnosticism, one could almost hide behind this term without having to give an account for a particular definition: a definition of Gnosticism is often just assumed. Moreover, in comparison the examples are not selected at random, but instead are adjudicated by the researcher as to whether or not they serve his or her own interests. For example, a scholar may decide to call the *Gospel of Thomas* Gnostic in order to legitimate his or her comparison to another Gnostic text. On

[66] Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, 121.

the other hand, one might decide the opposite, that it is not Gnostic, in order legitimate its comparison to the sayings document Q or the canonical gospels. Relying on these dubious terms relieves the researcher from having to explain the rationale behind the chosen data set for comparison. Similarly, the Gnostic texts are often marginalized in relation to the canonical texts: the latter is often *a priori*, fixed example to which all other extra canonical texts are compared. All this inevitably leads to certain, misguided, biased conclusions.

To be fair, it is certain that all researchers have their own interests that necessarily govern the examples and data they choose to compare. This, of course, is not the problem. What is problematic, however, is invoking ambiguous categories such as Gnosticism in order to circumvent self-reflexivity in scholarship. Therefore, removing the category Gnosticism would be helpful insofar as it would force more thorough explanations of method and would give the reader clearer insight into the background behind the researcher's conclusions. This would be an asset especially in cases where scholars seem to be patrolling the boundaries of an orthodox definition and understanding of Christianity.

In sum, more meaningful studies can be done if the Gnostic label is removed. Starting with decreasing the amount of data studied would simultaneously provide more thorough and closer readings of data. Incorporating the approach to comparison advocated by Bruce Lincoln that includes treating comparanada equally, being aware of both similarities and differences, and being cognizant of social and historical contexts would offer an excellent framework in which to situate the study of these texts. Similarly, abandoning the term would

force scholars to be more forthcoming with their particular interests or investments in the data being compared. All of this would pave the way for fruitful research without relying on the term Gnosticism. Perhaps the best advice regarding the category Gnosticism comes from Michael Williams:

> Louis Painchaud recently expressed the opinion that it is increasingly apparent that full advantage of the study of Nag Hammadi and related texts will be realized only when one "dims the switch" (*mettre en veilleuse*) on the category of Gnosticism. *I would say we should at least consider turning it off completely, to see what might only then be visible in the natural light of the sources themselves.*[67]

To this end, this study's examination of the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, will turn off the switch completely on Gnosticism so that the natural light of the text itself may be fully visible and not highlighted gratuitously by any Gnostic spotlights that were previously shone on it.

[67] Michael A. Williams, "Was There a Gnostic Religion? Strategies for a Clearer Analysis," in *Was There a Gnostic Religion?* (ed. Antti Marjanen; Helsinki; Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005) 78–79; emphasis added.

3. The Dangers of a 'Dubious Category': The Misconstrued Gnostic View of Women[68]

The category of Gnosticism has filtered its way down into numerous other areas, for instance, the study of women in early Christian communities. The scholarship of early Christianity has usually portrayed women as having limited roles in their communities. These conclusions have been largely derived from the New Testament. For example, scholars note that Jesus of the synoptic gospels did not seek out any female disciples, and primarily associated with males. The Pastoral epistles have also been used to suggest that women were not able to participate as equals to men within the church. The most widely used passage comes from the Pseudo-Pauline epistle 1 Timothy which writes: "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim 2:11–14).[69] This passage has been used by scholars to suggest that women were suppressed and not allowed to teach or have any significant role in the orthodox Christian community. In fact, Koester uses this exact passage to highlight the difference between the Pastoral Epistles' view on women compared to that of the *Dialogue of the Saviour*:

> [*The Dialogue of the Saviour*] is thus taking a position that is diametrically opposed to the Pastoral Epistles of the New Testament: 1 Tim 2:13–15 asserts that women will be saved by bearing children. Moreover, the

[68] A previous version of this section was written as a final paper for a course with Dr. Willi Braun (Winter 2012).

[69] All Biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version.

> Dialogue of the Saviour features Mary as the most prominent of the disciples of Jesus in the discussion with the Lord, while 1 Tim 2:11–12 demands explicitly that women should be silent in the assembly of the church.

Similarly, the broader gender language in the epistle is used to draw a distinction between the view of women in the Bible and the view of them in non-canonical texts such as the *Gospel of Mary*. After outlining the view of women's roles and gendered language in 1 Timothy, Robert Royalty argues that:

> Controversy over women's leadership and the value of women's teaching in the Christian community discursively connects the Gospel of Mary to the Pastoral Epistles. The Gospel of Mary in essence re-narrates the strictures and prohibitions against women in the controversy among apostles over Mary's teaching, challenging the ideology of the Pastorals on several key points.[70]

The works of early Church fathers have also contributed to the assumption that women had limited roles in the normative Church. For instance, Tertullian admonishes Thecla for baptizing herself and teaching, which Tertullian himself argues is against what Paul teaches in his letters.[71] Using sources such as these, scholars have formulated a superficial conclusion that women in normative or mainstream Christian communities were not able to participate in the same roles as men.[72]

Counter to this orthodox portrayal of women has been the assertion that Gnostic communities held women in high esteem and even granted them

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[70] Robert M. Royalty, *The Origin of Heresy: a History of Discourse in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 129.

[71] See Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 17. *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism* (trans. Ernest Evans; London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.), 1964).

[72] See for example Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 75–76.

leadership roles.[73] Many Gnostic texts have been used to establish and support this argument. For instance, the *Gospel of Mary* depicts Mary as a leader among the male disciples and as someone who received special teaching from Jesus. This text also features animosity from the disciple Peter directed at Mary. Elaine Pagels suggests that based on the tension between Peter and Mary in this text that "women's activity challenged the leaders of the orthodox community, who regarded Peter as their spokesperson."[74] Pagels also notes that many Gnostic texts incorporate a feminine image of the divine. She observes that "[i]n the simplest form, many gnostic Christians correlate their description of God in both masculine and feminine terms with a complementary description of human nature."[75] Based on these texts and motifs, Pagels surmises that "Gnostic Christians often take the principle of equality between men and women into the social and political structures of their communities."[76]

To be fair, Pagels herself acknowledges that there are exceptions to this generalization of a dichotomy between orthodox and Gnostic views of women. "Gnostics were not unanimous in affirming women—nor were the orthodox unanimous in denigrating them."[77] She notes that Gnostic texts such as the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, the *Paraphrase of Shem*, and the *Dialogue of the*

[73] See Antti Marjanen, "How Egalitarian Was the Gnostic View of Women? Mary Magdalene Texts in the Nag Hammadi and Related Documents," in *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies; Leiden, August 27 - September 2, 2000* (OLA 133; eds. M. Immerzeel, J. van der Vliet, M. Kersten, and C. van Zoest; Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 779–791.

[74] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 77.

[75] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 79.

[76] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 79.

[77] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 79.

Saviour all employ negative female imagery.[78] Moreover, she observes that in the *Gospel of Thomas*, females must be made male in order to transcend their human nature and be worthy of life.[79] Although Pagels does admit there are certain exceptions to the distinct dichotomy which she initially proposed, her initial framework of Gnostic versus orthodox tendencies overshadows any qualifications and continues to permeate throughout scholarly discourse.

Although Pagels' book was written over thirty years ago, the tendency to suggest that Gnostic women were esteemed in their communities is still prevalent in modern scholarship. April D. DeConick's *Holy Misogyny: Why Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter* (2011) frequently employs the term Gnostic and the same texts which Pagels used decades earlier. While DeConick distinguishes between different forms of Gnosticism, such as "Valentinian," much of the rhetoric and conclusions are the same. She uses the androgynous creation story in Genesis coupled with the Gnostic concept of females becoming male and the *Gospel of Mary* to argue that women in Gnostic circles had leadership roles. Combining all these concepts, DeConick argues:

> So what we have in the Valentinian Gnostic community is the argument that through marriage, women are able to achieve the primal androgyny of the first "man," thus becoming "male." This "male" conversion allowed the women Gnostics to stand up as church leaders alongside the men, giving sacraments and delivering homilies like the "male" Mary Magdalene in the *Gospel of Mary*. Given this interpretation of the Genesis story, it should not be surprising that, in the *Gospel of Mary*, Mary's leadership role is threatening to Peter and Andrew, who represent the

[78] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 79–81.
[79] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 81.

opinion of the Apostolic Church.[80]

DeConick continues to use the same Gnostic versus orthodox approach in her scholarship, albeit with slightly different terminology. Instead of simply using Gnostic she uses "Valentinian Gnostic" and instead of orthodox, she uses "Apostolic Church." Nevertheless, the false dichotomy and distinction remain the same: Gnostic communities have a positive or at least egalitarian view of women, whereas orthodox communities restrict or forbid the role of women. These conclusions inevitably stem from the typological approach, which has formed the "Gnostic ring of fire" of texts. Much like the normative view of Christianity, the Gnostic tradition is clearly deeply embedded in scholarship.

Recently, however, there have been some scholars who have noticed the problematic simplification of the Gnostic view of women. Anne McGuire argues that female imagery in Gnostic texts may or may not correspond directly to women's actual roles in these communities.[81] McGuire is also thorough in her analysis of various Gnostic texts and distinguishes between the various types of female imagery. For instance, she employs the use of three categories: "(1) divine beings, such as Barbelo, Sophia, and her daughter Zoe; (2) mythic women of primordial times, such as Eve and her daughter Norea; and (3) legendary women of more recent historical times, such as Jesus' disciples Mary Magdalene, Salome and Martha."[82] These categories help McGuire formulate a more nuanced analysis

[80] April D. DeConick, *Holy Misogyny: Why the Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 141.

[81] Anne McGuire, "Women, Gender and Gnosis in Gnostic Texts and Traditions," in *Women and Christian Origins* (eds. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 259.

[82] McGuire, "Women, Gender, and Gnosis," 267.

of Gnostic views of women. The distinction between these female characters enables her to interpret the female imagery at different levels recognizing that the audience and author would probably interpret divine beings such as Sophia differently than they would characters such as Mary Magdalene. Sophia would represent some sort of mythical figure whereas Mary might represent for the audience an actual historical woman whom they could imitate. McGuire concludes her study by saying:

> I hope [this study] has demonstrated that those who would unify these texts and traditions under a single category (like "gnosticism"), under a singular attitude toward women, or under a single use of gender run the risk of ignoring the diversity of these tests. At the same time, they fail to understand the complex ways these texts served their ancient readers, particularly in legitimating particular conceptions of gnosis as the key to the meaning of scripture, experience, and salvation.[83]

McGuire's conclusion draws attention to the issue of putting such a wide variety of data under one term or under one interpretation of gender. Moreover, she suggests that the ancient readers' use of these texts did not serve a single purpose but rather was also multifaceted. While McGuire's study is a step in the right direction, the use of the term Gnosticism throughout the essay continues to marginalize the phenomena within the ongoing Gnostic versus orthodox discourse prevalent in scholarship.

This survey of scholarship has demonstrated the ways in which the term Gnosticism has influenced scholarly perceptions of Gnostic communities and in particular Gnostic views of women. Starting with Pagels' scholarship from over three decades ago and ending with DeConick's much more recent book, the

[83] McGuire, "Women, Gender, and Gnosis," 288.

Gnostic and orthodox discourse continues to influence scholars' study of women in early Christianity. Even with more nuanced studies by McGuire and Marjanen, the Gnostic misnomer remains firmly intact governing the sources and motifs which scholars study.

3.1 The Gnostic Mary?

One of the most prominent female characters featured in scholarly assessments of Gnostic women is a character named Mary, who appears in several Gnostic texts. Her characterization and role are frequently used by scholars to extract data concerning the Gnostic perception of women. For example, Marjanen's approach focuses on the character of Mary Magdalene in Gnostic texts in order to draw conclusions about Gnostic perceptions of women as a whole. An important observation he makes is that "Gnostic texts give very little explicit information about concrete circumstances within Gnostic communities. We read hardly anything about their organization or composition."[84] Nevertheless, Marjanen argues that some information can be extracted based on the role of Mary in these texts.

Throughout his analysis, Marjanen finds conflicting portrayals of Mary and gender imagery. For instance, in the texts the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, and *Pistis Sophia*, Mary, who is a follower of Jesus in each text, comes under attack from male disciples. However, Marjanen observes "the authors of the

[84] Marjanen, "How Egalitarian," 781.

texts unequivocally side with Mary Magdalene."[85] Yet in other texts such as the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, and the *First Apocalypse of James*, any prominence given to Mary is marred by the use of negative female imagery.[86] The conflicting portrayals in these Gnostic texts lead Marjanen to conclude that:

> If these texts can be used to draw any conclusions about the social reality behind them they seem to imply that the discussion about women's role in religious groups was also a matter of inner-Gnostic debate. […] To sum up, in light of the so-called Gnostic Mary Magdalene texts the thesis that early Gnostic groups displayed a much more consistent and unequivocal egalitarian Christian view of women than their mainstream counterparts needs some qualification.[87]

Marjanen, like McGuire, provides a more nuanced and diverse reading of women's roles in Gnostic communities. He also draws attention to the immense varieties and contradictions found in texts that depict Mary as one of the featured female characters. At the same time, however, Marjanen falls into the same trap of perpetuating the Gnostic versus orthodox scholarly discourse.

Esther DeBoer notes that scholarship concerning the Gnostic Mary has been preoccupied with two theories: "(1) gnostic authors have constructed a Gnostic Mary Magdalene using the biblical portrait of her as a vehicle for Gnostic teaching, and, (2) biblical authors neglect the important role of Mary Magdalene, of which Gnostic authors preserved evidence."[88] Therefore the Gnostic Mary, much like Gnosticism itself, rises up from the canonical versus non-canonical dichotomy.

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[85] Marjanen, "How Egalitarian," 789.
[86] Marjanen, "How Egalitarian," 783–785.
[87] Marjanen, "How Egalitarian," 791.
[88] De Boer, *The Gospel of Mary*, 10.

Jane Schaberg also creates a Gnostic or Apocryphal Mary based on the Nag Hammadi texts in which she appears. She argues that these texts give "Mary Magdalene a startlingly prominent role, startlingly unlike the roles she plays in the legends and in the Christian Testament."[89] But is the difference really that "startling"? In her thorough study of Mary Magdalene in both canonical and extracanonical texts, Ann Graham Brock argues that Mary Magdalene had a similar role in both categories of texts. She explains:

> Another false dichotomy perpetuated in scholarship on these narratives is that Mary Magdalene became an authority figure for heretics, especially those called "gnostics," while Peter became the hero for those who eventually declared their traditions "orthodox." This study, however, has gone to special lengths to show that the claim for Mary Magdalene's apostolic status, rooted as it is in three of the four canonical gospels, is as "orthodox" as Peter's. In only one of those four gospels does she not receive a commission to tell others the good news.[90]

Therefore, Brock's argument clearly suggests that the Gnostic versus orthodox dichotomy does not stand, in particular with the image of Mary Magdalene, who so often is used by scholars to develop conclusions about Gnostic views of women.

Even though she sets out several cautions about using the term Gnostic, Schaberg nevertheless, like most scholars, continues to use it throughout her analysis.[91] For example, she asks the reader to keep in mind that "all or even most of the elements of the above descriptions do not appear in every gnostic text."[92] In her study of the Gnostic Mary, she sets out nine elements that she believes

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[89] Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 121.

[90] Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 171.

[91] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 121–203.

[92] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 124.

constitutes this character.[93] It is worthwhile to note that Schaberg's elements of Mary stem from the *Gospel of Mary*. This is problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, Mary in the *Gospel of Mary* is never named Mary Magdalene,[94] yet Schaberg's interpretation is based on this particular Mary. Secondly many scholars do not view the *Gospel of Mary* as a Gnostic text.[95] Schaberg herself suggests it is only Gnostic in the broadest sense of the term. As such, it seems strange that a possibly a non-Gnostic text is the primary source used for her Gnostic Mary construction. Thirdly, Schaberg herself wonders if separating and comparing the canonical versus apocryphal Mary is even a good idea.[96] These issues lead one to wonder if the whole premise of the Gnostic Mary is based on a solid foundation or unstable, artificial pillars.

Moreover, what seems to be overlooked in these discussions regarding the Gnostic Mary versus canonical Mary Magdalene comparison is the equally superficial construction of the canonical Mary. No one ever speaks of a canonical Jesus, but rather it is naturally assumed that each gospel presents a different character of Jesus. Why, then, do scholars overlook the individuality of the canonical gospels in order to construct a canonical Mary Magdalene? Even within the New Testament gospels, Mary Magdalene has varying degrees of prominence

[93] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 129.

[94] See below for a detailed discussion concerning the unnamed Mary in non-canonical texts, pp. 43–60.

[95] For example, Antti Marjanen and Esther De Boer, see above, pp. 15–17.

[96] Schaberg (*The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 202) self-reflexively wonders: "Perhaps it would have been better in this book to make no chapter division between apocrypha and canon, to treat the Christian Testament narratives that mention Mary Magdalene somehow side by side with the texts treated in this chapter."

and responsibilities with the result that it is difficult to even formulate a unified orthodox Mary.

Similarly, even when texts such as the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Gospel of Thomas* are not found in the same collection, why are the Marys of these texts linked together and subsequently labeled as Gnostic or Apocryphal? Surely we are able to recognize that connecting these texts on the basis of the name of one character and suggesting that this in some way constitutes a distinguishable, monolithic character reproduced throughout other non-canonical texts is highly speculative and problematic. Much in the same way that the adjective Gnostic carries with it many presuppositions and baggage, so too does the character of the Gnostic Mary. When she appears in what are deemed Gnostic text, her presence is immediately noted and she is subsequently granted a place of privilege even if it is not warranted.[97]

Much like the way the *Apocryphon of John* serves as the template for comparing Gnostic texts, the *Gospel of Mary* appears to be the template for the study of the Gnostic Mary. In some cases it seems that the prominent role of Mary in this text governs how she is perceived by scholars in other documents. Put differently, Mary's supposed esteem in other texts appears to depend on the role in the *Gospel of Mary*. Without this text one wonders if Mary would be regarded as such a prominent figure in the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Dialogue of the Saviour*.

[97] See below on the discussion of Mary in the *Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 41–42.

A closer analysis of the *Gospel of Thomas* reveals that Mary's role might not be that significant. Out of the 114 logia, her name appears twice. In the first instance she asks Jesus a question in logion 21: "Mary said to Jesus: Whom are your disciples like?" Jesus then answers with a lengthy response and unlike in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, Mary does follow up with a comment. Moreover, in his response, Jesus uses the second person plural pronoun, not the second person feminine singular pronoun. Therefore, he is not even addressing her specifically but rather an audience of multiple people. How much significance should be attributed to this question of Mary especially knowing that the name was quite common?

The second instance in which Mary appears in the *Gospel of Thomas* is logion 114:

> Simon Peter said to them, "Mary should leave us, for females don't deserve life." Jesus said, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven." (*Gospel of Thomas* 114)[98]

This is the passage that receives the most attention concerning Mary from the *Gospel of Thomas*, yet she is not even involved directly in the conversation. Instead, she is simply named by Peter and subsequently Jesus appears to stand up for her insofar as he says she is capable of being made male and therefore being worthy of the kingdom of heaven. At the very least, it can be concluded that she is in the presence of Peter and Jesus. Does this mere fact warrant a positive assessment of her esteem in this text? Given that no attributes are mentioned in

[98] Marvin Meyer trans. "The Gospel of Thomas," in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperOne, 2007), 153.

this passage or in logion 21, it could be that the character Mary exists only because of the commonality of the name at that time. On the other hand, one can argue that Peter's animosity towards Mary here should be linked to the similar situation in the *Gospel of Mary* where he questions her authority, thereby joining these two Marys together. However, in the case of the *Gospel of Thomas* Mary does not instigate the attack by saying anything, at least not immediately prior to logion 114.

With these considerations in mind, it is important to question whether scholars might have been giving too much esteem to the Mary in texts such as the *Gospel of Thomas* on account of her major role in the *Gospel of Mary*. The mention of her in two out of 114 logia seems to be a stretch. The *Gospel of Mary* therefore has led scholars on a misguided quest to seek out other strong Mary characters. In the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, Mary speaks more frequently than she does in the *Gospel of Thomas* and she is given praise by the final redactor and Jesus. In comparison to the other male disciples mentioned in the text, however, she seems to be portrayed equally. Here, as with the *Gospel of Thomas*, it is difficult to see Mary functioning as anything more than a female disciple character required to address certain issues presented by the author. If another female name was used, how would this change the interpretation of the text? It would not be possible to link this character with the Mary of the *Gospel of Mary*, and therefore her portrayal might not be as positive or significant as it currently stands.

3.2 Mary: Magdalene, Mother, or Another?[99]

Another issue that has not received enough attention is the fact that Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is never specifically identified as Mary Magdalene. This fact does not deter scholars from assuming that this character is meant to refer to her and not Mary the mother of Jesus or even some other Mary. This section looks at why Mary Magdalene seems to be the leading candidate for the identification of Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* as well as the ways in which this assumption has governed the interpretation of her character in the text.

In each of the four canonical gospels, Mary Magdalene is explicitly identified and maintained as separate from Mary the mother of Jesus. In these documents, she plays the role of a follower of Jesus. Her most prominent moment comes in the Gospel of John where she alone is the first one to see Jesus after his resurrection. With the exception of some non-canonical texts such as the *Gospel of Philip* and portions of *Pistis Sophia*, many texts outside the New Testament do not specify either Mary Magdalene or Mary mother of Jesus but instead simply use a character named "Mary." It is this canonical understanding of Mary Magdalene, as a follower of Jesus that governs the perceptions of scholars who study the unspecified Mary in non-canonical texts. Stephen Shoemaker calls her representation in the New Testament "a trump card capable of cutting through all of the complications to connect the apocryphal Mary with the Magdalene."[100]

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[99] An earlier version of this section was presented at the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies annual meeting May 29, 2012, in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

[100] Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Jesus' Gnostic Mom: Mary of Nazareth and the Gnostic Mary Traditions," in *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother* (ed. Deirdre Good; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 160.

Mary is not the only one who has her identity dictated by the New Testament. Judas in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is most often identified with Judas Thomas, not Judas Iscariot.[101] Is this because the Judas of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is not portrayed as the evil betrayer of Jesus as in the canonical gospels but rather merely a benign participant in the discussion? Marvin Meyer suggests that the tendency to associate Judas with the "twin" is based on the texts affinity with the *Gospel of Thomas* and other so-called Thomasine texts that mention the character of Judas Thomas.[102] In light of the discovery of the *Gospel of Judas*, however, Meyer also notes that identifying this Judas with Judas Iscariot is a possibility. He suggests this based on the fact that in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* "much of this presentation of Judas coheres, in general, with the depiction of Judas Iscariot in the *Gospel of Judas*."[103] As seems to be the case with the unspecified Mary, the canonical portrayal of the Judas Iscariot seems to govern the understanding of this unspecified character. However, in the case of Judas it is the *lack* of any distinctive attributes related to Judas Iscariot of the canonical gospels that necessarily leads scholars to opt for the only other choice of Judas Thomas.[104]

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[101] Scopello, "The Dialogue of the Savior," 298, states that Judas is most likely Judas Thomas, but that "Judas Iscariot is also a possibility."

[102] Marvin W. Meyer, *Judas: The Definitive Collection of Gospels and Legends About the Infamous Apostle of Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 69.

[103] Meyer, *Judas*, 70. Judas Iscariot in the *Gospel of Judas* is viewed as a hero by Elaine Pagels and Karen King in their analysis; see *Reading Judas: The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity* (New York: Viking, 2007). April DeConick, on the other hand, sees him as a villain (*The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* [London: Continuum, 2009]).

[104] There are also a few other characters named Judas in the New Testament including the one described in John 14:22 as "Judas (not Iscariot)," and in Acts 9:11 as the man who houses Paul. There is, however, no Judas Thomas in the New Testament. Therefore, the identification with Judas Thomas of the non-canonical texts seems to result from the absence of any characteristics or literary features linking him to any of the Judas characters in the New Testament.

The issue of the unspecified Mary has not gone unnoticed. There is an entire volume entitled *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* published in 2003. Many scholars in this volume identify the unspecified Mary in the texts such as the *Gospel of Mary*, *Gospel of Thomas*, and *Dialogue of the Saviour* as Mary Magdalene uncritically. For instance, Antti Marjanen supports this identification with Mary Magdalene in his work on these documents by suggesting that the spelling of her name in the Coptic and Greek texts is a reliable way of distinguishing between the two main Marys. He explains that in instances where Mary is specifically identified as the mother of Jesus her name is spelled *maria.* In turn, he argues that when another spelling *mariham(mē)* is used then Mary Magdalene is meant.[105]

Stephen Shoemaker, on the other hand, dismantles this claim by Marjanen noting that there are instances in which just the opposite is true in writings of the second and third century. He finds evidence of the spelling of Mary as *mariham(mē)* to be used in reference to the mother as opposed to Magdalene. In other words, the variations of the name are not used consistently but vary depending on the texts. He concludes that the spelling of Mary's name is in "no way a reliable criterion distinguishing the two women even though this is the most frequently advanced argument in favor of the [non-canonical] Mary's identity with Mary of Magdala."[106] Given that many of the extracanonical sources do not name Mary Magdalene explicitly and coupled with the fact that one of the

[105] Marjanen, "The Mother of Jesus or the Magdalene," 33.

[106] Stephen J. Shoemaker, "A Case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary," in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (ed. F. Stanley Jones; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 12–13.

main arguments which has been used to identify her as such has been disproved, it is necessary to explore other options with respect to the identity of Mary in these texts.

One possible solution to this issue is that the authors of these writings never intended to specifically refer to either Mary Magdalene or Mary Mother of Jesus, but instead chose to leave her as unspecified for their own benefit. Marvin Meyer, in his reading of the *Gospel of Thomas*, also grapples with the problem of the identity of Mary. He examines the various possibilities of identification, and in the end suggests that Mary Magdalene is the best possibility, followed by Mary the Mother of Jesus as the second best choice and the other possibilities of Mary Salome or even some other Mary.[107] Meyer, like other scholars, opts for Mary Magdalene as the best choice for this document but then proceeds to make another suggestion. He proposes that there could be a universal Mary who need not be identified as either Mary Magdalene or Mary mother of Jesus. Meyer suggests "[p]erhaps the safest conclusion is that a 'universal Mary' is in mind, and that specific historical Marys are no longer clearly distinguished, just as other historical personages may be blended into a 'universal James' or 'universal Philip' in later Christian literature."[108] I would advance Meyer's argument further and suggest that the ambiguous nature of the universal Mary works in favour of the author of the text whether or not he or she chose the ambiguity deliberately.[109]

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[107] Marvin W. Meyer, "Making Mary Male: The Categories 'Male' and 'Female' in the Gospel of Thomas," *NTS* 31 (1985): 562.

[108] Meyer, "Making Mary Male," 562.

[109] Stephen Shoemaker suggests something similar. He argues that the apocryphal Mary could be a "composite figure" who draws on both the mother and Mary Magdalene. See, Stephen J. Shoemaker "A Case of Mistaken Identity?" 7–10; "Jesus' Gnostic Mom" 159–161.

If, as Meyer suggests, that the Marys are "no longer clearly distinguished," then the ancient audience of these writings would not have been reading the text with a specific Mary in mind for all of these texts but varying dependent on the context. In other words, both the images of Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of Jesus could be amalgamated into this "universal Mary" and be extracted by the audience depending on which one best suited the context. In fact, there are instances in history when these two Marys are conflated by the authors.

In fourth century Syriac traditions, the author Ephrem states that it was Mary the mother of Jesus who first saw Jesus after his resurrection, and not Mary Magdalene as was the more common tradition.[110] Whether or not Ephrem gave the role traditionally ascribed to Mary Magdalene to the mother on purpose or by simply as a result of confusing the two Marys is not so important for the present discussion. What is more significant is the fact that the lines are blurred between the roles traditionally associated with each Mary. No longer is Mary Magdalene the only Mary to receive the first solo resurrection appearance by Jesus, but a tradition of his mother being the first resurrection witness also emerges based on Ephrem's writings. This in turn suggests that the Marys were no longer as clearly distinguished as they might have been when the earlier gospels were composed. From this growing ambiguity of the role of the Marys, it is plausible that other authors simply amalgamated the two Marys into one universal Mary without

[110] Brock, *Mary Magdalene,* 130–131.

identifying them specifically as one or the other in order to maintain both possible interpretations when necessary.[111]

Although such ambiguities exist regarding the role and identities of the Marys, scholars continue to favour Mary Magdalene as a one-Mary-fits-all for non-canonical Christian documents. Some ten years after publication of the volume *Which Mary*? this issue is largely swept to the margins, mentioned only in footnotes or endnotes. Scholars seem content to conveniently assume that Mary is Mary Magdalene. For example, in her brief discussion on Mary Magdalene in her 2012 book *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christian*, Kim Haines-Eitzen does not take up the issue in the main discussion of her text. Instead, in one of her endnotes she mentions: "Although there continues to be some debate about whether the Coptic Gospel of Mary from Nag Hammadi refers to Mary Magdalene, or Mary the Mother of Jesus, the evidence to my mind tilts decidedly toward Mary Magdalene."[112] She then proceeds to cite works by Karen King and sources of the opposing view provided by Stephen Shoemaker concerning the discussion. To be fair, one would not expect a detailed discussion on the matter in the body of the text, especially since

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[111] Even with this evidence, Jane Schaberg (*The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 127) remains unconvinced that the numerous texts with an unspecified Mary necessarily means that a universal Mary is in mind. She writes:

> This fact, and the variant forms of the name, are puzzling, but do not mean different characters named Mary are always or often indistinguishable ("a universal Mary"), nor that full conflation of characters has taken place, nor probably even that we are dealing with different sources within individual documents. Most scholars (Marjanen, King, Bovon) hold that it is reasonably clear in most cases when Mary Magdalene is meant. The gradual replacing of Mary Magdalene by Mary of Nazareth is documented by Brock in Syriac literature especially, but it has not been accomplished in the works discussed in this chapter.

[112] Kim Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 153 n. 21.

her discussion of Mary Magdalene is only three pages long. Nevertheless, it would be informative to see what specific data in the evidence "tilts decidedly toward Mary Magdalene." The absence of any of Haines-Eitzen's own qualifying remarks suggests that she, like many other scholars, is content to hold on to this convenient assumption uncritically.

Most of the attempts to account for this Mary problem have only considered the narrative accounts themselves and not any outside sources. Onomastics, the study of proper names, might offer some further insight to the unspecified Mary issue. A report on Jewish women's names from 330 BCE – 200 CE by Tal Ilan suggests that "Mary" would have been an extremely common name in Palestine during this period.[113] Ilan's study reported 247 women from sources including Josephus, the New Testament, Rabbinic Literature, funerary inscriptions, Papyri and ostraca from the Judean Desert. Out of 247 named women, 58 were named Maria or Mariamme, which translates into almost one out of every four women, making it the second most common name behind Salome.[114] Since the name was so common it is not surprising that each gospel of the New Testament would have more than one Mary. As such, it was necessary for the gospel authors to distinguish between them in their own narratives in order to avoid confusion. But how common was the name Mary in Egypt at the time of these non-canonical writings?

[113] Tal Ilan "Notes on the Distribution of Jewish Women's Names in Palestine in the Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods," *JJS* 40 (1989): 186–200.
[114] Ilan, "Notes on the Distribution," 196–197.

In his recent book, *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus,* Lincoln Blumell analyzes names of Christians in various papyri written in Greek, including letters, from the third to seventh century CE found in the town of Oxyrhynchus. He suggests that Mary became a common name in Christian circles in Egypt but notes that "the name is unattested in any document before the close of the third century at Oxyrhynchus."[115] The name occurs in several papyri from the sixth century perhaps most significantly in a papyrus that suggests there were feast days held in honour of Mary Jesus' mother (*theotokos*) at one of the churches in the area.[116] Blumell also notes that there is a monastery dedicated in her honour as well as sanctuary in the nearby village of Ophis.[117]

However, Blumell then goes on to suggest that "Mary Magdalene could have also been the source of some of the popularity of this name, as there is evidence that the gospel attributed to her was being read in the city: P.Oxy. L 3525 (III); P. Ryl. Gr. III 463 (III)."[118] Here, Blumell is assuming that the Mary in the two Greek fragments of the *Gospel of Mary* decisively refers to Mary Magdalene, which as I have mentioned, is not the case. Therefore, it remains unclear whether Mary Magdalene inspired the popularity of the name or if it was solely Mary the mother of Jesus. What this evidence does tell us, however, is that reverence for Mary the mother of Jesus was present in Egypt by the sixth century.

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[115] Lincoln H. Blumell, *Lettered Christians*: *Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 269 n. 156.
[116] Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 269.
[117] Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 270.
[118] Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 270 n. 158.

If this is the case, then it becomes more plausible to argue that the authors of the other texts, written some two hundred years earlier, could have been referring to her and not Mary Magdalene. Although this evidence does not conclusively put an end to the debate by any means, it does complexify the issue enough to warrant questioning scholars' convenient assumptions about Mary being Mary Magdalene.

In order to appreciate the extent to which the assumed identity of Mary influences scholarship, I will now turn to an analysis of her in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*. The first passage which scholars highlight is when the final redactor of the text praises Mary after she speaks three aphorisms as an interpretation and response to Jesus' teaching:

> Mary said, "Thus with respect to 'the wickedness of each day,'
> and 'the laborer is worthy of his food,'
> and 'the disciple resembles his teacher.'"[119]
> *She said this as a woman who knew everything.*[120]
> (DialSav 139,8–13)

This last line is what leads scholars to believe that Mary had an important role in this text and even the highest esteem above the other disciples. It is particularly

[119] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from: Stephen Emmel (ed.), *Nag Hammadi III, 5 The Dialogue of the Savior* (NHS 26; Leiden: Brill, 1984).

[120] Translation and italics mine. Here is where I disagree slightly with Emmel's translation. Whereas Emmel (*Nag Hammdi III, 5*, 79) has "She uttered this as a woman who had understood completely," I chose to translate the verb ⲉⲁⲥⲉⲓⲙⲉ as "she knew" since this appears to convey more of a sense that Mary was already aware of these three aphorisms, that is, she "knew" them already and just merely spoke them. Emmel's "had understood" suggests more so a sense of understanding at that particular moment, after the words she spoke, rather than simply demonstrating a prior knowledge. Instead of translating ⲉⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ as completely, I opted for "everything" since it fits better as a noun than as the adverb. Moreover, as suggested to me by William Arnal, the Greek τὰ πάντα is usually translated in the Sahdic Coptic New Testament as ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ. Some other translations have "the All" instead of "everything." For a detailed discussion see Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (NHMS 40; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 85–86. See also W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1939), 424.

significant for those reconstructing the role of women within early Christian communities since Mary is a "*woman* who knew everything." This statement alone has caught the attention of many scholars. For instance, Elaine Pagels determines that "The *Dialogue of the Savior* praises [Mary] not only as a visionary, but as the apostle who excels all the rest. She is the "the woman who knew the All."[121] Ann Graham Brock notices that this statement is "the most positive depiction of any of the disciples in the text."[122] Karen King suggests that it "make[s] it clear that Mary is to be counted among the disciples who fully comprehend the Lord's teaching."[123] Based on these interpretations, it is evident that scholars deem this passage to be a very positive portrayal of Mary, and by extension, women in general.

The second passage that scholars focus on in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* has a far more complex and arbitrary portrayal of gender imagery. The passage states:

> Judas said, "You have told us this out of the mind of truth. When we pray, how should we pray?" The Lord said, "Pray in the place where there is no woman." Matthew said, "'Pray in the place where there is no woman,' he tells us, meaning 'Destroy the works of womanhood,' not because there is any other [manner of birth], but because they will cease [giving birth]." Mary said, "They will never be obliterated." (DialSav 144,12–23)

This portion of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* has received mixed reviews from scholars in light of the previous passage where Mary, as a woman, appears to receive the highest praise amongst the disciples. At first glance it may seem that

[121] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 26.
[122] Brock, *Mary Magdalene*, 99.
[123] Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2003), 146.

the author is demeaning the role and function of women entirely. Most scholars, however, do separate "the works of womanhood" from "women" themselves. They suggest that the negative attention is directed not at woman *per se* but rather to that which is associated with femaleness, namely, material existence, birth, etc.[124] The disagreement, then, is not concerning the interpretation of the "works of womanhood" but to what extent this denigration of female imagery affects the overall message concerning women and the image of Mary within the text.

Some scholars suggest that these two passages combined present a mixed message to the audience. Marjanen, for instance, suggests that the women in the community in which the *Dialogue of the Saviour* was read would have been confused by this seemingly contradictory gender imagery. It is worth noting that in his interpretation he presumes the Mary to be Mary Magdalene. Marjanen sets out the juxtaposition by stating that Mary Magdalene was a "prominent woman" in the dialogue but yet her image as a woman is devalued by what he considers to be denigrating metaphorical gender language.[125] Moreover, he suggests that the message for the audience is made all the more confusing by the fact that Mary Magdalene is "made to accept uncritically, even to desire, that the works of womanhood be destroyed."[126] But what if this Mary was not to be interpreted as Mary Magdalene, but as the mother of Jesus? Would this still result in an overall mixed message for the audience?

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[124] For example, McGuire ("Women, Gender, and Gnosis," 276) states: "I would argue that it is not "women," but what the symbolic "works of womanhood" represent, namely, sexual intercourse, reproduction and childbirth that are devalued by this text."

[125] Marjanen, "How Egalitarian," 785.

[126] Marjanen, "How Egalitarian," 785.

Once again, while the identification of Mary may seem to be a trivial matter, this oversight by scholars has contributed to the ways in which the text has been interpreted. To be sure, reading the Mary as Mary Magdalene has clearly affected scholars' interpretation of the second passage which discusses the destruction of the works of womanhood. April DeConick, presuming Mary to be Mary Magdalene, suggests that the passage reflects the author's idea of the ideal woman through Mary, in terms of being celibate and avoiding the works of the womanhood. DeConick suggests the following interpretation for the passage:

> Mary asks Jesus if procreation will ever be destroyed. Jesus tells her that she knows that this will be so. His statement assumes that Mary herself is an exemplar of the celibate woman. Her responsibilities do not include traditional marriage, procreation, and childrearing.[127]

If DeConick had thought this Mary was supposed to be the mother of Jesus, she would certainly not have reached the same conclusion, since, of course, this other Mary would have been responsible for giving birth to Jesus. Suggesting that the Mary in the text could be a mother figure would open up the possibility of a new reading of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* and offer a solution to the so-called "mixed message" of the text.

As previously noted, Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is thought to be portrayed positively, having been described as "the woman who understood completely" but this positive portrayal is called into question later in the text when the disciples are told to pray in the place where there is no woman and to

[127] DeConick, *Holy Misogyny*, 137. In this interpretation, DeConick is working under the assumption that Mary's response is formulated as a question "Will they never be destroyed?" as opposed to a statement "They will never be destroyed." The grammar in the Coptic leaves both possibilities open. Most scholars, however, including Stephen Emmel translate it as a statement rather than as a question. See, Emmel, *Nag Hammadi Codex III, 5*, 89; King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 146.

destroy the works of the womanhood. If one were to read this latter passage not with Mary Magdalene in mind, but with the universal Mary and in this context using the image of Mary the mother of Jesus, the result would not be as contradictory as scholars have considered it to be.

Mary seems to agree that the works of the female will never be destroyed. This affirmation by Mary could suggest that she has some firsthand knowledge of this matter. If we consider the possibility that she, in this particular context, is meant to be Jesus' mother then this would be all the more plausible. As Jesus' mother, Mary would have experienced giving birth thus knowing more about the works of womanhood than the other two male disciples. It is also significant to note that the male disciples, Judas and Matthew begin this discussion, not Mary, further suggesting that she may already have some prior knowledge of the matter.

Moreover, if this dialogue is meant to be interpreted in a post-resurrection setting as some scholars have argued, [128] then the work of Mary's womanhood, her son Jesus, has not been entirely destroyed since he is still participating in this discussion. Presuming that she is the mother who is traditionally portrayed as having seen her son die, coupled with the fact that she sees and is in conversation with him in this text, this would surely give this Mary the confidence to state that the works of womanhood would not be destroyed.

[128] It is not clear anywhere in the text whether the setting of the dialogue is pre- or post-resurrection. Madeleine Scopello, however, observes that "many revelations of the Savior…are said to have taken place after his resurrection." See Madeleine Scopello, "The Dialogue of the Savior," 297; Brock (*Mary Magdalene*, 99) also believes it is the resurrected Jesus who appears in this dialogue.

Thus, unlike previous interpretations that have suggested that Mary as the Magdalene, is conceding to the seemingly negative portrayal of her gender, this interpretation featuring Mary the mother is by no means negative. Instead, Mary as the mother agreeing that the works of womanhood—in other words, childbearing—will never be destroyed demonstrates that she has an intimate knowledge of this fact considering that her son has not been completely obliterated.[129]

Even if the "Which Mary" question is answered sufficiently, the "why does it matter?" question remains. That is, why are scholars so interested in applying a specific identification with Mary whether it is Magdalene or the mother? Why not treat this Mary on an individual basis instead of lumping her identities together? It is clear that both Marys carry with them some sort of inherent meaning and symbolism. Although scholars are extremely diligent and cautious when noting that the negative image of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute is not attested before the sixth century, it is difficult to imagine this portrayal as completely escaping the consciousness when interpreting and analyzing her role in the non-canonical texts. Mary Magdalene serves as an unlikely leader based on her canonical description and would therefore make the ideal leader for a heretical

[129] Jesus does respond to this statement by Mary, but unfortunately the lacunae occur at the most inopportune places. Stephen Emmel (*Nag Hammadi, III, 5*, 88) fills one of the lacunae with the negation in Coptic [ⲁⲛ] and the other lacuna is thought to be a pronoun which he fills the interrogative pronoun "who" [ⲛⲓⲙ]. Based on these presumptions, it is not clear to whom Jesus is directing his response, since the pronoun is unknown. Moreover, it is not clear if it is supposed to be negated or not and scholars are inconsistent in their interpretation of this passage. Whereas Emmel's translation reads, "The Lord said, "[Who] knows that they will [not] dissolve,"" Marvin Meyer ("The Dialogue of the Savior," 313) in his translation has "[You] know they will perish [once again]." Based on the diverse readings of this fragmentary passage, I refrain from making an interpretation on it since it would be highly speculative.

group. The mother Mary is perhaps more likely to garner a positive portrayal based on her canonical role not because she is the mother of Jesus but also she is not tied to any later negative portrayals. As the "good" and "orthodox" Mary, she would not be the ideal candidate to lead the opposite Gnostic crew. In other words, the archetype bad Mary, Mary Magdalene, serves as the ideal anti-orthodox leader, because she is a woman and has an image inherently tainted by modern traditions. Therefore asking why do these Marys matter, is another way of asking "why does Gnosticism matter?"

Not surprisingly, the discussion regarding the unnamed Mary in non-canonical texts has not yet reached a consensus. In fact, there are perhaps more questions that come as a result of contemplating the identity of Mary. King herself suggests some helpful questions stemming from the "Which Mary?" debate:

> The scholarly discussion has been very useful, however, for pointing out the tendency of the tradition toward conflating the various Mary figures, a fact that should incline us to see these Marys as literary portraits, not historical figures. In every case, the first question is not "which Mary?" but "How is Mary being portrayed, what roles she is given, and what issues are at stake?" In the end, Western tradition distinguishes between Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother based largely on the portrayal of their sexuality: the repentant whore and the virgin mother—although in the end, both are used to promote the tradition of celibacy.[130]

One way to answer the questions King poses, is to look at the ways in which these characters are constructed in non-canonical texts. For instance, it is imperative to note that the Gnostic Mary is usually constructed and compared relative to Peter who is portrayed as a leader of what scholars have called the orthodox Christian tradition. In this framework, the roles of Mary Magdalene and Peter are

[130] King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 205 n. 58.

essentially to function as the figureheads of each side of the heretical/orthodox dichotomy.

Peter and Mary are in conflict in these texts including the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Mary* and *Pistis Sophia*. Perhaps most notable is the instance in the *Gospel of Mary* where Peter directly contends with and questions Mary's authority as a woman.[131] Therefore it seems tempting to associate this Mary with the heretical movement, for she is receiving special instruction from Jesus and being instructed to teach her fellow disciples. As previously mentioned, the perceived orthodox Christian outlook is to silence women and forbid them from speaking in the assemblies, as in the Pastoral Epistles. Scholars suggest that Peter, in these non-canonical texts where he contends with Mary, is representing his opposition to women having leadership roles:

> Some would say that this reinforces the assumption that orthodox early Christianity is misogynist and gnostic early Christianity is not, and they would argue that Peter's hostility toward Mary in gnostic texts is to be interpreted symbolically. In this quite common view, Peter stands for the orthodoxy of the church and Mary Magdalene for gnosticism.[132]

Viewing Mary as the part of the cohort of non-canonical disciples counter to the perceived orthodox disciples such as Peter is a pervasive conclusion in scholarship. DeConick, for instance, writes that "in the *Gospel of Mary*, Mary's leadership role is threatening to Peter and Andrew, who represent the Apostolic

[131] Karen L. King (trans.), "The Gospel of Mary," in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperOne, 2007), 744–745.

[132] Esther De Boer, "'Should We All Turn and Listen to Her?' Mary Magdalene in the Spotlight," in *The Gospels of Mary: The Secret Tradition of Mary Magdalene the Companion of Jesus* (ed. Marvin W. Meyer; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 79.

Church. Mary is in direct conflict with Peter and Andrew who challenge her opinions as 'some other ideas.'"[133]

Therefore, much in the same way that Gnosticism is used to shore up the boundaries of orthodox Christianity, so does the Gnostic Mary shore up Peter's supposed orthodox perspective on women. Put differently, Mary is the ideal representative for that which does not seem to conform to the ideas found in the New Testament, where male disciples seem to dominate the narratives. "No clear boundaries between orthodox and other Christianities were fixed. It is far too simple to conclude that orthodox Christianity would have given Mary Magdalene little credit while gnostic Christianity would have had high esteem for her."[134] This is indeed true, yet for most scholars, it seems easier said than done. In her conclusion, Esther De Boer writes "The balancing of the Gospel of Mary and the other non-canonical texts against the New Testament's "official" minimalizing allows Mary finally to emerge from the shadows of history."[135] Although her distinction is not as sharp as her earlier caution between the different esteem attributed Mary in the New Testament and non-canonical texts, it nevertheless seems as though De Boer continues to replay the orthodox versus Gnostic rhetoric here. Instead of scrapping the false dichotomy, she utilizes it as her frame of reference to conclude her analysis of Mary.

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[133] DeConick, *Holy Misogyny*, 141. For similar perspectives viewing Peter as representing the orthodox Christian perspective against Mary's unorthodox perspective, see Brock, *Mary Magdalene*, 99; Royalty, *The Origin of Heresy*, 129; Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 77–78; Douglas M. Parrot, "Gnostic and Orthodox Disciples in the Second and Third Centuries," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (eds. Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr.; Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), 193–219.

[134] De Boer, "'Should We All Turn,'" 85.

[135] De Boer, "'Should We All Turn,'" 96.

In answer to King's questions: "How is Mary being portrayed, what roles she is given, and what issues are at stake?," it can be said that Mary is portrayed in opposition to Peter with the role of the leader of the non-orthodox Christians. The issues at stake, subsequently, are what constitute mainstream and normative Christian views on certain issues, on the one hand, and what does not, on the other hand. These, at least, are how other scholars have viewed the function of Mary in these texts. In order not to get caught up in modern nomenclature and discussions regarding ancient Christian rhetoric, however, I would say that the authors of these texts employing Mary were not writing against the normative or orthodox Christians *per se*, since there were so many varieties of Christianity at that time. Instead, the authors were merely writing their beliefs concerning their ideas of women at that time.

4. Women and Gender in Antiquity

Studying depictions of women in ancient texts is a complex endeavor. It is well-known now that it is difficult—if not impossible—to get at actual historical women. Peter Brown states that "Christian men used women to think with in order to verbalize their own nagging concern with the stance that the Church should take to the world" because they regarded "women as creatures less clearly defined and less securely bounded by the structures that held men in place in society."[136] Elizabeth Clark argues that it is unlikely that we can recover anything more than the opinions of the men who wrote the texts rather than actual women.[137] Ross Shepard Kraemer, not as pessimistic as Clark, suggests that we merely need to be cautious regarding "the degree to which the rhetorical uses of gender obscure our vision of antiquity."[138] The malleable image of women in these texts thus serves as a valuable area of insight into the opinions and rhetoric of early Christian debates about them.

In light of these observations, this chapter seeks not to recover a historical Mary, nor does it assume that her role in the text reflects the historical reality of the role of women in the community that read the *Dialogue of the Saviour*. Instead, the aim is to adequately situate her characterization as a female disciple within the larger cultural context of the text. In the majority of scholarly

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[136] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 153.

[137] Elizabeth A. Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the "Linguistic Turn,"" *JECS* 6 (1998): 430.

[138] Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11.

assessments of Mary and gender related passages in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, the ancient understanding of gender is only, at the most, cursorily considered. This section seeks to rectify that neglect by bringing to the forefront the ways in which notions of male/female and men/women would have been understood in similar communities.

Current reconstructions of gender in antiquity are largely based on Thomas Laqueur's foundational book *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990).[139] In it, he discusses the concept of the "one sex" model that was conveyed in works by ancient authors such as Aristotle and Galen,[140] and only seemed to dissipate around the eighteenth century:

> [M]en and women were arrayed according to their degree of metaphysical perfection, their vital heat, along an axis whose telos was male, gave way by the eighteenth century to a new model of radical dimorphism, of biological divergence. An anatomy and physiology of incommensurability replaced a metaphysics of hierarchy in the representation of woman in relation to man.[141]

In other words, maleness was the measure of perfection, and both men and women could either become more or less male. To be sure, as Stephanie Cobb notes:

> Sex was understood as a continuum, with perfect maleness at the one end and imperfect, defective or deficient maleness (what we might call "femaleness" at the other). Humans were believed to be composed of both

[139] For a recent re-evaluation and commentary on Laquer's work, see Brooke Holmes, *Gender: Antiquity and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 46–55; 70–71.

[140] See also the work of Maud Gleason who looks at the one-sex model in ancient physiognomic sources: "The Semiotics of Gender: Physiognomy and Self-Fashioning in the Second Century C.E.," 389–415 in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (eds. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[141] Thomas W. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 5–6.

> male and female elements, however, so individuals were placed somewhere between those two extremes.[142]

This ancient notion of gender is crucial to understanding and reading texts such as the *Dialogue of the Saviour*. Suspending our modern conceptions of gender is imperative to ascertaining the ways in which its audience would have understood its gendered language.

In addition to understanding sex as a continuum, equally important is being cognizant of the fact that there was flexibility and fluidity in these characteristics. A common theme in stories of Christian women, such as the martyr Perpetua, is the attempt to become more male or in other words, transcend their femaleness.[143] Once again, Cobb explains:

> Since women not only were inferior to men, but were, in fact, inferior *men*—a belief expressed repeatedly in ancient literature—they could move up the continuum toward masculinity. Because sex categories were not fixed, individuals were aware of the possibility that their actions or demeanor could propel them up or down the scale of manliness.[144]

As such, it should not be surprising to read statements by Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas* where he says that he will make Mary male so that she is worthy of life.[145] Jorunn Buckley, for instance, argues that Logion 114 in the *Gospel of*

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[142] Stephanie L. Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 26.

[143] Another example is Thecla in the *Acts of Thecla*. For a detailed account concerning the ways in which Thecla strives to become more male, see Willi Braun, "Physiotherapy of Femininity in the *Acts of Thecla*," in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson*. Studies in Christianity and Judaism / Études sur le christianisme et le judaïsme 9 (eds. Stephen G. Wilson and Michel Desjardins; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 209–230.

[144] Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 28.

[145] For a concise discussion on the understanding of gender in the *Gospel of Thomas*, see Willi Braun, "Fugitives from Femininity: Greco-Roman Gender Ideology and the Limits of Early Christian Women's Emancipation," in *Fabrics of Discourse: Essays in Honor of Vernon K. Robbins* (eds. David B. Gowler, Gregory L. Bloomquist, and Duane Watson; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 320–321.

Thomas "speaks of an initiation ritual required for the female so that she may be restored to the lost unity of Adam in Gen. 2. The woman must first become male, then take the last step to the "living spirit" stage."[146] From a modern perspective, this notion is misogynistic, but to the ancient audience this is a natural, cultural perception of gender. Dale Martin explains that

> [W]hen ancient writers talk about the difference between female and male nature, they are referring not to deep ontological differences but to a difference in degree or position on a spectrum. In such a system, obviously, any androgyny that is taken to be salvific must be oriented toward the higher end of the spectrum, the male.[147]

Therefore, instances of women striving to be more male or overcoming their inherent female characteristics should be regarded as commonplace in ancient writings. In fact, in cases where it seems that women are perhaps seen as heroic for taking on roles usually reserved for men, it can be said that instances such these "[concede] that maleness is the true measure of humanity and, thus, however heroic (or desperate?) the gesture, in the end confirms and reinscribes androcentric ideology."[148]

Lest exclusive emphasis be placed on women striving to become male, it should be noted that men were not exempt from having to achieve and maintain manly characteristics. They too were in jeopardy of possessing female elements. One such example, as Cobb suggests, is the call to Polycarp to "be strong" and

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[146] Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, *Female Fault and Fulfillment in Gnosticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 84.

[147] Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New edition; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 230.

[148] Braun, "Fugitives from Femininity," 324.

"be a man" during his martyrdom.[149] Based on this, one can surmise that gender was not fixed for either women or men.

[149] Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 24.

5. Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*

An underlying issue of understanding Mary and the gender imagery of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* seems to be the inconsistent contextualization of the understanding of gender contemporary with the text. For example, Marjanen is cognizant that females we treated as inferior to males, yet in his conclusion he seems to lose sight of this fact when he suggests:

> Still, the book referring to a woman as one of its authorities speaks about destroying the "works of womanhood," in accordance with the dominant male gender constructions typical of Mediterranean society, when it alludes to sexual abstinence. These examples show how firmly fixed the dichotomy between "male" and "female" was in the language and cultural values of the contemporary society.[150]

In this commentary, Marjanen starts off correctly: males were perceived as dominant over females. Yet when he goes on to label "male and female" as a dichotomy, he seems to forget that gender was viewed more so as a spectrum and not a dichotomy. This in turn leads him to conclude that Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* "hardly created any change in the attitudes towards women or their role in society and religious life. In neither case does the treatment of Mary Magdalene lead to any reflection about the position of women in general."[151] It is doubtful that the final redactor, in his or her inclusion of Mary in the text, would have sought to displace the gender hierarchy in contemporary society. Instead, like other ancient texts, it is merely reaffirming the commonly held belief that women should strive to be more male.

[150] Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 220–221.
[151] Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 221.

If Marjanen adhered consistently to the cultural context of the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, he would have noted that women embodying femaleness themselves would never be equal to men as such. Instead they would be striving to ascend the continuum of gender construction to become more male rather than somehow attempting to change attitudes toward the position of women in society. This type of interpretation seems more in line with modern discourses rather than ancient gender constructs. To be sure, Pheme Perkins observes: "What it means to be female is depicted over against and idealized masculine paradigm that defines what it means to be fully human."[152] Therefore, Mary, or any other female in an early Christian text, would be compared to this masculine paradigm as a measure of her overall status as a human. In this cultural context women's esteem could not stand alone but required masculine framework to measure their worth.

Mary reinforces the standard cultural perception of women and works of womanhood. Although she is given a speaking role, this does not necessarily mean that the text is reflecting a prestige of women within the community of the text. The inclusion of Mary seems to be merely a necessity in order to provide a launching point for issues concerning gender. Why would a group of only male disciples and Jesus need to discuss praying in a place where there is no woman or destroying the works of womanhood? What also seems to be forgotten is that women were everywhere! Early Christian communities were no exception. Given the commonality of the name Mary, this character could be merely an arbitrarily

[152] Pheme Perkins, "Gender and the Body of Christ: Problems in 1 Corinthians," in *Method and Meaning: Essays on New Testament Interpretation in Honor of Harold W. Attridge* (eds. Andrew B. McGowan and Kent H. Richards; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 491.

chosen name to fulfill a need for a female participant in the dialogue. It is perhaps significant to note that both male disciples are merely described by an individual name without any further characteristics or place descriptors.

Moreover, Jesus himself is never actually called "Jesus" in the text but simply the Lord or Saviour. It could be that name is not preserved in the current fragmentary state of the manuscript, but existed in its original state where the lacunae now appear. If this is the case, however, one would wonder why the redactor opted for lord instead of the shorter two letter *nomina sacra*.[153] Based on this the author may not necessarily have been interested in reiterating traditional perceptions of certain disciples but merely needed some names to fill out the characters in the dialogue.

Considering all these aspects of gender prevalent in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, the text seems to be in accord with contemporary perceptions of femininity. Suggesting that Mary somehow, as a disciple, symbolizes a heroine for ancient women readers is only possible if one uses modern understanding of gender while ignoring the cultural context and manipulating the interpretation of Mary's portrayal such that it forms a character that is governed by other texts that have a character with the same name.

As previously noted, scholars typically focus on two main pericopae from the *Dialogue of the Saviour* when reconstructing a portrayal of Mary. This section

[153] Further speculation on this matter is beyond the scope of this study. It is sufficient to note the seemingly abnormal absence of the actual name of Jesus in this text. A future study might consider investigating the frequency of words such as lord or saviour in comparison to the name of Jesus in other Coptic texts to see if this is indeed abnormal or merely a growing trend in this literature.

provides a more detailed overview concerning the evaluation of these passages. Additionally, it expands the survey of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* to include two other passages in order to provide a more complete assessment of Mary in the text.

The selection that garners the most attention is: ⲡⲉⲓϣⲁϫⲉ ⲁⲥϫⲟⲟⲩ ϩⲱⲥ ⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲁⲥⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲡⲧⲏⲣ̄ⲟ which translates as "she said this as a woman who knew everything" (139,11–13).[154] Most scholars think that this makes her the greatest of the disciples in the text.[155] Others also adjudicate it as a positive comment for Mary, but do not state that she is above the other disciples in the text. Rather, King, for example notes that it "make[s] it clear that Mary is to be counted among the disciples who fully comprehended the Lord's teaching."[156] Marjanen, even more conservative in his interpretation, argues that this statement "does not in fact try to do more than point out how this one comment of hers manifests a good insight."[157]

Brock, on the other hand, does not agree with Marjanen, pointing out that "In response [to Marjanen] it must be said that no other disciple receives this acclamation as having spoken as someone 'who understood completely' or 'who understood the all.'"[158] Here I am more inclined to agree with Marjanen,

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[154] Translation mine; "The All" or "completely" are also possible translations of ⲉⲡⲧⲏⲣ̄ⲟ. See above p. 51 n. 120.

[155] Brock, *Mary Magdalene*, 98; Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 26, 77; Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 186.

[156] King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 144; see also De Boer, *The Gospel of Mary*, 5; DeConick, *Holy Misogyny*, 138; Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 149; McGuire, "Women, Gender, and Gnosis," 276.

[157] Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 86.

[158] Brock, *Mary Magdalene*, 98 n. 94.

especially since, as Schaberg notes, Matthew also receives praise after asking a question.[159] Jesus describes Matthew's question as a saying "which eye has not seen, [nor] have I heard it except from you" (DialSav 140,2–4). Therefore, although Matthew is not described as someone who understands the all, he nevertheless receives praise from Jesus himself, and not from the final redactor. In fact, it could even be argued that Matthew is the one who gets the higher praise since it is depicted as coming straight from Jesus and not a later addition. Moreover, there is one instance where the second person plural pronoun is used when Jesus gives the following praise to his disciples: "The Lord said, "You have understood all the things I have said to you, and you have accepted them on faith." (DialSav 142,11–13). With this in mind, it seems that the other disciples too were praised for their understanding, even if they were not singled out individually for it, as Mary.

Additionally, one wonders if women were to endeavour to become more male, as the socio-historical context suggests, would the author—if he or she really wanted to give Mary praise—be more likely to describe Mary as a man (ⲣⲱⲙⲉ) or disciple (ⲙⲁⲑⲏⲧⲏⲥ) who understood the all? While this argument might be a stretch, the point is not to be pedantic, but merely to draw attention to the fact that scholars have perhaps been too generous when ascribing such a positive portrayal to Mary.

To be fair, not all scholars attribute the highest praise of the text to Mary; a small minority of scholars interpret Judas—not Mary—as having the most

[159] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 149 n. 144.

prominent role of the disciples in the text.[160] Moreover, Marjanen suggests that the redactor did not intend to put Mary above the other disciples since Judas too receives "a special moment of understanding."[161] Considering the choice of gendered wording to describe Mary, along with the fact that she is not necessarily the clear-cut favourite amongst the disciples, suggests that spotlight focused on her role in the text is projected by the scholar rather than the final redactor of the text.

Another instance of praise for Mary comes after she asks: "Tell me, Lord, why I have come to this place to profit or to forfeit." The Lord said, "You make clear the abundance to the revealer!" (DialSav 140,14–19). This other affirmation by Jesus is usually coupled with the 139,11–13 praise of her understanding for scholars painting a positive portrayal of Mary.[162] Yet, Marjanen argues again that this comment does not necessarily grant Mary esteem. He reasons that although the verb ⲉⲣⲉⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ contains the second feminine singular pronominal form, this praise is meant not only for Mary, but the entire group of disciples.[163] Marjanen bases his argument on the fact that earlier in the document Mary asks a question, followed by a response from the Lord in the second feminine singular, and afterwards "The next question asked by all the disciples and the subsequent answer indicate that despite its grammatical form the first response of the Lord

[160] Pheme Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue*: *The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 107.
[161] Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 87.
[162] Brock, *Mary Magdalene*, 98–99; DeConick, *Holy Misogyny*, 138; King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 143–144; McGuire, "Women, Gender, and Gnosis," 276; Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 149.
[163] Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 82–83.

was not meant to be to Mary alone."[164] This leads him to conclude that based on 140,14–19, Mary "is seen as *one* of those who seek and can see, and thus can 'make clear the abundance of the revealer.'"[165]

Silke Petersen disagrees with this assessment by Marjanen based on the fact that Marjanen has seemingly neglected the lines immediately preceding 140,14–19. She believes that the affirmation by Jesus is indeed meant only for Mary. She states:

> Marjanen führt als Begründung an, daß auch an anderen Stellen des Dial auf eine Frage einer JüngerIn eine an alle gerichtete Antwort erfolge. An den von Marjanen herangezogenen Stellen wird tatsächlich die Adressierung an alle aus dem Kontext ersichtlich. Eben dies ist aber im vorliegenden Abschnitt nicht der Fall: Die Anrede Jesu erfolgt hier in der zweiten Person fem. sing., und an die Aussage schließt keine generalisierende Formulierung an, sondern eine weitere Frage der Maria. […] Die Intention Marjanens hat durchaus ihre Berechtigung, allerdings vernachlässigt er den m.E. entscheidenden Aspekt des Textes, da er die direkt vorangehende Aussage nicht berücksichtigt.[166]

Therefore, it seems that Marjanen mistakenly takes away the credit from Mary that she deserves and subsequently this passage should indeed be regarded as praise for Mary.

Up to this point, then, it seems that Mary indeed warrants a positive assessment from the readers of this text, and perhaps, by extension, women in general. However, it is at this point that the majority of scholars jump to 144,12–23 for the next portion of their overall analysis of Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*:

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[164] Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved,* 82.
[165] Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 83; italics original.
[166] Silke Petersen, *Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit: Maria Magdalena, Salome und andere Jüngerinnen Jesu in christlich-gnostischen Schriften* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 114.

> Judas said "You have told us this out of the mind of truth. When we pray how should we pray?" The Lord said, "Pray in the place where there is no woman. Matthew said, "Pray in the place where there is [no woman]," he tells us, meaning, 'Destroy the works of womanhood,' not because there is any other [manner of birth], but because they will cease [giving birth]." Mary said, "They will never be obliterated." (DialSav 144,12–23)[167]

This passage has much more varied interpretations than the previous two.[168] One thing about this pericope on which most— if not all—scholars agree, is that it does not devalue women themselves, but rather the works of womanhood, i.e. procreation.[169] What remains ambiguous, then, is how to interpret Mary's response. Pagels states that Mary "along with Mathew and Judas rejects the 'works of femaleness.'"[170] King, on the other hand, suggests that "Mary's response can be read as resistance: the works of womanhood will never be obliterated."[171] Schaberg seems to side more with Pagels when she says that Mary "might be seen here as objecting, standing up for 'the works of womanhood' but more likely is voicing her pessimism."[172]

Marjanen observes that Mary "can participate in the discussion of the obliteration of the 'works of womanhood' without feeling personally touched by

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[167] As previously mentioned, Mary's response can be read in the Coptic as either a statement or a question. See above, p. 54 n.127.

[168] Many scholars see this passage as a parallel to a statement by Jesus in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, preserved in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*. Jesus states that he has come to destroy the works of womanhood and tells Salome that humans will continue to die as long as women continue to give birth, Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 3.9, 63–64. See Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 185; Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 90; Pierre Létourneau, *Le Dialogue du Sauveur: NH III, 5* (Québec, Canada; Louvain: Presses de l'Université Laval; Peeters, 2003), 297; Erika Mohri, *Maria Magdalena: Frauenbilder in Evangelientexten des 1. bis 3. Jahrhunderts* (Marburger theologische Studien 63; Marburg: Elwert, 2000), 315–316.

[169] King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 146–147; Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 186; Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 89; McGuire, "Women, Gender, and Gnosis," 277; Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 80; Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue,* 136 n. 10.

[170] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 80; similarly, DeConick, *Holy Misogyny*, 137–138, suggests that Mary is agreeing with the encratic views portrayed in this passage.

[171] King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 146.

[172] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 139.

the topic any more than the male disciples."[173] At the same time, however, he is quick to caution that this passage uses negative feminine imagery that does not help to esteem the women in the audience of the *Dialogue of the Saviour*. This leads Marjanen to contemplate a set of what I consider to be insipid questions:

> If these women readers wanted to become or stay as members of the community which used the *Dialogue of the Savior*, they could not simply identify with a shrewd spiritual authority whom they met in [Mary], but they also had to face the challenge of negative gender language in order to appropriate this message of the text. How did they go about solving this dilemma? Did they protest and rebel? Or did they quietly comply with the fact that even if a woman could discuss matters of salvation, womanhood symbolized factors which prevented one from being saved? *Or were they so accustomed to language patterns of their time that they overlooked the problem altogether? There is no way to give certain answers to these questions.*[174]

Firstly, it should be noted, as this work has gone to great lengths to stress, that it is nearly impossible to know whether the text of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* reflected actual historical community situations. Secondly, the questions that Marjanen asks, with the exception of the last one, are seemingly constructed on a modern reading of the gender language in the document and not read within the proper ancient cultural context. Lastly, I would disagree with Marjanen and say that *there is* indeed a way to give an answer to at least one of these questions: "were they so accustomed to language patterns of their time that they overlooked the problem altogether?" I would say yes! In fact, I would argue that this supposed "problem" of gender language would not be perceived as a problem at all, but rather taken as the norm at the time. Furthermore, as Anne McGuire rightly observes:

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[173] Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 91.
[174] Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 92; emphasis added.

> The symbolic association of the category of the female ("femaleness or "womanhood") with the negative pole of sexuality and reproduction does not necessarily devalue women, lead to a negative attitude toward women, or exclude women from leadership, as some have implied. Such an association may, of course, lead in that direction has frequently been used to justify such devaluation and exclusionary practice. Individual women, however, can become free of such devaluation as the example of Mary Magdalene [sic] makes clear.[175]

This observation by McGuire should be well-known by scholars of early Christianity. As I have demonstrated, it seems scholars, such as Marjanen, are cognizant of the different cultural perceptions of gender in antiquity, yet they quickly forget this when they see Mary in texts such as the *Dialogue of the Saviour* in a seemingly important role.

If this were the only instance in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* where it seemed that Mary was a participant in a discussion that uses negative gender imagery, the questions by Marjanen might be warranted. However, because most scholars do not include another key passage in their study of the *Dialogue of the Saviour*,[176] it is difficult to grapple with this ancient understanding of gender. As mentioned above, 139,11–13 and 140,17–19 are often cited as positive comments concerning Mary, while 144,12–23 seems to devalue her esteem by means of negative female gender imagery. The oft neglected passage that requires attention comes between the two praises of Mary:

> Judas said, "Why else, for the sake of truth, do they kill and live?" The Lord said, "Whatever is born of truth does not die. Whatever is born of woman dies." (DialSav 140,9–14).

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[175] McGuire, "Women, Gender, and Gnosis," 277.

[176] There are two monographs that do include this passage: Erika Mohri, *Maria Magdalena,* 312–314; and Silke Petersen, *Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!*, 113–114. Unfortunately, while both these works pre-date most of the other analyses discussed in this present work and, are even included in the bibliographies, the authors' perspectives are not included directly in discussions concerning Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*.

Here we have another instance of what from a modern reading might be considered a negative estimation of female imagery since they are essentially the ones who produce that which dies. It is significant, in fact imperative, to note that what immediately follows is Mary's question for which she receives praise as the one who makes "clear the abundance of the revealer!"

Whether or not the author or final redactor put this question by Mary immediately after this passage concerning what is born from truth and woman deliberately cannot be determined conclusively. What can be observed is that: 1) at the very least, the author/final redactor did not feel the need to avoid placing a question from Mary immediately afterward; 2) Mary does not need to question directly what has just been said, but rather seeks clarification from Jesus concerning her role; 3) not only is Mary afforded the opportunity to ask a question, she also receives a positive comment from Jesus. What this means, then, is that the author, and thus his or her audience, would not have found it irregular for this sequence in the dialogue to take place (i.e. negative comment concerning womanhood, question by Mary to topic just discussed, praise from Jesus for Mary). This suggests, as I have argued, that the so-called negative gender imagery, if it was even seen as such at the time, would have been standard, unworthy of comment or reflection even when mentioned in the presence of Mary. In sum, one must be cautious when discussing passages laden with gender imagery with respect to being attentive to proper contextualization in terms of cultural context and other relevant passages within the text itself.

Another pericope that should be added to the discussion regarding Mary and gender imagery in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is:

> [Mary said, "Of what] sort is that [mustard seed]? Is it something from heaven or is it something from earth?" The Lord said, "When the Father established the cosmos for himself, he left much over from the Mother of the All. Therefore, he speaks and he acts." (DialSav 144,5–12)[177]

This passage reveals that the cosmology of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* includes a feminine divinity figure. The "Mother of the All" (ⲧⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ) is usually thought to refer to Sophia,[178] who is found in a number of other texts, including *On the Origin of the World* and *Pistis Sophia*. Whether or not she is meant to be linked to this specific female deity, it is sufficient to note that the Mother of the All, is not, at least in the portion of the text that survives, portrayed as the source of evil or material existence. Moreover, it is interesting to note a possible philological link between "the Mother of the All" (ⲧⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ) and the "woman who knew everything" (ϲϩⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲁⲥⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ̄). Is the use of ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ to describe these female characters done purposefully or merely a coincidence?

The base form ⲧⲏⲣ occurs 18 times in the text, however ⲧⲏⲣ-ϥ as a noun appears only 4 times (including 139,13 if it is translated as "the All" and not adverbially as "completely"). The other two instances are "The Lord [said] to them, "Be [prepared] in face of everything (ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ)" (DialSav 141,23–24) and

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[177] Instead of "he speaks and he acts," another possible translation is "he sows and works," Marvin Meyer (trans.), "The Dialogue of the Savior," in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer; New York: HarperOne, 2007), 310; see also, Létourneau, *Le Dialogue du Sauveur*, 98–99; 295–296.

[178] Létourneau, "The Dialogue of the Savior," 88; Meyer, "The Dialogue of the Savior," 310 n. 77.

"Matthew said, "Lord, you have spoken about the end of everything (ⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ) without concern" (DialSav 142,9–11). These two passages do not mention Mary or anything concerning femaleness. It should also be noted that in another instance Mary says "I want to understand all things [just as] they are" (DialSav 141,12–14). Here one would expect that ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ could be used to convey the meaning of wanting to understand "everything" or "all things" but instead, the author uses the phrase ϩⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ.[179] As such, if the author or final redactor truly wanted to create some sort of link between Mary, the Mother of the All, and ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ this would have been another location in the text where one would expect this philological link to be solidified. As it stands, I believe that it is more coincidental than deliberate that ⲡⲧⲏⲣϥ is used in relation to both female characters.

The presence of the Mother of the All, who appears in the pericope (DialSav 144,5–12) that immediately precedes the discussion on praying where there is no woman and the destruction of the works of womanhood (DialSav 144,13–23), should be noted in the overall evaluation of women and gender imagery in the *Dialogue of the Saviour*. In fact, Silke Petersen sees the Mother of the All contributing to the context of the destruction of the works of female passage:

[179] Petersen (*Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!*, 116–117) discusses the philological relation between ϩⲱⲃ in this passage and its use in the "Works of womanhood" passage (DialSav 144,19–21).

> Leider bleibt durch den fragmentarischen Zustand des folgenden Textes unklar, was auf den Einwand Marias erwidert wurde. Die Erwähnung der Archonten p. 145,5 deutet aber darauf hin, daß das Aufhören der Gerburten in einen kosmologischen Kontext gestellt wurde. Möglicherweise ist das Aufhören der Geburten in einem Zusammenhang zu sehen mit der Überwindung der von den Archonten verschuldeten mangelhaften Weltordnung, an deren Enstehung auch die „Mutter des Alls“ (p.144,11) beteiligt war.[180]

Petersen links the fragmentary portion of the end of the passage to a cosmological context due the mention of archons. As such, she speculates that the Mother of the All could have been responsible for creating them and therefore the destruction of the works of femaleness possibly means overcoming the archons in order to achieve salvation.

The question remains: how does praying in a place where there is no woman and destroying the works of womanhood relate to Mary's status as a disciple? Petersen suggests that the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is not arguing that women be excluded from participation in these Christian communities, but rather that they be included on the condition that they abstain from reproduction (i.e. works of the femaleness).[181] Similarly, Erika Mohri states that the text does not advocate for the exclusion of women but rather the renunciation of the world.[182] Ultimately, Mohri's concluding assessment of Mary of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* is that she is a role model for women and an example to men that women can attain *gnosis*.[183]

[180] Petersen, *Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!*, 117.
[181] Petersen, *Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!*, 117.
[182] Mohri, *Maria Magdalena*, 318.
[183] Mohri, *Maria Magdalena*, 318.

Considering this, perhaps Mary's presence as a woman in the text merely functions as a way for the author to reinforce what he or she believes women and gender roles should entail. Mary appears as the voice of a woman subordinate to the gender hierarchy of the time and is able to participate in these discussions. Should this really be that surprising? From as early as Paul's letters to the Corinthians, to texts contemporary with the *Dialogue of the Saviour* and beyond, women have been playing some sort of role in early Christian documents. How many texts have only men mentioned or do not mention female imagery?

Although it might be tantalizing to see Mary as a heroine or prominent early disciple, this cannot be conclusively determined from the *Dialogue of the Saviour* itself. Instead, this is only becomes a possibility if the Mary of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* leans on the Marys from other extra-canonical texts such as the *Gospel of Mary*, and the *Gospel of Philip*, for support. Otherwise, her individual portrayal does not stand on its own as anything remarkable or uncommon with contemporary perceptions of women and gender.

6. Conclusion

The Mary of the *Dialogue of the Saviour* serves as a confluence of several issues worthy of attention. Firstly, as a member of the Nag Hammadi codices, the *Dialogue of the Saviour* itself is an example of one of the victims of the distorting Gnostic label. Secondly, the character Mary serves as a piece of the dubiously constructed Gnostic Mary mirage. Thirdly, without being designated specifically as Mary Magdalene, she draws attention to an oft overlooked assumption concerning her scholarly representation and perhaps that of other unspecified early Christian characters. Fourthly, as a participant in a dialogue that mentions certain gender issues, the analysis of her esteem in this context functions as a reminder of the necessity to ground assessments of women and gender in their proper historical and social contexts. Lastly, the study of Mary in this text emphasizes the dangers of isolating only certain passages from a given text in producing an analysis. Ultimately, Mary in the *Dialogue of the Saviour* serves as an intersection where all these various topics converge simultaneously.

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