

Eve, the Virgin, and the Magdalene:
Women and Redemption in the Early Church

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Abstract

In the early stages of the Christian Church there were numerous variations on the conception of sin and salvation. This thesis explores four texts from the 2nd and 3rd centuries—Irenaeus's *Refutation and Overthrow of Falsely So-Called Gnosis* (or *Against Heresies*), Hippolytus's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, the Sethian text called the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and the Valentinian text called the *Gospel of Philip*—in order to examine the roles of female and male figures within each text's conception of original sin and its redemption. The issue of redemption is defined by the fact that, in the texts discussed in this thesis, human suffering and death is always traced back to two figures, male and female: in the Book of Genesis Adam and Eve both sin in the Garden of Eden, and in gnostic versions of the creation myth male and female figures within both the divine and the earthly realms are involved in the first mistake. There is significance both in the duality out of which the original mistake comes, as well as the relationship of the offenders as partners or counterparts. Is one individual more at fault than the other? And how does this affect the role of a redeeming figure? Can one savior redeem them both or could two saviors be involved in the redemption of humankind? The authors of the four texts discussed would each have different answers.

The manner in which the four texts discussed here each employ gendered relationships in their conceptions of sin and redemption reveal different universalized ideologies about men and women. These ideologies are expressed through the manner of involvement of male versus female figures in the original sin, the manner of redemption by male versus female figures, and the conception of the pre-existent divine realm (gender structures above affecting gender structures below). The material for these three

elements in the four texts addressed comes from existing scriptural sources such as the letters of Paul and the Gospels of John and Luke. The point of departure from scriptural adherence to the authors' own intertextual readings is a good place to start analyzing the authors' ideologies about gender hierarchy and often reveals varying notions about the role of women within different early Christian movements.

I

Introduction

A forbidden tree, a forbidden fruit, forbidden knowledge. According to traditional Christian theology, these are the elements that provoked original sin, a hereditary sin of disobedience that could only be redeemed by Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. But was it always so straightforward? In the early stages of the Christian Church there were numerous variations on the conception of sin and salvation. Not only were there different ideas about what kind of sin or mistake was at the root of human suffering and death, there were also varying perspectives on who played the part of redeeming that mistake.

The issue of redemption is defined by the fact that, in the texts discussed in this paper, human suffering and death is always traced back to two figures, male and female: in the Book of Genesis Adam and Eve both sin in the Garden of Eden, and in gnostic versions of the creation myth male and female figures within both the divine and the earthly realms are involved in the first mistake. There is significance both in the duality out of which the original mistake comes, as well as the relationship of the offenders as partners or counterparts. Is one individual more at fault than the other? And how does this affect the role of a redeeming figure? Can one savior redeem them both or could two saviors be involved in the redemption of humankind? Frankly, it depends on who you were talking to. Irenaeus of Lyons and Hippolytus of Rome (who wrote in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, respectively) were both in the field of disproving heresy—and, hence, defining orthodoxy. In the process of shedding light on Christianity's "true" teachings, both Irenaeus and Hippolytus present their perspective on the redemption of the sin committed by the first humans in the Garden of Eden. These perspectives logically differ from the

heretical gnostic teachings they were rejecting, in which human suffering stems not from the sin in the Garden but from an entirely different mistake. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip* in particular display a view of redemption quite distinct from those put forward by the Church Fathers, Irenaeus and Hippolytus. Much can be gleaned from a close examination of the variation between redemption theories in the texts coming out of these different early Christian traditions.

The two orthodox theories of salvation come from Irenaeus's *Refutation and Overthrow of Falsely So-Called Gnosis* (or *Against Heresies*) (c. 180s) and Hippolytus's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (early 3rd century). For Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* the downfall of humankind originated in the Garden of Eden the way Genesis describes it, when Eve and Adam ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge. In explaining Adam's sin Irenaeus references the Gospel of John and calls Adam "the figure of Him that was to come" (Irenaeus, 3:22:3).¹ This suggests the Johannine progression from pre-existent Logos (Word), to Adam, to Jesus, emphasizing the preordained aspect of Adam's mistake. However, when he discusses Eve's sin, Irenaeus focuses on her aberrant disobedience to God and names the obedient Virgin Mary as her redeeming figure (Irenaeus, 3:22:4).² In his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* Hippolytus also highlights Eve's disobedience as inherent to her downfall, but her redemption is not solely reliant on the obedience of a future female. Hippolytus names Mary Magdalene as Eve's redeemer through her search

¹ Alexander, Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 455.

² Roberts and Donaldson, 455.

for and subsequent spiritual union with Jesus after his resurrection (Hippolytus, 25:4).³ According to Hippolytus, in her redeemed state Eve is reunited with Adam in her proper role as his follower and helper.

From the overarching category of gnostic tradition come the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip*. These two texts are a part of the Nag Hammadi Library, a collection of heretical texts copied down in Coptic around 350 and found in Egypt in 1945.⁴ The *Hypostasis of the Archons* places the responsibility for human suffering on Sophia, a female aspect of the divine within the Sethian gnostic conception of the spiritual realm. Her mistake is that she tries to create something without her male counterpart, which results in the creation of the archons (false gods) who are responsible for the corrupt world and a human population unaware of their spiritual origins (*HypArch*, 94:5-18).⁵ Redemption is made possible through Jesus who teaches the descendents of the divine spirit to recognize the same spirit within themselves (*HypArch*, 96:32-97:4).⁶ The *Gospel of Philip*, coming out of Sethian gnosticism, employs a creation myth similar to the one in *HypArch*, but it points more clearly to the separation of Eve from Adam as the mistake in need of redemption. Therefore, it presents sacraments of reunion as a means to achieve redemption, such as the Eucharist (in which soul and spirit are united) (*GPhilip*, 57:3-10, 75:14-24) and the sacrament of the bridal chamber (in which male and female are physically and spiritually reunited) (*GPhilip*, 70:9-21).⁷ Mary Magdalene is

³ Esther de Boer, ed., *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up: The Sources Behind the Myth*, translated by John Bowden, (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 101.

⁴ Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, (New York: Doubleday, 1995), xxvi.

⁵ Layton, 74.

⁶ Layton, 76.

⁷ Layton, 333, 343.

presented as Jesus's counterpart, exemplifying the spiritual union he promotes as a model for redemption (GPhilip, 59:6-10, 63:33-64:8).⁸

Although it is usually Jesus who is named the savior of humankind, women clearly played key roles in theories of redemption for all of these writers. What might the implications be of the different roles assigned to the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene in writings such as these? What can we learn about the communities reading these texts or the people putting them forth? In their varying discussions of sin and redemption all four texts, whether intentionally or not, put forward distinct ideologies.⁹ Elizabeth Clark describes the term ideology as “stress[ing] power and power differentials, on the one hand, and the role of discursive formations in shaping the construction of the self, on the other.”¹⁰ In exploring the distinct conceptions of human failing and redemption within these four texts inherent ideologies emerge. More specifically, the different ways women function in these distinct conceptions implies a range of gender hierarchies within the ideologies being put forth. Most of the texts' conceptions of human failing and redemption undoubtedly represent gender hierarchies which place women in an inferior

⁸ Layton, 335, 339.

⁹ Elizabeth A. Clark's essay, “Ideology, History, and the Construction of ‘Woman’ in Late Ancient Christianity,” provides useful methods for reading early Christian texts. In it she discusses her theory about the ideological writing employed by the Church Fathers of the 4th and 5th centuries and its implications for women of the time. According to Clark, their method included techniques of naturalization (labeling certain negative characteristics or hierarchies as *natural* phenomena), universalization (concluding that the characteristics or hierarchies pertinent to one person must, by extension, be *universally* pertinent to the group of which he/she is a part), and intertextual exegesis (reinterpreting the meaning of texts and/or reconstructing texts to support claims about history). These three techniques, taken separately and/or in conjunction with each other, are used to build ideologies that serve as “strategies of containment,” a term Clark borrows from Fredric Jameson.

¹⁰ Elizabeth A. Clark, “Ideology, History, and the Construction of ‘Woman’ in Late Ancient Christianity,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994), 159.

position in relation to their male counterparts, while the *Gospel of Philip* alone appears to promote equality between the sexes. In the case of the other three texts (the writings of Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and the *Hypostasis of the Archons*) the implied ideologies serve to ‘contain’ women insofar as they enforce restrictions and limitations on women and present models of submission for women to follow.¹¹ These restrictions and limitations are imposed through techniques of naturalization, which refers to labeling certain negative characteristics or hierarchies as *natural* phenomena, and techniques of universalization, which concludes that the characteristics or hierarchies pertinent to one woman must, by extension, be *universally* pertinent to the group of which she is a part—womankind. Female models of submission are presented through intertextual exegesis—reinterpreting the meaning of texts, reconstructing texts, or conflating texts to support one’s account of history.¹² The ideologies put forth by these different writers are significant in their ability to inform us about attitudes toward women in different movements within the early Church.

Sin and salvation, a mistake and its redemption. The story of humanity’s failing and fate is a fundamental component within all veins of Christian theology. Therefore, the manner in which key male and female players take part in different interpretations of this story point to different ways of understanding male and female Christians in the developing Church.

¹¹ Clark, 162-163.

¹² Clark, 167-168.

II

Scriptural Resources for Early Christian Conceptions of Redemption: Adam, Eve, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene

Four figures play prominent roles in the redemption theories posited in the early Christian writings to be explored: Adam, Eve, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene. All of the texts—Irenaeus's *Refutation and Overthrow of Falsely So-Called Gnosis* (or, *Against Heresies*), Hippolytus's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and the *Gospel of Philip*—present ideas about these characters that are heavily based upon scripture that would eventually be included in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. In an attempt to understand as fully as possible the differing conceptions of redemption put forward by the authors to be explored, it is necessary to examine some of the influential scripture they were probably all reading.

Adam-Christ Typology in the Letters of Paul

In all four texts, Adam is generally accepted to be the first human being, Eve's counterpart, and, to varying degrees, the Pauline imperfect prototype of the Christ to come. In the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* Hippolytus connects Adam to Christ through their parallel non-nakedness, for when Adam was created he was clothed with sinlessness and incorruptibility just as Jesus was clothed when he was resurrected (even though his robe lay in the empty tomb) (25:5).¹³ The *Hypostasis of the Archons* implies this Adam-Christ connection by naming Jesus the salvific "true human being" (96:32-97:4), as opposed to Adam who was created partially in the image of the true divine spirit

¹³ de Boer, 101.

and partially in the image of the false creator gods (87:30-32)—not a wholly *true* human, due to his murky origins.¹⁴ The *Gospel of Philip* makes reference to an Adam-Christ pairing at various points by comparing Adam’s limited mortal offspring and “the perfect human being’s” more numerous immortal offspring (58:18-22), promoting (through God’s blessing) the idea of preexistence (64:9-11, 70:36), and most obviously in the comparison of their parallel virgin births (71:16-21).¹⁵ Irenaeus perhaps makes the most deliberate reference to the Adam-Christ typology in *Against Heresies* when he calls Adam “the figure of Him that was to come” (3:22:3).¹⁶

The following passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans presents Adam as the cause of sin and death and sets him up as the prefiguring of “the one who was to come,” or Jesus Christ.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come... Therefore, just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all (Romans, 5:12-14, 18).¹⁷

For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ (1 Corinthians, 15:21-22).

Gender Hierarchy in the Letters of Paul

Another aspect of the texts that can be traced to the letters of Paul is an implied gender hierarchy coming mostly from the tradition of a female (Eve) committing the first

¹⁴ Layton, 69, 76.

¹⁵ Layton, 334, 339, 344.

¹⁶ Roberts Donaldson, 455.

¹⁷ All biblical quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

sin, as well as the comparison between the church's inferior position to Christ and a wife's inferior position to her husband. This gender hierarchy is more apparent in some texts than in others. The *Gospel of Philip*, for example—especially the sections pertinent to this discussion of redemption—does not display much evidence of a strong hierarchy compared to the other texts discussed. Irenaeus, however, presents a clear male-dominated ordering through his language of obedience: Eve sinned in her disobedience to God and the Virgin Mary redeemed her through her obedience to him (3:22:4).¹⁸ Hippolytus explains that after her redemption, Eve will follow and be guided by Adam without going astray and will be his helper, descriptions that place her in a subordinate role (25:4, 8).¹⁹ He also compares Mary Magdalene's search for Jesus with the synagogue's search for him, which places her in an inferior position like that held by the synagogue²⁰ in relation to Christ (24:2).²¹ Although it does not center around the inferiority of *Eve* as the first sinner, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* has a gender hierarchy worked into the very foundation of its creation myth, because the corrupt physical world is brought about when Sophia, a female element of the divine, tries to create something without her male counterpart (94:2-18).²² The following letters of Paul are likely sources for the basic male-dominated gender hierarchy inherent in these writings.

¹⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, eds., 455.

¹⁹ de Boer, 101, 108.

²⁰ As Haskins explains, the term 'synagogue' here refers to "the Church of the Jews, who are first witnesses of the Church of Christ." Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor*, (London: Harper Collins, 1993), 64.

²¹ de Boer, 100.

²² Layton, 74.

In the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians he explains how the order in which man and woman were created defines the order of authority (and, subsequently, proper practices regarding women's head coverings).

For man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God (1 Corinthians, 11:7-12).

In the Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians he references Eve's mistake in the Garden of Eden to explain his concern that the community in Corinth was at risk of being tempted away from a true allegiance to God and Christ.²³

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians, 11:2-3).

In the First Letter of Paul to Timothy he uses the male-dominated hierarchy referenced in 1 Corinthians and supported by Eve's sin referenced in 2 Corinthians, in order to argue that women should not hold leadership roles within a spiritual community and should instead remain silent.

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. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty (1 Timothy, 2:11-15).

²³ This can also be interpreted as Paul's concern that this community was at risk of being tempted away from his own teaching by another spiritual leader of some kind.

The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians identifies wives as inferior to their husbands as the church is inferior to Christ.

Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24).

The Virgin Mary's Obedience in the Gospel of Luke

As mentioned above, Irenaeus designates the Virgin Mary as Eve's redeemer through her obedience. Mary's attribute of obedience comes from Luke's gospel account, which includes the story of the annunciation of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. Mary is depicted as obedient to God's plan in which she will spiritually conceive and bear the Son of God, Jesus.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her (Luke, 1:26-38).

Mary Magdalene References in the Four Gospel Accounts

Hippolytus, unlike Irenaeus, presents Mary Magdalene as Eve's redeemer. The following quotations refer to her by name and were most likely fundamental to his conception of her.

Mary Magdalene is mentioned explicitly as a disciple of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark and in the Gospel of Luke. In Mark it is not until the crucifixion scene that she is mentioned as having followed and provided for him. According to the passage in Luke, Jesus cured her of possession by demons, and it similarly describes her as one of the women who provided for Jesus and the twelve male disciples.

Mark:

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem (Mark, 15:40-41).

Luke:

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources (Luke, 8:1-3).

The following passages describe Mary Magdalene at Jesus's death. She is present at the crucifixion in all four Gospels and is mentioned by name in all but the Gospel of Luke, in which he indirectly references her through referring to the above passage in which she is named. In the synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) she is also mentioned by name as observing the burial of Jesus' body.

Mark:

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem (Mark, 15:40-41).

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid (Mark, 15: 47).

Matthew:

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matthew, 27:55-56).

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb (Matthew, 27: 61).

Luke:

But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things (Luke, 23:49).

The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid (Luke, 23:55).

John:

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene (John, 19:25).

All of the gospels specifically describe Mary Magdalene going later to the tomb and finding it empty. In the synoptic accounts she is always accompanied by at least one other woman, and they are going to anoint the body of Jesus. The synoptic accounts also include one or two angels at the empty tomb who explain that Jesus has already risen, while there are no such characters in the John's account.

Mark:

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid (Mark, 16:1-8).

Matthew:

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples (Matthew, 28:1-8).

Luke:

Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles (Luke, 23:56 – 24:1-10).

John:

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him" (John, 20:1-2).

Finally, Mary Magdalene appears as a direct witness to Jesus' resurrection in the longer ending of Mark, the Gospel of Matthew, and the Gospel of John. In these three gospels he appears to her and, in Matthew and John, gives her instructions to tell the other disciples that he has risen.

Mark:

Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping (Mark, 16:9-10).

Matthew:

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me" (Matthew, 28:9-10).

John:

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her (John, 20:14-18).

Sources for the Conflated Mary Magdalene of Hippolytus

Hippolytus presents a conflated version of Mary Magdalene by incorporating elements of other female characters (who are not explicitly named Mary Magdalene) from the gospels of Luke and John.²⁴ For example, he inserts the sisters Martha and Mary into John's account of Jesus's resurrection where only Mary Magdalene had appeared before. This implies that, for Hippolytus, Mary the sister of Martha was in fact Mary Magdalene. An important thematic strand that Hippolytus taps into is the image of Mary at the feet of Jesus. Although Mary Magdalene is not actually portrayed kneeling at the feet of Jesus in John's resurrection passage, Hippolytus draws on this image from Mary the sister of Martha in Luke and Mary the sister of Martha in John and inserts it into his retelling of the Johannine resurrection account. Furthermore, this kneeling imagery (especially the anointing scene in John) evokes the scene in Luke 7 in which an unnamed woman sinner anoints Jesus's feet. So while she is not directly conflated in Hippolytus, an implied connection exists.

Mary the sister of Martha is found kneeling at Jesus's feet once in Luke's gospel and twice in John's gospel. The scene in Luke's gospel defines a hierarchy in which Mary is placed above her sister, having chosen the "better part." When Mary is depicted kneeling at Jesus feet in John, she expresses her loyal and emotional devotion.

²⁴ This conflation comes centuries before Pope Gregory the Great cemented the fully amalgamated figure of Mary Magdalene in his sermon about the Gospel of Luke probably given in 591 (Haskins, 95-96). It is important to recognize that in associating Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany, Hippolytus is presenting a milder conflation than the 591 version, but it is an interesting display of early ideas about the nature of her role.

Luke:

Now as they went on their way, [Jesus] entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke, 10:38-42).

John:

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved (John 11:32-33).

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume (John 12:3).

The second instance of Mary, the sister of Martha, kneeling at Jesus's feet in John recalls the woman sinner in Luke 7, implying a fuller conflation of Mary Magdalene than is initially apparent.

And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment (Luke 7:37-38).

These early scriptural sources appear to have served as both foundational to these early Christian writers' ideas, as well as starting off points for the exploration and development of Christian ideas in new and unfamiliar directions. Because intertextuality plays a big part in all of the texts discussed in the following chapters, examining these

early sources encourages a more precise reading of the ideas laid out by Irenaeus, Hippolytus, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and the *Gospel of Philip*.

III

The Eve-Virgin Mary Pairing in the Context of Irenaeus's Adam-Christ Rhetoric

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 150-200)²⁵ wrote the *Refutation and Overthrow of Falsely So-Called Gnosis (Against Heresies)* between 182 and 188²⁶ in order, primarily, to refute gnostic beliefs of the time. Its title clearly takes the label of “falsely so-called gnosis” from the First Letter of Paul to Timothy, which ends with the statement, “Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and contradiction of what is falsely called knowledge; by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith” (1 Timothy, 6:20-21). Of course, in arguing against what he believes is false knowledge Irenaeus lays out his own understanding of Orthodox Christianity. Irenaeus’s writing employs a wealth of intertextual references to the New Testament. In Book III of *Against Heresies* Irenaeus addresses the Virgin Mary’s redemptive role as Eve’s anti-type in light of the Pauline Adam-Christ pairing (see Chapter 2). Irenaeus was not the first person to write about the Virgin Mary as Eve’s redeemer; Another Church Father, Justin Martyr (c. 110-165),²⁷ had already introduced this idea in his *Dialogue with Trypho*.²⁸ However, Irenaeus further explores the pairing in *Against Heresies*, rooting it more firmly in Pauline tradition.²⁹

²⁵ Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: the Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, translated by Thomas Buffer, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 51.

²⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, 312.

²⁷ Gambero, 44.

²⁸ Gambero, 46-47.

²⁹ Gambero, 52.

Irenaeus's Pauline-Based Adam-Christ Typology

Irenaeus makes use of intertextuality by quoting Paul's Letter to the Romans in his explanation of the Adam-Christ pairing, but transforms the identity of the Pauline Christ into the Johannine conception of the pre-existing Logos (the Word who was *with* God, and who *was* God, John 1:1) of God:

Hence also was Adam himself termed by Paul "the figure of Him that was to come," because the Word, the Maker of all things, had formed beforehand for Himself the future dispensation of the human race, connected with the Son of God; God having predestined that the first man should be of an animal nature, with this view, that he might be saved by the spiritual One. For inasmuch as He had a pre-existence as a saving Being, it was necessary that what might be saved should also be called into existence, in order that the Being who saves should not exist in vain (3:22:3).³⁰

Here Irenaeus makes a connection between the Logos of John's gospel and the first human, Adam. Because Adam was created in the image of God—for Irenaeus, the Johannine Word, or the "Maker of all things"—Irenaeus is highlighting in this quotation the direct connection between the Logos, its initial incarnation as Adam, and finally Christ's existence on earth. This strengthens Adam's link to Christ, not only as one whose sin necessitated redemption, but also as an essential player in a preordained progression from the eternal divine Logos to Christ incarnate, sent to redeem humankind. Irenaeus alludes to the preordained nature of this [Logos-]Adam-Christ pairing when he explains, "For inasmuch as He had a pre-existence as a saving Being, it was necessary that what might be saved should also be called into existence, in order that the Being who saves should not exist in vain." This is an interesting way to look at the hierarchy. Rather than presenting the sin of the imperfect Adam (and his offspring) as necessitating Christ's saving powers, it seems Irenaeus presents Christ, incarnation of the eternal Logos, as the

³⁰ Roberts and Donaldson, 455.

constant—the pre-existent divine figure whose saving powers require a people in need of salvation—and Adam as fulfilling the role of he whom Christ will redeem. He compares this retrospective view with the backward looking genealogy in Luke, “implying that it is He who has summed up in Himself all nations dispersed from Adam downwards, and all languages and generations of men, together with Adam himself” (3:22:3).³¹ With this set-up in mind—a redeemer undoing the sin of the redeemed—it reasonably follows that Eve, the first female sinner, be redeemed by a female redeeming figure. For Irenaeus, the logical solution is the Virgin Mary.

Obedience and Passivity in the Eve-Virgin Mary Pairing

Irenaeus first connects Eve and the Virgin Mary through their virginity:

Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.” But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless as yet a virgin..., having become disobedient, was made the cause of death, both to herself and to the entire human race; so also did Mary, having a man betrothed [to her], and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race (3:22:4).³²

He explains that although both had male partners, both, at the time of Eve’s sin and Mary’s conception, were virgins. The two women, at similarly pure stages in their lives, were each presented with a command. Eve took one path and disobeyed the command (not to eat from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden), and the Virgin Mary took another path and obeyed (God’s command that she bare Jesus Christ), and this is how Irenaeus places Mary in her salvific role within the comparison. The point of difference

³¹ Roberts and Donaldson, 455.

³² Roberts and Donaldson, 455.

between the paths taken by Eve and Mary that Irenaeus stresses the most lies in the issue of obedience. The importance placed on obedience in the above passage highlights as paramount the act of submission to a divine will, and Eve's disobedience stands in direct contrast to this value. Comparing this language to the language Irenaeus uses to describe the Adam-Christ situation sheds more light on the ideology he is potentially endorsing.

First, something is missing in the Eve-Mary pairing that exists in Irenaeus's discussion of the Adam-Christ pairing: a female counterpart to the divine Logos. For Irenaeus, it was the male Logos who existed in the very beginning and "formed" Adam, who was the "figure" of Jesus to come. But Eve and the Virgin Mary do not quite hail from such divine origins. Eve came out of Adam, the creation and prototype of a male God, rather than directly from her own original female divinity. Thus the structure of male and female beings in the world is imbalanced, privileging the male over the female due to the existence of a sole supreme male God from which everything comes. A male-dominated divine realm understandably suggests a male-dominated earthly realm, and Adam's sin as compared to Eve's sin illustrates this hierarchy.

Addressing Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, Irenaeus draws on the idea of Adam's *nature* (though the concept of nature operates differently here than in the description of naturalization in which attributing negative qualities to one's nature implies inherent weakness). Instead of using naturalization to explain the many downfalls of women, here it is used to *excuse* one of man's. The way Irenaeus presents it, Adam's sin appears inextricable from his nature: "God having predestined that the first man

should be of an animal³³ nature, with this view, that he might be saved by the spiritual one.” With the Adam-Christ pairing, there seems a suggestion of inevitability, Adam’s nature is out of his control and destined to be redeemed. But Eve is charged with the active and concrete violation of a rule; she was disobedient, “For she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin.” Irenaeus stresses her virginal status, a detail that serves to magnify the seriousness of her sin. Here, it is as if Eve’s sin stems from her *rejection* of the standard “nature” of a virgin. Hence, Adam’s “animal nature” or “nature of soul” (arguably a more accurate translation) inevitably necessitates Christ’s “spiritual one,” but it is Eve’s act of defiance against her virginal nature, her act of disobedience, that requires the Virgin Mary’s redemption.

The features of Adam’s sin versus Eve’s sinful act are reversed in the redeeming figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary. This reversal is apparent in the language Irenaeus uses to describe the manner of Christ’s redeeming role in relation to the language he uses to describe the manner of Mary’s redeeming role: “It was necessary that what might be saved should also be called into existence, in order that the *Being who saves* should not save in vain” (3:22:3. Italics added). Irenaeus’s statement about Christ’s role uses active language to describe salvation. As quoted earlier in the letter to the Romans, Paul describes Christ’s salvation in terms of action as well: “Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s *act* of righteousness leads to justification and life for all” (Romans, 5:18. Italics added). Backed by a tradition

³³ The word ‘animal’ in the Roberts and Donaldson translation is problematic. In Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau’s French translation of *Against Heresies* (with side-by-side Greek and Latin) the word is translated to ‘psychique’ (*Contre les Hérésies, Livre III*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1974, 439). This derives from the Greek ψυχή (psychē) and *animalem* in Latin, both translated to mean *soul*.

emphasizing Christ's assertive power in his "act of righteousness," the phrase "Being who saves," puts him in the effective role of "saver," redeeming through *action*.

"Being who saves" may not immediately strike the reader as an overly active description, but when compared with the language used to describe Mary's method of salvation a noticeable difference appears: "Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word'" (3:22:4). Mary does not take an active role in her act of redemption so much as she agrees to be subject to whatever is "according to [God's] word" in the fundamentally submissive role of "the handmaid of the Lord." It is not even that she *is* obedient, Mary "is *found* obedient." Later in the passage Irenaeus stresses this point when he writes that Mary, "by yielding obedience, [became] the cause of salvation." The choice of the word "yielding" and the idea that she became "the cause of salvation" both emphasize that Mary was part of a larger structure of salvation, serving a divinely ordained plan by following instructions and thereby "causing" salvation. Thus, Eve's active defiance is eventually undone by the Virgin Mary's passive obedience. Calling Christ one "who saves" places him in an undoubtedly assertive position in comparison.

Finally, Irenaeus mentions the difference between Eve and Mary's faith when he writes, "For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith" (3:22:4).³⁴ Eve's sin of disobedience stemmed from her unbelief. This suggests that the problem is her lack of trust in God, but surrounded by so much talk of disobedience, the concept of disbelief becomes shaded with an air of defiance. It is not so much that Eve thought about her options and made a rational decision; she is presented

³⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, 455.

as simply rebelling, perhaps entirely without any real motivation, against God as a child might against their mother. Similarly, the Virgin Mary's faith almost seems surpassed, in level of importance, by her obedience. In fact, throughout the passages in *Against Heresies* in which the Eve-Virgin Mary pairing is addressed (3:22:4 and later 5:19:1) Mary's obedience is mentioned five separate times, while her faith is mentioned only once. This indicates a certain value set that Irenaeus may have been trying to enforce.

The intertextual application of Pauline sources regarding Christ's pre-existent nature and active redemption of Adam's sin serves as a foil for the Virgin Mary's passive redemption of Eve's sin through obedience to the male Divine. With the language used in the story of humanity's redemption Irenaeus promotes a male dominated gender hierarchy in which obedience is presented as a natural feature of faithful women and provides an example of submission in the figure of the Virgin Mary.

IV

The Bride-Mary Magdalene-Eve Comparison in Hippolytus's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*

While Irenaeus writes in *Against Heresies*, as Justin did in *Dialogue with Trypho* slightly earlier, that the Virgin Mary is responsible for undoing the sin of Eve and bringing salvation to humanity, Hippolytus (c. 170-235),³⁵ writing not too long after Irenaeus, presents a strikingly different comparison in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Rather than naming the Virgin Mary as Eve's salvific anti-type, Hippolytus instead identifies the figure of Mary Magdalene as the woman who undoes Eve's original sin. Hippolytus's conception of Mary Magdalene was the first of its kind at the time he was writing.³⁶ As outlined in Chapter 2, Mary Magdalene's character before her official conflation in 591 was defined by the points in scripture where she is mentioned by name. These references designate her membership among Jesus's women followers, her presence at the cross and empty tomb, and her role as witness to the risen Jesus.³⁷ Before Hippolytus wrote his *Commentary of the Song of Songs*, the traditional understanding of Mary Magdalene (based on the aforementioned stories from scripture) focused on her role "as one of the myrrhophores, anointers of Christ or ointment bearers, and witness to the central tenet of [early Christians'] beliefs."³⁸ Hippolytus, however, compares her to the bride or Shulamite in *Song of Songs* as she seeks her bridegroom. This comparison assigns new meaning to the role of the Mary Magdalene whose search for the Jesus in the

³⁵ de Boer, 99.

³⁶ Haskins, 65.

³⁷ Of course each gospel account includes slightly different versions of Mary Magdalene's identifying functions, and some of them include more references to her than others.

³⁸ Haskins, 62.

garden (John 20:11-18) is compared to the bride seeking her bridegroom. Hippolytus stresses the themes of seeking and reuniting in Mary Magdalene's redemption of Eve and in her acquisition of the title "Apostle to the Apostles" for the first time.³⁹ Although the language used to describe Mary Magdalene's redemption emphasizes love and union, Hippolytus maintains a traditional gender hierarchy insofar as he continues to uphold the assigned feminine traits of obedience and subordination to men.

**The Puzzle of Conflation:
Martha and Mary in John's Resurrection Narrative**

Hippolytus addresses the issue of redemption by bringing John's resurrection narrative into his discussion of the *Song of Songs* and comparing Mary and Martha to the *Song of Songs* bride or Shulamite:

O blessed voice [of the bride]! O blessed *women* who show that what has been seen before is a prefiguring. Therefore she calls out and says 'In the night I sought him whom my soul loves.' See how that is fulfilled in Martha and Mary (24:2. Italics added).⁴⁰

Martha and Mary seek Christ the way the bride seeks her bridegroom, and thus they illuminate the prefiguring of the bride's earlier search for her bridegroom, now being recapitulated in their search for Jesus after his death. In *Commentary on the Song of Songs* Hippolytus draws his resurrection account almost directly from John's gospel, in which only Mary Magdalene searches and finds Jesus in the garden. So why does Hippolytus keep referring to "Martha and Mary" or "the women" in his account of the first witnesses to the risen Jesus. J.A. Cerrato addresses this inconsistency by presenting

³⁹ Haskins, 65.

⁴⁰ de Boer, 100.

the possibility “that a tradition did flourish in the second century which placed Martha and Mary of Bethany (perhaps with Mary Magdalene already identified as Mary of Bethany) at the tomb and made much of their presence.”⁴¹ Hippolytus does not spend time explaining why he describes Martha and Mary as witnesses to the resurrected Jesus, but if it was already an commonly held belief among his readers and listeners then this adjustment to the narrative would have been a familiar move.⁴²

Even though Hippolytus references these two women throughout the resurrection narrative, his framing of this narrative in terms of the *Song of Songs* suggests that the *Song of Songs* bride who searches for her bridegroom would have a *single* female counterpart who searches for her risen Lord. Haskins reasons that, taken in the context of John’s resurrection narrative, it is clear that Hippolytus’s Martha and Mary pairing refers specifically to Mary Magdalene.⁴³ Cerrato disagrees with Haskin’s argument, claiming that “the suggestion of Haskins that the single figure of Mary Magdalene is the correct reconstruction of the original Hippolytan text (Cant. 24-5) is weakened by the context.”⁴⁴ By ‘context’ he points to the deliberate insertion of Martha into a section of Johannine text that originally included only Mary Magdalene, numerous mentions of “the women,” and the constant use of plural pronouns to refer to them. While these are all valid points,

⁴¹ J.A. Cerrato, “Martha and Mary in the Commentaries of Hippolytus,” *Papers presented at the thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies*, (Oxford, 1999), 296.

⁴² Cerrato explains that the *epistula apostolorum* of the late second century includes Martha as one of the witnesses to the empty tomb and resurrection. He also suggests, “The identification of Mary of Bethany with Mary Magdalene is perhaps visible as early as the Ethiopic version of the *epistula apostolorum*, which appears to couple Martha and Mary Magdalene.” J.A. Cerrato, *Hippolytus between East and West: the Commentaries and the Provenance of the Corpus*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 174-175, 177-178.

⁴³ Haskins, 63.

⁴⁴ J.A. Cerrato, *Hippolytus between East and West: the Commentaries and the Provenance of the Corpus*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 180.

there is strong evidence that Mary at least played a special role apart from Martha in Hippolytus's resurrection account. In fact, it is the evidence that suggests a conflation of Mary (Martha's sister) with Mary Magdalene that simultaneously points to Mary's special role over and above Martha in the story. While this paper will not try to argue that every time Hippolytus writes 'Martha and Mary' he actually means Mary Magdalene (as Haskins suggests) it will argue for the importance of recognizing the implications of intertextual conflation as well as the nuances of language when it comes to singular versus plural pronouns (and there are nuances).

As stated above, in John's gospel Mary Magdalene is the sole witness of the newly risen Lord. Already this implies that the Martha mentioned in Hippolytus's retelling of John's resurrection narrative is joining a Mary that is both her sister and Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene's individual importance is emphasized in relation to the bride from the *Song of Songs* when the two women seek the risen Jesus. The bride's counterpart is revealed clearly as Mary Magdalene in a passage in which the "they" of Martha and Mary switches to the singular female pronoun at a significant moment:

But the Saviour answered and said: 'Martha, Mary.' And they said 'Rabbouni', which translated means 'my Lord'. 'I have found him whom I love and I will not let him go'. For at that moment *she* [Mary Magdalene] clings to him, embracing his feet. . . . Because love of Christ had gathered in *her* [Mary Magdalene's] belly *she* did not want to go away (25:2. Italics added).⁴⁵

After the two women ("they") recognize their teacher or "Lord," the text switches pronouns and continues on with only one woman as the subject—Mary Magdalene. One could argue that Hippolytus's "I," "she," and "her" could be referring to the singular Martha just as easily as to the singular Mary, but because the original Johannine passage

⁴⁵ de Boer, 100-101.

unquestionably casts Mary Magdalene in the *noli me tangere* scene,⁴⁶ it is most likely that Hippolytus has her in mind as well for his own version of the story. Not only is Mary Magdalene the one who implicitly reaches out to the risen Christ in John's gospel, Mary the sister of Martha is the one who is depicted repeatedly at the feet of Jesus in the gospels of Luke and John. Therefore, for Hippolytus, both aspects of Mary's character (sister of Martha and Mary Magdalene) carry associations with kneeling in front of Jesus, so if one out of the two women (Martha and Mary) throws herself at the feet of Jesus in Hippolytus's account, it would logically be Mary.

It is stated nowhere in the Bible that Mary, the sister of Martha, is actually Mary Magdalene, but we have discussed how Hippolytus's insertion of Martha and Mary into an account where only Mary Magdalene had appeared before implies that, for Hippolytus, Mary the sister of Martha was, in fact, Mary Magdalene. In conflating these two women Hippolytus is taking a step toward the amalgamated figure of Mary Magdalene cemented by Pope Gregory the Great in 591.⁴⁷ However, it is important to recognize that in associating Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany, Hippolytus is presenting a milder conflation than the 591 version. Nevertheless, a look at the figure of Mary—Martha's sister—in the New Testament does highlight some interesting implications. The sisters Mary and Martha appear in both Luke and John's gospels. In Luke 10 Mary is the sister who “[chooses] the better part” by sitting and listening to Jesus's teachings (Luke 10:39-42). Here Mary is privileged over her sister Martha and placed closer to Jesus, both physically and spiritually, which supports the claim that Mary is the primary figure in

⁴⁶ The phrase *Noli me tangere* (translated directly to “Do not touch me”) refers to the Gospel of John in which Jesus speaks these words to Mary Magdalene. See Chapter 2 for the text of John, 20:15-17.

⁴⁷ Haskins, 95-96.

Hippolytus's *Commentary*. Another thematic strand that Hippolytus takes hold of (already mentioned above) is the image of Mary at the feet of Jesus. Although Mary is not actually portrayed kneeling at the feet of Jesus in John's resurrection passage, Hippolytus draws on this image from other places within John and Luke and inserts it into his retelling of the Johannine account. In John's gospel Martha and Mary live in Bethany with their dying brother Lazarus. Mary, thinking her brother could have only been saved if Jesus had been there earlier, kneels and weeps at Jesus's feet (John 11:32). Later when Jesus returns to Bethany in the next chapter, Mary anoints Jesus's feet with "costly perfume," wiping them with her hair (John 12:3).⁴⁸ This is presented in the context of Jesus's impending death, and when Judas criticizes Mary for wasting costly perfume Jesus defends her saying, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial" (John 12:7). In this case Mary's kneeling and anointing shows an understanding and love for her Lord, perhaps similar to the love shown in the resurrection passage that Hippolytus wants to depict. Therefore, Hippolytus's conflation does not openly promote the idea that Mary of Bethany/Mary Magdalene was a penitent sinner or prostitute as the fuller amalgamation of 591 suggests. Rather, in lieu of the above and in moving forward with our study of Hippolytus's *Commentary*, it is important to recognize his language of conflation and to explore the intertextual implications of

⁴⁸ The anointing story with Mary of Bethany is strikingly similar to the one in Luke 7 about an unnamed woman sinner who anoints Jesus feet with ointment and tears and dries them with her hair. The woman from this story would later become one of the woman conflated with Mary Magdalene. While Hippolytus is not outwardly conflating Mary of Bethany with the unnamed woman in Luke, the image of a kneeling woman "embracing [Jesus's] feet" (Hippolytus, 25:2) does evoke Luke's story. Whether or not this is intentional on Hippolytus's part, it is important to recognize how early Christians might have read this text, including all the possible intertextual connections they could have drawn.

using Martha and Mary to signify Mary Magdalene. The theme of unconditional and emotional love and devotion shown through these scenes at Jesus's feet is fundamental to the picture of redemption Hippolytus paints.

Redemption in Love and Union

In *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Hippolytus constantly uses the bride's words, "him whom my soul loves," to refer to her bridegroom:

Therefore she calls: 'In the night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him and did not find him. The watchmen who guarded the city found me. "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" And behold, when I had gone a little away from them I found him whom my soul loves" (24:1).⁴⁹

She seeks him "in the night," then asks the watchmen if they've seen him, and finally finds him when she has "gone a little away from them," each time calling her bridegroom "him whom my soul loves." After his initial summary of the bride's search in *Song of Songs*, Hippolytus starts incorporating her words into the story of Mary Magdalene (called Martha and Mary) in John's resurrection narrative:

O blessed women [Mary Magdalene] who show that what has been seen before is a prefiguring. Therefore she [the bride] calls out and says 'In the night I sought him whom my soul loves.' See how that is fulfilled in Martha and Mary (24:2).⁵⁰

By comparing Mary Magdalene's search for Jesus after she find his tomb empty with the bride's search for her bridegroom, Hippolytus emphasizes the element of love present in her search for Jesus. So from the start, the connecting element between the bride in *Song of Songs* and Mary Magdalene in John's resurrection narrative is the search for a loved one. Hippolytus explains that the seeking bride in the *Song of Songs* is re-envisioned

⁴⁹ de Boer, 100.

⁵⁰ de Boer, 100.

through the lens of John's gospel as a foreshadowing of the seeking Mary Magdalene; the two are connected in their loving searches for bridegroom and Jesus, respectively. Soon Hippolytus starts conflating the stories of the bride and Mary Magdalene at the tomb:

See that there a new mystery has been fulfilled. For thus she calls out and says: 'I sought him and did not find him. The watchmen who guarded the city found me.' Who other than the angels who sat there were those who found him? And what city did they guard other than the new Jerusalem, the body of Christ? 'The watchmen who guarded the city found me.' The women [Mary Magdalene] asked this: 'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?' But they said: 'Whom do you seek? Jesus of Nazareth? Behold, he has risen'" (24:4).⁵¹

Hippolytus transitions from the Song of Songs narrative to the Johannine narrative through the parallel figures of the watchmen in the city and the angels at the tomb (an addition from the synoptic gospels; angels do not appear in John's resurrection account). The point where the two narratives meet is unclear because the angels and the watchmen seem to be interchangeable within Hippolytus's conflation of text. It is clear that Hippolytus is talking about John's resurrection narrative at the words, "The women [Mary Magdalene] asked this." By placing the bride's words in the mouth of Mary Magdalene, Hippolytus stresses the aspect of love in her search for Jesus. Mary is searching for Christ because her soul loves him; in finding him she, like the bride, will be united with he whom her soul loves. Hippolytus will place great significance on this union when he discusses Eve's redemption.

As mentioned earlier, Hippolytus explicitly converts the characters of Martha and Mary into the individual Mary Magdalene in the *noli me tangere* scene. This passage of the *Commentary* reveals more than just Mary Magdalene's singular importance over and

⁵¹ de Boer, 100.

against the pair of Martha and Mary. There is a clear language of love and union present that complicates Mary Magdalene's role:

‘I have found him whom I love and I will not let him go’. For at that moment she [Mary Magdalene] clings to him, embracing his feet...Because love of Christ had gathered in her [Mary Magdalene's] belly she did not want to go away (25:2).⁵²

It is Mary Magdalene who declares she has found him whom she loves, who clings to him and wishes never to leave his side because of the love she has for him. This switch in language highlights the loving bond between Mary Magdalene (specifically) and Jesus. Hippolytus continues on with this rhetoric of unification, putting the following words into Mary Magdalene's mouth:

“Take my heart to mix it with the Spirit! Secure it, fulfill it, until it can be united with the heavenly body! Mix this body of mine with the heavenly body! Drink it as wine! Take it and then reach it to heaven as a newly mixed drink” (25:4).⁵³

The “mixing” and “uniting” in this passage are not necessarily erotic or sexual the way interactions between Mary Magdalene and Jesus are often read. Rather, the words are eucharistic in nature and refer to the mixing and uniting of the earthly body or heart with the heavenly body or spirit. The parallel story of the bride seeking union with her bridegroom (whom her *soul* loves) emphasizes the role of love (of a spiritual kind) in this eucharistic union between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. It is only through Mary's spiritual union with Jesus that Eve can be redeemed.

⁵² de Boer, 100-101.

⁵³ de Boer, 101.

Implied Gender Hierarchies in Redemption

Hippolytus's passage about spiritual reunion continues below, showing how Mary Magdalene's redeems Eve's sin through her loving union with "the heavenly body/spirit":

...Take it and then reach it to heaven as a newly mixed drink. So that the woman [Eve] follows the one whom she desires and does not go astray! She is no longer pierced in the heel and no longer touches the wood of knowledge. Instead, from now on she has been made a conqueror through the death on the wood. (25:4).⁵⁴

Here Hippolytus finally makes the connection between Mary seeking Jesus and uniting spiritually with the "heavenly body" and Eve's redemption from her sin in the garden.

There is much to be gleaned from the language used to describe Eve's redemption, but first we must acknowledge the way Hippolytus universalizes Eve's behavior to represent all women.

When Hippolytus refers to Eve (or 'the woman' in this case) he is talking about all of womankind. A few passages clarify Eve's universal aspect in the way Hippolytus discusses the burdens of being a woman that find their origins in Eve's sin. Following Eve's redemption through Mary and Jesus's spiritual Eucharist, Hippolytus writes, "Take up Eve, so that she shall no longer give birth with pain, for the pangs, the pain and the sorrow have been driven away" (25:5).⁵⁵ Hippolytus is clearly referring to the universal pangs that all women experience in childbirth, reminding the reader that every woman's pain and sorrow are due to Eve's sin. Similarly, every woman's salvation will be through Eve's redemption. Later, when the women (or just Mary Magdalene) bring the news of Jesus's resurrection to the disciples, they are disbelieved: "They regarded her as misled and they doubted. However, the cause was this, that Eve usually proclaimed lies and not

⁵⁴ de Boer, 101.

⁵⁵ de Boer, 101.

the truth” (25:9).⁵⁶ The male disciples are clearly accustomed to attributing the sinful nature of Eve to all women, revealing a tradition that considers the figure of Eve a representative of womankind, and therefore places women in an explicitly inferior position in relation to men.

Mary Magdalene is a member of this inferior womankind, but she is also an instigator of change. She is responsible for redeeming Eve, but the language Hippolytus uses to describe Mary Magdalene’s search and reunion and Eve’s (and, therefore, womankind’s) subsequent redemption reveals a male dominated gender hierarchy perhaps unexpected in the context of Mary’s seemingly powerful role. Mary Magdalene’s search for Jesus is directly linked to “the synagogue [seeking] zealously for the dead Christ, whom she thought no longer to be alive” (24:2).⁵⁷ Here Mary is compared to the female-gendered synagogue (the “Church” of the Jews that would become the Church of Christ)⁵⁸ because they both, according to Hippolytus, are in search of Jesus. While it may not be immediately apparent, the Pauline source alluded to in this comparison, which describes Christ’s relationship to the church, brings an inherent gender hierarchy to this aspect of the text. The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians instructs: “Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands” (5:24). By recalling this passage, which places women in the same subordinate role of the ‘feminine’ church, Hippolytus identifies Mary Magdalene with this pattern of female subordination to Jesus. Furthermore, because the scriptural reference is universalizing in nature (referring to *all* wives, which can easily be extended to women in general) it implies a

⁵⁶ de Boer, 108.

⁵⁷ de Boer, 100.

⁵⁸ Haskins, 64.

similarly subordinate role for all members of the female gender who follow in the honorable footsteps of Mary Magdalene in their search for Jesus.

Once Mary Magdalene finds Jesus, the nature of her redemption of Eve emphasizes the subjugating influence of female obedience. Returning to the quote from 25:4, in her spiritual union with Jesus, Mary Magdalene makes redemption possible for Eve through “following” and “not going astray”—language that puts Eve’s salvation in terms of the male figure that she must follow closely. Esther de Boer picks up on this language and helpfully highlights the importance of obedience in the redemption of womankind in the *Mary Magdalene Cover-up* when she writes, “...[Eve] has been made worthy for the good and united with the new Adam/Christ, through whom she allows herself to be led in obedience.”⁵⁹ Eve’s redemption can occur only in relation to the male Adam/Christ, following obediently where she disobeyed where she went astray before. Later in chapter 25 Hippolytus mentions the redeemed Eve as part of a union with Adam (like Mary’s union with Christ), but the role she plays in that union upsets any equality implied by the term: “From now on she is united and a helpmeet, for Adam guides Eve. O good helper, by bringing her spouse the good tidings!” (25:8).⁶⁰ Eve’s redemption lies in the undoing of her original sin—disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit and leading her male counterpart, Adam, astray—through Mary Magdalene’s devoted search for and spiritual union with her male counterpart, Jesus. Furthermore, it is made clear that Eve’s redeemed state is dependent on her acceptance of her subordinate role in relation to Adam.

⁵⁹ de Boer, 111.

⁶⁰ de Boer, 108.

Similar hierarchical particularities occur in Hippolytus's discussion of Mary

Magdalene as Apostle to the Apostles:

And after this the synagogue recognizes, crying about these women: 'Those bear us a good witness who, sent by Christ, became apostles for the apostles, to whom the angels said: "Go and tell the disciples: He is going before you to Galilee." There you shall see him' (25:6).⁶¹

Haskins claims that "here in Hippolytus is possibly the first appearance of the title which recognizes the importance of Mary Magdalene's...role in announcing the resurrection to the apostles:...the New Eve becomes 'Apostle to the Apostles'."⁶² It is certainly important to recognize the uniqueness of Mary Magdalene's new title, but this must not overshadow the nuances of Hippolytus's language that do not quite point to the feminist position we may be inclined to read into his writing. Hippolytus's take on Mary Magdalene's apostle status comes out later in chapter 25 when he describes the specifications of the role for a woman—likely very different from those for a man: "Thus it became clear that the women were apostles of Christ and were to make up through obedience the shortcomings of the old Eve" (25:6).⁶³ This moment, where Mary is actually called an apostle of Christ, is interesting because, although she is being acknowledged as an apostle, it is on certain terms. The theme of obedience is almost more damaging in this specific instance because it explains the manner in which Mary is to live out her apostleship. Apostleship could be explained any number of ways, but to explain it for the first time in terms of obedience sets up a strict hierarchy. By explaining or validating her apostleship in this way, Hippolytus undermines the power this role

⁶¹ de Boer, 108. The element of the angels telling the women to go to Galilee and spread the news of Jesus's resurrection is taken from the synoptic gospels (Mark 16, Matthew 28, and Luke 24) in another example of intertextual conflation.

⁶² Haskins, 65.

⁶³ de Boer, 108.

could potentially afford her. To explore this issue further, let us return to a passage discussed earlier and examine what follows. In verse 8 of chapter 25 Hippolytus calls Eve Adam's "helpmeet" and "good helper." These terms imply a subordinate role for Eve within the couple. Interestingly, what follows directly after links Mary's message to the male disciples to Eve's "helpmeet" status:

From now on she is united and a helpmeet, for Adam guides Eve. O good helper, by bringing her spouse the good tidings! Therefore the women brought the good news to the disciples. Therefore, too, they regarded her as misled and they doubted. However, the cause was this, that Eve usually proclaimed lies and not the truth. 'What kind of message about the resurrection is this, woman?' And therefore they regarded her as misled (25:8-9).⁶⁴

This extended passage tells us two things: first it shows that, for Hippolytus, Mary bringing the good news to the disciples is good inasmuch as it is similar to Eve—helpful, obedient spouse that she is—bringing Adam good tidings. Mary's worth as a female apostle is, therefore, wrapped up in her helpfulness to the male disciples. Also, the male disciples initially disbelieve what Mary is saying because Eve is known to be a liar. Obviously this was an accepted stereotype of women at the time for the men to "[regard] her as misled" simply based on beliefs about the first female. Looking further along in verse 9 (not quoted), Jesus has to appear himself in order to convince the male apostles that Martha and Mary (Mary Magdalene) are actually apostles. This calls to attention a clear gender hierarchy that placed women in specific roles in relation to men and rarely allowed women to occupy leadership positions.

Through careful analysis of this text it becomes apparent that in Hippolytus's time, the idea of a female apostle was unheard of. The author was most likely breaking new

⁶⁴ de Boer, 108-109.

ground by presenting Mary Magdalene as a “New Eve” through her loving union with Christ (derived from the loving union of bride and bridegroom), but the constant allusions to a culture saturated with Pauline-based gender hierarchy show an inability to completely reshape the role of women in the early Church. There were other movements during this early period in Christianity’s development that, although eventually labeled heretical, pushed the conceptual boundaries of redemption even further as it related to their unique ideas about the origin of human failing.

V

Sophia, Eve, Mary Magdalene, and Redemption in Two Gnostic Texts

Gnosticism is the category used to describe a variety of unorthodox or heretical movements during the early stages of Christianity (probably peaking during the second and third centuries).⁶⁵ Much of our knowledge about different gnostic traditions comes from Coptic texts found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945. The Nag Hammadi library consists of 13 codices comprised of about 50 texts all written on papyrus. The manuscripts were dated to around 350 C.E., surviving well due to the dry climate in which they were buried.⁶⁶ Of course much insight can be gleaned about the context in which gnostic movements existed from writings by early Church Fathers (like Irenaeus and Hippolytus) who attacked the heretical nature of gnostic beliefs from the perspective of orthodox Christianity, but it is essential to examine the texts that members of these movements actually read. Two works in particular, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip*, both from the Nag Hammadi Library, present interesting pictures of Eve and Adam, the origins of human failing, and redemption.

Two Gnostic Movements: Sethianism and Valentinianism

The two gnostic texts discussed in this chapter come from different strains of gnosticism. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* is identified with the Sethian tradition while the *Gospel of Philip* is categorized as Valentinian. Sethian gnosticism refers to a group of

⁶⁵ Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3.

⁶⁶ Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, (New York: Doubleday, 1995), xxvi.

texts that bear commonalities in mythology and overlap in significant characters and terminology.⁶⁷ The title “Sethianism” refers to Seth, the third son born of Adam and Eve after Eve bears Cain and Abel. In his account of Sethian gnosticism, the fourth century heresiologist Epiphanius explains that Seth held the seed of divine power within himself, transferred from the female aspect of the Divine, designating his offspring as a chosen people.⁶⁸ While this feature often appears in one form or another in texts labeled as Sethian, the category as a whole is quite complex due to the idiosyncrasies between the individual texts. The *Hypostasis of the Archons*, for example, downplays the role of Seth but maintains an emphasis on the idea of a spiritual line descending from the female Divine.

Irenaeus attacked the Valentinian movement (to which the Gospel of Philip belongs) in *Against Heresies*, but the group was not completely alienated from orthodox Christianity until the 4th century.⁶⁹ This is largely due to the fact that “their teachings were an interpretation of Christianity, not a rival religion.”⁷⁰ (Members of the movement did not call themselves anything different than other Christians, rather the name Valentinian was assigned to them by their objectors.) Valentinians accepted a gnostic creation myth (like those labeled “Sethian”) but were accepted for so long by orthodox Christians because they embraced the standard accepted Christian scripture. However, they read this scripture allegorically, looking for deeper meaning than what appeared on the surface.⁷¹ This esoteric and overtly intellectual style is evident in the *Gospel of*

⁶⁷ Williams, 13.

⁶⁸ Williams, 144, 193.

⁶⁹ Layton, 271-272.

⁷⁰ Layton, 270.

⁷¹ Layton, 272, 273.

Philip's often cryptic passages that hint at underlying significance sometimes seemingly impossible to decode.

In these texts we find a very different approach to the issue of humanity's inherent sin/mistake/imperfection and its redemption than presented by Church Fathers like Irenaeus and Hippolytus. The two texts come from different traditions within early Christianity, but they both draw on similar ideas about gender, union, and knowledge. In examining the texts a new conception of humanity emerges in which salvation becomes less about obedience and subservience to the Divine and more about acquaintance and reunion with it.

Recognizing the Spiritual Element in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*

While the Church Fathers we have looked at thus far have discussed salvation in terms of Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (*HypArch*) has an entirely different take on the root of humanity's imperfection and, consequently, on salvation. *HypArch* and other similar texts' "version of the creation of the cosmos, which explains the origin of human limit and the necessity for a savior, usually ascribes the primal error to heavenly Sophia (Wisdom)." ⁷² In *HypArch*, the blame is lifted from Eve; her most important trait is not her disobedience in eating from the tree of knowledge, but rather her close connection with the spiritual, feminine aspect of the divine. The necessity

⁷² Gail Corrington Streete, "Women as Sources of Redemption and Knowledge in Early Christian Traditions," in *Women and Christian Origins*, Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 340.

for salvation actually stems from a mistake made by Sophia, the female aspect of the divine herself:

Wisdom (Sophia), who is called faith (Pistis), wanted to create something, alone without her partner; and her product was a celestial thing. A veil exists between the world above and the realms (aeons) that are below; and shadow came into being beneath the veil; and that shadow became matter; and that shadow was projected apart. And what she had created became a product in the matter, like an aborted fetus... Opening its eyes it saw a vast quantity of matter without limit; and it became arrogant, saying, 'It is I who am god, and there is none other apart from me (94:4-21).⁷³

Thus, in this text's version of creation and original sin, Sophia plays the part corresponding to Eve's role in orthodox Christianity. The primary mistake made in the initial stages of creation occurred when Sophia "wanted to create something, alone without her partner." Because she separates herself from her "consort"—the male aspect of the divine—to create a being alone, the being turns out horribly wrong, becoming a false god responsible for the creation of the imperfect world. This is an entirely different kind of mistake than Eve's disobedience to God, but both result in the suffering of humanity. In examining the implications of Sophia's error (parallel in the gnostic myth to Eve's error in Genesis), the Virgin Mary no longer fulfills the role of humankind's redemptive figure that Irenaeus ascribes to her. Instead, the spiritual Eve and her daughter Norea⁷⁴ pave the way toward salvation through Christ for the "children of the light" (97:13), their offspring.⁷⁵

In order to understand the topic of redemption in *HypArch*, it is necessary to examine more closely the story of Sophia's mistake as it is presented in this text.

⁷³ Layton, 74.

⁷⁴ Interestingly, Seth's character is mentioned in *HypArch*, but he is bypassed for the role of "carrier of the spiritual seed" in favor of Norea.

⁷⁵ Layton, 76.

Sophia—also referred to in the text as Incorruptibility and the Spirit—is the female aspect of the divine. There also exists a male aspect within the divine that makes the divine whole. Elaine Pagels explains that texts like *HypArch* are based around the idea that there are “two distinct elements within our nature ... first, the *psyche*, or soul— ... in effect our ‘ordinary consciousness’—and, second, the *spirit*, that is, the capacity for spiritual consciousness, or the ‘higher self.’”⁷⁶ The two elements are designated inherent genders, and in *HypArch* the soul is male while the spirit is female. As the female aspect of the divine, Sophia represents the spiritual element, a being of divine knowledge—her name does mean Wisdom after all. Her divine knowledge is revealed toward the beginning of *HypArch*: “there was a voice that came forth from incorruptibility, saying, ‘You are mistaken, Samael’—which is, ‘god of the blind’” (87.1-3).⁷⁷ In speaking to her corrupt creation and recognizing his blindness, Incorruptibility (Sophia) is proving her own insight that comes with being “of the spirit.” Male and female aspects are meant to coexist, not separately, but in a balanced union. This is where Sophia’s mistake comes in. Separating herself from her “consort,” or male counterpart, she is trying to create a being while in an incomplete state. Gail Corrington Streete reasons, “Because Sophia is incomplete without a male half, her creation, the male deity of Genesis, is himself incomplete.”⁷⁸ Sophia’s mistake results in the construction of an arrogant, false god who creates for himself seven offspring. These false gods, the archons, are responsible for creating the imperfect world, void of the divine spirit. Sophia realizes the implications of

⁷⁶ Elaine Pagels, “Adam and Eve and the Serpent in Genesis 1-3,” from *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, Karen L. King, ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 413-414.

⁷⁷ Layton, 68.

⁷⁸ Kraemer and D’Angelo, 341.

a world ignorant of its true spiritual origins and, horrified by her error, actually tries to redeem herself through two spiritual humans.⁷⁹

Sophia's first attempt at reinstating the spirit or divine knowledge in the world coincides with the creation of the first human being. When the archons create the first human being they model it after both themselves and after a beautiful being they saw reflected in the water: Sophia (Incorruptibility). The archons then breathe into the human being trying to bring him to life, and the being comes to be of *soul* but does not arise because it is missing its spiritual element. At this point Sophia sees her chance to establish spirit or divine knowledge in the world, so "the spirit came forth from the Adamantine Realm; it descended and came to dwell within him, and that human being came to be a living soul" (88.13-15).⁸⁰ In this stage, before Eve exists, the initial androgynous human is of soul *and* spirit, and it seems that Sophia has redeemed her mistake.

However, the first human does not last long in its original form. The archons soon come together and decide to make Adam a separate counterpart:

The rulers took counsel with one another and said, "Come, let us cause a deep sleep to fall upon Adam." And he slept. —Now, the deep sleep that they "caused to fall upon him, and he slept" is lack of acquaintance. —They opened his side like a living woman. And they built up his side with some flesh in place of her, and Adam came to be merely animate. And the spirit endowed woman came to him and spoke with him, saying "Arise, Adam." And when he saw her, he said, "It is you who have given me life; you will be called 'mother of the living' (89:3-15)."⁸¹

Interestingly, when the archons put Adam to sleep the text specifies that "the deep sleep that they 'caused to fall upon him, and he slept' is lack of acquaintance." This "lack of

⁷⁹ Kraemer and D'Angelo, 341.

⁸⁰ Layton, 70.

⁸¹ Layton, 70.

acquaintance” is reinforced with the loss of his spiritual element to the newly created Eve. When they take the first woman from his side, Adam is left as a being of soul. Right away Eve is called “the spirit-endowed woman,” and her role is highlighted in her first dialogue with Adam: “And when he saw her, he said, “It is you who have given me life; you will be called ‘mother of the living’.” In her designation as Adam’s life-giver, Eve is connected to Incorruptibility (the Spirit, Sophia) who entered the original human and gave it life. However, immediately after her creation the archons are “enamored of her” and try to rape her, so Eve’s spiritual element flees her body: “And she laughed at them for their folly and their blindness; and in their clutches, she became a tree, and left before them a shadow of herself resembling herself; and they defiled it foully” (89.24-28). The shadow of Eve’s former spiritual self is subject to the archons attack, but her spiritual element escapes undefiled. This again leaves humanity without spiritual, divine knowledge.

In her second attempt to correct her error, Sophia passes on divine knowledge to Eve’s daughter Norea:

Again Eve became pregnant, and she bore [Norea]. And she said, “He has begotten on [me a] virgin as an assistance [for] many generations of humankind.” She is the virgin whom the powers did not defile (91:34-92:1).⁸²

While *HypArch* does say that Eve bore Norea, Norea’s title as “the virgin whom the powers did not defile,” associates her more closely with Sophia. This description of Norea harkens back to the attempted rape of Eve earlier in the story. Because Eve’s spiritual element escaped the archons undefiled, calling Norea the “the virgin whom the powers did not defile” defines her also as being ‘of the spirit.’ How could this spiritual

⁸² Layton, 72.

being born of the fleshly Eve? When the archons tell Norea, “Your mother Eve came to us,” (92.19) she denies this fleshly Eve as her mother.⁸³ Pagels argues for Norea’s awareness of the difference between flesh and spirit in her origins: “Norea knows that she is not born from the female *plasma*, wife of ‘their Adam.’ She is born rather from his feminine counterpart, ‘Eve,’ the spirit: ‘... it is from the world above that I come.’”⁸⁴ This identifies Norea exclusively with her mother’s former spiritual element—with Sophia.

Does Norea’s spiritual existence factor into the salvation of humanity? In a dialogue that concludes *HypArch*, the angel Eleleth assures Norea,

“You, together with your offspring, belong to the primeval parent; from above, out of the incorruptible light, their souls are come... And all who have become acquainted with this way exist immortal in the midst of dying humankind.”... Then I said, “Sir, how much longer?” He said to me, “Until the moment when the true human being, within a modeled form, reveals the existence of [the spirit of] truth, which the parent has sent” (96.19-32).⁸⁵

This reinforces the importance of Norea’s spiritual/knowledgeable origins to the salvation of humanity, but it also isolates her from the rest of “dying humankind.” Does this story present a view in which there can never be hope for the salvation of humanity as a whole? *HypArch* suggests a tradition that held the idea that only a favored group of people (descending from the spiritual Eve and Norea) would be privy to the truth that Jesus—“the true human being”—would later come to teach them. The “true human being” who will come to redeem the earthly realm is described as a “modeled form,” which implies

⁸³ Layton, 73.

⁸⁴ Elaine Pagels, “Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip*,” in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism: Studies in Antiquity and Christianity*, Karen L. King, ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 197.

⁸⁵ Layton, 75-76.

his pre-existence in the divine realm, echoing the idea of Logos in John. It is interesting to note that, although it is the feminine spiritual element that humanity is ignorant of, a male figure is sent to reacquaint humanity (or those so lucky to be descended from Norea) with their spiritual element. Later, Eleleth explains that this hereditarily spiritual group would “trample under foot death... and...ascend into the limitless light” (97:6-8), in other words, they alone—through their connection to the spiritual aspect of the divine via the spiritual Eve and Norea—would be redeemed by Jesus.⁸⁶

The conception of redemption in *HypArch* is defined by the course of events in its story of creation. The divine spiritual element that once resided in Adam (before the creation of Eve), then Eve (before her rape), and finally Norea and her offspring, came from a female aspect of the divine realm—Sophia. But for this movement within early Christianity, her mistake is not redeemed through the obedient act of a single future female figure. Redemption is made *possible* through two female figures, the spiritual Eve and Norea, who maintain the divine spiritual element for their offspring. However, redemption cannot actually occur until the male figure of Jesus, the incarnation of “the true human being,” comes to earth to teach Norea’s descendents the truth and reunite them with their spiritual element, so that they may become acquainted with their divine origins, thus redeeming Sophia’s first mistake of separation. This is an interesting departure from the clearer “type/anti-type” redemption pattern presented in the writings of Irenaeus and Hippolytus, emphasizing the idea of a *process* of or *journey* to redemption.

Gender Equality and Reunion in the *Gospel of Philip*

⁸⁶ Layton, 76.

Then is there no hope for the rest of humanity? Perhaps not according to *HypArch*, but the *Gospel of Philip* (*GPhilip*) opens up some possibilities for redemption in its language about the reunion of male and female components and this reunion's connection to the rituals of the bridal chamber and the Eucharist. To begin, according to *GPhilip*, in order for the whole of humankind to be redeemed, another figure is needed to facilitate that redemption (similar to the way the Virgin Mary facilitates humankind's redemption for Irenaeus). This figure is Mary Magdalene.

Before delving into why Mary Magdalene fulfills this redeeming role we must understand what (according to *GPhilip*) needs redeeming. Although the Valentinian creation myth is similar to the Sethian creation myth (like that of *HypArch*), its differences shape the nuances of the Valentinian notion of redemption found in *GPhilip*. In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus describes the Valentinian creation myth according to Ptolemy (a student of Valentinus). Ptolemy's version of the creation myth names a multitude of aeons within the divine realm, all emanating from an overarching Divine being called "a preexistent, perfect eternity," and "the prior source, ancestor, and the deep. And it existed uncontained, invisible, everlasting, and unengendered" (1.1.1).⁸⁷ The aeons that emanate from the pre-existent Divine emanate in pairs, maintaining an androgynous equality. Sophia is the last aeon to be emanated and her mistake is that she attempts "to comprehend [the parent's] magnitude" without her consort, "the wished-for" (1.1.3).⁸⁸ In her struggle she gives "birth to essence without form," which is named Achamoth. The myth continues: "The essence of matter—they say—had its first source

⁸⁷ Layton, 281.

⁸⁸ Layton, 283.

in the aforementioned lack-of-acquaintance, grief, fear, and terror” (1.2.3).⁸⁹ This, then is what needs to be redeemed—“lack-of-acquaintance”—and it is redeemed first in the divine realm by the pre-existent Christ who teaches about “the nature of membership in a pair,” and secondly in the earthly realm by Christ’s emanation, Jesus (1.2.5-6).⁹⁰ Like the “modeled form” of the “true human being” in *HypArch*, this Jesus is an incarnate emanation of a divine prototype, which calls to mind the Johannine pre-existent Logos that becomes incarnate in Jesus.

GPhilip does not outwardly discuss Sophia’s original mistake. It does, however, talk about the separation of the first human into the figures of Eve and Adam: “In the days when Eve was [in] Adam, death did not exist. When she was separated from him death came into existence. If he [reenters] and takes it unto himself death will not exist” (63).⁹¹ This separation in the earthly realm mirrors the separation that occurred previously in the divine realm (not dissimilar to the *HypArch* myth). Although human suffering and mortal existence are the result of the separation of male and female aspects both in the divine realm and in the Garden of Eden, *GPhilip* discusses separation primarily in terms of Adam and Eve, perhaps because the concept is more tangible in an earthly setting. Based on the text, the readers of *GPhilip* were probably concerned with how to redeem the separation of male and female. Later, *GPhilip* addresses more clearly the manner in which this mistake of separation is redeemed:

If the female had not separated from the male, she and the male would not die.
That being’s separation became the source of death. The anointed (Christ) came
to rectify the separation that had been present since the beginning and join the two

⁸⁹ Layton, 284.

⁹⁰ Layton, 285-286.

⁹¹ Layton, 342.

(components); and to give life unto those who had died by separation and join them together (70).⁹²

Like *HypArch*, Jesus is presented as the primary bringer of redemption, but the manner of this redemption is slightly altered because of the nature of the original mistake. In *HypArch* Jesus spreads knowledge about the spiritual (female) divine aspect within all of Norea's descendents with which they must reconnect in order to be redeemed. But in *GPhilip*, because the male and female divine aspects actually reside in men and women, Jesus redeems through the actual joining together of men and women.

Verse 74 places Jesus in the familiar role of Adam's redeeming counterpart, connecting them through their analogous virgin births: "Adam came into being from two virgins: from the spirit and from the virgin earth. The anointed (Christ) was born of a virgin so that he might rectify the fall that occurred in the beginning" (74).⁹³ Jesus is aligned as Adam's counterpart in the process of redemption, so who, then, is Eve's? Unlike Irenaeus's conclusions about the Virgin Mary redeeming Eve's sin of disobedience through obedience, *GPhilip* works in terms of counterparts. If the mistaken separation of a pair of counterparts (male and female) necessitates redemption, then that separation would logically be recapitulated in the union of another pair of counterparts (another male and female). Mary Magdalene, then, is inherent in the salvation of Eve's (and Adam's) sin of separation through her union with Jesus.

In *GPhilip* Mary Magdalene is depicted as having a special relationship with Jesus: "Three women always used to walk with the lord—Mary his mother, his sister, and

⁹² Layton, 343.

⁹³ Layton, 344.

the Magdalene, who is called his companion” (28).⁹⁴ Susan Haskins explains that the Greek word *koinonos*, often translated to mean companion, “is more correctly translated as ‘partner’ or ‘consort’, a woman with whom a man has had sexual intercourse.”⁹⁵ However, in keeping with the tradition that focuses so much on spiritual relationships, it is also possible that Jesus and Mary Magdalene’s companionship could have been of a distinctly spiritual nature. Whether Jesus and Mary’s relationship was sexual or spiritual (or both), this kind of language places Mary on a different plane than the male disciples. In a later passage in *GPhilip* the disciples question Jesus about his relationship with Mary: “‘Why do you love her more than all of us?’ The savior answered, saying to them, ‘...When the light comes, then the person with sight will see the light, and the blind person will remain in darkness’” (48).⁹⁶ In other words, Mary Magdalene’s faith and openness to knowledge have prepared her to receive divine knowledge when the time is right—“when the light comes.” She is different from the other disciples because of her understanding or ‘sight’, and this is what places her closest to Jesus in a text that privileges knowledge in its quest to eliminate ignorance or ‘blindness’.

Verse 70 continues to describe how men and women in the world can redeem themselves from the mistake of separation: “Now, a woman joins with her husband in the bridal bedroom, and those who have joined in the bridal bedroom will not reparate. Thus Eve became separate from Adam because it was not in the bridal bedroom that she joined with him” (70).⁹⁷ Here a distinction is made between the sexual intercourse between Adam and Eve (which obviously did not repair the separation that had occurred)

⁹⁴ Layton, 335.

⁹⁵ Haskins, 40.

⁹⁶ Layton, 339.

⁹⁷ Layton, 343.

and what happens in the sacramental bridal bedroom about which Jesus preaches. While it is unclear how literally one should read the term ‘bridal bedroom’, it cannot simply be physical, a spiritual coming together is key. Haskins discusses how *GPhilip* uses imagery of the bridal bedroom to reunite Adam and Eve, “in which the polarities of male and female would be abolished.” She then continues, “The relationship between Christ and Mary Magdalene symbolizes that perfect spiritual union.”⁹⁸ Through their relationship, which reunites male and female, divine knowledge is passed to Mary Magdalene. Annti Marjanen describes Mary’s special relationship with Jesus by labeling Mary Magdalene a ‘beloved disciple.’ Marjanen points out certain second and third century texts, including the *First and Second Apocalypses of James*, the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, the *Apocryphon of James*, and the *Pistis Sophia*, “in which a ‘beloved disciple’ demonstrates or receives a special ability to understand Jesus and his message.”⁹⁹ According to these various gnostic texts, Mary Magdalene’s role as beloved disciple confirms that her receipt of knowledge is directly connected to her closeness to Jesus.

According to *GPhilip*, Jesus was not alone in his mission to save humankind. His partnership with Mary Magdalene was required in order to redeem the mistake of separation that occurred in the divine realm and again during humanity’s conception. If an ignorant, suffering humankind was created because of the separation of male from female, then they could only be saved through the reunion of male and female. Unlike Hippolytus’s discussion of Mary Magdalene as Eve’s redeemer through reunion with a male counterpart in which the reunion is based on a male-dominated hierarchy, *GPhilip*

⁹⁸ Haskins, 41.

⁹⁹ Annti Marjanen, “Mary Magdalene, a Beloved Disciple,” in *Mariam, the Magdalene, and the Mother*, Deirdre Good, ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 51.

preaches about a reunion of equality, bringing male and female counterparts back together in the original balanced way of the pre-existent aeons. By uniting with Jesus as an equal counterpart, Mary Magdalene becomes the recipient of divine knowledge that he carries from the pre-existent Christ above, and thus together they are able to bring the opportunity for salvation to humanity.

VI

Conclusions

The manner in which the four texts discussed here each employ gendered relationships in their conceptions of sin and redemption reveal different universalized ideologies about men and women. These ideologies are expressed through the manner of involvement of male versus female figures in the original sin, as well as the manner of redemption by male versus female figures. Another element within these texts that affects their different ideologies of gender is the conception of the pre-existent divine realm; gender structures above affect gender structures below. Two texts work within a Johannine structure of Logos-Adam-Christ, and two within a gnostic structure that includes multiple pre-existent beings. By closely examining these three elements within a text—the manner of male and female involvement in sin, the manner of male and female involvement in redemption, and gender structure in the pre-existent divine realm—a conception of gender begins to emerge.

In Irenaeus's *Against Heresies* Adam's sin and Eve's sin, although identical on the surface, are framed differently. Adam is already set up to sin and be redeemed by Christ, because of the pre-existent order instituted by Logos. But Eve receives more of the blame, and is labeled disobedient, so her sin is only undone through the obedience of another woman. Irenaeus was not doing anything new by reading this inequality into the text of Genesis. Yes, Justin had written about the redemption of Eve's sin in similar terms not long before, but more importantly, this inequality was already built into these early Church Fathers' conceptions of gender based on the scripture they were studying. Of course there is plenty of Pauline scripture that presents women as inferior to men, but

what about non-earthly male-female relations? The Johannine conception of Logos that both Irenaeus and Hippolytus were working with does not have a female counterpart. In the beginning was Logos. *Just* Logos. Without her destiny of sin and redemption predetermined by a female divine entity, Eve is left with a curse of disobedience that will plague womankind until another female figure—the Virgin Mary—can redeem her sin through obedience. This shows that the gender hierarchy innate in the thinking of Irenaeus is being supported by a male-dominated structure that exceeds the earthly realm.

While Irenaeus presents the Virgin Mary as salvific in her obedience (undoing Eve's *disobedience*), Hippolytus places Mary Magdalene in the role of Eve's redeemer in *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, resulting in different implications. Here the male-dominated divine gender structure remains the same, as does the manner of male and female involvement in sin on earth, but Mary Magdalene redeems Eve in a new way. Through a devoted search for and subsequent spiritual union with Jesus (the male redeeming figure) Mary Magdalene reunites Eve with her male counterpart, Adam, as his obedient helper. This is an interesting cross-over point in the four conceptions of sin and redemption explored in this paper, because it introduces the idea of redemption through reunion with a spiritual element or being in the context of a Genesis-based conception of original sin. However, in this case reunion does not guarantee equality. Hippolytus, like Irenaeus, uses language of obedience in his discussion of the redemption of female sin, but he also frames Eve's redemption in terms of "following" Adam and "not going astray," as if her sin had expanded from simply disobeying God's command to include disobeying her husband on earth. In this case, reuniting with a counterpart is not an equalizing move the way it is in some of the gnostic conceptions of redemption.

Both the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip* work within constructions of reality in which the divine realm is made up of equal pairs of male and female counterparts, and in both texts suffering and death came about due to the separation of one of these divine pairs. Although this would suggest perfectly gender-balanced ideas about sin and redemption, such a conception is not necessarily the case. According to *HypArch*'s myth of creation, Sophia, a female figure, brings about the first separation by trying to create something without her male consort, eventually resulting in a humankind unaware of their spiritual origins. Someone had to make the first mistake, and here it happens to be a female character. But it is in this sin's redemption that a gender hierarchy becomes even clearer. Although the female characters of Eve and Norea play a big part in continuing their line of spiritually endowed human beings, it is ultimately Jesus Christ who brings redemption through teaching these descendents of the divine spirit about their origins.

GPhilip, however, uniquely promotes gender equality through the manner of redemption of the pre-existent separation. Although this text is based on a creation myth in which Sophia is, again, the original female offender, it places more stress on the issue of separation in general, not only prefigured in the divine realm but also focusing on the separation of Eve from Adam in the earthly realm. Hence, the redemption of sin lies in reunion of male and female (but for different reasons than in Hippolytus). Jesus preaches about rejoining with one's counterpart physically and spiritually in order to repair the mistake that occurred in the Garden (and was prefigured in the divine realm). In this text Mary Magdalene is the implied female redeeming figure because she understands Jesus's teachings and is his companion, demonstrating the reunion of male and female

counterparts in their relationship. Therefore, the redemption of sin lies not in one man and one woman's acts of obedience, but rather in the constant reunions that take place between spiritually attuned men and women in the earthly realm.

Exploring texts such as these can reveal possible ideologies held by the texts' authors and audience. But the exploration cannot end there: texts such as the four presented in this paper offer such differing ideologies that their study begs the question, what sources were informing these writings and the movements that produced them? Even writings coming out of the same or similar traditions could focus on one aspect of scripture over another and completely shift the ideology being put forth. In examining the place of women within the early Church, it is clear that studying early scripture (like the Letters of Paul and the Gospel of John, which would be named canonical later on) was only a jumping off point from which early Christian movements could weave together intertextual interpretation in order to promote universalized notions about the nature of original sin and redemption and, consequently, gender.

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