

THE GOSPEL OF MARY MAGDALENE

Translation by David Curtis (3rd Draft)

Page 7 (Pages 1-6 are missing)

(The disciples asked:¹) "Teach us about the material world. Will it last forever or is everything impermanent?"² The Saviour answered: "All that is created, everything that is formed, every natural thing, all exist interdependently³ in and with each other. Then each will be dissolved again back into its own roots. It is (the way of) nature that everything will eventually decompose back into its own elements⁴. Those who have ears, let them hear."

Peter said to him: "While you are explaining everything to us, tell us one more thing: What is the sin of the world?"⁵ The Saviour answered: "There is no such thing as sin⁶, you only make it appear when you act according to the habits of your adulterated nature: that is how what you call 'sin' manifests⁷. This is why the Good has come into your midst, pursuing (the Good) which is in everyone's true nature⁸, to restore⁹ it inward to its root." Then he continued, saying: "This is what sickens and destroys you: it is your love for the things that deceive you. Those who have ears, let them hear. Whoever can understand, let them understand!"

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"Attachment¹⁰ to matter gives rise to incomparable¹¹ suffering¹², because it goes against your true nature¹³. Then the whole body becomes disturbed. This is why I taught you to find contentment at the level of the heart. When you feel disturbed and out of balance, reclaim wholeness in the presence of all the different forms of your true nature. Those who have ears, let them hear."

¹ 'The disciples asked' is my addition but serves to set the scene and seems uncontroversial.

² Literally, will everything be destroyed or not? My choice of language here emphasises a parallel with the Buddhist notion of impermanence.

³ Interdependence sits well with a Franciscan view of our relationship and connection with the rest of creation, and again my choice of language serves to reference Buddhist teachings.

⁴ Tuckett p139 The Saviour's answer here is that, while all material things—'all natures, all forms, all creatures' form a unity at present, they will all 'be dissolved again into their roots'. 'Root' here probably means 'original state', so that what is being claimed is that the destiny of all material things, all 'matter', is that they will be dissolved into their original constituent parts.

⁵ This echoes John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the **sin of the world**."

⁶ See Julian of Norwich "But I did not see sin; for I believe it has no sort of substance nor portion of being, nor could it be recognised were it not for the suffering it causes." Also Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward* p12 'theologically and objectively speaking, we are already in union with God. But it is very hard for people to believe or experience this....'

⁷ From a Buddhist perspective of the ultimate nature of reality, both suffering and the causes of suffering are seen as essentially illusory. In more Christian language, everyone is always in direct personal union with God if only they knew it, but habitually behave in ways which obscure this and then reap the consequences of those actions, of falling in love with the things that deceive. *Quaker Faith and Practice* 26.31 – Divine Love "does not create heaven and hell for us, but allows us to do that for ourselves."

⁸ See Matthew Fox on Original Blessing vs Original Sin. The notion of original sin only emerged long after GosM was written, first appearing in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE). GosM rejects notions of sin and judgement; adulterated nature can be seen as an inherited or traumatic wounding which temporarily obstructs and obscures a follower's true nature of original goodness, creating the illusion of distance or alienation from the Divine.

⁹ The emphasis is on healing, restoration and salvation, not on threats of judgement, accusation and condemnation.

¹⁰ Following deBoer's understanding that it is not matter per se which is problematic, but a distorted relationship with it

¹¹ **Incomparable** passion or suffering as it cannot be **compared** with any worldly or divine blueprint see Tuckett p145. At one level, the claim that the 'passion' concerned has 'no image' and comes from what is 'contrary to nature' may simply be claiming that it has no ultimate reality, or at least no corresponding entity in the world of ultimate reality.

¹² Suffering, passion, instability, confusion.

¹³ Compare with the 'adulterated nature' of page 7

When the Blessed One had said these things, he embraced them all and took his leave¹⁴, saying: "Peace be with you! Cultivate¹⁵ my peace within yourselves!

Be vigilant, and don't let anyone lead you astray by saying 'Here it is' or 'There it is', for the Son of Man, the Child of Your True Humanity, already¹⁶ lives within each one of you. This is what you should follow! I tell you, those who seek this within will surely find it. Go then and proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom ¹⁷!"

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"Do not lay down any rules other than what I have given you. Do not establish more laws like the lawmaker, or else you too will become constrained by them." Once he had said these things, he departed from them.

The disciples grieved bitterly, shedding many tears and saying: "How are we supposed to go out preaching to the rest of the world, proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare him, then what will become of us?¹⁸"

Then Mary rose up. She embraced them all, kissing¹⁹ them tenderly and began to speak to her brothers and sisters: "There is no need²⁰ to remain stuck²¹ in sorrow, grief, and doubt! For his Grace will be with you all; it will guide you, comfort you, shelter, and protect you²². Rather, let us be thankful and praise his greatness, for he has brought us together and prepared us for this. Through him, we too can become fully human²³."

Saying these things, Mary turned their hearts inward toward the Good, and they began to wrestle²⁴ with the meaning of the Saviour's words and to discuss his sayings²⁵.

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Then Peter said to Mary, "Sister, we know that you are greatly loved by the Saviour, more than any other woman. Tell us those words of His that you remember, the things which you know and we don't, the teachings we never heard."

Mary answered, saying: "What is hidden from you I shall reveal to you. Whatever is unknown to you, and I remember, I will tell you."²⁶

¹⁴ Parkhouse "Translation issues 8,13. ἀσπάζε from ἀσπάζομαι is usually translated as 'greeted' as Wilson/MacRae, Tuckett, Bass, Pasquier. However, it can also be used as to 'say farewell', e.g. Acts 20.1, 21.6. | 8,15"

¹⁵ See Tuckett p152 peace, that is to be 'acquired' or 'engendered' by the disciples themselves. The precise meaning of the verb used here is not certain, though it does seem to imply an element of active involvement and responsibility on the part of the disciples. The peace, although it is in one sense Jesus' peace, is also something they are meant to acquire and/or engender for themselves.

¹⁶ See Tuckett p154 "[this] serves to displace the futurist eschatology completely: the Son of Man is not going to come in the future, for he is already 'within you.'

¹⁷ The translation here as *Kingdom* does admittedly carry connotations of imposed hierarchical authority which seem inconsistent with the message of this gospel. However, this term usefully echoes Jesus's many teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven, which serve to disrupt traditional social constraints. See Thich Nhat Hanh "The kingdom of God is available to you in the here and now. But the question is whether you are available to the kingdom. Our practice is to make ourselves ready for the kingdom so that it can manifest in the here and now."

¹⁸ 'what will become of us' – literally, 'how will they spare us?'

¹⁹ Including both Coptic and Greek, see King

²⁰ Literally, 'do not', but using invitational language here feels more compassionate and accessible, rather than issuing a command.

²¹ Not to say that grief is wrong, rather that it is a process to pass through rather than to remain stuck in. And that 'his Grace' will help that process.

²² See Leloup, King and Parkhouse

²³ Tuckett p165 Almost all are agreed that this is to be connected with the earlier assertion of the Saviour that 'the Son of Man is within you'. To 'become human' is to become the true human being and realize one's destiny by making real the full potential of the 'full humanity' (the 'Son of Man') who already exists within.

²⁴ Parkhouse points out that *gymnazo* has a combative meaning, it derives from athletic training and is where we get the word 'gym' from.

²⁵ See Jennnott, Bauman and Tuckett.

²⁶ Using both the Greek and the Coptic

And she began saying these words to them. She said, "Once I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to him: 'Lord, Rabbouni²⁷, now I see you in this vision.'

He answered me and said: 'Blessed are you Mary, for you do not waver at the sight of me. How wonderful you are!²⁸ For this is where the treasure lies - in (that place where heaven and earth meet, where deep understanding arises in the heart and mind), 'the nous'.²⁹

I asked him this: 'Now tell me Lord, how does a person see such a vision, is it through the agency of their soul or through The Spirit?'

The Saviour answered: 'It is neither through the soul nor through The Spirit, but through the understanding which arises between the two, that is how the vision is seen.'

Pages 11-14 are missing.

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And Craving spoke: "I didn't see you descending, but now I see you rising up. Who are you fooling? You're controlled by me!"

The Soul responded: ("My friend, it is you who were mistaken!)³⁰ I saw you, but you never really saw me or knew me. You mistook the cloak I was wearing for my true self, so you didn't recognise me." Having said all this, the Soul went away joyfully.

Again, the Soul came into the realm of the third Authority³¹, which goes by the name of Ignorance. This scrutinised the Soul closely and interrogated it, saying: "Where do you think you're going? You are the slave of malicious habits, trapped and held prisoner by your own wicked inclinations. You lack discrimination, so your judgement is unsound!³²"

The Soul said: "Why are you so critical of me, even though I have not been judgemental? I have been dominated and have lacked my own agency. I was never recognised for my true self, but now I have recognised this: that everything is impermanent, the whole of creation will be dissolved. All worldly things, all heavenly things, everything passes, everything will be released."

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Liberated from the realm of the third Authority, the Soul continued, and came face to face with the fourth, the Authority of Wrath.

This took on seven fearful manifestations. The first was everything obscured³³; the second was craving; the third, ignorance, the fourth, the longing for oblivion³⁴; the fifth, enslavement to the demands of the body, the sixth was foolish worldly wisdom, the seventh, the hot-tempered certainty of anger.

²⁷ The Aramaic title Rabbouni here is my addition, referencing the meeting of MM with the risen Saviour in John 20:16

²⁸ Using both the Greek and the Coptic

²⁹ The term 'nous' is left untranslated, as there is no exact English equivalent, but it then warrants some explanation which is an addition.

³⁰ My addition, to express an understanding that the Soul is not battling with the authorities, but is in friendly and non-violent dialogue, standing up for herself and speaking truth to power.

³¹ These authorities or powers can be seen in relation to adulterated nature p7, the causes of 'incomparable suffering' p8, the cultivation of divine peace p8 and the Good coming into our midst p7. This dialogue with shadow side can be seen through a Jungian perspective. Release comes with divine assistance, and through compassionate non-judgemental recognition and the practice of speaking truth to power (see Saxon on Parrhesia). See also *No Bad Parts*, Richard Schwartz and the work of Dr Gabor Mate on Compassionate Inquiry.

³² literally, 'do not judge!' Note the difference between 'being judgemental' and 'having good judgement.'

³³ The term 'Darkness' has hurtful connotations for some people and is best avoided here. Let us find an alternative! Unseeing, Lost and unseeing, Hidden, head-in-the-sand, obscurity, murkiness, fear of darkness....?

³⁴ Literally, jealousy of death

These formed the seven-fold Authority of Wrath, which interrogated the Soul, demanding: "Where do you come from, murderer? and, where do you think you're going, deserter?"

The Soul responded: "It is what dominated³⁵ me that has been vanquished, and what was steering³⁶ me that has been overcome. It's my craving that has come to an end, and my ignorance that has died."

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I have been set free from one world with the aid of another world, from one pattern through the moulding and shaping of a greater pattern. I have been liberated from the chains of forgetfulness which are both temporary and temporal³⁷. From this moment on, now and for all seasons, I am released into silent restfulness³⁸, where time rests in the eternity of time³⁹."

After saying these things Mary settled into silence: that place of sanctuary⁴⁰ to which the Saviour's words had brought her.

But Andrew responded and said to the brothers and sisters:

"Tell me, what do you think about all that she has been telling us? Say what you will, but I for one don't believe that the Saviour would have said such things! Certainly, these are unorthodox teachings, it all seems quite different from his way of thinking."

After some consideration, Peter responded in a similar way.

He questioned the brothers about the Saviour: "Did he really speak secretly with a woman and not openly so that we could all hear? Are we just going to turn around and listen to her? Did he really choose her and prefer her to us? Surely, he wouldn't have wanted to show that she is more worthy than we are?"

³⁵ The Soul has not murdered its human body or self. Rather what has been vanquished are those patterns of thought and behaviour which were constraining the soul from reaching its full human potential in this worldly existence. Has it murdered aspects of personality, or liberated the self to become more authentic? In modern psychotherapeutic understanding (eg Compassionate Inquiry), some aspects of the personality are seen as maladaptive behaviour patterns which were adopted in early childhood to shield from intolerable pain. But they have been effective and necessary coping strategies, which one might later learn to grow out of, in order to better access and express authentic self. Thus, they are to be approached with compassion, rather than with a judgemental or aggressive attitude.

³⁶ To make to turn, hence to steer. The image is of that which has controlled the Soul's behaviour, as though with puppet strings.

³⁷ "Which exist only for a time" AND "which exist only within the dimension of time" - both are valid and meaningful translations, both apply.

³⁸ Wisdom of the Desert Fathers: "A clear unobstructed vision of the true state of affairs; an intuitive grasp of one's own inner reality as anchored, or rather lost, in God through Christ. The fruit of this was *quies*: 'rest.'a kind of simple nowhere-ness and no-mindedness that had lost all preoccupation with a false or limited 'self.'"

³⁹ "Where the soul, purified of all that it is not, comes into possession of its own timelessness." - W.B.Yeats

⁴⁰ Often translated as 'point', the Coptic word here for 'place' has meanings of dwelling place or home, and can also refer to a temple, shrine, monastery, or a monk's cell. After the Soul is released into silent restfulness, Mary as narrator also settles into silence with a sense of coming home to that peaceful place to which the Saviour had guided her.

Then Mary wept. She said to Peter: "My brother, Peter, what are you thinking? Do you really believe that I made all this up, or that I would tell lies about our Saviour?"

Levi also responded to Peter, saying: "Peter, you have always been hot-tempered from the beginning, and now we see you arguing against this woman as though you were her adversary. Yet if the Saviour deemed her worthy, indeed if he himself has made her worthy⁴¹, then who are you to despise and reject her? Surely the Saviour's appraisal of her is completely reliable. That is why he loved her more than us.

Brothers, we should be ashamed of our behaviour⁴². Let us cloak⁴³ ourselves with True Humanity⁴⁴. We too can follow his instructions and cultivate this in ourselves. Let us do as we were instructed and proclaim the good news the Saviour taught, never laying down any rules or laws beyond what he himself gave. After Levi had said these things, they started going out to teach and to proclaim the gospel.....

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARY

⁴¹ Giving both the Coptic and Greek readings here

⁴² 'ashamed' has difficult connotations – However, there is a case for arguing that the patriarchal forces of power in the church might indeed express regret for some of its past behaviour. Blame is as unconstructive as denial and can perpetuate a victim narrative without resolving anything. Shame is better applied to actions than to people, lest they are made to seem irredeemable. But for an individual or group to be ashamed of past behaviour can mean the open recognition of mistakes which have been made, and a declared intention to change those patterns of behaviour. Ref the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of post-apartheid South Africa. There is a clear difference between the shaming of others, and a free personal choice to be ashamed of one's past actions, which might lead to the changes of heart required as we learn to cloak ourselves with True Humanity.

⁴³ Like Paul's 'cloak ourselves with Christ.'

⁴⁴ With the qualities of divine nature, salvation and of perfection in the sense of completeness of character or wholeness.

