

Class 8b

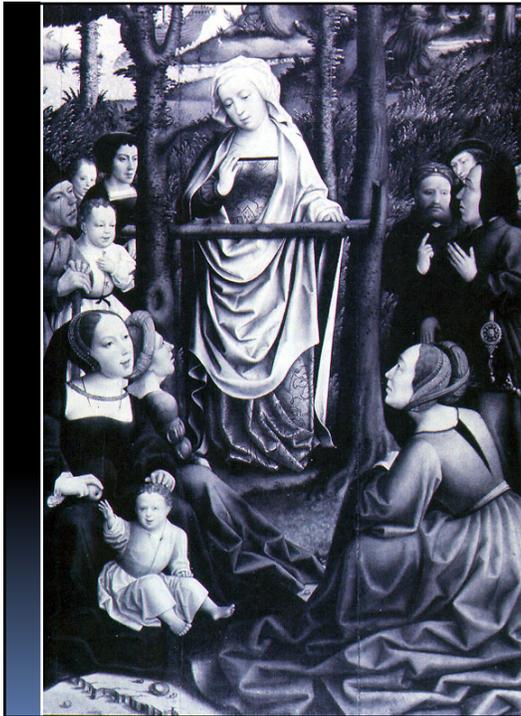
## WAS MARY MAGDALENE "MRS. JESUS"?



Giotto di Bondone

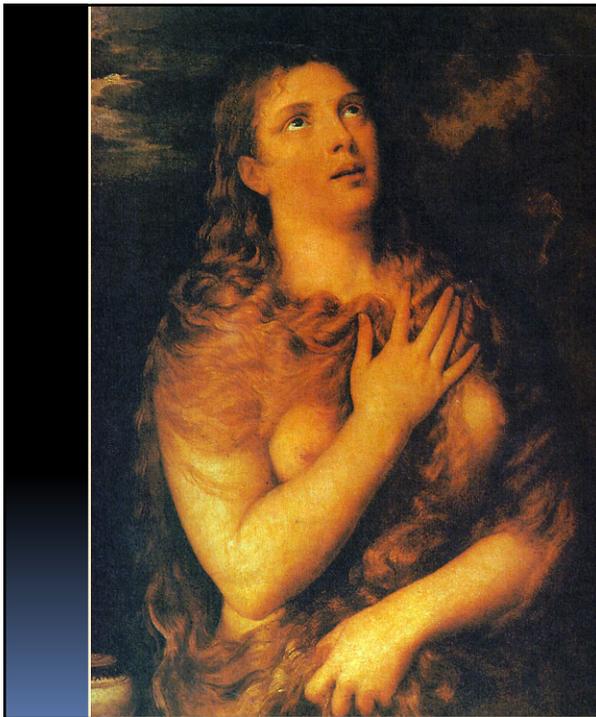
The Life of Jesus:  
Noli me tangere

1304-1306  
Arena Chapel  
Padua



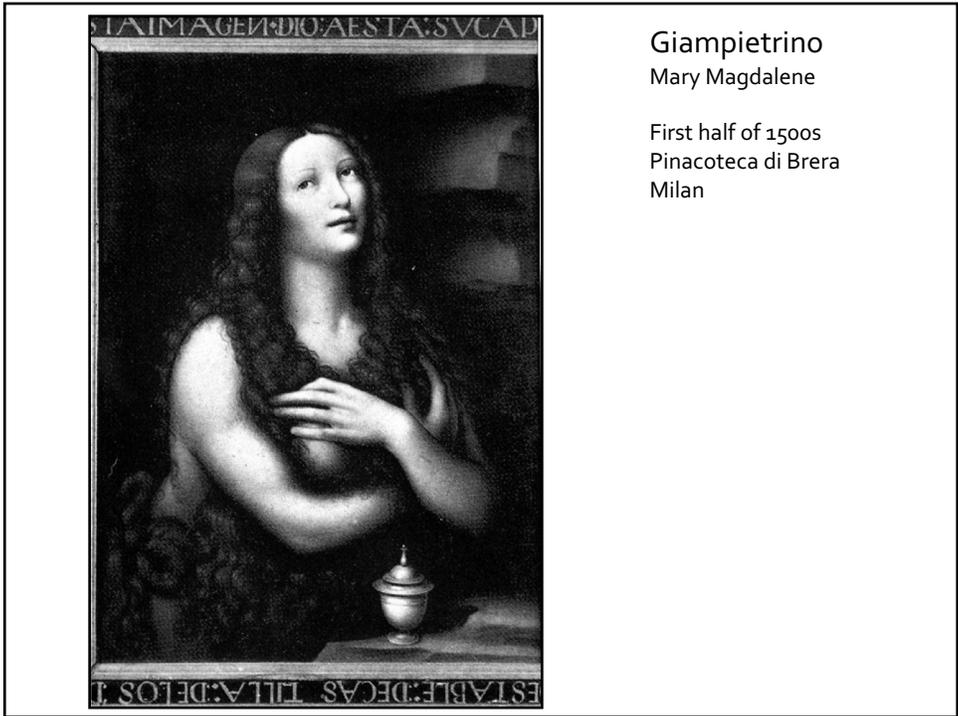
Flemish Master of the  
Magdalene Legend  
Mary Magdalene Preaching

c. 1500-1520  
John G. Johnson Collection  
Philadelphia



Titian  
The Atoning Magdalene

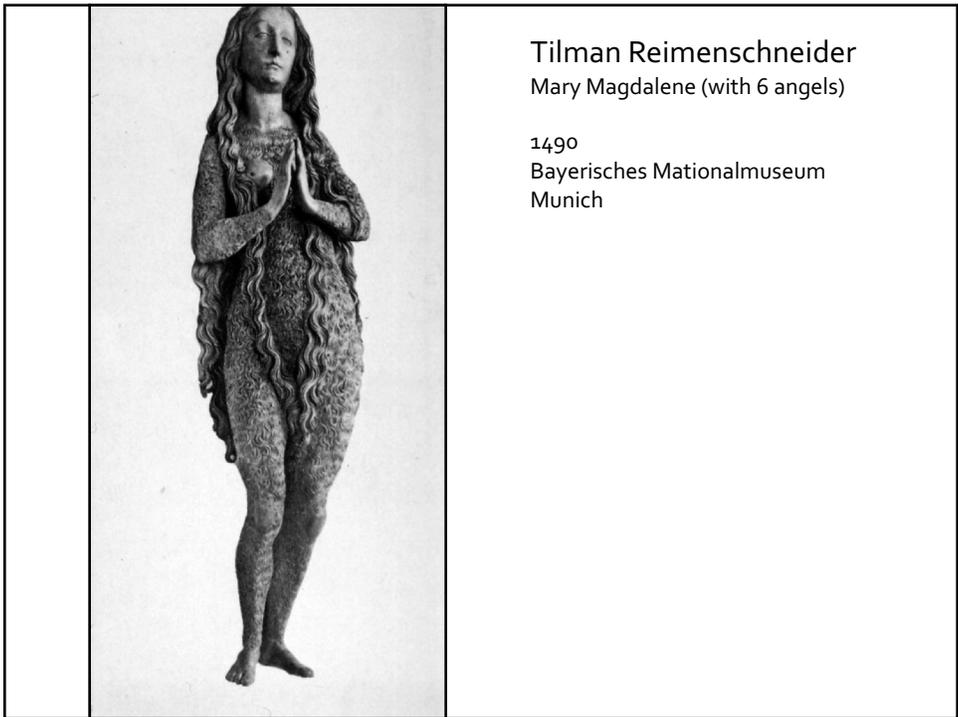
1490-1576  
Galleria Palatina  
Palazzo Pitti, Florence



Giampietrino

Mary Magdalene

First half of 1500s  
Pinacoteca di Brera  
Milan



Tilman Reimenschneider

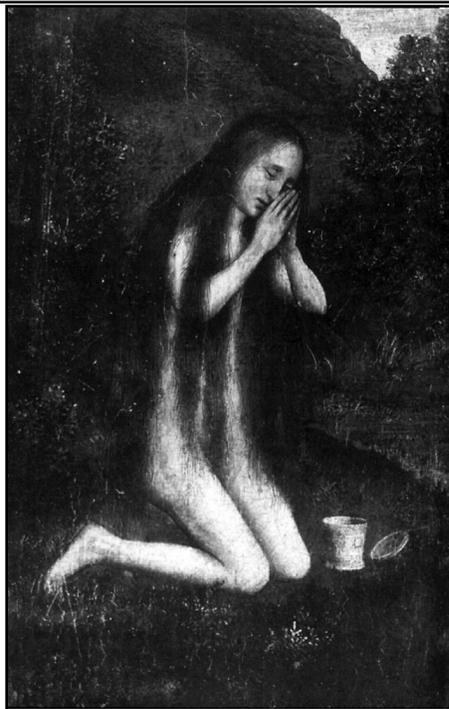
Mary Magdalene (with 6 angels)

1490  
Bayerisches Nationalmuseum  
Munich



Donatello  
The Penitent Mary Magdalene

Mid 15<sup>th</sup> century  
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo  
Florence



Quentin Metsys  
The Penitent Mary Magdalene

1466-1530  
John G. Johnson Collection  
Philadelphia



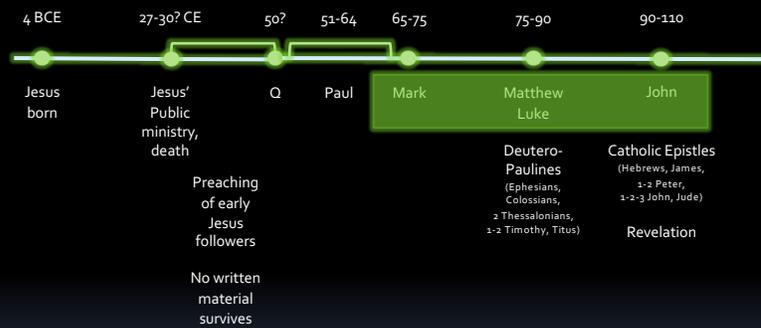
Leonardo da Vinci

The Last Supper

1495-1498

Fresco in the dining hall at Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy

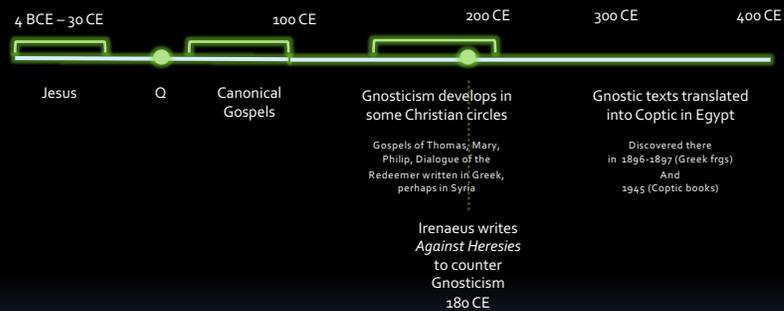
## The Developing Tradition of Mary Magdalene



## Mary Magdalene in the Canonical Gospels

- Leading witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus
  - Mark and Matthew only mention her at the death, though they say she's been there from the Galilean period of Jesus' ministry
    - In Mark, the women are terrified at the resurrection and never report it to anyone
    - In Matthew, they run to tell the disciples "with fear and great joy," and meet Jesus on the way
  - Luke mentions her earlier (ch. 8), but changes her
    - Jesus cast seven demons out of her
    - She and the other women are providing for the group "from their means"
    - The angel doesn't commission the women to tell the male disciples
    - The male disciples don't believe their report of the resurrection, thinking it trumped up
  - John makes her the first witness of the risen Jesus and "apostle to the apostles"

## The Developing Tradition of Mary Magdalene



# The Great Discoveries

## Oxyrhynchus 1895–1930

50,000+ fragmentary Greek mss,  
some of them Christian

## Nag Hammadi 1945

13 books with 57 separate "tractates" —  
4<sup>th</sup> century copies of earlier gnostic works



Oxyrhynchus



Grenfell



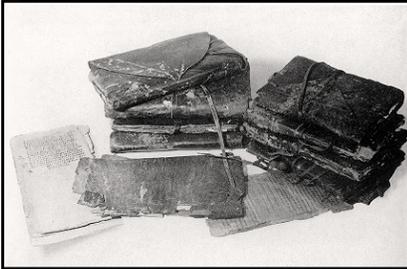
Hunt



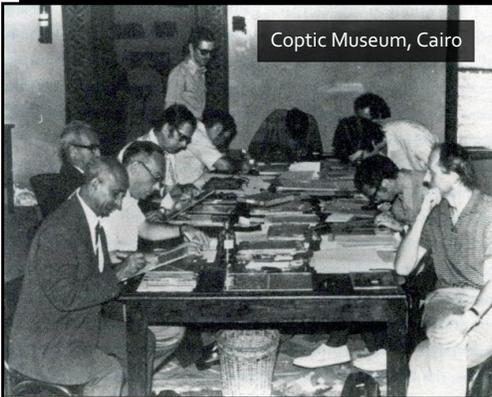
Nag Hammadi

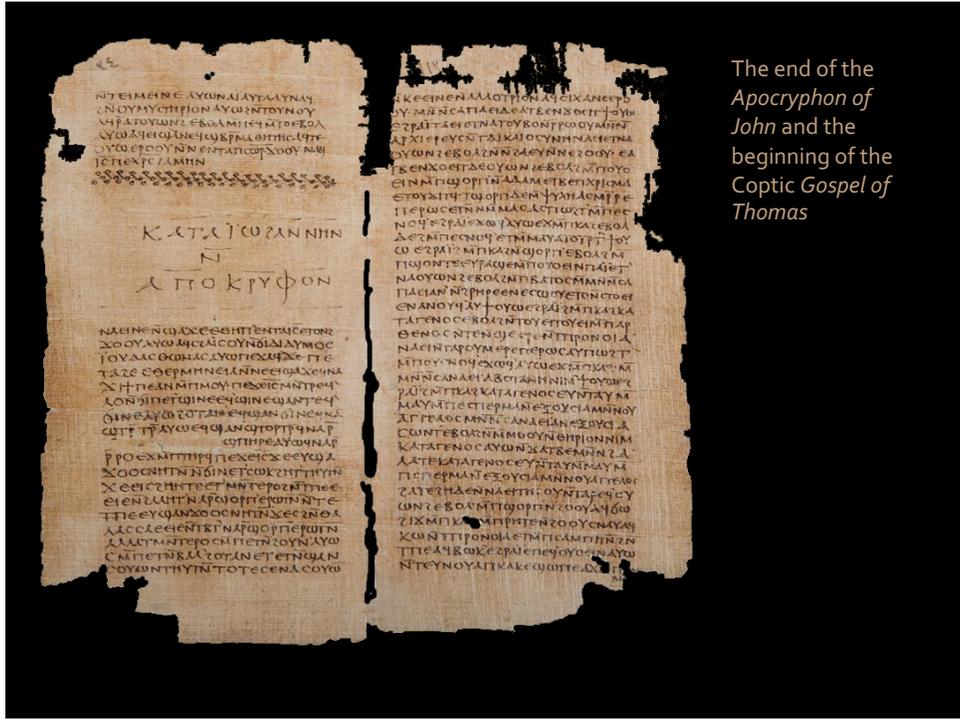


Muhammad Ali Samman,  
who discovered the  
codices



Nag Hammadi





The end of the Apocryphon of John and the beginning of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas

## Gospel of Thomas Manuscript Evidence

This gospel survives in 4 witnesses

- ❖ 3 Greek fragments from separate mss found at Oxyrhynchus (100–200s CE)
 



pOxy 1



pOxy 654



pOxy 655
- ❖ A Coptic translation found complete in Codex II from the Nag Hammadi corpus (+ XIII 2; 400 CE)
 



NH II 2-3

## Gospel of Thomas



- **Date** Mid-100s CE, Syria, though some sayings may go back to the first century
- **Genre** Sayings gospel, like Q; almost no narrative material
- **Gospel comparison** Some sayings are very similar to Q, but there are also unusual sayings
- **Content** Jesus reveals the secret of the disciples' origin; the world and human body are viewed negatively; the kingdom is the divine self of the disciple

## Gospel of Thomas

Logion 56



Jesus said, whoever has come to know the world has discovered a carcass, and whoever has discovered a carcass, of that person the world is not worthy.

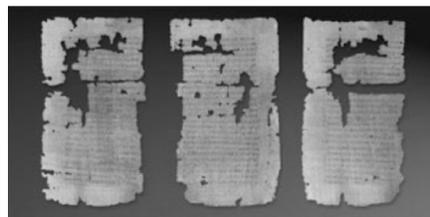
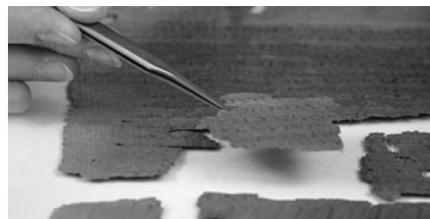
## Noncanonical Literature:

### The Gnostic Texts

- Gnosis = knowledge (in Greek)
- Gnostics = early Christians who fused neo-Platonic philosophy with Christian mythology, emphasizing
  - the ideas of Jesus rather than his acts/biography
  - the risen Jesus rather than the historical man
  - an elaborate cosmology to explain the origin and defeat of evil
  - salvation through knowledge and reunion with the true God

## Gospel of Judas

A gnostic text recently featured in a National Geographic television special. In this gospel, Judas the “betrayor” of the canonical gospels, is Jesus’ liberator, freeing him from his earthly body.



## Gendered Metaphors in Gnostic Texts

### Excerpt from Theodotus

A Valentinian Gnostic who lived in Turkey 160-170 CE

For while we were children only of the female, as though a product of illicit intercourse, incomplete and infants and senseless and weak and unformed, brought forth like abortions, we were children of the woman. But having received from the Savior, we became children of a man and a bridal chamber.

*According to Clement of Alexandria*

## Gendered Metaphors in Gnostic Texts

### Exegesis on the Soul

- fall of soul is imaged as young virgin's foolish desertion of her father's house
- she becomes sexual prey to the cosmos,
  - like an exploited prostitute receiving the due reward of her error
  - the soul has a womb, but it is turned inside out, resembling male genitalia
- her rescue is effected by the descent of the soul's heavenly brother/bridegroom and her marriage to him
  - now she is properly united to her superior male
  - and her repentance, her turning inward again, is imaged by the return of her soul / womb inside her
- but the "marriage" metaphor is only that; this text embraces virginity

## Gospel of Thomas

Logion 114



Simon Peter said to them, "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life."

Jesus said, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the domain of heaven."

## A Problem that Gnosticism Addresses

How do you account for the presence of evil in the world?

Three basic answers

Animosity  
between the gods  
at creation and ongoing  
(Mesopotamian mythology)

Two Gods  
one good, one evil  
(Zoroastrian dualism)

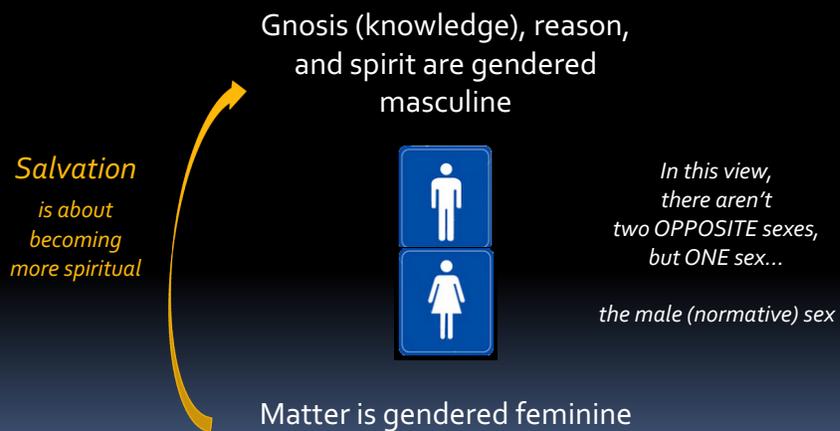
One Supreme God  
with a lesser "demiurge"  
who creates this world  
(Platonic system)

# A Problem that Gnosticism Addresses

How do you account for the presence of evil in the world?

Basic Platonic Idea	Gnostic Adaptation	Orthodox Adaptation
<p>Supreme God</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Demiurge a lesser god who creates this world</p> <p>↓</p> <p>this world is but a shadow of what is in the mind of the supreme God</p>	<p>For gnostics, creation occurs without the permission of the Supreme God <i>(demiurge = OT God)</i></p> <p>So the Supreme God does a workaround, implanting humans with a spirit / soul / spark of gnosis (= knowledge of their true nature)</p> <p>Salvation = return to true root; return of spark to light</p>	<p>For orthodox Christians, the "demiurge" is Christ</p> <p>While "lesser" than the Father, he is of the same nature, so evil does not derive from him</p> <p>Nor is the world God creates evil. "Sin" is the natural state of humans, from which Christ saves people.</p>

# How Gender Maps to Platonic Ideas



## The Definition of the Canon

- **Definition** a Greek word for a tool of measurement; in scripture studies a list or catalogue of books that “measure up” to the standards of the church as authoritative texts
- **Time-Frame** 4-gospel limit in some communities by 180 CE; earliest canon that matches our NT’s is in 367 CE (Athanasius’ *Easter Letter*).
- **Criteria**
  - apostolic, or traceable to one of the apostles
  - in traditional use, or in use from an early period in many churches
  - catholic, or universal in appeal
  - orthodox, or in conformity with emerging mainstream teaching

## Gospel of Mary Manuscript Evidence

This gospel survives in 3 witnesses, none of them found at Nag Hammadi (but all of them from Egypt)

- ❖ Papyrus No. 463 in the John Rylands collection at the University of Manchester (from Oxyrhynchus; Greek, early 200s CE)
- ❖ POxy 3525 (Greek, 200s CE)
- ❖ a Coptic translation at the beginning of the Berlin Papyrus 8502 (a.k.a. the Akhmim Codex, 400s CE), that first surfaced in 1896 on the Cairo antiquities market



## Gospel of Mary



- **Date** 100s CE, Egypt (or Syria?)
- **Genre** Revelatory dialogue / secret instruction
- **Gospel comparison** Entirely set after the resurrection; Q & A and commissioning of disciples; but content of conversation is gnostic
- **Content** Post-resurrection dialogues with disciples about the destiny of matter and the nature of sin (which the Savior says "does not exist"); Mary then shares the special revelation

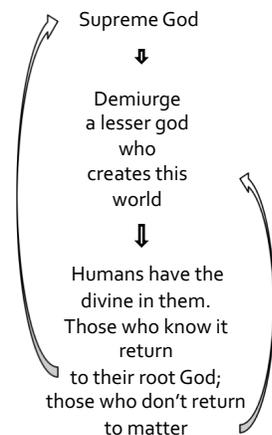
## Gospel of Mary

7:1-9



*[The disciples ask]* "Will matter then be utterly [destroyed] or not?"

The Savior replied, "Every nature, every modeled form, every creature exists in and with each other. They will dissolve again into their own proper root. For the nature of matter is dissolved into what belongs to its nature. Whoever has ears to hear should hear."



## Gospel of Mary

7.10-20



Then Peter said to him, "You have been explaining every topic to us; tell us one other thing. What is the sin of the world?"

The Savior replied, "There is no such thing as sin; rather, you yourselves are what produces sin when you act in accordance with the nature of adultery, which is called 'sin.' For this reason, the Good came among you, pursuing the good that belongs to every nature. It will set it within its root."

## Gospel of Mary

17.10–19.5



Andrew responded, addressing the brothers and sisters, "Say what you will about the things she has said, but I do not believe that the Savior said these things, for indeed these teachings are strange ideas."

Peter responded, bringing up similar concerns. He questioned them about the Savior, "Did he, then, speak with a woman in private without our knowing about it? Are we to turn around and listen to her? Did he choose her over us?"

## Gospel of Mary

17.10–19.5



Then Mary wept and said to Peter, “My brother Peter, what are you imagining? Do you think that I have thought up these things by myself in my heart or that I am telling lies about the Savior?”

Levi answered, speaking to Peter, “Peter, you have always been a wrathful person. Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. For if the Savior made her worthy, who are you then for your part to reject her? Assuredly the Savior’s knowledge is completely reliable. That is why he loved her more than us.

## Gospel of Mary

17.10–19.5



“Rather, we should be ashamed. We should clothe ourselves with the perfect human, acquire it for ourselves as he commanded us, and announce the good news, not laying down any other rule or law that differs from what the Savior said.”

After [he said these] things, they started going out [to] teach and to preach.



Dan Brown published his book in 2003

Ron Howard directed the 2006 film, starring Tom Hanks

In the book, Brown's characters discover:

- that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and had a child
- that their descendents and those who protect them:
  - worshipped the divine feminine
  - celebrated the union of Jesus and Mary through a ritual sexual act (the bridechamber)
  - allowed women to have leadership positions
  - remembered the sexual union of Jesus and Mary in texts that mentioned their frequent kisses
- that the Catholic Church has tried to suppress this truth
- that the gnostic gospels reveal it, and gnostic Christians



Leonardo da Vinci

The Last Supper

1495-1498

Fresco in the dining hall at Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy

## WHY DID THE ORTHODOX CHURCH MAKE MARY A PROSTITUTE?

### The Developing Tradition of Mary Magdalene

- Tendencies *in* the canonical gospels
  - Female companions are marginalized
    - Ignored until they can't be avoided (Mark, Matthew)
    - Or turned into respectable women (Luke)
  - Role at resurrection grows
- Tendencies *after* the gospels

## How Mary Magdalene became a Prostitute

- The Bible *never* associates her with sexual transgression, but
  - Luke introduces her right after the story of a “sinful woman” who anoints Jesus’ feet
  - John mentions a different Mary who anoints Jesus’ feet (not a sinner, but a Mary)
  - In all 4 gospels, Mary Magdalene does try to anoint Jesus’ body on the first day of the week (but it’s not there)

*All those anointing women/Marys get merged*

- The Gnostics liked her, which may have led the orthodox church to discourage adherents by tainting her reputation
- As virginity got really popular, and as Christianity became the Roman imperial religion and “sinners” converted, stories of penitent prostitutes became popular, so Mary became one

## So Who Was Mary Magdalene? And which image is more liberating?

- Witness of the resurrection (canonical gospels)
- Apostle to the apostles (Matthew, Luke, John)
- Apostle to southern France (French traditions)
- Penitent prostitute (mainstream Christian tradition)
- “Founder” or hero to some gnostic communities (Gospels of Thomas, Philip, Mary)
- Mrs. Jesus (Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*)