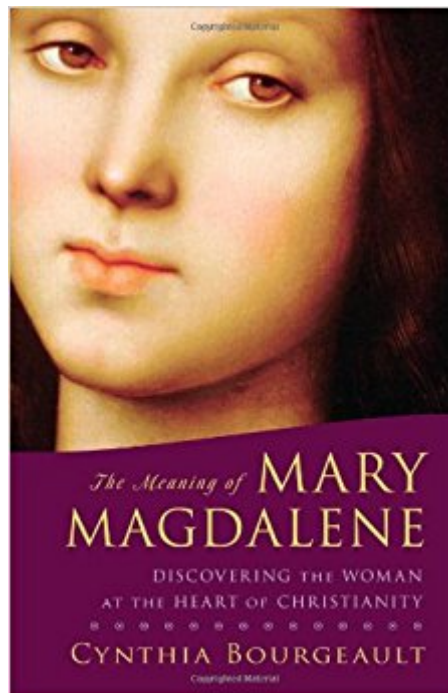


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# The Meaning Of Mary Magdalene: Discovering The Woman At The Heart Of Christianity



## Synopsis

Mary Magdalene is one of the most influential symbols in the history of Christianity—yet, if you look in the Bible, you’ll find only a handful of verses that speak of her. How did she become such a compelling saint in the face of such paltry evidence? In her effort to answer that question, Cynthia Bourgeault examines the Bible, church tradition, art, legend, and newly discovered texts to see what’s there. She then applies her own reasoning and intuition, informed by the wisdom of the ages-old Christian contemplative tradition. What emerges is a radical view of Mary Magdalene as Jesus’s most important disciple, the one he considered to understand his teaching best. That teaching was characterized by a nondualistic approach to the world and by a deep understanding of the value of the feminine. Cynthia shows how an understanding of Mary Magdalene can revitalize contemporary Christianity, how Christians and others can, through her, find their way to Jesus’s original teachings and apply them to their modern lives.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“A spiritual masterpiece, and by far the wisest and most profound book ever written on Mary Magdalene.”—Andrew Harvey, author of *Son of Man and Hope: A Guide to Sacred Action* “A remarkable invitation into the origins and wisdom of Christianity, through the apostolic witness of Mary Magdalene. Expect a challenge, perhaps more than you’re ready for. This book should change something, as it invites you to deepen your capacity for love,

through the witness of Jesus – his beloved disciple. – The Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schiori, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church – “It takes courage, intelligence, maturity, but mostly Christian intuitive wisdom to write a book such as this. Cynthia Bourgeault succeeds grandly! – Richard Rohr, OFM, author of *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* – “Pastor, scholar, mystic . . . Cynthia Bourgeault is all of these, but never before has she combined them so compellingly and persuasively, and – dare one say it? – so efficaciously as here in this work that lives so close to the center of her own being. – Phillis Tickle, author of *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* – “Bourgeault masterfully takes the best of tradition, history, and recent scholarship, sums it up with clarity, and then respectfully and artfully flings open new doors of insight, wisdom, and possibility. – She offers completely unique and stirring insights about Mary Magdalene. – Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction – “This is not simply another book on Mary Magdalene along the lines of Dan Brown or the Holy Blood/Holy Grail authors. Yes, Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopal priest, is making an argument about the relationship between Magdalene and Jesus, an argument that is certainly controversial, and in lesser hands has been badly distorted. However, Bourgeault does it in a way that is grounded both spiritually and academically. – Parabola

Cynthia Bourgeault, PhD, is an Episcopal priest, teacher, and retreat and conference leader. She is the author of several books, including *Chanting the Psalms* and *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*.

I enjoyed this. Lots of information, well sourced, nice conversational style. The concentration is on Mary's role as one of Christ's disciplines, not as a lover or a reformed whore. My only complaint would be the cover portrait looks more like the Mona Lisa than what I imagine Mary Magdalene actually looked like. Maybe she WAS a babe, but that's not what this book is about. Bring forth what is in you and it will save you. Got it. Read the book, methinks you'll enjoy it.

She has an interesting perspective that is worthy of consideration and reflection. Her style appeals to different readers in our church's small group found. However, at times she uses one scholar's interpretation and then proceeds to base her argument upon it as if the matter was definitively settled among all biblical and religious history scholars. This gave the impression that she was trying too hard to be convincing rather than let the reader draw his or her own conclusions.

Moreover, her emphasis on the role of Mary Magdalene had the unfortunate effect of minimizing the importance of other women in the formation of the early Church.

This book will be a welcome relief for those who have difficulty in reconciling their sexuality with their spirituality. It is a painstaking exploration of the deeper dimensions of eros, and argues against any divide between agape and eros. Through a laborious stepwise examination of the gospels of Thomas, Mary Magdalene, and Phillip, and by quoting innumerable references, Bourgeault crafts a hypothesis about the nature of the love between the Magdalene and Jesus. One has to admire the breadth of Bourgeault's intellect, and the rich fruit of forty years of thought on the subject. Again and again she returns to the question of whether this love involved physical union. As a spoiler, I'll mention that she leaves this open, although her preference shows through her writing. My major objection to the book is its extensive reliance on Phillip's gospel, a collection of disconnected gnostic writings thrown together largely by writers in the Valentinian tradition of theology. (Read about this theology and about Valentinus for yourself, and then make up your mind about how much validity to accord this offbeat tradition.) I feel that Phillip's gospel is given undeserved credence by various writers who want to buttress their view of Jesus and Mary being lovers. However, Bourgeault has written a liberating book that helps advance the role of the feminine into current Christian thinking - which too often tends to be under the shadow of centuries of patriarchal domination. She argues convincingly about how the synoptic gospels and the book of Acts maximize the role of males as the only twelve "apostles", at the expense of Mary Magdalene and the other committed women in Jesus's entourage. (I for one, have never figured out the difference between an apostle, a disciple, and a committed follower of Jesus.) Finally, she encourages and challenges us to a more expansive vision of our capacity for love, one that enables us to bring out our self at best.

A thoughtful and lively study of how women got left out of the early church even though they were central in Jesus ministry and affections.. A great start at bringing the power of the feminine back into the church which needs to focus on the power of love in community rather than right belief if it is to survive in the 21st century. Rev. Stephen G. Prichard

This is a very intriguing look at the evolution of a most important figure in the New Testament. It is a great look into a fascinating period of time which the Nag Hammadi document find in Egypt have revealed for us. The true nature of Mary Magdalene as a wise and beloved disciple of Jesus emerges from the careful analysis of how and why she became the "penitent whore" over the

centuries. A challenging book well worth reading.

Beautiful book... written so lovingly. I discovered this book while listening to Ken Wilber's interview w/ Cynthia Bourgeault on Integral Life and was fascinated by the wisdom perspective of christianity. Most striking lessons was about the Fifth Way path: we learn about the practice of kenosis, abundance, and singleness. Practice of conscious love (kenotic love), which she describes as, "love in service of inner transformation" or "inner transformation in the service of love." Her scholarship is a blend of analyzing text and from her "lived wisdom" or based on her kenotic love experience with her beloved (or that is my understanding, for how can you understand Jesus and Mary's relationship without having some experiential knowledge of kenotic love?). This blend of scholarship and wisdom combined makes for a very interesting perspective. I don't think it's the kind of book where you begin to scrutinize "facts" but, perhaps, become more contemplative about what it means to love with every fiber of your being. It made me think about Mother Teresa's path - to love others like she loved Jesus, that the true meaning of love was to give. It taught me about preaching "the word" vs. "doing the work." Mary Magdalene practiced what she learned. That is a true way to honor and to love. Practice.

Bourgeault is apparently a great scholar and some of her insights went beyond my ability to understand or comprehend. However, in evaluating Magdalene, I could only come to the conclusion that she, with the exception of perhaps Jesus, is the greatest spiritual guide known to man. I can't help but love Mary Magdalene.

At a time when much is being written about Mary Magdalene, Bourgeault's volume is totally readable, inspiring and well documented with reliable source material. This is a volume to be read and reread by student and seasoned reader alike.

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