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What was the relationship between Peter and Mary Magdalene?

23 Questions & answers about Jesus Christ, prepared by a team of catholic theologians of the University of Navarre. This is question 19: "What was the relationship between Peter and Mary Magdalene?"

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● The Gospel according to St John refers to the day after Saturday,

when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where Jesus was buried. There, after seeing that the stone had been moved away from the tomb, she runs to tell Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. When they receive the news, they set out for the tomb, where later Mary Magdalene finds the risen Lord (John 20:1-18).

► This is all the Gospels tell us about the relationship between Peter and Mary Magdalene. From a historical point of view, there is nothing else to add.

► The gospel according to Peter, an apocrypha probably from the 2nd century, which also recreates the last scenes from the Passion, the Resurrection, and the encounters with the risen Lord, refers to Mary Magdalene as “the disciple of the Lord”.

● In the marginal literature from Gnostic circles, we find various texts in which some confrontations between Peter and Mary Magdalene are noted. It is good to remember that these texts do not have a historical identity. They refer to fictitious dialogues between the various characters, as a way to spread the Gnostic doctrines.

► In the gospel according to Mary Magdalene, as in other Gnostic gospels, Peter seems to disapprove of the so-called “secret revelations” Mary Magdalene had received.

● Another text, apparently earlier, is the gospel according to Thomas. Here there is a story where Peter says: “Let Mariham leave us, for women are not worthy of life.”. Jesus then answered, “I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every

woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.”

► In *Pistis Sophia*, Peter becomes impatient and he complains because Mary understands the mysteries of faith better than others do, although in a Gnostic sense. Jesus also congratulates her, and Peter says: “My Lord, we will not endure this woman, for she takes the opportunity from us and has let none of us speak, but she discourses many times” (36). In this scene, nevertheless, Martha, Lazarus’ sister, is present, so actually Mary could be Martha’s sister, and not Mary Magdalene, but the reference could well have been to both Mary’s.

► We observe in these texts some distinctive aspects of the rabbinic rationale, where women were not considered able to appreciate religious doctrine (cf. John 4:27), and classical elements of the Gnostic

anthropology, where females play a fundamental role as a vehicle to communicate esoteric revelations.

● The relationship between Peter and Mary Magdalene would have been like the one between Peter and John, or between Peter and Paul, or between Peter and Salome, etc.

► This probably means that the relationship was proper to one at the head of the Church with others who had been the disciples of the Lord, and who after the resurrection, gave testimony of the risen Lord and proclaimed the Gospel.

► Any other insinuation about these relationships is the result of fantasy.

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