



# **Between Contempt and Veneration...Mary Magdalene: The Image of a Woman through the Centuries**

*Ingrid Maisch*

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No other female image has been so strongly influenced by the culture and history of past European centuries as Mary Magdalene. From ancient times to the present, Mary Magdalene has been a summary image of the feminine in each era. Despised as a sinner, revered as a saint, admired as a model disciple, Mary Magdalene became the symbol of all women whose fate she shared throughout history: honored, defamed, pushed to the margins, elevated to unreality, and degraded.

Ingrid Maisch examines Mary Magdalene's life from the perspectives of the biblical witnesses through Christian Gnosticism, the early Church interpreters, the Middle Ages to the present. She shows that while the biblical Mary Magdalene still had a leading role in the Jesus movement, in the Middle Ages she gradually became a saint held up to console sin-conscious Christians. In the Reformation and the baroque era, she was seen primarily as a penitent, then as an image of melancholy and resignation. Bourgeois modernity adopted the secularized figure of the Magdalene as a tool for social criticism, especially regarding the treatment of women. In recent decades critical exegesis of the biblical texts and feminist theology revealed another image of Mary Magdalene: the first witness of the Resurrection.

Mary Magdalene is one of the great women of the Bible, yet attitudes toward her in the Church and in art, history, and society have wavered between veneration of her as a saint and curiosity about her sinful past. In *Mary Magdalene* Ingrid Maisch stresses that reflecting on Mary Magdalene means not only looking behind the history of the influence of the woman from Magdala but also inquiring about women in general, for the image of Mary Magdalene in every era is an indicator of the image borne by women at the time.

Chapters are "Mary Magdalene in the New Testament," "The Heiress of the Empire of Light: The Gnostic Mary Magdalene," "Mary Magdalene as Interpreted by the Medieval Mystics," "Mary Magdalene as Saint: The Middle Ages," "The Penitent Magdalene: A Symbol of the Baroque Era," "Mary Magdalene Between Religion and Aesthetics," "A Pearl More Precious than all Others: Magdalene in Brentano's Jesus-Novel," "The Fallen Woman, the Noble Courtesan," "The Woman at Jesus' Feet: Mary Magdalene in Modern Spiritual Poetry," "The 'sinful Magdalene from Bethany': The Confused Image Today," and "Freed from Sins, Demons, and Subjection." Includes eight pages of full color images of Mary Magdalene from earliest to most recent times.

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